“Looking for a City”:
Community, Politics, and Gay and Lesbian Rights in Atlanta, 1968-1993

by

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Abstract

"'Looking for a City': Community, Politics, and Gay and Lesbian Rights in Atlanta, 1968-1993," explores the evolution of gay and lesbian communities and the development of lesbian and gay rights in Atlanta, Georgia, from gay liberation to a queer nation. Atlanta's gay, lesbian, and queer community history is marked by local events that shaped the contours of its activism. I look at gay and lesbian political and community organizations, institutions, newspapers, and events to explore an important history of a dynamic and active lesbian and gay community in the city. Atlanta's lesbian and gay political and community organizing, like other urban communities, grew out of the local politics of the city. Studies about modern Atlanta largely ignore the gay and lesbian community. This dissertation addresses gay and lesbian communities in Atlanta and seeks to make them a visible and important addition to understanding the politics of the city.

As lesbians and gays are invisible in Atlanta's histories, they are also invisible in the context of national lesbian and gay history narratives. This history has been based mainly on bicoastal metropolitan communities. Atlanta's lesbian and gay community history reflects that it was a smaller city and a regional hub. Important academic interventions have pushed back at the centering of Stonewall and expanded concepts about community and sexuality in non-urban places. Atlanta's lesbian and gay community history has been left largely unexamined because much of the literature about southern queer history has focused on regional identity and the rural geography of the South. As a result we know far less about the dynamics of urban queer life in the South and this dissertation is an attempt to address that need.

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GLOSSARY

AALGA	African American Lesbian/Gay Alliance
ABPG	Atlanta Business and Professional Guild
ACHR	Atlanta Campaign for Human Rights
ACT UP/ATL	AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power/Atlanta
ALFA	Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance
AGC	Atlanta Gay Center
ALACC	Atlanta Lesbian Agenda Conference Committee
ALGHT	The Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History Thing
AMC	Atlanta March Committee
BWMT/ATL	Black and White Men Together/Atlanta
CDA	Citizens for Decent Atlanta
CPA	Citizens for Public Awareness
FTA	First Tuesday Association
GAMA	Gay Atlanta Minorities Association
GAPAC	Greater Atlanta Political Awareness Coalition
GGLF	Georgia Gay Liberation Front
LEGAL	Legislate Equality for Gays and Lesbians
L/GRC	Lesbian/Gay Rights Chapter of the Georgia ACLU

MACGLO	Metropolitan Atlanta Council of Gay and Lesbian Organizations
NBLGC	National Black Leadership Conference for Black Gay and Lesbian
NLC	National Lesbian Conference
QN/ATL	Queer Nation/Atlanta
SECLG	Southeastern Conference for Lesbians and Gay Men

INTRODUCTION

Here among the shadows in a lonely land,
We're a band of pilgrims on the move;
Burdened down with sorrows, shunned on every hand,
Looking for a city built above.

Looking for a city, where we'll never die,
There the sainted millions, never say good-by,
There we'll meet our Savior, and our loved ones too,
Come O Holy Spirit, all our hopes renew.

— "Looking for a City," The Goodman Family

Al Cotton, a writer for the Atlanta gay and lesbian newspaper, *Southern Voice*, reflected on an unprecedented and exciting moment for the city in a 1992 article about that year's Pride celebration. In "Looking for a City," he considered the complicated history of Pride and local lesbian and gay politics.[1] Atlanta's Pride never drew more than five to seven thousand people in its biggest years and then only rarely. Crowd sizes were small for nearly all of its history. In 1992 the city's annual Pride celebration saw attendance reach around 60,000 people, an unimagined reality. Just a year before, for the first time in twenty years, gays and lesbians proved willing to come out for Atlanta's Pride in massive numbers. Organizers were pleasingly shocked when they filled downtown with 30,000 queer folks. When the crowd doubled the next year it was an immediately historic moment because it made lesbian, gay, and queer communities more visible than ever before and marked their presence in the city

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[1] Al Cotton, "Looking for a City," *Southern Voice*, July 23, 1992.

Before 1991, Al Cotton theorized that the consistently small crowds created a self-fulfilling and perpetual cycle. People did not come out for Pride because no one else did. He also thought the explosion in numbers from the year before drew the attention of queer people throughout the Southeast. He saw more evidence that people came to Atlanta from across the region, travelling to the city specifically to participate in Pride. He called those regional visitors "True Pride Heroes" and awarded them a symbolic rainbow heart for their participatory engagement. He said "They are the pioneers, even missionaries, in places where being gay isn't one quarter as easy as it is here. I'm glad the Big City Cousins finally showed the rest of the South that we can be brave, too." That year he gave the city the crown it deserved and had long desired as he deemed it finally worthy of its longtime nickname as the "Gay Mecca of the Southeast."[2]

Al Cotton's outlook on the importance of Atlanta Pride was shaped by two decades of its history. The event repeatedly failed to attract the kinds of numbers that San Francisco or New York City brought out. Neither did it come close to the crowds that showed in other queer regional centers like Houston or Boston, though they had similarly sized gay and lesbian populations. It failed to emerge as an important social and community rallying event and was instead a consistent and disappointing annual reminder of the local community's inability to produce meaningful political progress in the city. Al Cotton made this argument explicitly by outlining the recent history of Atlanta's anti-discrimination or "Gay Rights" law. He noted that the law, passed quietly by the City Council in 1986, was pushed for by just a few local gay lobbyists. It failed to cover anyone but those employed by the city, which severely limited its scope and use, much like Pride failed to engage with Atlanta's large and diverse population of gay and lesbian people. How the law was passed and what it did seemed to Cotton an obvious example of how things worked—or more accurately did not work—in favor of the broader gay and lesbian community in Atlanta.

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[2] Cotton, "Looking for a City."

Though Atlanta's gay and lesbian politics and Pride could use some work, Al Cotton thought the city's queer community excelled in other areas. He said, "One thing that works here is Drag." Cotton came to this conclusion after he recently attended "Atlanta's "Authentic Drag Experience" wherein he witnessed a singular performative number that for him spoke to the heart of the city's queer community, that of "Vestal Goodman's "Looking for a City."[3] He thought the song was a perfect metaphor for queer Atlanta, which was likely the reason it was performed as part of the grand finale in a unique to the city drag show called the "Gospel Hour." According to religious ethnographer, Edward Gray, the performance and audience interactions served as a ritual coming out rite for many southern gay Christians in Atlanta. Gray thought that attending a Gospel Hour show gave them a chance to "reconcile their newly achieved modern urban gay identity with their childhood and young adult evangelical Christian formation."[4]

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[3] Edward Gray, "Looking for A City: The Ritual and Politics of Ethnography," in Carlos L. Dews and Carolyn Leste Law, eds., *Out in the South* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 173.

[4] Ibid., 175.

The Happy Goodman family version of "Looking for a City" was one of a number of songs performed in the Gospel Hour. Al Cotton was familiar with the song and with the Happy Goodman gospel singers, though he was generally unappreciative of their musical stylings. He recollected that as a child growing up in Alabama he disengaged with the Sunday morning television as soon as the Happy Goodman family came on the screen. As an adult he found it ironic that he joined a community where the song was a noted "camp treasure." Edward Gray pointed out that before "Looking for a City" started one of the Gospel Hour girls distributed "cocktail napkins for the audience to wave as hankies, back and forth, to-and-fro, round and round, in time with the music."[5] It was not just a spontaneous outburst, but one that was planned and conceived to bring people together as they interacted with the performance and gave meaning to the song in their own lives.

"Looking for a City" was performed in like manner across shows. The singers lip-synced the performance, acting out an incremental ascension of octaves that made the Happy Goodman family version of the song a "camp treasure." In a 1974 performance, singers Vestal Goodman and Johnny Cook made the song into a good-natured and friendly competition as they sang louder and higher than the other in a round of choruses. Al Cotton's description of the performance indicated how the song was queered by an audience who interpreted it as reflective of their experiences trying to find a community in the Southeast. He said they listened together as it pitched towards its rapturous end.

> This man with a voice as high as Whitney Houston and as loud as Ethel Merman sings about "looking for a city, where you'll never die," and each chorus is a half-step higher than the last, and

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[5] Gray, "Looking for A City," 180.

> you're sure each chorus is pitched as high as this "woman" can sing, but there's always one more half step to go.[6]

The song's central theme about a long search for a homeland also resonated with those who were less religiously inspired. The lyrics were reflective of their own migratory journeys and their newfound home in Atlanta. In 1991, a panel of local activists gathered to discuss the early origins of gay rights activism in the city and in their discussion six of them identified the year they came to Atlanta, and most came from other places in the South.[7] That many gay and lesbian people came to Atlanta from other places was a well-known aspect of the community. The city's size made it unique in the region and queer southerners created new communities from their common backgrounds in the large urban environment.

Atlanta's big community of gay, lesbian, and queer people existed as a refuge in the Southeast. Many southerners came to Atlanta because they wanted to experience the kind of queer urban community found in the bigger coastal gay centers like San Francisco or New York. However, for many people these cities lacked home comforts, were too far away, too cold or too expensive. In Atlanta they could experience the life but without the expense, the snow, and with the added benefit of sweet tea. The southern connection was an important dimension to how many Atlantans imagined their community. Al Cotton made this clear when he considered that "Looking for a City" was a popular song in Atlanta "precisely because of who we are—everyone here from Macon and Savannah and

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[6] Cotton, "Looking for a City."

[7] "1991 Gay History Panel," Touching Up Our Roots, https://vimeo.com/26924698. [accessed October 24, 2018] and Transcript of "Panel on Gay Activism," June 13, 1991, Box 115, James T. Sears Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, hereafter cited as Sears Papers, DU.

Birmingham and Nashville and Charlotte and Jacksonville and all points in-between came Looking for a City, and they found one."[8]

Gay Mecca of the South: An Urban South Queer History

"Looking for a City: Community, Politics, and Gay and Lesbian Rights in Atlanta, 1968-1993," explores the development of community consciousness and the evolution of gay and lesbian rights in Atlanta, from gay liberation to a queer nation.[9] The city's community history is marked by local events and turning points in Atlanta's gay, lesbian, and queer history that shaped the contours of its activism. It includes major national movements and historical events like the gay liberation movement, lesbian feminism, anti-gay conservative activism, AIDS, and organizing around three national Marches in 1979, 1987, and 1993.

Atlanta's lesbian and gay history originated within the local politics of their urban community. In the stories told about modern Atlanta, the gay and lesbian community is largely ignored. In part this is because the majority of the works about the city have focused on the dynamics that drove the city's politics, namely business interests as they manifested in urban development, transportation projects, and other redevelopment plans.[10] The focus has been on the middle-class and elites, both black and white who were involved with and worked in business and politics.[11] These stories have focused also on the most powerful dynamic that drives Atlanta, its race relationships, and shown that during and after the Civil Rights Movement the city's adopted "too busy to hate" approach to desegregation could be more complicated and resistant than the image projected by the city's leaders.[12]

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[8] Cotton, "Looking for a City."

[9] For the purposes of this dissertation I use the term "community" to refer to people who consider themselves part of the gay and lesbian community. The gay and lesbian community encompassed and included many people, but I study those who were actively engaged in building physical, social, and political spaces in the city.

[10] Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising: The Invention of an International City, 1946-1996* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1996); Larry Keating, *Atlanta: Race, Class, and Urban Expansion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); Winston Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid: Atlanta and Black Struggles for Human Rights* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); David Harmon, *Beneath the Image of the Civil Rights*

Since the era of Maynard Jackson, the story has focused on the changes in the city's elite communities as they adjusted to the new balance of power. Jackson represented a new era of political power for black people in the city and was resisted by the city's white elites. During his first term as Mayor, Jackson faced criticism from the white business community and the city's daily newspapers, who challenged his leadership on everything from development plans to his initiation of affirmative action programs. These stories are well-documented and well-trod moments in works on Atlanta. Recent studies have addressed more nuanced and analytical questions of the familiar narratives.[13] A more detailed look at the class dynamics that made the black elite in Atlanta and the political power that accompanied it has been at the heart of these works. In explaining how the city came to be known as a "Black Mecca," Maurice Hobson considers the city's long history of boosterism in the context of its own myth-

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Movement and Race Relations (New York: Garland Pub., 1996).

[11] Gary Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn* (New York: Penguin, 2009).

[12] Kruse, Kevin M. *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[13] Alton Hornsby, *Black Power in Dixie: A Political History of African Americans in Atlanta* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009); Maurice Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca: Politics and Class in the Making of Modern Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2017).

making. Hobson's work is the first study of Atlanta that reaches outside the box and examines grassroots organizations and how the agendas of the business and political elite often worked against and to ill-effect on the city's lower class and poor blacks.

In the urban and political histories before, the sources and subjects reflected those who held the power. These histories read as top-down narratives that delved deeply into the numbers of local electoral politics and elections and the agendas of the city's developers as they made Atlanta the "American South's crown jewel."[14] The histories of Atlanta have focused on those aspects of the city that were most important to explain at the end of an era. Atlanta's status as a "crown jewel" and a Black Mecca were self-evident to many by the early 1990s. By then Atlanta's first black Mayor had served two terms and the city elected its second black Mayor in 1981, who also served two terms. In 1989 Atlantans elected Maynard Jackson to a third term and soon after it was announced that Atlanta would host the 1996 Olympics. The histories have sought to explain how Atlanta did this and found the answers in politics and business plans.

Other stories have been less integrated into Atlanta's story of growth. The whole history of Atlanta has been interpreted to be driven by economic development, but there are other stories that can add to our understanding of the city's current climate. Christopher Huff's 2012 dissertation on Atlanta's hip community explored an important and untapped source of information, the *Great Speckled Bird*, to consider how the city was rapidly transformed in a short period by a huge influx of young people in the late 1960s. [15] Huff's dissertation explored the emergence of the city's hip culture and to a limited extent how the city's bohemian gay community contributed and influenced events in the era. His study, however, ends in 1973. The physical entrance of a whole new community whose presence on the streets was a persistent and sometimes violent problem for the city is a subject that needs to be further addressed in the political context of the era.

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[14] Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 7.

[15] Christopher Huff, "A New Way of Living Together: A History of Atlanta's Hip Community, 1965-1973"

Not one of the major studies of Atlanta has considered the growth of the gay and lesbian community in the city. Atlanta's gay and lesbian community grew and matured over the course of the 1970s and 1980s. They interacted with the city and were part of the urban political story yet have been almost entirely ignored by non-LGBT historians.[16] The history of the city's out gay and lesbian community and how they interacted with the new black political power structure adds an important dimension to the analysis of the white backlash and criticism that Mayor Jackson received in his first term.

Another important area left understudied because of the focus on race and economic development, obscures the dynamics of change in some contexts. Maurice Hobson's re-examination of the Atlanta Child Murders showed how class effected the police and the Mayor's handling of the cases and introduced measures that found the city's working class and poor black communities more policed as a result. Gay rights activists in the same era fought with the police about an increase in harassment and sought to change the culture of repression and homophobia that marked their interactions

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(PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2012).

[16] A recent dissertation on Midtown spends no time addressing the gay community's long history with the neighborhood that developed in the post-World War II years. Midtown was one of the earliest "gayborhoods" to develop in the city and to consider a cultural "renaissance" in the area without considering how the gay and lesbian community might have influenced events is a continued erasure of the city's queer history. Susan Tindall, "Creating Cultural Connections: A Renaissance in Midtown Between 1900 and 1983" (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2017).

with the local police. Gay activists approached the issue in a very Atlanta way, through moderation and diplomacy, yet failed to enact change. Their failures at compromise and discussion with the police led to a more aggressive and direct approach. When Michael Hardwick, an out gay man, was arrested for sodomy in 1982, local activists challenged the constitutionality of Georgia's sodomy law, which led to the 1986 Supreme Court decision *Bowers v. Hardwick*. It seems that a local issue that became national precedent would warrant consideration in a political history of the city.

As Maurice Hobson showed, for many of Atlanta's black working class and poor communities, the countering opinion that Atlanta was not a Mecca for everyone was an important reflection of the ways in which the city had left them behind in its march towards Olympics gold. That the reality of Atlanta did not often live up to the hype is a theme present in the gay and lesbian community of Atlanta too. However, Atlanta was still imagined as a Mecca for gays and lesbians who lived in the South. The freedom and opportunity that drew thousands of black Americans to Atlanta from the South and elsewhere also drew queer people. *Southern Voice's* Al Cotton said Atlanta had long been called the "Gay Mecca of the Southeast," though it was a title he thought undeserved until recently. In an assessment that reflected the history of boosterism in the city he said,

> Atlanta's reputation across the Southeast is that of a City That Is Always Selling Itself. For years, Atlantans have told people what Atlanta is—the City Too Busy to Hate, the Next International City, the Olympic City, the Gay Mecca of the Southeast—and it was never true when we first said it. And then we went out and made it true.[17]

Kath Weston described what she called the "Great Gay Migration" in the decades after gay liberation as a period when thousands of gay and lesbian people made their way to urban centers, most iconic of all to San Francisco. [18] In this period the rise of political consciousness and identity became entwined with the urban community. Weston focused her analysis on the way that the coming out narrative embraced the migratory experience. As people moved from rural places to urban gay spaces they came out and found community, something seemingly impossible to experience in rural places. Once arrived in the city, they confronted the reality that urban gay life was also problematic, limited and circumscribed by gender, race, and class. Many people who made the "arduous trek to the urban Promised Land" did not find the community they imagined.

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[17] Cotton, "Looking for a City."

The Great Gay Migration, of queer people from rural places, shaped the creation of the imagined urban gay community in more places than just San Francisco. The symbolic value of the journey encompassed, as Kath Weston wrote the "odyssey of escape from the isolation of the countryside and the surveillance of small-town life to the freedom and anonymity of the urban landscape."[19] For author and playwright Jim Grimsley, and countless others who were from the South, Atlanta was an outpost and a refuge. In a moving essay about gay migrations, published in the 2001 anthology *Out in the South*, he divided the work into two parts. The first half, "We come from the country," discussed the reasons why many southerners chose to stay in the South and what it meant to identify with being southern. In the second half, "We live in the city," he related his own introduction to gay life in Atlanta, a city he chose to relocate to because "it was the largest, closet place, central in the region."[20]

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[18] Kath Weston, "Get Thee to a Big City: Sexual Imaginary and the Great Gay Migration," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2, no. 3 (January 1995): 253-77.

[19] Weston, "Get Thee to a Big City," 274.

[20] Jim Grimsley, "Myth and Reality: The Story of Gay People in the South," in Dews and Law, eds., *Out in*

When Jim Grimsley and others got to Atlanta he said they "stuck our noses out of the closet" and liked what they saw. Whether from the country, another city, or another part of the city, Atlantans had "set about the business of making a place for ourselves out in the open, in sunshine, in our city."[21] Other Atlantans saw themselves as outsiders in their regional geography. In the summer of 1976 Atlanta's Pride slogan was "Christopher Street South." It was a reference to the moment of origin for gay liberation, the Stonewall Riots in 1969, as they would come to be known. At their monthly meeting in June, ALFA discussed the coming Gay Pride Week, where some objected to the name on the grounds that the original "Uprising" was "primarily carried out by men." But there was also a regional issue involved for some of the women who seemed to argue that Atlanta was not representative of the South. Karen, who submitted ALFA's meeting minutes to their monthly newsletter, made sure to include a provocative statement about how they felt concerning their place in the regional South. She wrote "We aren't anything south: we're Atlanta."[22]

For Jim Grimsley, Atlanta was unlike other big cities because it was in the South, a place where the history and legacy of slavery could be seen in the modern world. The fact of slavery reminded those in the South that "freedom can vanish, never to return." What replaced slavery was a rigid social and political system that reinforced old hierarchies and limited the freedom of people based on factors of race, gender, class, *and* sexuality. People in the South, he said, "grew up steeped in the notion that one kind of

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the South, 233.

[21] Ibid., 235.

[22] Karen, "Minutes—June 6 ALFA Meeting—32 present," *Atalanta* (July 1976). Box 116, Sears Papers, DU.

people always tries to dominate another; we grew up surrounded by a complicated class system driven by wealth and privilege; we lived in a world where women were always subjected to men's ideas, men's power, men's definitions."[23] The remnants of this learned social system are reflected in Atlanta's lesbian and gay community history and politics.

People who came to Atlanta from other places in the South experienced the gay migration in the context of their region and all its problematic parts. Kath Weston argued that the imagined gay community in the "urban Promised Land" often disappointed people who found themselves locked out of community and opportunity in the city. Atlanta's lesbian and gay histories reflect these issues too. John Howard's contribution to the groundbreaking anthology that he also edited, *Carryin' On in the Lesbian and Gay South* published in 1997, was the first academic foray into Atlanta's queer past. His essay, "The Library, the Park, and the Pervert: Public Space and Homosexual Encounter in Post-World War II Atlanta," described a 1953 scandal that involved the arrests of twenty men caught engaged in sodomy at a public restroom in a public library and the trials that drew local media attention. Howard's essay addressed important questions about the wide impact of Cold War purges on homosexual communities throughout the country, not just in the nation's capital and the offices of government. It also focused on the lives and issues that faced "white, gay, male Southerners."[24]

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[23] Grimsley, "Myth and Reality," 235.

[24] John Howard, "The Library, the Park, and the Pervert: Public Space and Homosexual Encounter in Post-World War II Atlanta," in Howard, ed., *Carryin' on in the Lesbian and Gay South* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 108; John Howard, "Place and Movement in Gay American History: A Case from the Post-World War II South," in Genny Beemyn, ed., *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1997).

Carryin' On in the Lesbian and Gay South was a foundational work for the establishment of southern gay and lesbian history. Major community studies from the era focused on gay and lesbian communities as they developed in the urban landscapes of metropolitan cities. The essays in *Carryin' On* explored sexuality, space, geography, and identity in a critical analysis specific to the South. The anthology sought to dismantle the myth of the South as "wasteland" for gay and lesbian people. The essayists embraced the idea that rural gay and lesbian communities developed their own sense of identity and politics based on place and space that existed outside of the normative narrative of gay consciousness emerging from and precipitated on the modern urban experience.

Carryin' On showcased the rural disruption of the urban narrative, but essays in the work also considered the urban South and its smaller outposts like Louisville and Memphis. John Howard's essay touched on major themes that would be present in other Atlanta histories, as he showed how the increased visibility of the gay community in the city's public spaces provoked an anti-gay backlash from the city and the police. Howard's essay was the only one focused on Atlanta's queer past before Stonewall but three other essays considered more modern aspects of the city's queer history and pointed to future areas of study. ALFA was the subject of two essays that looked at the development of the lesbian feminist community in Atlanta and its special relationship to Charis Books and More.[25] Meredith Raimondo's essay examined how Atlanta's local gay and lesbian community was erased from the accounts of the history surrounding AIDS, replaced instead with nationalized reporting that focused Atlanta as the home of the CDC, rather than a place with a gay community affected by AIDS.[26]

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[25] Saralyn Chesnut, Amanda C. Gable, and Elizabeth Anderson, "Atlanta's Charis Books and More: Histories of a Feminist Space." *Southern Spaces* (November 3, 2009), https://southernspaces.org/2009/atlantas-charis-books-and-more-histories-feminist-space (accessed December 2, 2018).

"Women Ran It": Charis Books and More and Atlanta's Lesbian-Feminist Community, 1971-1981"Ibid.; Becca Cragin, "Post-Lesbian-Feminism: Documenting 'Those Cruddy Old Dykes of Yore,'" in Howard, ed., *Carryin' On*.

The essays in *Carryin' On* laid the foundation for future academic research into Atlanta's lesbian and gay community. James Sears added to the growing body of research with multiple studies of gay, lesbian, and queer history and identity in the South, though his first contributions focused on South Carolina and Florida.[27] His first book in 1991, *Growing Up Gay in the South: Race, Gender, and Journeys of the Spirit*, explored what would become familiar terrain for southern queer histories and looked at the ways that class, religion, race, and gender shaped the contours of queer life in the South.[28] Sears's exhaustive research skills produced the first look at Atlanta's post-Stonewall urban gay and lesbian history in *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South*, published in 2001. Though it was a regional community study, Sears documented all of the major events and organizations of the gay revolutionary period in Atlanta up through the first national March on Washington in 1979.

Like his other works, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, allowed the history to speak for itself for the most part. Sears limited his analysis within chapters devoted to different places and themes, which covered a dizzying number of events and people. At the end of this work, he offers some important insights into the process of building out and political gay and lesbian community within a regional context. He argued that in the period before Stonewall gays and lesbians in the South made their own communities and created a zone where they could build relationships with others, but it was forced by the political climate to exist in the shadows. Tolerated only in silence, he emphasized that in the years following Stonewall there was rapid and vast change as "gay liberationists punctured this fourth dimension of queer space."[29]

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[26] Meredith Raimondo, "Dateline *Atlanta*: Place and the Social Construction of AIDS," in Howard, ed., *Carryin' On*.

[27] James T. Sears, *Lonely Hunters: An Oral History of Lesbian and Gay Southern Life, 1948-1968* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997) and Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

[28] James T. Sears, *Growing Up Gay in the South: Race, Gender, and Journeys of the Spirit* (Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press, 1991).

James Sears described a regional community that was best understood as distinct "local queer ecologies" that sometimes united in brief periods of coalition.[30] Another anthology published in 2001, *Out in the South,* grew out of a 1997 conference held in Atlanta at Emory University called "Queering the South: A Gathering of LGBT Arts, Activists, and Academics."[31] Carolyn Leste Law, one of the editors, introduced the anthology as a next step in the "growing field of southern queer studies," but one that focused on the "institutions that often define and limit the terms by which the South is understood." Instead of looking at the local ecologies of certain places and their communities, this book considered the themes that dominated regional identification and difference. This was in reaction to the "historical, ethnographical, or documentary" works that had so far made up the field.[32]

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[29] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 318.

[30] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 319 and footnote 17 in Charles E. Morris, "Travelin' Thru" the Queer South," *Southern Communication Journal* 74, no. 3 (July–September 2009): 241.

[31] Carolyn Leste Law, "Introduction," in Dews and Law, eds., *Out in the South*, 5.

[32] Beemyn, *Creating a Place for Ourselves*.; Sears, *Growing Up Gay in the South*, *Lonely Hunters*, and *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*; Daneel Buring, *Lesbian and Gay Memphis: Building Communities Behind the Magnolia Curtain* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997); John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Angelia R. Wilson, *Below the Belt:*

Out in the South included essays on the institutions that defined and limited the South. Conceptually grouped into parts, the essays in "Claiming Queer Space in a Hostile Place" refuted myths about rural invisibility and continued racism and sexism within lesbian and gay communities. In "Striking Out/Striking Back" the essays explored coming out and leaving the South and what happens to those who stayed. This section continued Kath Weston's earlier examination of the rural and urban divide and how that influenced concepts of a greater gay and lesbian community. In the last grouping, "Representing Queer Lives in Public Space," the essays "explored the openness of performance, in religion and the arts." These intersections were "essential sites of activism by existence." Two of the essays related these experiences in Atlanta.[33] Edward Gray's "Looking for a City: The Ritual and Politics of Ethnography" focused on the religious aspects of community and ritual in the performances of the Gospel Girls, the drag gospel act popular in the city. Jim Grimsley's contribution, "Myth and Reality: The Story of Gay People in the South," focused more loosely on the concept of community and how it was intimately connected in Atlanta to gay migrations.

Carryin' On proved that historians of gay and lesbian history needed to reassess their impressions of sexual diversity in the South. At the heart of the book, those who wrote about southern gay and lesbian history wanted to correct assumptions about the importance of the urban gay world and its influence on the development of other queer communities. The essays in *Out in the South* reflected the influence of the queer turn in

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Sexuality, Religion and the American South (London; New York: Cassell, 2000).

[33] Gray, "Looking for a City," and Grimsley, "Myth and Reality," in Dews and Law, eds., *Out in the South*.

gay and lesbian history.[34] The field of southern queer studies was booming and its growth was not focused on the urban community studies of the past. This was due to the extraordinary influence of John Howard's *Men Like That*, which Charles Morris called "chief among the interventions," which had "queered both the history of the South and gay history."[35] In a review for *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Lisa Duggan called Howard's work nothing less than a "breakthrough book in modern U.S. lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer history."[36]

John Howard's *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* examined the development of gay consciousness and community in Howard's home state of Mississippi. His study used space and the geography of the rural South to expand on ideas about community and pushed at the boundaries of national historical narratives of gay life that were dominated by the bicoastal heavyweights of New York City and San Francisco. *Men Like That* emphasized looking outside of the familiar or larger cities and successfully challenged the queer-urban community connection and chronology of Pre-Stonewall gay life. His work deeply impacted the field as the next generation of southern queer history monographs reflected the decentering of the urban community and political identity as the essential narrative of queer history and studies.[37]

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[34] Ed. Allida Black, *Modern American Queer History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

[35] Morris, "Travelin' Thru" the Queer South," 235.

[36] Lisa Duggan, "Down There: The Queer South and the Future of History Writing," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8, no. 3 (2002): 379.

[37] E. Patrick Johnson, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Karen Graves, *And They Were Wonderful Teachers: Florida's Purge of Gay and Lesbian Teachers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Brock Thompson, *The Un-natural State: Arkansas and the Queer South* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2010); Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2010).

In 2004, "Hitting Below the Bible Belt: The Development of the Gay Rights Movement in Atlanta," an urban studies article by Arnold Fleischmann and Jason Hardman sketched out the basic history of Atlanta's gay and lesbian community since the era of gay liberation.[38] This article was focused on identifying the people and organizations of gay rights activism in the context of their development as a social justice movement and did not consider any of the theoretical issues that were circulating in southern queer history at the time. Their work was firmly in the community studies vein and extensively used primary newspaper articles and local community histories. Fleischmann and Hardman centered gay and lesbian activism in Atlanta's history, more so than Sears in *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, but did not move much beyond fact-finding. They ultimately determined that Atlanta's gay and lesbian political activism looked "in many ways, like cities in other regions."[39]

Wesley Chenault noted the lack of clearly southern distinction in Atlanta's urban gay and lesbian community in the period before Stonewall too.[40] His 2008 dissertation, "An Unspoken Past: Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History, 1940-1970," was the result of his work on an oral history project and a public exhibition with the Atlanta History Center that focused on the same era.[41] In Chenault's view, the national post-Stonewall narrative of urban gay community consciousness and political rights movement obscured the social communities and private networks built out of survival in the era before. However, he chose not to focus on what made Atlanta distinct from other cities because in many ways its history looked much like other cities in this period. Chenault instead focused his work on the changing landscape of the city and the substantial effects of the postwar boom.

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[38] Arnold Fleischmann and Jason Hardman, "Hitting Below the Bible Belt: The Development of the Gay Rights Movement in Atlanta," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 26, no. 4 (October 2004): 407-26.

[39] Ibid., 423.

[40] Wesley Chenault, "An Unspoken Past: Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History, 1940-1970" (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 2008).

[41] Wesley Chenault's work with the Atlanta History Center and the exhibit, "The Unspoken Past: Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History" resulted in another important addition to documenting Atlanta's lesbian and gay history visually. The publication of *Gay and Lesbian Atlanta*, a pictorial history drawn from the collections in the archives, shows in images some of the important people, places, and organizations that contributed to different aspects of the city's communal life. Wesley Chenault and Stacy Braukman, *Atlanta Lesbian and*

Wesley Chenault's "An Unspoken Past," was clearly influenced by John Howard's critique of the modern narrative that emphasized the urban community over other forms of association and identity in the South. Howard influenced other regional histories that have sought to increase the diversity of experience counted in the historical context. Central to these histories was the use of oral interviews to document people and communities that have been traditionally excluded from the mainstream narratives that emphasized traditional power structures. E. Patrick Johnson used oral histories extensively to show how black gay men navigated community and identity in the rural and urban south. Johnson's work focused on regional experiences, not Atlanta, but it was the first major study to focus on black gay experience in the South.[42] Johnson's study showed that black experiences in the field of southern queer history that had developed up to that point were severely lacking in documentation and analysis.

Atlanta's lesbian history in the post-Stonewall era has been explored in more depth than its gay male community. Because ALFA was such a unique and long-lasting organization, it has deservedly received more attention.[43] La Shonda Mims' 2012

Gay History (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2008).

[42] Johnson, *Sweet Tea.*

[43] La Shonda Mims, "Drastic Dykes and Accidental Activists: Lesbians, Identity, and the New South," (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2012).

dissertation “Drastic Dykes and Accidental Activists: Lesbians, Identity, and the New South,” was a comparative study of the development of two different urban lesbian communities in the New South—Charlotte, NC and Atlanta, GA. Mims grounds her work in a comparative analysis that examined the development drive of both cities and how women engaged with the broader gay community to form identities as lesbians in their urban environments. In a more in-depth examination of the politics articulated by ALFA, Heather Lee Branstetter’s dissertation looked at how the politics and history of ALFA in Atlanta produced an important community of activists who because of their specific location and their “historical and geographical positioning (southern, lesbian, and radical feminist)” have been ignored by other scholars.[44]

Gay and lesbian communities and their activism are unique to the place where they exist. They are linked to a national community through political movements, individuals, and organizations that advocate broadly on behalf of them. The histories of the largest queer communities in the country do not necessarily reflect the local histories of smaller cities, regional hubs, and most obviously they do not tell the story of people who live and find community in rural places. Atlanta’s lesbian and gay community history reflects that it was a smaller city, a regional hub, and that it was shaped by its significant population of rural migrants. In a queer turn of events, Atlanta’s lesbian and gay community history has been left largely unexamined. The urban center occupied less interesting territory for scholarship. Studies that focused on rural place and the pre-Stonewall era made important and necessary interventions in the field. However, as a result we have examined how lesbian and gay men find and develop community and identity in a regional and rural context, but we know far less about the dynamics of urban queer life in the South.

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[44] Heather Lee Branstetter, “An Alfa-Omega Approach to Rhetorical Invention: Queer Revolutionary Pragmatism and Political Education” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012).

The pushback against the urban and political community narrative that developed in the mid-1990s among many southern lesbian and gay historians and scholars working in the field was the result of a historical imbalance that dated back to the gay liberation era. The communities that had received the most scholarly attention were urban cities with historically large populations of gay and lesbian people, who because of this had an outsized role in the national narrative. In this era histories of the recent gay rights movement established the importance and supremacy of the city as a definitive part of the rise of gay and lesbian political consciousness and group identity, which was also highly dependent on a timeline developed around the impact of Stonewall.[45] John D'Emilio's foundational study of early homophile organizing set the course for a modern lesbian and gay history that was rooted in the urban community and the political organizations associated with the emergence of a civil rights movement based around sexual identity.[46]

In the early 1990s, new works challenged the political history narrative of the modern lesbian and gay rights movement. Scholars reacted to the influence of sexuality history and pushed the field into more nuanced analysis about the ways in which definitions of heterosexuality and homosexuality were created over time and for specific purposes.[47] Other works still firmly centered the urban community but documented the important dimensions of class, gender, and race as they shaped gay and lesbian communities.[48] In *Boots of Leather*, *Slippers of Gold*, Elizabeth Lapovsky-Kennedy and Madeline Davis showed how class influenced socialization and sexual relationships in a working class lesbian community in Buffalo, New York. George Chauncey's *Gay New York* explored how the urban gay male community was created from conceptions of class, race, and gender that were unique to their social world. Chauncey's work in particular was an influential study because he examined how the social and urban world contributed to the creation of sexuality and sexual communities, based on fluid and unstable categories that changed over time.

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[45] Eric Marcus, *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990, An Oral History* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1993); Leigh W. Rutledge, *The Gay Decades: From Stonewall to the Present: The People and Events That Shaped Gay Lives* (New York, N.Y.: Plume, 1992); Martin B. Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Plume, 1994).

[46] John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

The city was an essential part of the history of gay and lesbian Americans and gay and lesbian community histories are deeply connected to the growth of modern cities in America. The geography and size of urban spaces allowed gay and lesbian newcomers of gay migrations to develop opportunities for social involvement on a scale impossible in rural or small town places. The sheer power of congregating with other queer people in public had a profound impact on gay and lesbian people. This has been shown to be the case in the pre-Stonewall period and after. Events of significance before Stonewall consider the importance of gay and lesbian urban social communities and the birth of political consciousness. Central to accounts of the pre-Stonewall era is that World War II and its attendant mobilization bolstered a younger generation of gay and lesbian people who experienced a loosening in sexual attitudes in the postwar years.[49] In cities across the nation, these factors contributed to an emerging awareness of group consciousness in gay and lesbian communities, locally and nationally.[50]

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[47] Michel Foucault and Robert Hurley, *The History of Sexuality* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1984); John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); Eve K. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (London: Penguin Books, 1990); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[48] Allan Bérubé*, Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990); Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

Historians have spent decades identifying the events and people who have shaped and defined the modern history of gay and lesbian identified Americans. The established narrative outlines a general progression of cultural and political community awareness and consciousness throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Urban community studies adjust for the local politics of each city and regard the complex ways that gay men and lesbian women built their nascent sense of community. Individual studies take into account that the specific place does matter and that lesbian and gay communities do not and will not always tidily match the national narrative. This is largely due to the fact that the narrative we know is primarily based on the local histories of activism within two of the largest concentrations of queer people in the country—New York City and San Francisco.

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[49] Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*l Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*; Susan Stryker and Buskirk J. Van, *Gay by the Bay: a History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 1996); Nan A. Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Gary L. Atkins, *Gay Seattle: Stories of Exile and Belonging* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003); Genny Beemyn, *A Queer Capital: A History of Gay Life in Washington, D.C.* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2015); Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* (Philadelphia : Penn, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Lilian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A. A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2009).

[50] Elizabeth A. Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco, 1950-1994* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

Despite the breadth of our knowledge about other places, New York City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco still occupy the center and starring role in lesbian and gay American history.[51] In the time before gay liberation these places had large concentrations of lesbian and gay people who emerged to advocate for equality and acceptance for the homosexual in society. Postwar lesbian and gay history has shed much light around the political rights activism of the Homophile movement. [52] In the 1950s and 1960s lesbian and gay activists created the first organizations that advocated for an assimilationist approach to obtaining civil rights protections for homosexuals, the name by which they identified. This movement was highly dependent on gendered, racial, and class-based respectability politics. New accounts have added to our understanding of the Pre-Stonewall years and have detailed the structures and institutions that influenced the development of state repression of non-normative sexualities.[53]

Homophile activists were influenced by other political movements of the era too. The Civil Rights Movement influenced lesbian and gay political activism and encouraged more people to openly protest the government's discrimination against homosexuals.[54] By the late 1960s activists had also responded to the radical politics of the moment.[55] The increased radicalization of some people within the homophile movement created discord and dissension as assimilationist activists rejected the new politics. Gay and lesbian political organizations were in the midst of great debate when a riot in New York City forced a transformation.

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[51] Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015); Linda Hirshman, *Victory: The Triumphant Gay Revolution* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012).

[52] D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*; Harry Hay and Will Roscoe, *Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of Its Founder* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996); Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006); James T. Sears, *Behind the Mask of the Mattachine: The Hal Call Chronicles And the Early Movement for Homosexual Emancipation* (Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park Press, 2006); Vern L. Bullough, *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2008); C. Todd. White, *Pre-Gay L.A: A Social History of the Movement for Homosexual Rights* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

[53] David K. Johnson, *Lavender Scare: The Persecution of Gays and Lesbian in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2009); Karen Graves, *And They Were Wonderful Teachers: Florida's Purge of Gay and Lesbian Teachers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Stacy Lorraine Braukman, *Communists and Perverts Under the Palms: The Johns Committee in Florida, 1956-1965* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012); Daniel Winunwe Rivers, *Radical Relations: Lesbian Mothers, Gay Fathers, and Their Children in the United States Since World War II* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

Recent studies have pushed back on the monumental force of Stonewall and have located its origins in the radicalizing political environment of the 1960s. Since the earliest accounts of the period, historians have reevaluated the centrality of Stonewall and found that ideas about radical gay liberation pre-dated June of 1969. Marc Stein defined a revolutionary period of gay and lesbian activism after Stonewall, because that date marked the rise of new movements like gay liberation, lesbian feminism, and gay and lesbian liberalism.[56] The radical movement that emerged in the aftermath of Stonewall was an organizationally short moment that in most places was over by 1973. The Stonewall Riots only became a touchstone because the event was associated with a political movement, the Gay Liberation Front. Stonewall and the GLF were linked in the minds of many. Together they affected a profound change in gay and lesbian political activism. Most importantly, they influenced people outside of New York City to join the gay liberation movement by coming out of the closet.

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[54] Craig A. Rimmerman, Kenneth D Wald, and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *The Politics of Gay Rights* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Frank Kameny and Michael G. Long, *Gay is Good: The Life and Letters of Gay Rights Pioneer Franklin Kameny* (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2014); Walter Frank, *Law and the Gay Rights Story: The Long Search for Equal Justice in a Divided Democracy* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2014).

[55] Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995) and *Voices of Revolution: The Dissident Press in America* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001); David Eisenbach, *Gay Power: An American Revolution* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2006); Tommi Avicolli Mecca, *Smash the Church, Smash the State!: The Early Years of Gay Liberation* (San Francisco, Calif.: City Lights Books, 2009); Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves, Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*; Hobson, *Lavender & Red*.

[56] Stein, *Rethinking*, 79.

The gay rights movement developed over the course of its existence and it looked different in each local community. As more people came out in the immediate years after Stonewall out local gay and lesbian communities grew, sometimes where there had never been any before. This dissertation, “Looking for a City,” starts with the voice of one of Atlanta’s most radical gay liberationists and his review of a documentary about a drag beauty contest that was published in the *Great Speckled Bird* in 1968. The *Bird* was an underground leftist and counterculture community newspaper started that same year, which operated from the hip community’s Midtown neighborhood. From the beginning, Atlanta’s gay and lesbian community consciousness was connected to the growth and visibility of the urban and hip culture. It does not start in 1969 with Stonewall because that was less important to the early development of Atlanta’s new gay community consciousness.

As was true in other big cities in the era gay men and women created social communities. These grew through private networks and parties and in certain public bars and lounges that were friendlier to them.[57] These types of networks only supported a limited visibility of community or political consciousness. As the studies of Atlanta’s pre-Stonewall history have shown, no homophile or political organization mobilized in the city in this era. Like other smaller or regionally important cities in the rest of the country without local homophile organizations, gay liberation was the first gay politics many Atlantans engaged with. When gay liberation came to the city it was channeled through the countercultural and downtown youth scene, not the political activism of homophiles. It was political, but expressed through the energy of the youth movement and leftist radicalism not the Mattachine Society. Atlanta's out gay community developed a unique countercultural space in the Midtown neighborhood and cultivated a lively nightclub scene that embraced drag as part of the movement, but only briefly. Gay liberation clashed with radical sexual and gender liberation politics in the period, as occurred in other places, and liberalism vs. liberation became a dividing line for many activists.

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[57] Howard, “Place and Movement”; Chenault, “An Unspoken Past”; Chenault and Braukman, *Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History*; Mims, “Drastic Dykes.”

This study takes into consideration the longer decade of the radical 1960s, that in fact carried on well into the 1970s, if you look for it. Emily Hobson showed that in San Francisco, radicals continued to be politically active in their community long after the official end of certain organizations and this was also the case in Atlanta. The traditional end dates for the gay liberation or revolutionary period extend until 1973. The APA's declassification of homosexuality as a mental disorder often serves as an easy reference point and a positive victory for the movement, ending on a high note. This event also proved to be not as important to Atlanta's local history. In Atlanta, the Georgia Gay Liberation Front lasted officially from 1971 until 1973. The Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance lasted from 1972 until 1994. The periodization of the radical era in local communities varies widely and is often obscured because one group or source is privileged over another. It is clear that radicalism did not end in Atlanta with the disbanding of the GGLF nor did the APA’s decision make much of an impact in the city beyond a middle-class and professional community.

Throughout the 1970s, gay and lesbian people established businesses like clubs and bookstores, political and social organizations, churches, newspapers, and community centers all over the country. In cities that had gay centers, the community was offered access to important mental and sexual health resources as well as a safe social space. Gay college students fought administrations and conservative student bodies for their right to organize on campus giving younger students a visible and vocal source of community.[58] As the gay and lesbian rights movement of the 1970s expanded, organizations devoted to niche groups appeared and reflected a diverse body of activists, feminists, lawyers, writers, and professionals. Local communities fought the everyday battle for social acceptance as they worked on an individual level, person to person.

Gay and lesbian political activism in the 1970s has been described as turning away from radicalism and towards a liberal civil rights style activism. This interpretation muddles the history of political discourses in the gay and lesbian liberation and rights movement. From its start people were divided on the best way to achieve their goals and even the goals were hotly debated. The gay liberation period has been seen as an exceptional era that produced a transformation in gay and lesbian communities, but one that was not ultimately able to sustain a radical political movement.[59]

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[58] Katherine Rose-Mockry, “‘We’re Here And We’re Not Going Away’: How the Lawrence Gay Liberation Front Challenged Norms and Changed the Culture for the Gay Community at the University Of Kansas in the 1970s” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2015); Patrick Dilley, *Queer Man on Campus: A History of Non-heterosexual College Men, 1945-2000* (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2002); Brett Beemyn, “The Silence is Broken: A History of the First Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual College Student Groups,” *Journal of American History* 12, no. 2 (April 2003): 205-23; Stephan L. Cohen, *The Gay Liberation Youth Movement in New York: “An Army of Lovers Cannot Fail”* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

Emily Hobson's *Lavender and Red* documented the continued activism of radicals in San Francisco well past the end of the gay liberation or revolutionary years. Her work makes clear the importance of not making assessments about other places based on the history of activism in one. By favoring a historical narrative that ends the era of radicalism in the early 1970s, the activism of lesbian feminists has been greatly minimized, though there has been important work on the movement.[60] In Atlanta, ALFA continued their more radical style of activism and collectivism well into the decade, though the GGLF split up in 1973. Atlanta's local era of gay liberation began in the late 1960s and doesn't end at any specific point. It does fade into the background, though, when the era of conservative backlash begins. For Atlanta, this period starts in the summer of 1976, just one year before Anita Bryant made Miami a national conservative victory.

The 1970s have been understood as the decade in which conservative New Right and Christian political activists began their ascent to power.[61] Marc Stein called it an era of "conservative backlash" for the gay and lesbian rights movement. This period lasted from 1973 (marked by the APA victory) until the dawning of the AIDS crisis in 1981. Anita Bryant and Miami in 1977 is a better marker for the beginning of the conservative backlash in Atlanta, a period that in many ways never really ended. After Anita Bryant's Save Our Children campaign successfully repealed an anti-discrimination ordinance passed by gay activists in Dade County, Florida, there was an explosion of activism in the city. More gay and lesbian people became politicized in these years because they felt their lives were threatened, especially after the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. The increased politicization of more gay and lesbian people in this period also led to the creation of organizations for people of color and an organized pushback against racism within Atlanta's gay community.

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[59] Hobson, *Lavender & Red*, 6.

[60] Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Kristen Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Bonnie J. Morris, *Disappearing L: Erasure of Lesbian Spaces and Culture* (State University Of New York Press, 2017).

[61] Stein, *Rethinking*, 115.

Marc Stein's concept of the 1970s as an era of conservative backlash is even more compelling if considered from this later periodization, starting in 1977. From this vantage point, Ronald Reagan's election and the rise of the Christian Right are even more dangerous a threat to lesbian and gay rights activists in this period because it was a national confirmation of conservative anti-gay politics. It also allows us to think about the ways that a solidified and powerful conservative backlash, strengthened with a seeming mandate from the majority of America, was the context and environment that existed when AIDS made its devastating appearance in America's gay male communities. The conservative backlash was building throughout the 1970s, but like Stonewall in 1969, Anita Bryant's message and her victory in Miami politicized countless Americans—Christians, conservatives, gay, lesbian, and all manner in between.[62]

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[62] Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012); Michael Stewart Foley, *Front Porch Politics: The Forgotten Heyday of American Activism in the 1970s and 1980s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013); Jim Downs, *Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

The Miami defeat was immediately felt in Atlanta and for years afterwards. Shortly after the repeal passed Atlantans organized a gay and lesbian Democratic club called the First Tuesday Association, named after the date of the infamous defeat. Miami marked a turning point nationally and locally for gay and lesbian communities as it solidified the power of the new anti-gay activism. The conservative backlash resulted in the formation of new gay rights groups and a strengthening and recommitment from those that already existed.[63] There were important victories too, like in California, where the defeat of the Briggs Initiative showed how mainstream and liberal political activism were effective in combatting local conservative measures. Propelled by the assassination of San Francisco gay activist and politician Harvey Milk, gays and lesbians organized the first ever National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights in 1979.[64] Atlanta activists became involved with the planning and after the March they returned home to the city energized.

Fighting the conservative backlash motivated more people in this period to become politically active but this moment was disrupted and eventually overshadowed by AIDS. Gay organizations had begun the long process of fighting local civil rights issues. Activists attempted to protect their communities from civil rights violations, legal discrimination, and encouraged public awareness campaigns to combat harassment, especially from the local police.[65] In the midst of a tentative start to successful political progress, a plague struck. AIDS, usually marked in the gay and lesbian history timelines as making an entrance in 1981, while technically true, creates a false sense of direct impact. AIDS crept up on the gay male community specifically and obviously, as men within intimate social circles began to get sick and die quickly. Early reports from 1981 to 1983 physically centered the sickness in bigger cities like New York and San Francisco. The timeline of AIDS and its impact on gay communities across the country are well known and extensively detailed in Randy Shilts exhaustive study of the day by day reporting on AIDS in its first years, *And the Band Played On*.[66]

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[63] Stein, *Rethinking*, 119-120.

[64] Amin Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent: How Conflict and Culture Work in Lesbian and Gay Marches on Washington* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[65] Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*; Christina Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Kevin Mumford, “The Trouble with Gay Rights: Race and the Politics of Sexual Orientation in Philadelphia, 1969–1982,” *Journal of American*

What is often overlooked in the accounts of the toll it took on New York City and San Francisco is that AIDS entered local communities at different points. Marc Stein reconsidered periodization in *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* and ended the conservative backlash in 1981 with the emergence of AIDS in gay communities.[67] Stein's rethinking of this era as the "Age of AIDS," which lasted until 1990, needs to be readjusted, especially because it implies an endpoint in the crisis, which is ongoing. AIDS was a major issue—and for many, primarily the only one—but it was not the entire movement. In the early 1980s, activists in Atlanta continued to work within mainstream channels lobbying for gay rights and legal activist organizations challenged laws and countered conservative measures as AIDS crept into the local news.

History 98, no. 1 (June 2011): 49-72.

[66] Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); Eric Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights* (New York: Perennial, 2002).

[67] Stein, *Rethinking*, 143.

Gay and lesbian communities in America were deeply impacted by the trauma of the health crisis they faced with AIDS and confusion reigned in the early years. The overwhelming reluctance of state and federal government to intervene with public health campaigns and research funds forced the gay community at large to literally fight for their lives because help from others was not forthcoming. Communities responded by establishing new health organizations and political advocacy groups that dedicated themselves to serving their local communities. Gay men and lesbians came together and formed organizations to raise money for the sick and created a social support safety net for people so they would not have to face AIDS alone. In New York City, the Gay Men's Health Crisis famously formed and organized for the public health epidemic, but Atlanta's similar organization formed not much longer after that in 1982.[68] News reports showed that AIDS related deaths increased each month in the early years, which made Atlantans anxious or apathetic about the looming crisis. AIDS took more from the community than anyone would have thought possible, but it brought people together by the sheer weight of the tragedy. Many more gay and lesbian people became politicized by AIDS, government inaction, and the social and cultural reactions to the deadly health crisis that was overwhelmingly affecting gay men in the United States.[69]

During the era of the conservative backlash Atlanta's gay and lesbian activists developed organizations that emphasized lobbying, fundraising, and access to power.[70]

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[68] Ibid., 155.

[69] John-Manuel Andriote, *Victory Deferred: How AIDS Changed Gay Life in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Stephen Inrig, *North Carolina and the Problem of AIDS: Advocacy, Politics, and Race in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

[70] Marcus, *Making Gay History*; Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*; Urvashi Vaid, *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996); Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, *Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York:

There was an increase in lobbying efforts on behalf of gay rights legislation but also influenced by the dire need for access to funding and health care supports related to AIDS. At mid-decade there was a turn away from the mainstream political model and towards radical activism in light of the continuing crisis of AIDS. The 1986 *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision deeply affected activism in lesbian and gay communities and pushed the already growing anger into a different gear, changing the direction of the movement. *Bowers* acted as a symbolic rejection of the worth of gay and lesbian people everywhere and as a catalyst for new political activism.[71]

After *Bowers*, Atlantans became active and involved in organizing for the second National March on Washington in 1987. This March proved to be a national moment that effected change in local communities. Instead of expending all their energies in Washington, Atlantans came back to their hometown and put their organizing skills to use to transform the city. The March was held in October of 1987 but emerged in what Amin Ghaziani called "times of war and protest."[72] The March made a huge impact on the national community and provided memorable and moving moments like the first display of the AIDS Memorial Quilt. It was also there that many people were first introduced to the new gay and lesbian and anti-AIDS politics of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power), who formed in New York City in the spring of 1987.

Simon & Schuster, 1999); John D' Emilio, William B. Turner, and Urvashi Vaid, eds., *Creating Change: Sexuality, Public Policy, and Civil Rights* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002); Craig A. Rimmerman, *The Lesbian and Gay Movements: Assimilation or Liberation* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2008).

[71] Vicki Lynn Eaklor, *Queer America: A GLBT History of the 20th Century.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008; Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics Emotion and ACT UP's Fight against AIDS* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 122-23, 133-43.

[72] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 91-92.

ACT UP had a national impact on the lesbian and gay rights movement. It was an entirely new form of direct action activism that the movement had not seen since the era of gay liberation. ACT UP sought to educate and politicize the straight and gay and lesbian community. Their actions and protests were designed to draw visibility to national issues that affected local communities everywhere.[73] ACT UP chapters sprang up across the country in cities of many shapes and sizes. In Los Angeles, activists organized an ACT UP chapter soon after they returned home from the March in 1987.[74] ACT UP chapters created a new national community of activists, just as the Gay Liberation Fronts had. But like those groups, ACT UP chapters also burned out fairly fast. Deborah Gould documents the shifting emotional environment that created and sustained ACT UP chapters in her work *Moving Politics*.[75] These groups came together as community collectives and involved gay and lesbian activists in a new direct action protest movement that was deeply connected to the despair, rage, and grief that AIDS caused in the community.

Nineteen eighty-eight was a pivotal year in Atlanta's gay and lesbian history. The Democratic National Convention, held there that summer, centered the city in mainstream politics. The DNC focused some lesbian and gay Atlantans on mainstream activism and motivated others to join the direct action protest movement. From the activism around the DNC, ACT UP/Atlanta organized and brought direct action protest to the city, which drew out longstanding divisions in local gay politics. Activism in this era is generally divided into two camps, direct action or mainstreaming.[76] In Atlanta, these two streams of activism overlapped constantly. Lesbian and gay activists and community members offered support to aspects of each side as they contextualized the politics of their current fights.

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[73] Sean O'Brien Strub, *Body Counts: A Memoir of Activism, Sex, and Survival* (New York: Scribner, 2014); Tamar W. Carroll, *Mobilizing New York: AIDS, Antipoverty, and Feminist Activism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); David France, *How to Survive a Plague: The Story of How Activists and Scientists Tamed AIDS* (London: Picador, 2017).

[74] Benita Roth, *The Life and Death of ACT UP/LA: Anti-AIDS Activism in Los Angeles from the 1980s to the 2000s* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2017) 25.

[75] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 268, 280-281.

The group Queer Nation formed in 1990 in New York City to reduce the burden of ACT UP in their activist agenda.[77] Deborah Gould showed that in the early 1990s ACT UP activists started to feel more overwhelmed and burned out from their years of rage related politics.[78] QN protested and demonstrated in a similar style to ACT UP but their focus was on issues of specifically queer concern—like combatting street harassment and violence and confronting homophobia in local communities. QN, much like ACT UP, was a controversial source of activism in many communities.[79]

The formation and activism of Queer Nation/Atlanta was a critical moment in Atlanta's lesbian, gay, and queer community. When the group formed in the fall of 1990 their early actions looked much like other national chapters in New York City, San Francisco, and Chicago. But in the spring of 1991, QN/ATL's activism took on a battle that changed their group and made a powerful impact in the city. When the restaurant chain Cracker Barrel fired gay and lesbian employees in Georgia for being gay and lesbian, QN/ATL started a relentless campaign of protests at local stores. They held sit-ins and pickets almost every other week throughout the spring and summer of 1991 and continued in 1992. QN/ATL's Cracker Barrel protests emphasized mainstream politics but used direct action protest in a way that made it different from other QN activist groups and propelled it into the national spotlight.

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[76] Eaklor, *Queer America*, 205; Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*; L. A. Kauffman, *Direct Action: Protest and the Reinvention of American Radicalism* (Verso Books, 2017); Jason Pierceson, *Sexual Minorities and Politics: An Introduction* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc, 2016).

[77] Stein, *Rethinking*, 184-186.

[78] Gould, *Moving Politics,* 416-419.

[79] Michael Warner, *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Michelangelo Signorile, *Queer in America: Sex, the Media and the Closets of Power* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1994).

Groups like ACT UP and Queer Nation sought opportunities to publicize issues in a confrontational style that made direct action ubiquitous and mainstream eventually. Marc Stein asserts that 1990 was a date of transition from the gay right movement to the era queer and eventually to LGBT politics . His understanding is marked by the emergence of the queer movement and the academic field of queer studies in the decade. This dissertation marks the end of an era in 1993 with another major defeat for the lesbian, gay, and queer movement. "Looking for a City" ends with the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, an infamous compromise with local ties to Georgia, that was deeply felt within Atlanta's gay, lesbian, and queer communities.

Part I. Gay South Rising Up: Liberation, 1968-1976

"Looking for a City" has twelve chapters and is divided into four parts that reflect the periods and moments that most effected change in the city. The first part of this dissertation, "Gay South Rising Up: Atlanta Gay and Lesbian Liberation" spans from 1968 to 1976 and documents the founding of the city's first gay and lesbian organizations, their political philosophies, and how gay men and lesbian women put their ideas into action on the ground. Chapter One, “Gay Power on The Strip,” looks at the development of a gay culture that overlapped with the hip, radical, leftist, counterculture, and sexual liberation communities that grew from 1968 to 1970 in the Midtown area and around Piedmont Park. Chapter Two, “Gay South Rising Up,” focuses on radical gay and lesbian political organizing from 1971 to 1973, in the Georgia Gay Liberation Front and the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance. Chapter Three, “Come Out Slugging,” explores how Atlantans actualized the revolution by building out gay and lesbian communities in the city, from 1974 to 1976. It highlights community building and considers the beginnings of a conservative backlash in the controversy over Gay Pride Day in Atlanta in 1976.

Part II. Stonewall Then, Atlanta Now: L/G Rights, 1977- 1983

Part Two of the dissertation, “‘Stonewall Then, Atlanta Now’: Atlanta Gay and Lesbian Rights,” documents political organizing, activism related to the police, and anti-racist and anti-discrimination activism. It begins in 1977 with the gay rights setback in Miami and ends in 1983 with the passage of a local anti-discrimination ordinance. These chapters explore the political activism that emerged in reaction to conservative anti-gay activism and the gay community’s growing alliances with the city government.

Chapter Four, “After Miami We’re All Afraid,” documents activism in the immediate aftermath of Miami, from 1977 to 1980. Activists established new organizations in the city to combat the conservative backlash and the increased harassment of the local gay male community by the police. Chapter Five, “Stonewall Then, Atlanta Now,” focuses on an intense period of activism in the city, between 1981 and 1982, when the newly established Lesbian/Gay Rights Chapter of the Georgia ACLU quickly became an important player in local gay politics. Chapter Six, “Equal Justice,” focuses on another important organization in Atlanta’s gay history, Black and White Men Together (BWMT), from 1981 to 1983. The group integrated social and political activism as they fought racism in the gay community locally.

Part III. Gay Rights Y’all: Political Activism, 1984-1988

The third part of the dissertation, “‘Gay Rights Y’all’: Activism in the Age of AIDS” spans a period of time when AIDS became a full blown and catastrophic public health epidemic in Atlanta, from 1984 to 1988. These chapters look at early reactions to AIDS in the local community and a new era of direct action protest that emerged in relation to it. Chapters highlight activism in the city around local and national issues and events, like the 1986 *Bowers v. Hardwick* Supreme Court decision, the second National March on Washington in 1987, and the Democratic National Convention held in Atlanta in 1988.

Chapter Seven, “Apathalanta,” looks at the impact of AIDS in the city’s gay community in the early years of the epidemic. In this period Atlantans struggled to educate themselves and their community about AIDS, but early on organized AID Atlanta, a group that would become the only service organization in the city for years. Chapter Eight, “Almost Free At Last” explores one very important year in Atlanta, 1986, which marked a turning point in gay and lesbian activism. That year a more confrontational style of politics emerged in the community and people engaged in more direct action protests. Chapter Nine, “Gay Rights Y’all,” considers the experiences of

Atlantans who became involved in organizing around the 1987 March and examines the profound effect it had on local activism and activists, one of whom founded *Southern Voice* in 1988, a lesbian and gay newspaper that became a cornerstone support for the community.

Part IV. Queers Take Peachtree: Direct Action, 1988-1993

Part Four of the dissertation, "'Queers Take Peachtree': Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Activism," documents the years between the two national Marches, from 1988 to 1993, as a revolutionary period in Atlanta's local history. These chapters look at the activism of ACT UP/Atlanta and Queer Nation/ATL as they pushed the city towards a more radical style of politics. Tensions between radicals and mainstream activists were high as the community reacted to a new vocal element that took root in the city.

Chapter Ten, "Outrageous and Respectable," examines ACT UP/Atlanta and the impact of direct action activism in the city from 1988 to 1990. This chapter documents major discussions and arguments that showed how direct action was controversial and opposed by many who preferred a more moderate approach to gay rights activism. Chapter Eleven, "Gay America Loves You," focuses on a year of transition, 1990, and how mainstream approaches to political activism proved popular in Atlanta because they offered people a way to be out and political but not aligned with ACT UP. Chapter Twelve, "Queers Take Peachtree," documents the formation of a local chapter of the group Queer Nation. This chapter looks at the rise of QN/ATL and the impact they made on the city, especially with their campaign of protests against the restaurant chain Cracker Barrel over employment discrimination.

In the Epilogue, "The Very Beginning of a Long War," I consider events in 1993 that marked a turning point in the movement. The repeal of the military ban on gays and lesbians became a central issue many people believed winnable with President Bill Clinton's support. When DADT became law it proved another failure to secure equal rights through national efforts and forced activists to reformulate their strategies.

This dissertation considers how gay and lesbian people developed notions of community in light of the politics of coming out. Gay and lesbian Atlantans built a collective identity with new media and social and political organizations. They created a place for themselves in the city and occupied new spaces that were defined and divided by race, gender, and class. Divisions created communities within communities as people articulated their sexual politics. As the community grew, political activists fought for gay rights against the backdrop of sometimes friendly or hostile city administrations. They built alliances where they could as they found the "city too busy to hate" was not a city too busy to discriminate based on sexuality. Atlanta's gay and lesbian community struggled to build effective leadership over the years and their victories were often hollow. They continued to fight for equality, however, despite encountering a broader community that was often less engaged and willing to fight for their own rights too.

CHAPTER 1

"GAY POWER ON THE STRIP": THE GAY REVOLUTION, 1968-1970

The Queen

In the fall of 1968 a new documentary called *The Queen* was playing at the Ansley Mall Mini Cinema in Atlanta's Midtown neighborhood. The arts theatre originally had it set to run through October 17, but on the 28th it advertised the film as "held over."[1] The local Atlanta underground newspaper, the *Great Speckled Bird*, paid attention to the movie and writer Miller Francis's thoughtful review likely had an impact on the movie's staying power in the city. Miller Francis described the film as a "behind the scenes" look at a beauty contest, but one that was different and so "*vive la difference!"* The documentary followed in *cinema verité* style the contestants of the 1967 "Miss All-America Camp Beauty Pageant" held at Town Hall in Manhattan. The pageant showcased some of America's best drag performers as they competed for the crown. The film peeks behind the curtain to let the viewer see how the magic is created, Miller said

> We see them learning the rules of the contest from "Sabrina," promoter of the contest and sometimes-narrator of the film. We see them in their hotel rooms, practicing their acts, renewing old acquaintances, and discussing homosexuality. We go with them to try on evening gowns and wigs, and we are there when they are making up.[2]

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[1] Miller Francis, Jr., "The Queen," *Great Speckled Bird*, October 14, 1968, 8-9 and October 28, 1968, 16.

[2] Ibid.

To Francis, the documentary revealed uglier truths about modern America as represented in the contrast between beauty pageants like Miss America, which were interpreted as "straight, legitimate, and thus normal" and the drag pageant, the Miss All-America, which was "gay, illegitimate, thus queer."

Behind these scenes unfolded the layers of a world unknown and unseen by straight people, and even to many gay men. As the documentary began it followed contestants from when they arrived in New York City to their departures. The movie concludes with the crowning of a sweet, innocent type of All-American Queen, but its final note points in a new direction. In a climactic battle at the end, Miss Manhattan, Crystal LaBeija, angrily confronted Sabrina the organizer and the winner, Harlow, a nineteen year old from Philadelphia. The scene at the time played into stereotypes about jealousy and pettiness in the drag circuit, with queens screaming charges that the contest was rigged or unfair in other ways. Francis thought the scene simply "the angry protest of a bad loser."[3] The exchange showed off an energy of anger related to the politics of drag, that stemmed from a complex of racism, sexism, and classism that shaped urban gay male communities during the post-World War II period. Just a year after its release the gay community would see an even bigger example of this same kind of anger with the Stonewall Inn Riots.

Throughout the 1960s, a growing militancy in homophile politics had initiated a shift in the movement. This chapter looks at the beginning of a new era of gay and lesbian visibility in Atlanta as it developed in relation to a national radical and political liberation movement. It looks at the establishment of a community created through an identification with gay liberation and details the beginnings of gay power as it spread and influenced the city's gay and lesbian population. It explores the public coming out of gay and lesbian Atlantans, primarily through their presence in The *Great Speckled Bird,* to show how the gay revolution was experienced and related locally. In Atlanta*,* gay and lesbian *Bird* contributors and other radicals shaped the early tone of the liberation movements they organized. This chapter looks at the many different voices that represented a broader gay and lesbian community in Atlanta, in the South, and as citizens in America. In the pages of the *Bird* there were political radicals, Marxists, anarchists, street types and hippies, camp queens, lesbians, lesbian feminists, and also gay liberals and mainstream civil rights activists. This chapter looks at how these people represented their ideas about the politics of gay and lesbian liberation, revolution, and community as they developed them for the first time in Atlanta.

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[3] Francis, Jr., "The Queen."

The Stonewall 1969 date provides a clear division in history that helps conceptualize the modern gay and lesbian historical timeline.[4] As many historians have shown, the transition point from pre-modern to modern is complicated and far messier and transitional when examined up close and on the streets. In New York City, the Stonewall Riots in 1969 marked an important new era of political activism around sexuality, but the years before provide the context for the outburst. Stonewall and its aftermath were shaped by the growing militancy in the homophile movement, the influence of radical youth politics, the civil rights movement, and a growing anger on the streets from gays and lesbians. The Stonewall Riots looked much like a community's backstage outburst and other cities had experienced it before. What makes Stonewall so important is that gay and lesbian people in other places adopted this moment as representative of their struggle in a new political, social, and civil rights liberation movement.[5] It was a moment that might have been passed over had other local gay and lesbian communities not brought it into their collective history.

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[4] For noteworthy discussion of the significance of this chronological divide see Carter, *Stonewall*; Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good*; Deitcher, *The Question of Equality, Over the Rainbow;* Faderman, *The Gay Revolution;* Rutledge, *The Gay Decades*.

The national gay and lesbian community changed after Stonewall in critical ways that marked the beginning of a new era of activism. As Timothy Stewart-Winter argued in his recent study of how gay politics developed in Chicago, local events like Stonewall or the election of Harvey Milk in San Francisco in 1977, have occupied an over-sized portion of our national collective history.[6] Stewart-Winter looks at how "gay politics developed in relation to key moments in the life of local politics" and "turning points in the history of Chicago's gay politics." This chapter outlines some of the turning points in Atlanta's gay and lesbian history and how it was deeply shaped by local politics, much like in Chicago, New York City, San Francisco, and countless other urban communities.

This chapter looks at the city in transition, from the mid-1960s until 1970. The founding of the *Great Speckled Bird* was critical for the development of the gay and lesbian community in Atlanta.[7] It captured an era in the midst of a sexual revolution, influenced by and practicing radical politics, and pushing for countercultural freedoms.

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[5] For a summary of this discussion see "Debate: How Important was the Stonewall Riot?" in Eaklor, *Queer America*, 124-125.

[6] Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*, 11.

[7] Chenault, "An Unspoken Past," 156-59; Huff, "A New Way of Living Together," 351-52; Chesnut and Gable, "Women Ran It," 253-54; Fleischmann and Hardman, "Hitting Below the Bible Belt," 414-415; Sally Gabb, "A Fowl in the Vortices of Consciousness: The Birth of the *Great Speckled Bird*," *Serials Review* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 107.

These ideas became consistent aspects of gay and lesbian community building and politics in the years after Stonewall. The *Bird* was the home for gay and lesbian radicals, socialists, and a drag counterculture that diversified the gay and lesbian liberation experience in Atlanta. This chapter looks at how radical gay revolutionaries clashed with a socially closeted "coat-and-tie" community of older gay and lesbian Atlantans.[8] It also looks at how gay liberationists forced their way into the non-political gay, urban and cultural nightlife and demanded it change to reflect the new politics. During these years Atlanta experienced a boom in the growth of bars, drag, and social communities for gay men and lesbians that was connected to the growth of downtown's hippie, countercultural, and street community that was physically centered around Piedmont Park and Midtown.[9] All of these influences contributed to the development of Atlanta's gay and lesbian communities and their nascent political awareness and activism.

"Homosexuality Leaves the Back Alley": Gay Atlanta, c. 1968

The *Great Speckled Bird* was a radical newspaper that reported on counterculture and leftist politics and organizations that started publishing in Atlanta in the spring of 1968.[10] Just six months into publication Miller Francis introduced Atlanta's radical community to gay liberation and some very revolutionary ideas about drag and the sexual revolution. His review included a discussion of the gay world, straight society, and how the homosexual lived in a “totally hostile, totalitarian world, one which is not merely anti-homosexual but anti-sexual.”[11] His review of *The Queen* pushed Atlanta’s radical community to expand its scope and forcefully argued for gay liberation before it was defined as such. His emphasis on “the implications and associations of the images in *The Queen*” allowed for a more open discussion about gender and sexual revolution in Atlanta’s radical community.

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[8] Chenault, "An Unspoken Past," 144.

[9] See Chapter 4, "Moving into a Tight Squeeze: The Development of the Strip," in Huff, "A New Way of Living Together."

[10] Gabb, "A Fowl in the Vortices of Consciousness"; Janice Hume, "The Past as Persuader in the *Great Speckled Bird*," *Journalism History* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 182-90.; see Chapter 5, "Bitch and Badger, Carp and Cry": *The Great Speckled Bird* and Atlanta's Hip Community," in Huff, "A New Way of Living Together."

The Queen was released in June of 1968 and drew some positive national press attention and reviews. The movie followed the men as they dressed, rehearsed, and socialized during the contest and showed the visual magic used in transformation from male to female, which embodied the drag pageant. The event was one of many like pageants organized by Jack Doroshow, who narrated the movie and emceed the pageant as Miss Sabrina. In a review of the movie from 1993, when it was running again in New York City, reviewer William Grimes included a bit more about the history and lead-up to the 1967 All-America Pageant.[12] Doroshow “held 46 contests a year from 1959 to 1967 through his company, the Nationals Academy, which in its heyday had 100 employees on the payroll.” Doroshow described how he got his contestants for the pageants from a “thriving drag subculture.” He sent “advance men from town to town, putting out the word of a contest through gay bars, which sold tickets.” Another way that made their own publicity was through local “phone freaks,” gay men in the community who Sabrina said were "girls who loved to gossip on the phone for hours. We'd give them tickets and have them hype the contest."[13]

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[11] Francis, Jr., “The Queen.”

[12] William Grimes, “‘The Queen’ on the Runway Again,” *New York Times*, March 27, 1993.

In 1968, the *New York Times* responded positively to the humanity of the documentary and offered that it "shows us another America."[14] Not all the press was favorable though; the review from *Vector*, a nationally distributed gay magazine published out of San Francisco, resented the film and the attention it received.[15] *Vector* reviewers thought that *The Queen* reinforced stereotypes as the documentary style tempted audiences to conflate all homosexuals with drag. The review noted that gay life wasn't "all feathers and wigs" and that the movie, because it showed real people, would "perpetuate the myth that all homosexuals are nelly drag queens."[16] In Atlanta, Miller Francis responded to its style, tone, and the subject. He situated it within a broader public discussion on homosexuality and regarded the film as a political statement. He argued that the drag contest depicted in the movie served the audience and the community in different ways. Francis reflected on the positive mood in *The Queen* of "healthiness, a freshness, a freedom, the best word for which is gaiety."[17]

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Renata Adler, "'Queen' of Drag is Crowned," *New York Times*, June 18, 1968; Betty Luther Hillman, "'The Most Profoundly Revolutionary Act a Homosexual Can Engage In': Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964-1972," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 1 (January 2011): 153.

[15] Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995); Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s–1970s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[16] Hillman, "The Most Profoundly Revolutionary Act," 153.

[17] Francis, Jr., "The Queen.

Miller Francis used *The Queen* review to speak directly about misconceptions and stereotypes of people in the gay community. While the *New York Times* review offered the possibility that the contestants "may be absolutely miserable (like others) in their private lives," Miller Francis resolutely rejected the common insinuation that all homosexuals were "laughing on the outside, crying on the inside."[18] Francis used the language of political militancy that was circulating in gay liberation discourse at the time to relate the impact of the documentary. Early in the review he argued that "We've all been indoctrinated with the belief that the homosexual subculture is termed "gay" ironically," but the truth was that the word "accurately describes the mood" of the community when it is free from social and political constraint.[19] Francis described the non-gay world in bleak terms as a "totally hostile, totalitarian world… anti-homosexual and anti-sexual." He backed up his claim with evidence, for when gays gathered straight society felt threatened and "the paddy wagon and the billy club (not to mention universal moral revulsion and censure) are never far away."[20]

Just three years before, the police showed just how effective the paddy wagon could be in Atlanta. On Halloween night in 1965, police raided an after-hours party and arrested 97 people; they had five paddy wagons waiting outside when they raided the bar.[21] Arnold Fleischmann and Jason Hardman looked at how Atlanta's gay and lesbian rights movement developed in specific relation to its local politics and found that the first political organization emerged in Atlanta only after Stonewall and in the liberationist mode with the establishment of what they called the "Atlanta Gay Liberation Front."[22] The gay and lesbian social community in Atlanta before Stonewall was small. In a 1966 *Atlanta Journal Constitution* article called "Atlanta's Lonely 'Gay' World," Fleischmann and Hardman noted that there were "at least five bars" for gay and lesbian Atlantans but that even they were subject to intense regulation as authorities "want[ed] to close the 'gay' bars that cater exclusively to homosexuals [and] to convert homosexuals to 'straight' lives—by force, harassment, arrests, prosecutions."[23] In Florida, gay and lesbian people were targeted in a political campaign that saw the Johns Committee interview, harass, and publicly purge gay and lesbian teachers that worked for the state.[24]

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[18] Ibid. and Adler, "Queen' of Drag is Crowned."

[19] Francis, Jr., "The Queen."

[20] Ibid.

[21] Fleischmann and Hardman, "Hitting Below the Bible Belt," 413.

No such public campaign had ever been mounted against gay and lesbian people so unilaterally in Atlanta or Georgia, though a brutally intrusive culture of surveillance developed around policing the urban gay world.[25] In "Atlanta's Lonely 'Gay' World," a police sergeant recounted that on his squad were "six men who know how to handle these cases." Handling the cases involved these tactics used by the police: plainclothes police who parked away from Piedmont Park and walked into "known gay hangouts" where they would "make themselves available to homosexuals." Police patrolled areas they called “troubled” and took pictures of people they believed to be “homosexual.” These pictures probably ended up as part of an even more drastic policy of intimidation and harassment against gay and lesbian people in Atlanta. The sergeant added to his description of tactics for policing homosexuals in the city that “We keep a file on [them]. We have a pretty extensive file.”[26]

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[22] Ibid., 414.

[23] Ibid., 413.

[24] Braukman, *Communists and Perverts Under the Palms;* Graves, *And They Were Wonderful Teachers*; Sears, *Lonely Hunters*, and Julio Capo, Jr., "It's Not Queer to Be Gay: Miami and the Emergence of the Gay Rights Movement, 1945-1995" (Ph. D. Dissertation, Florida International University, 2011).

[25] Howard, "The Library, the Park, and the Pervert"; Anna Lvovsky, "Queer Expertise: Urban Policing and the Construction of Public Knowledge about Homosexuality, 1920–1970" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2015).

In the mid-1950s, the American Law Institute, an organization of what legal historian William Eskridge called “America’s most eminent lawyers, judges, and academics” set out to create a Model Penal Code that attempted to bring into modernity and uniformity America’s patchwork of state laws and criminal codes.[27] Over the course of debate a compromise was struck between conservative members who favored the continued criminalization of sodomy and those who viewed themselves as “more modern and up to date.”[28] A compromise made sodomy a misdemeanor but when the draft was debated, the Institute voted to drop the criminalization of sodomy altogether, except as used in reference to forcible sexual assault and when committed against a minor. When the Code was finalized in 1962, the American Law Institute voted to decriminalize consensual adult sodomy and some states soon adopted a version of the Model Penal Code. Illinois was the earliest and first state to decriminalize sodomy in 1961, even before the Model Penal Code was finalized.[29] In 1968, Georgia’s General Assembly undertook criminal law reform, the first in the South and like many states used the Model

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[26] Fleischmann and Hardman, “Hitting Below the Bible Belt,” 413.

[27] Eskridge, *Dishonorable Passions*, 121.

[28] “A young lawyer,” quoted in Eskridge, *Dishonorable Passions*, 124.

[29] Ibid., 124-27.

Penal Code as a template, except for when it came to sodomy law.[30] As George Painter outlined in his extensive history of sodomy laws in state criminal codes, Georgia's 1968 criminal code revision did not just ignore the Model Code's recommendations on decriminalization of sodomy but they actually implemented more conservative measures. The state adopted some of the advisements in that they expanded their definition of sodomy to include cunnilingus (the Model Code defined the crime between any man or woman who were not married to each other), whereas the state's prior sodomy law did not cover sexual acts between women. In 1968, Georgia legislators also found inspiration in the Code that had recommended making "public solicitation of same-sex intercourse a misdemeanor."[31] In an exceptional statement about their feelings on the severity of sodomy as a crime, the Georgia 1968 revised code increased the felony punishment from a minimum of 1-10 years imprisonment to 1-20 years, in what William Eskridge called the "harshest regime in the nation."[32]

In states where sodomy was decriminalized, gay and lesbian communities were still harassed by the police, discriminated against, and subject to anti-gay and lesbian violence. However, the charges were minimized and the potentiality of becoming a felon, imprisoned and released as a sex offender without rights and supports made the penalties far less destructive, though not without their clear and serious dangers. Anna Lvovsky, a legal historian who has looked at the development of how police departments in the modern period developed a system of professional expertise to help them police and control gay male communities in the city noted that "In all states, however, judges tended to keep watch for police officers who overstepped their bounds in arresting gay men, throwing out evidence of sodomy procured through invasive clandestine surveillance stations, or finding informal ways to dismiss solicitation arrests by overly aggressive decoys."[33] Though it was likely the case that in many states a system of checks and balances between judges, state legislatures, and local attorneys kept the police from overtly and obviously engaging in questionable practices of entrapment and harassment, it was not the case in the South.

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[30] George Painter, "The Sensibilities of Our Forefathers: The History of Sodomy Laws in the United States," *SodomyLaws.org*, (1991) Gay & Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest (GLAPN). https://www.glapn.org/sodomylaws/sensibilities/georgia.htm#fn110 .

[31] Eskridge, *Dishonorable Passions,* 124.

[32] Ibid., 391.

In Atlanta tactics of clandestine surveillance became a policing practice that coupled with the new misdemeanor law of solicitation for sodomy introduced a whole new way for police to target, infiltrate clubs and communities, and entrap gay men and women. Further, what constituted "public indecency" was expanded to include partial nudity and "lewd caress." In 1969 and 1970 the state Court of Appeals upheld police use of these laws and added the alarming specifications that proof of public indecency could be determined with circumstantial evidence, that police testimony needed no corroboration, and that the new sodomy law only required "some contact" between genitals, and not penetration. As George painter noted these revisions basically gave "police carte blanche for harassment."[34]

The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* reported that in 1966 "Atlanta's homosexuals are content to remain quiet [and] not militant about change…They want society's acceptance, they want change. They want to hold jobs without fear, but they usually don't carry signs or wave banners about it."[35] Dick Hebert's article took a close look at the growing gay community in Atlanta and what Chenault noted was probably for many in the city a "more troubling aspect" to the city's new popularity. Hebert said that "Across the South, homosexuals are saying Atlanta is 'a nice place to go" and that it was "quite gay for its size.'"[36] The article appeared in Atlanta's newspapers around the same time that across the nation other major press and periodicals started to examine other local gay subcultures in their own cities. Martin Meeker's study of gay and lesbian press and communications tracked the beginning of a shift in America's awareness and attention to these minority communities. Starting with the *Life* magazine article "Homosexuality in America" in 1964, there soon followed numerous stories about local communities and other in-depth profiles.[37] Stories in the mid-1960s profiled gay male communities in San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles.[38] Major national magazines published articles about gay life like *Time's* 1966 piece "The Homosexual in America" and *Look* magazine's 1967 feature "The Sad 'Gay' Life" and Hebert's profile of Atlanta's gay community seemed to fit right into the national trend.[39]

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[33] Lvovsky, "Queer Expertise," 9.

[34] Painter, "The Sensibilities of Our Forefathers."

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[35] Fleischmann and Hardman, "Hitting Below the Bible Belt," 413.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Meeker, *Contacts Desired,* 151-153.

[38] Ibid., 165-172.

[39] Ibid., 190 and 296, n125. In Miami, Julio Capo noted that in August of 1970 the *Miami Daily News* ran features of a similar subject, "It's the Most Unhappy, Unrewarding Life There Is" and "His Life Pattern Shrouded in Controversy"; Capo, "It's Not Queer to be Gay," 131.

Wesley Chenault included some important geographic details about the known gay hangouts that police cruised themselves in their attempt to curtail gay cruising in the city. The police looked for people they could charge with loitering "from the Fox Theatre heading south along Peachtree."[40] One investigator, W. L. Duncan of the "Metropol Sex Crime Investigation School," told the reporter that he carried a camera and threatened to take young men's picture as a deterrent to keep them off the streets. He said they wanted "to make it unattractive to the younger ones. We want to keep them away from the public. We aren't going to change them. We know that."[41] The increased attention to the streets and the park reflected another new growth in Atlanta's population, that of an evolving hip community that was developing in the late 1960s in Midtown. Christopher Huff's research on Atlanta's hippie community showed that by 1966, a visible group of young people of about 200 or 300 hundred had come to Midtown, in much the same way that cities across the nation saw an influx of young people coming from somewhere else.[42]

The opening of two coffeehouses, The Catacombs and the Twelfth Gate in 1967 was instrumental in the development of "the Strip," an area that would become the epicenter of the explosion in the hippie community in Atlanta, according to Christopher Huff.[43] The Catacombs was located in the basement of a building on the corner of 14th and Peachtree, that held on the first floor the art gallery business of David Braden, who came to Atlanta from Greenville, Alabama in 1962. The Catacombs quickly became a popular spot for hanging out and listening to live music. Braden became "an early figurehead in the hippie community" when he started to rent out beds on the second floor of the building to some of the kids who were homeless in Atlanta.[44] This earned him "the nickname "Mother David," a moniker that reflected his role as caretaker for the burgeoning hippie population but which also derived from his open homosexuality." When police showed up at the Catacombs to question Braden about a shooting, some of the hippies told them that "She's in bed."[45]

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[40] Chenault, "An Unspoken Past," 131.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Huff, "A New Way of Living Together," 210-12.

[43] Ibid., 210.

In Midtown the new hippie community interacted with the urban gay community and changed the contours of the neighborhood. Wesley Chenault pointed out that in this same period white men and women who were middle-class and of the "coat-and-tie crowd" still went to bars along Ponce de Leon Avenue or the more exclusive ones in Midtown. On Ponce de Leon, two older and well-established gay and lesbian bars, Mrs. P's and Dupree's (a women's bar) were joined by Frank Powell's Joy Lounge that opened sometime in 1967. Powell was a local gay businessman who owned and operated many gay bars in Atlanta over the next two decades. At the Joy Lounge he reintroduced drag to Atlanta's gay nightlife with shows put on by Billy Jones, who performed as Phyllis Killer, Shirley Temple Jones, and as the humorous emcee for a review called Billy's Beautiful Boys.[46] Eventually drag would come to the Strip and in turn be influenced by the counterculture, the sexual revolution, and the radical politics there.

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[44] Ibid., 211.

[45] Ibid., 211-12, n8.

[46] Chenault, "An Unspoken Past," 144-45; Chenault and Braukman, *Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History*, 55, 72; Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 81-82.

The hippie community around Piedmont Park and the Midtown area had drawn attention from city officials and the police as they sought to control the growing number of people on the streets. Throughout 1967 the police increased their patrols around the Catacombs and on the Strip. They raided the Catacombs in November of 1967 and arrested over a dozen people on drugs charges, including Mother David, who received a suspended one-year sentence. In what many believed to be part of the continued campaign against the Strip and hippies, Mother David was arrested again in March of 1968 for selling marijuana to a nineteen-year-old minor and was sentenced to seven years.[47] Before Braden's last arrest he told the *Atlanta Journal* that the hippie community wouldn't be stopped or contained. He "predicted the local movement would continue to grow but move off of Peachtree Street and east into the nearby Little Five Points neighborhood. Once there, the community would expand through the help of local churches, the opening of health clinics, and the launch of a hippie newspaper."[48]

Christopher Huff pointed out that Mother David's prediction about the community was only off by how quickly he thought it would change its physical community center in the city.[49] Mother David's predictions also foresaw the development of Atlanta's gay and lesbian community as it interacted with the hip community and as it was influenced by the radical politics of the era, best exemplified by their relationship with the *Great Speckled Bird*. But Mother David was not the universal leader of the hippies that Atlanta's mainstream press had deemed him and he did not speak for all of them. In a newsletter produced by non-violence activists in 1967, Miller Francis criticized a recent hippie attempt at protest that he thought a failure because they refused to organize. Francis criticized the hippies reliance on Mother David, who had not given his support for a past anti-war protest because it was "organized by communists."[50] By the time that Miller Francis introduced gay liberation to Atlanta's radical community with his review of *The Queen*, "Mother David" Braden was no longer a major influence on the younger, hipper, gay and lesbian community due to his arrests and impending imprisonment. Francis would continuously push the gay and lesbian community to see the political nature of their lives. His radical politics influenced the beginning of gay liberation in the city, but did so alongside the continued presence of a more culturally hip counterculture element that desired to not have their sexuality be political.

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[47] Huff, "A New Way of Living Together," 216.

[48] Ibid., 215.

[49] Ibid.

"Gay Power on the Strip": Gay Liberation Comes to Atlanta, 1968-1970

With the founding of the *Great Speckled Bird*, the political and the hippie community came together in what historian Christopher Huff argues was a reflection of Miller Francis's position that emphasized "community development as a form of resistance."[51] Atlanta's hip community began to resist intellectually and politically by organizing in the community and the most basic way to achieve this first step was to create a community that was aware of the ways in which they were being repressed. This was for many, an obvious thing to point out to a community that was patrolled by police in cruisers from the street and on foot on the sidewalks, that raided houses and arrested owners for renting out rooms, and that used undercover officers extensively to infiltrate and influence young hippies. The gay community faced the same problems of police harassment, except with a lavender twist. Police cruised the gay cruising spots on the look-out for possible homosexuals, in the same way that other gay men cruised looking for other possible gay men. They raided bars and after-parties and filled paddy wagons. By the mid-1960s as Dick Hebert's article made clear, the Atlanta police had spent a considerable amount of time developing tactics that attempted to deter gay people from congregating in public together. Entrapment by police in Piedmont Park was used against the gay community as well as the hippie community. In the late 1960s, Atlanta's Midtown seemed to have two major problems: a growing hip community and a growing gay community, both of which they hoped to police out of existence.

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[50] Huff, "A New Way of Living Together," 224.

[51] Ibid., 225.

The years that led up to Stonewall saw an increase in urban and public spaces claimed by gay people.[52] The *Bird* reported on gay community issues as the paper grew and expanded its coverage of Atlanta city politics and urban issues related to leftist and radical politics. The paper considered the issues that Atlanta's gay community faced to be part of the radical fight against mainstream society and were included as part of the alternative scene. Police harassment of gay people in Atlanta was a controversial topic and not covered in the mainstream newspapers like the *Atlanta Journal* and the *Constitution*. It was only in the *Bird* that issues of local city governance, police harassment, and the gay community were discussed. The *Bird's* reporting on police issues in Atlanta reflected the changes of the late 1960s as hippies, new left and radical students, homeless or runaway youth and people who lived on the streets congregated around the Strip. Along the Strip, an area that roughly consisted of the blocks that led from 8th Street to 14th Street, kids would hang out together. It was "the Freaky people's main street to Piedmont Park" and it was where the hip community mingled with the gay community.[53] The Strip became contested ground by the end of the decade as Christopher Huff noted that it was literally divided in half, in territorial stalemate that put one half of Peachtree in the hands of the hip community and the other half ruled increasingly by "rednecks" and "slick-backed hair types."[54] Atlanta's gay community, alongside the hip community faced harassment from the police and the city alderman who sought to curb the area's usage by its new community.

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[52] Studies of post-war urban gay communities include major studies on political and social development in New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Chicago and many other smaller cities. Notable among them are D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*; Chauncey, *Gay New York*; Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold;* Boyd, *Wide Open Town*; Timmons, *Gay L.A;* Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*; Hanhardt, *Safe Space*; Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout.*

Phillip Forrester came from Savannah and settled in Midtown before the hippies came to town and had an antiques business on Peachtree Street. He performed as Diamond Lil and was a well-known local drag celebrity and *Bird* contributor during the period. Lil recalled that the hippies

> were up and down Peachtree Street, from about, oh, 5th street to about 15th, about 10 blocks on Peachtree, and then the side streets.. .going into Juniper, going into Piedmont Avenue, going all down into Charles Allen, toward Monroe. All through that Midtown area was just filled.[55]

At Piedmont Park, Diamond Lil remembered a free love atmosphere and friendly people. Later the park was closed off to auto traffic but in the hippie years you could still drive through. Lil said:

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[53] The Strip Project, Community "The Strip," http://www.thestripproject.com/community/piedmont-park/ (accessed November 9, 2018).

[54] Huff, "A New Way of Living Together," 231.

[55] Diamond Lil interview with Wesley Chenault, quoted in Chenault, "The Unspoken Past," 155.

> It was really good because you could park and sit there or park and get out and do some cruising on the hillside or by the lake, which was quite lovely because it was easy to strike up conversations and stuff like that.

Those conversations were, according to Diamond Lil, easy to have as the hippies and gays got along fine. Clearly reminiscing about the past, Diamond Lil described the period fondly

> Everybody was just very free. And gayness—that didn't even phase them, so to speak. They thought that that was vogue if you turned out to be on the gay side, and I was definitely queen of the hippies.[56]

In the spring of 1969 an escalating situation between Atlanta's Parks Commission and the hippies and "homosexuals" around the 14th street neighborhood and Piedmont Park came to a head. Howard Romaine reported in the *Bird* that a local Alderman who represented the area of the park asked the city of Atlanta for new ordinances that would reign in what some of his uneasy constituents saw as abuses.[57] The ordinances attempted to ban music after hours and close all the parks in the city to any traffic at all- vehicle or pedestrian—and would even prohibit parking.[58] The ordinances were openly proposed by city aldermen to curtail the problem of "noisy homosexuals." Romaine reported that for some members of the Parks Committee, the real interest in discussing the severe measures was the "distasteful openness of homosexuals who congregate in Piedmont Park." The measure was set aside when publicity surrounding it drew negative attention. Romaine used the words of a critic of the ordinance to bring attention to the issues of police harassment in the gay community. He quoted Linda Jenness, a socialist candidate for mayor, as she charged one of the city Aldermen of victimizing young people and gay people. Jenness quoted the Alderman's own statement to reinforce the real reason for the passage of the ordinance, as he said "everyone one of these people ought not to be in jail, but under the jail."[59]

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Howard Romaine, "Parks Belong to Alderman," *Great Speckled Bird*, June 16, 1969, 7 and Romaine, Untitled report, *Great Speckled Bird*, August 11, 1969, 3.

[58] Huff, "A New Way of Living Together," 247-49.

The police stepped up their presence and over the summer and fall a series of confrontations saw hippies, radicals, and street kids fighting police in the streets. In early August, a crowd of about 200 surrounded Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) agents, shouting things like "Fuck the pigs!"[60] The Atlanta Police also continued their harassment of the gay community and the *Bird* documented and reported on the busts. A recent showing of the Andy Warhol movie *Lonesome Cowboys* was interrupted by a police raid at the Ansley Mall Mini-Cinema.[61] Plain clothes police charged into the theater, locked the doors of the lobby, confiscated the movie, and filmed the audience as they were refunded their ticket money and forced to leave the theater.[62] The tensions between the police and the hippie community were connected to the issues the police and the city had in the same period with the increasingly visible gay community. The two developed at the same time and it is reasonable and necessary to consider the response and development of them together. If not for the growing hippie presence, police may have quietly enforced or allowed gay men some limited space in the city. Alternatively, if not for the growing gay male culture and confidence in their claims to public space and visibility, the hippies may have been the target of softer sweeps and forgiveness related to their youth. However, each community was growing visible and attracted attention from more conservative Midtown residents who rejected the new look of their neighborhood.

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[59] Birdseye, "Vixen, Si, Viva, No," *Great Speckled Bird*, August 11, 1969, 3.

[60] Huff, "A New Way of Living Together," 233.

[61] Birdseye, "Vixen, Si, Viva, No;" Wesley Chenault, Andy Ditzler, Joey Orr, "Discursive Memorials: Queer Histories in Atlanta's Public Spaces," *Southern Spaces* (February 26, 2010). Accessed November 9, 2018. https://southernspaces.org/2010/discursive-memorials-queer-histories-atlantas-public-spaces

[62] Berl Boykin interview with David Hayward, excerpt on police raid, Touching Up Our Roots Oral Histories, Date of interview, January 29, 2011. Excerpt available online at http://digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/lgbtq/id/2417

Later that year relations further deteriorated when local terrorists began a campaign of violence against the hippie community. A local community center and business cooperative called Atlantis Rising was firebombed in early September, which led to a brief calm and peace between Atlanta, the police, and the hippies. That calm broke by the end of the month when another firebombing of a hip bar followed close on the heels of an alleged riot in Piedmont Park.[63] The decline of the Strip came at the end of a campaign of violence waged against the hip community. Throughout the late 1960s, arsonists set fire to a number of buildings in the community and firebombs destroyed others. As Huff noted, these violent tactics were used on the gay community when it emerged in the 1970s as an organized and visible community in Midtown.[64] Christopher Huff showed that the hip community dominated the Strip and Midtown from 1968 until the end of 1969. After that he concluded, "the Strip, the *Bird* and Atlanta were undergoing periods of important transformation. By the autumn of that year the Strip had entered into a period of decline."

Howard Romaine adopted a militant and aggressive tone in his reports on local harassment of the gay community. He connected the city's politics to the police department and the lack of a gay organization to address their grievances. He claimed that the “liberal fat cats” wiped out the “homosexuals who had in the past met in the parks of the area” through a combination of a “vicious campaign of harassment” but also due to the “inability of our gay subculture to fight for the rights of its own sexual taste and the indifference of people to the destruction of others’ rights.”[65] It was probably for Romaine a hard foreshadowing of the future for the local hippie community who might face the same fate. From its earliest days, Atlanta’s gay and lesbian community emerged in public from the radical countercultural movement of the late 1960s. Atlanta’s gay and lesbian history stands out from other major metropolitan areas because it did not have a foundational root of homophile organizing to push it forward or to evolve from. Since the mid-1960s, homophile organizing in places like New York City, San Francisco, and Chicago had become more militant, illustrating a progression in movement philosophy.[66] No such organizations existed in Atlanta before the Stonewall Riots of 1969.

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[63] Huff, "A New Way of Living Together," 233-36.

[64] Ibid., 188.

The *Bird* reported on civil rights issues that were specific to the bar culture of the urban gay world. Much of the early local news they reported was the regular and increasing police harassment of hippie gathering spots and gay areas and bars. The *Bird* championed radical voices in Atlanta and sought to engage the counterculture and “hip” community that had developed around Piedmont Park, 14th Street, and the cultural underground. The newspaper’s coverage of gay and lesbian liberation was slow to build. Between 1968 and 1969, there were less than twenty articles printed that related gay or lesbian content, and that number included advertisements for national gay publications.

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[65] Birdseye, “Vixen, Si, Viva, No.”

[66] See, for example, Marcus, *Making Gay History*; Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities*; Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*; Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout.*

The publicity for gay organizations and actions increased and mirrored the rise and ascent of gay liberation nationally.[67] In September of 1969, the *Bird* published alongside a Miller Francis review of the *Staircase* (a movie that featured gay characters), an interview excerpt with the Gay Liberation Front, recently established in New York City after the Stonewall Riots.[68] Soon after, advertisements began to appear in the classifieds section for the establishment of a Mattachine International group in Atlanta, under the headline "Gay is Good."[69] The ads indicated some of the first moves and attempts to organize a political gay community in the era.[70]

The *Great Speckled Bird* was an important source for gay community building, activism, and political consciousness raising. The *Bird* gave voice to early gay liberationists and lesbian feminists and circulated their ideas in the city and the hinterland of the South. The "Gay Caucus," who were self-identified gay activists and writers, took up the cause of gay revolution in the pages of the newspaper. They were an important part of the radical and countercultural new politics of the era.[71] As political gay activists came out in public and in print they forced the wider gay and lesbian social community to reckon with their own liberation and oppression.

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[67] Kristin Gustafson, "Grass Roots, Activist Newspapers from Civil Rights to the Twenty-first Century: Balancing Loyalties and Managing Change" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2010).

[68] Miller Francis, Jr., "A Review and More," *Great Speckled Bird*, September 15, 1969, 6.

[69] "Gay is Good," *Great Speckled Bird*, October 6, 1969, 8.

[70] Ibid.

[71] "Gabb, "A Fowl in the Vortices"; Hume, "The Past as Persuader"; Huff, "A New Way of Living Together."

Miller Francis joined Atlanta in a national discussion about drag and gender in the gay community with his review of *The Queen*. Francis contributed to a radical dialogue of gay liberation and was part of the circulation of ideas in the homophile and gay press. His positive review of the movie contrasted to a more negative perspective that emanated from California in the magazine *Vector*. The magazine began publishing in 1965 as the printed voice for The Society of Individual Rights (SIR), a political organization formed in 1964 in San Francisco.[72] The *Vector* review framed *The Queen* as a negative cultural product that would do "more harm than good" because it represented a segment of the gay community that was in the late 1960s becoming a controversial and critiqued part of the political philosophy of radical gay liberation. Betty Luther Hillman examined the gay community's discussion of drag in the late 1960s and found it to be rather complex. Drag was regarded in the gay community as different things; it was interpreted in highly individualistic ways based on cultural, racial, and economic ideas about gender and sexuality. Drag was most contentious as a topic when it related to the activism and place of transsexuals within the movement. Hillman concluded that those at *Vector* regarded drag as a vestige of an older homosexual community that was repressed by sexuality and gender roles.

This view was common for many gay militants in the era. From the perspective of many who were starting to develop a radical gay left critique of their own homosexual underworld, a drag queen contest reflected regressive ideas about masculinity and gender, and it was especially concerning to some that those influences would be connected to gay liberation or the sexual revolution. Atlanta's gay and lesbian liberation movement grew from the radical community and considered these national discussions. Those who were more countercultural or from the gay urban world resisted the new politics that regarded them as obsolete or worse detrimental to the new community being built. Gay leftists and radicals were not successful in their attempts to curtail drag or the growth of the traditional gay bar world, and eventually gay liberation shifted away from radical politics.

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[72] Hillman, "The Most Profoundly Revolutionary Act," 153.

Radicalism and the sexual revolution and freedom from heteronormative life was an important part of the gay revolution during its earliest years. In Atlanta, female impersonation, drag, and street drag all occupied different meanings in relation to gay and lesbian liberation. Some militants early on rejected drag and the gay bar as cultural remnants of a past that they were happy to leave behind. However, it was not an immediately accepted or uncontested view even for more radical, leftist, and militant gay liberationists. In his review of *The Queen*, Miller Francis argued that the gay revolution had to include liberation from gender. He suggested that the drag performance was a powerful expression of freedom. He argued that

> Homosexuals have lived intimately with the falseness and cruelty of America, and they have had to contend with their special insight by transforming it, lest it destroy them psychically. Thus, the drag ball or beauty queen contest is in essence a quite serious game, a positive healing ritual where the contortions and gestures of a sick, insane society are transformed through the folk art of a troupe of self-sustaining actors into a true guerilla theatre, "caricaturing the caricature" (D.W.C.).[73]

The *Great Speckled Bird* offered readers and writers the space to communicate new liberation and radical ideas about sexuality in film and theater and in book reviews. Early in its history the paper cast a wide net when it included the gay community as part of the hip, countercultural, and radical community of Atlanta. Coverage of gay liberation increased in 1970 and new voices came to the pages of the *Bird*. That year saw over twenty-five pieces printed about gay liberation and activism that covered local happenings as well as national, including events in New York City and San Francisco. Locally, Atlanta gay liberation in the *Bird* was dominated in 1970 by two voices: Miller Francis Jr. and Diamond Lil. Francis used film criticism as the primary vehicle for his evolving philosophy and radical approach to gay liberation. Francis was part of the radical political scene in Atlanta and wrote for the *Bird* for a number of years. He got his start as a music reviewer who covered the underground rock scene in Atlanta, but he also reviewed the arts more generally as a critic of movies, music and concerts.[74] He eventually covered gay news in the city from his radical stance. The local drag queen Diamond Lil mounted a guerrilla-style classified ad campaign to force her way into the *Bird*. Diamond Lil combined the politics of radical gay liberation with counterculture and hippie influences in her own unique, distinct, and revolutionary approach to drag. Diamond Lil became a staff writer for the *Bird* and wrote under the name the "Voice of Xtabay" and possibly "Capone." [75] Diamond Lil exposed readers to the gay urban world of female impersonators and traditional camp but she also transformed it with a new gay revolutionary ethos and countercultural street awareness.

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[73] Francis, Jr., "The Queen." D.W.C. (Donald Webster Cory) was the pseudonym used by the author of *The Homosexual in America*, published in 1952 which discussed the repression and depression of those in America who experienced same-sex sexuality.

The *Bird's* increased attention to the gay community seemed to encourage more intellectual, political, and radical discussions about drag, gender, and sexuality and over the next few years Atlanta saw more people engage with the gay liberation movement.

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[74] Miller Francis, Jr., interview by Patrick Edmonson for The Strip Project, "Voices of the Freak Era," The Strip Project, April 17, 2014. Available online at http://www.thestripproject.com/miller-francis-interview/

[75] Chenault, "An Unspoken Past," 154.

Drag and gender and its role in gay liberationist theory were important and frequent subjects for gay and lesbian writers for the *Bird*. The newspaper gave in-depth coverage to the performances of Diamond Lil who had a lively run at the Centaur Club, a short-lived venue started by Billy Jones in the spring of 1970 which the city closed by the end of the year. The Centaur was a nightclub in the 14th street neighborhood and the primarily gay shows included a mix of older style female impersonation, pantomime performances, and camp but also mixed in the new and surrounding counterculture and hippie styles. A new style of drag emerged to compete in Atlanta and was personified by Diamond Lil as she fused various hip, street, counterculture, sexual and gender liberationist philosophies of the era to her own campy aesthetic.

The development of Atlanta's gay neighborhoods, which included cruising areas, bars, lounges, and other businesses, mirrored similar period developments in other major urban centers.[76] In Atlanta, historically gay neighborhoods that developed as gay-friendly or gay dominated spaces, overlapped with those areas that had significant hip communities, which created a dynamic new community. Midtown, Piedmont Park, and Little Five Points were all areas that co-developed radical, bohemian, counter-cultural, and gay communities.[77] The gay bars that were often at the center of the gayborhoods offered the best chance and opportunity to meet other people who felt an attraction to the same sex so many people braved or risked the consequences because the alternative was isolation and loneliness. Gay bars were often centrally located within easy travelling distances to popular residential neighborhoods or cruising areas. The gay bar was an integral site to the physical community though it was riven with internal complexities and notoriously segregated by gender and race. However, the gay bars still allowed people to find the comradery of others and were therefore important centers of community. Going into a bar required at least a personal awareness of sexual orientation if not a conscious decision to "come out" in a political context.

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[76] Chenault, "An Unspoken Past," 7; Fleischmann and Hardman, "Hitting Below the Bible Belt," 423.

[77] Huff, "A New Way of Living Together," 210.

Atlanta's gay community claimed an assertive presence as citizens of the city. Gay people were routinely surveilled, harassed, and severely restricted in their activities but could take comfort and gain some protection in being part of visible and acknowledged communities. To gain knowledge of this geographic information and the gayborhoods was an important step in coming out in the city. Urban social life for gay men could be diverse and entertaining if you lived in a larger city like Atlanta. Atlanta had numerous bars, cruising spots, and neighborhoods, supported by sizeable gay population that include men, women, and people of color.[78] Drag shows and female impersonation was a popular form of gay entertainment in Atlanta and queens and their fans were an important part of the urban gay community. As performers they were included in some of the earliest publications for the gay community and often became icons in their local scenes. Drag shows in local gay bars became popular as a way to make extra money on a slow night but the performers and the acts fought for legitimacy and a place in the gay revolution.

Drag shows were important to the gay bar community as sites of creative exchange and performance but they were not always so popular with the bar management and became increasingly unpopular with the gay liberation and radical community. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, drag performances were still illegal in many places, though the laws were skirted by bribery and loose interpretations of theater and performance. Bar owners who allowed drag shows challenged local city laws and the police by violating ordinances against cross dressing. As drag became more popular and more lucrative, bar owners tested the local police and their commitment to policing gay venues. Wesley Chenault cited drag performer Diamond Lil's remembrance of how she got her start on the Atlanta stages in 1968 with a word of mouth campaign for a Tuesday night show.[79] She said the whisper campaign for a drag show on a slow night only moved forward when the bar owner, Chuck Cain, talked to the police and received their permission.[80]

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[78] A map from a 1971 issue of the gay magazine, *David*, listed fourteen different gay businesses in Atlanta's Midtown area, in Chenault and Braukman, *Gay and Lesbian Atlanta*, 60.

By 1970 the geography of the Atlanta gay world and its drag scene had become influenced by the rapid growth and demise of the hippie community in Midtown, the Strip, and around Piedmont Park. Wesley Chenault noted that "Female impersonation moved outside of the downtown straight clubs and into the gay bars along Ponce De Leon Ave." This physical location change represented other shifts within the Atlanta gay community when drag became so popular in gay clubs that business owners saw an opportunity to expand the size of their audiences and make more money. A new gay publication, *David*, from Jacksonville, Florida reported that Atlanta club owner Billy Jones planned on making his new venture, Club Centaur, the "forerunner of female impersonation shows opened to the public in the South."[81] The shows that Billy Jones promoted at the Centaur Club included his own act as Phyllis Killer and an act called "Billy's Beautiful Boys." Vi Hess's article in *David*, "Billy Jones Finds Show Biz No 'Drag," quoted Jones's new angle to promote drag outside of the gay male community. He said "we welcome tourists to come in and do their thing."[82]

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[79] Chenault, "An Unspoken Past," 145; Sears, *Rebels*, *Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 81-82.

[80] Diamond Lil, interview by J. D. Doyle for Queer Music Heritage, March 2006. Available online at http://www.queermusicheritage.com/mar2006s.html .

When promoters opened their shows and reviews to all audiences, some in the gay community reacted defensively. Opposing the Billy Jones article in *David* was a small editorial by Marc Rodgers that described a scene at bar with two "Georgia crackers" who heckled the drag performers.[83] Eventually the two hecklers left but Rodgers, and presumably some others in the community, questioned the new attitude in management that opened up their world to hostile outsiders. This new policy "has some visitors a little confused." It was this opening up of the gay community to others (straight, hippie, counterculture) which likely led many of Atlanta's *Great Speckled Bird* readers to the Centaur. The *Bird* advertised and positively reviewed the shows and scene at the Centaur, adding a countercultural, radical, stamp of approval to gay liberation and the gay community.

In May of 1970, Lance, a writer for the *Great Speckled Bird*, was given an early opportunity to see Diamond Lil perform her act at the Centaur. His review, "Gay Power on the Strip," described the atmosphere, tension, and energy of the crowd when Diamond Lil made her entrance. She "descends the staircase, completely in control. We are all hypnotized; the place is hers now, and she struts possession, all arabesques and sly smiles."[84] Lance's review bubbled with militant ideas about gay power and the revolution in gender. Influenced by gay liberation ideas, he saw the gay bar as a place for sexual politics. The focus of his argument was on the power of the people in the gay bar who celebrated the drag performance in the clubs. During the show Lance mused to himself that "visions of Gay Power rallies stream through my mind." He connected drag to gay liberation because it was a radical and revolutionary act against gender and sexuality norms. For Lance, drag represented a radical challenge to heterosexuality in the context of gay liberation, as the men embraced their femininity and simultaneously exposed the repressive system of gender roles. The performances made him question what he thought he knew about drag. At the end of the show, the Atlanta Supremes, "Black Drags in pink pants-jumpers" ended the show with a song from West Side Story. And as the Atlanta Supremes sang "there's a place for us," Lance firmly agreed, "And there is, and they're proud of it. And its Art. DRAG POWER!"[85]

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[81] Vi Hess, "Billy Jones Finds Show Biz No 'Drag," *David,* December 1970. Box 11, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Serial Collection, MSS 991, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Marc Rodgers, *David*, December 1970.

Just a month before Lance heralded "Drag Power" in Atlanta, Diamond Lil had still not finalized her act. At the beginning of April, a Diamond Lil classified advertised for a band to perform with her, specifically she asked for "four muscle bound guys" to "accommodate" her in a "fantasy night club act."[86] Diamond Lil introduced gay camp culture to a younger hip culture but she channeled the feeling of the era into a new kind of gay drag performance. Diamond Lil's act was different from other drag performers in the city. She sang live and played with her muscled rock band, which she named the Converse All-Stars. In an interview with the online radio music show *Queer Music Heritage*, Diamond Lil recalled that she chose to start a band in response to the competition in Atlanta's drag scene. After some queens asked the owners of a club not to promote her act, Diamond Lil went her own way. She said "the hell with them, I'll just get me a band. I'll just put a little ad in the paper and drum up a band."[87] Once Diamond Lil had her band she started to play out at clubs and her performances were an "immediate success." She likened her live performance act to a gayer, campier version of Tina Turner. According to her the drag scene in Atlanta—up until her appearance—was focused on pantomime shows and led to jealous competition between drag performers. Lil said "the drags made me do it. It was not my intention to become a big rock & roll star. It was all an accident."[88]

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[84] Lance, "Gay Power on the Strip," *Great Speckled Bird*, May 11, 1970, 9.

[85] Ibid.

[86] "Gigs," *Great Speckled Bird*, April 13, 1970, 23.

From April to September Diamond Lil placed ads in the classified section of the *Bird*. Some postings were short and merely reported that Diamond Lil was the "queen of queens" or that "Diamond Lil is the queen of the flower children. She's a heavy trip."[89] Longer classifieds ran in September and read like news briefs, wherein Diamond Lil herself reported her own news coverage. This campaign of promotion through classified advertisements forced Diamond Lil's voice into the *Bird* and she was eventually included in the newspaper as a named writer. Her official debut came, appropriately with reference to her ad campaign, placed in the classifieds section. A photograph of Diamond Lil, who had been seen in paid advertisements for the Centaur Club elsewhere in the *Bird*, and in the classified ads before, ran with a manifesto-like declaration that was satirical and genuine. It was camp and liberation as Diamond Lil declared "the "movement" has shown me not to know rejection, but to crave injection… right on!"[90]

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[87] Diamond Lil, interview by J. D. Doyle, Queer Music Heritage.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Diamond Lil, "Personals," *Great Speckled Bird*, May 25, 1970, 27 and June 1, 1970, 23.

As Diamond Lil's voice grew in the pages of the *Bird,* Miller Francis altered and amended his thoughts on drag, "male supremacy," and gay culture.[91] In movie reviews Francis discussed gender and drag in the gay community and examined his opinions about drag, camp, and even transsexuality as they related to gay liberationist ideas. In a review entitled "Sexism and Film" he outlined his major critiques of films that depicted gay people in current popular culture.[92] He considered many of the most important movies for gay visibility in the last decade, including *Myra Breckenridge* and *Boys in the Band*. Francis said, "Now a struggle is beginning in the area of communications/ideology over who will articulate the homosexual experience of oppression—the victim or the perpetrator."[93] These movies cast gay men in stereotypical characterizations, he thought, and were outdated.[94]

In his initial review of *The Queen,* Miller Francis saw some value in drag as they related to gay liberationist politics. By 1970, Francis regarded drag and drag performers as vestiges of an older representation of the shared repression of gay people. In a reprinting *The Queen* review, Francis regarded his change in perspective. In the two years since the review originally appeared in the pages of the *Bird*, he acknowledged the spread and proliferation of gay liberation and its influence on him. He agreed with the sentiment that "many Gay Liberation groups have come to see even gay institutions—gay bars, drag balls, cruising, baths, etc. as part of our oppression."[95] Francis recognized the importance of the gay bar and the drag queen and so did the *Bird's* editorial staff who chose to run the photo of Lil with the review of *The Queen*. Diamond Lil looked glamorous in a provocative bare-shouldered pose with a full face of makeup and teased out hair. As the *Bird* gave the crown to Diamond Lil, Miller Francis conceded that the gay bar was an important site for the gay community but it needed to be enlightened with some liberation. He argued that gay people needed to address the politics of the gay bar, "Out of the bars and into the streets—but remember why we were in the bars in the first place."[96]

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[90] Diamond Lil, *Great Speckled Bird*, September 14, 1970, 19.

[91] Miller Francis, Jr., "Sexism and Film," *Great Speckled Bird*, July 27, 1970, 4, 22; "Christine Jorgensen: A Fixed Idea," August 10, 1970, 9; "The Emperor's New Clothes: The Queen," October 19, 1970, 8, 16.

[92] Francis, Jr., "Sexism and Film."

[93] Ibid.

[94] Brian J. Distelberg, "Mainstream Fiction, Gay Reviewers, and Gay Male Cultural Politics in the 1970s" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, no. 3 (2010): 389-427.

The *Bird* helped to launch Diamond Lil's regional fame when they printed a two page spread about her recent arrest in Savannah while in drag. In her article, "Diamond Lil, Most Glamorous Queen in the World, In Captivity," she recounted her arrest and how the police had busted into a club and attempted to charge her falsely with public intoxication.[97] Lil and two other queens were held overnight and had their photographs taken, a favored intimidation tactic of police for harassing gay men and women.[98] Diamond Lil and the *Bird* printed those photographs in a show of power and liberation—they chose to not let the photos be incriminating evidence. It was undeniable after reading Lil's narrative of events at the station and in the court room that the gay people busted were targeted by law enforcement and charges made up after arrest. Before Diamond Lil made an official appearance in the pages of the *Bird* that fall other classifieds shed light on her predicament and that of many drag performers in the period. In June an ad declared "Diamond Lil, Riverboat Queen, jailed in Savannah, banned from Stage, husbandless, is there a conspiracy?"[99] One week later another ad continued her saga, "Since Diamond Lil is the only professional drag in town why is she so persecuted."[100] It may have been that Diamond Lil's arrest in Savannah may have made her too risky a performer for Atlanta.

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[95] Francis, Jr., "The Emperor's New Clothes."

[96] Ibid.

[97] Diamond Lil, "Diamond Lil, Most Glamorous Queen in the World, In Captivity," *Great Speckled Bird*, September 28, 1970, 10-11.

After watching Diamond Lil and the Converse All-Stars perform at the Centaur, Miller Francis knew no one in the crowd would ever be the same.[101] For Miller the energy of Diamond Lil's performance and the general atmosphere at the Centaur exposed all of the conflicted transitions in the gay community. He marked the contrast between the uniformed officers who "traipsed in and out" and the make-up and gowns of the drag performers on stage. Diamond Lil, more so than the other performers who "did a pantomime thing," represented gay liberation. As uniformed police officers inserted themselves into the crowd, Miller thought that it reflected "a new world busy being born and a pitiful, helpless old world busy dying." The new drag was a lifestyle and a way to resist the dominant political and social establishment. Miller interpreted drag as a revolutionary political tool as he said that "folks are just beginning to dig that it's all the same struggle, whether you smash the state with a gun or with glitter—or both."[102]

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[98] For a discussion of the creation and expansion of modern police surveillance of urban gay communities see Lvovsky, Chapter 6 "Cruising in Plain View: Clandestine Surveillance and the Eye of the Common Man, 1900-1962," in "Queer Expertise."

[99] Diamond Lil, June 1, 1970.

[100] Diamond Lil, "Personals," *Great Speckled Bird,* June 8, 1970, 23.

[101] Diamond Lil, "The Centaur Once a Myth - Now a Legend," *Great Speckled Bird*, November 30, 1970, 13-14.

"Out of the Bars and Into the Collective Conscious"

Sometime between the summer and fall of 1970, the Centaur Club changed management and became the subject of numerous instances of police harassment. In October, Diamond Lil wrote in her article "Gassed Grease" that "the spirit of the pigs is competitive to the turbulence of your dynamic star."[103] She described a scene one night in which the Centaur's patrons were subjected to tear gas that was "courtesy of the pigs outside involved in an all-out melee." As the performance started, she said the crowd became "red-eyed, breathless, and in awe. Was Diamond Lil real or an apparition? Was Phyllis Killer really Judy Garland's reincarnation?" Christopher Huff detailed the increasing violence in and around the Strip in 1970 that culminated in a riot on October 10th that saw hip and street people fighting with the police, scattered throughout the district when the police fired into the crowd.[104] The gay community shared the community feeling that the police were part of the problems that beset the area. The

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[102] Miller Francis, Jr., untitled review of Centaur Club, *Great Speckled Bird*, November 1, 1970, 6-7.

[103] Diamond Lil, "Gassed Grease," *Great Speckled Bird*, October 19, 1970, 5.

[104] Huff, "A New Way of Living Together," 332-33.

"Voice of Xtabay" recounted the night's police harassment with an article titled, "GBI Agents Eye Drags-Not Drugs." Xtabay (Diamond Lil) reported that agents looked for drugs and firearms on the patrons during the raid.[105] Those inside the Centaur were finally allowed to leave the club after police attempted to clear the streets with tear gas. Diamond Lil considered the contrast as the "show on the inside with the little girl-boys" must go on while outside a different show played with "little boy blues."

The Centaur's final demise was eulogized in the *Bird's* November 30th edition with articles from both Diamond Lil and Miller Francis.[106] Diamond Lil reported that she suspected, as did many others, that the club was for some months under surveillance because the GBI and police presence visibly increased. However, she claimed no one thought the problems were so severe that officials would shut the club down. Francis said City Hall closed the Centaur Club because of its "underworld connections."[107] Diamond Lil took the closure personally and directed her plea to the Mayor of Atlanta, Sam Massell, "Mr. Massell, or whoever, how could you do this to me? What am I to do? My career is shot!"[108] But she was also looking out for her fellow queens. Diamond Lil said when they heard the news, "tears were shed, careers were shattered, waiters, bartenders and doormen were now unemployed." Worst of all was that Billy Jones, aka Shirley Temple Jones, aka Phyllis Killer, "had to grow up and at last face life."[109]

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[105] Voice of the Xtabay, "GBI Agents Eye Drags-Not Drugs," *Great Speckled Bird*, October 26, 1970, 9.

[106] Miller Francis, Jr., "Centauricide," *Great Speckled Bird*, November 30, 1970, 13.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Diamond Lil, "The Centaur - Once a Myth."

[109] Ibid.

Miller Francis charged the city of Atlanta and its mayor with something more serious. Francis said that the Mayor and the city took advantage of a minority population that was defenseless. He saw the closing of the Centaur as a way to "give the appearance of stamping out "organized crime" in Atlanta and at the same time practice a bit of gay repression at a time when Atlanta's gay population is in the process of getting it together."[110] The city closed the Centaur under the guise of cleaning up organized crime but everyone knew, Miller claimed, that gay bars were "tight within the clutches of Mafia and syndicate organizations." He spelled it out in detail, without the mafia/underworld connections "how else could any gay bar obtain and keep the necessary licenses without dealing directly, on a cash-in-hand basis, with police departments of each city, all of which have fairly smooth working relationships with "organized crime."[111] It was a charge that would be made over the years in Atlanta and other cities as gay liberation activists sought to end police harassment and discrimination against their communities.[112]

The short life of the Centaur was worth remembering because it was different. Though it only opened in May and was dead by December, it represented a moment in time. Francis regarded the politics of its existence and its closing. This gay bar, unlike so many others, had a "healthy atmosphere," which had not just spontaneously occurred but was created by Atlantans who made it that way. The Centaur should be remembered "*because it contained and employed gay people*, and because on its stage were displayed the talents of drag queens, guerrilla theater troops who have functioned before the advent of organized Gay Liberation, to provide one of the few out front challenges to the sexual politics of Amerika during the last few decades."[113] Channeling more of the hippie vibe than radical politics, Francis thought that the Centaur was special because it was a place where gay people came together and because "gay people are beautiful."

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[110] Francis, Jr., "Centauricide."

[111] Ibid.

[112] Timothy Stewart-Winter, "Queer Law and Order: Sex, Criminality, and Policing in the Late Twentieth-Century United States," *Journal of American History* (June 2015): 61-72 and *Queer Clout*, 93, 115; Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, 87, 95; Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 102.

While Francis agreed with the love and community feeling that people got from going to the Centaur Club, he also pointed out that it was not entirely free. He reminded his friends that gay people were not actually vested in the business of the club. The Centaur Club and other "gay institutions" like it in the city were open to gay people only in the sense that they represented an exploitable market. Miller Francis, ever the radical, related the closing of the bar back to the issue of capitalism and collectivism. Because gay people did not own the bars, they operated as managers in many of them, they were always at the mercy of others whose "primary purpose is to make money for a few individuals." The closing of the Centaur offered the gay community a chance to try and develop something new in the city. From its end he hoped they would "derive energy to go about building gay-defined and controlled structures that the Man (and you know who that is!) can't destroy whenever he chooses." If gay and lesbian people could build something outside the bars it would represent a thing of their own that they could control and direct. He signed off with a variation of gay liberation that indicated a new era of radical movement in the city's gay and lesbian community. He called for them to come "Out of the bars and into the collective conscious."

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[113] Francis, Jr., "Centauricide," italics in original.

The Atlanta police were not finished with their campaigns against the gay bars, though. Writing as Capone, Diamond Lil reported that in December at a popular gay bar called Chuck's Rathskeller as she "was in the midst of my cheapest and most common uninhibited, wild exotic dances" news spread throughout the club that it was "surrounded by oink-oinks."[114] The police blocked the exits and management announced that patrons needed to have their IDs ready to present upon their exit. Checking ID from all the patrons under the guise of busting underage drinkers was a common intimidation and harassment tactic used against the gay bars and other hippie and countercultural spots in the Strip and around Midtown.[115] But that night Capone objected to the way that the Police went out of their way to harass the "genteel gay people of the Dogwood City." Capone described the scene as a sense of paranoia gripped the crowd, not knowing if they would be "hauled off to the hoosegow like sheep by creatures of another animal world commonly called pigs." Diamond Lil gave respectable praise to Miss Brandy Fontaine the "big scene stealer" of the night. When one detective asked for her ID, she responded, "Honey, would you like to dance?" Miss Fontaine was then promptly escorted into the "Black Maria."[116]

The outcome of the raid at the Rathskeller did not end well for many people. Capone reported that all people over twenty-one were released but those who were underage were arrested and given suspended sentences. Capone wondered if it really was the "Yuletide season" because it seemed more like the "season of the witch, or the hunt?

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[114] Capone, "Wrath Wrought Upon the Rathskeller," *Great Speckled Bird,* December 14, 1970, 8.

[115] Huff, "A New Way of Living Together," 177-178.

[116] Capone, "Wrath Wrought Upon the Rathskeller."

Only the harassed can tell!"[117] Diamond Lil reviewed her year in an essay that related some details that cleared up the more cryptic classified ads. She asked her readers to think about what it was like to have been "wearing my pumps all last year."[118] Twice she was cast into the ranks of the unemployed, first when the bar Mrs. P's was closed and then again when the Centaur Club was shut down. Worse than that was the personal violence she had been subjected to that year, inflicted by those she trusted around her. Diamond Lil described in shockingly amusing detail how she was held at gun-point and robbed by "two very fine roommates of mine." It was unclear if Diamond Lil was phrasing a casual sexual encounter in euphemism, but it seems likely that there was an element of that in her story. Later in the year after this violent incident she was again robbed by two different friends, who she described as people she "felt sorry for" and had given them a place to stay.

Diamond Lil's year was full of "grease" that revealed a complex web of the realities of working class gay life in the city. Lil related a violent and terrifying tale. The very fine roommates had wrapped her in "bedclothes" and bound her with clothesline. She understandably went into a panicked and shocked state because people she knew were doing violence to her. In a terrible reflection of the dimensions of the crime being committed by queer people against another queer person they told her that they only robbed her because they were unemployed and "they had to get even with someone, and it might as well be me." They took Diamond Lil's own gun, "a fully-loaded revolver which I had just purchased from Arlan's (three big stores in one)," stole her cash, a tape recorder, and her car, a “brand new LTD.” Before they gagged her and locked her in the bedroom, Lil asked for two favors that were weirdly granted. She said “out of the kindness of their little hearts” they gave her the two tranquilizers she asked for to help calm her down. When they came back into the room with the gag, she asked if they would leave some music playing to keep her company and “Being a person of kindest benevolence,” this too they did.

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[117] Ibid.

[118] Diamond Lil, "1970 - And To Hell With It!," *Great Speckled Bird*, December 14, 1970, 14-15.

What happened after they left shifted the story from the violence that gay men were subject to in their own community to what happened to them when they reported crimes to the police in the straight community. What Diamond Lil described in detail was what many gay men had experienced at some point, a trick gone wrong. Casual sexual encounters within the working class and street gay world could turn violent at any moment. For gay men who had sex with men who were identified as hustlers, “trade,” and “rough trade,” their sexuality was threatened by their vulnerability. Two men might meet through cruising and after sex, the hustler could demand money, beat you up, or even kill you. When gay men attempted to assert their rights and demand justice, they were often ignored, demeaned, and sometimes subject to harassment as a gay person.

Diamond Lil managed to escape that night after the men left. As she sat in the locked room she was overcome by the fear that they would come back and murder her or set the house on fire to cover up their crimes. Then she would “really be a flaming star!” In a daring escape, Diamond Lil, used her chin to unlock and open a window because her hands were tied behind her back. Somehow she managed to get out of the house by pulling herself through the window. As she made a run for it across a parking lot she fell down when the bedclothes that were still wrapped around her got snagged on a car’s bumper. When she was finally able pull herself free she ran to a neighbor’s house and called the police. And then she called the police again. Diamond Lil said she had to call “la gestapo” three times before they sent someone out to talk to her. She said the police were unconcerned with “the theft of my superfine automobile” and spent the majority of their time chit-chatting with the neighbor. Lil was angry and said that if they’d “taken the botherment” she might have gotten her car back that night. Instead, a month later, it was found abandoned in New Mexico.[119]

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[119] Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

“GAY SOUTH RISING UP”:

GAY AND LESBIAN LIBERATION, 1970-1972

Y’all Come Out

In May of 1971 the recently organized Georgia Gay Liberation Front (GGLF) announced it was planning a demonstration in June to commemorate the second anniversary of what they called the Christopher Street Rebellion.[1] Only the cities with the largest gay and lesbian communities organized big celebrations in 1970, where in San Francisco and New York “Say it out loud, GAY IS PROUD” was the chant.[2] The next year, Atlanta joined with many more gay people across the nation as they commemorated the meaning of the Christopher Street Rebellion in their local communities with events, demonstrations, and marches. The GGLF’s plans for the celebration included a press conference, meetings with local officials from the city and the state, and concluded with a march to Piedmont Park where they held a rally with speakers from the local gay and lesbian liberation community. As they announced details of the event they asked Atlantans, gay and straight, to join in the planning process in an effort to build support for the movement. They said “Help build Gay Pride. Help end Gay Oppression. Help build Atlanta’s first GLF demonstration.”[3]

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[1] K. Green, “Christopher Street Rebellion, *Great Speckled Bird,* May 24, 1971, 17.

[2] Faderman, *The Gay Revolution;* McFarland Bruce, *Pride Parades;* Eisenbach, *Gay Power.*

The planning of the event was well-publicized in the *Great Speckled Bird*. Local gay liberation activist, Steve Abbott created a full cover cartoon for the June 28 edition of the *Bird* entitled “The Christopher Street Story.”[4] The comic showed the story of the raid on the Stonewall Inn, the protests in New York City, and how those events and ideas affected gay people in Atlanta. It connected the local community to a national movement, as Abbott wrote that “Gay sisters and brothers are oppressed in Atlanta, GA too. By the churches, by the government, by almost everyone…” Abbott’s comic illustrated some local examples and indicated the direction of gay liberation’s protest. In one panel an angry cleric used a cross to beat someone down, calling them an “Unnatural creature!” and another showed gay people jailed behind bars, each illustrative of how the church and the government oppressed gay people. A third example was a potent representation of how gay and lesbian people were excluded and specifically discriminated against. The cartoon showed two people confronted by a wall of hands aligned in a general position of refusal, palms faced outward, either stopping their progress or refusing their entrance. The hands were disembodied against the black background and the voice bubble highlighted multiple sources as they said collectively, “No jobs for Queers.”[5]

The “Christopher Street Story” comic ended with a big reminder about the planned march, which would take place on Sunday June 27th. They urged people to come out to "Smash Gay Oppression!"[6] Because of the coverage in the *Bird* leading up the march and demonstration more people in the city were aware and came out to support it. A week before the march a longer article updated the community on the event, which they noted was already endorsed by two organizations active in local radical and liberation politics, the Atlanta Peace Action Coalition and Georgia State Women's Liberation.[7] The GGLF used the "action" as a moment to direct attention to political and social issues, the slogan for the march they said was "End Gay Oppression" and they meant it in many different contexts. The day's activities started off, pointedly on a Sunday, with a round of leafletting at local churches along "4th and Peachtree streets" because they had a long history of oppressing gay people by interpreting "Gaysexuality" as "unnatural and ungodly." Activists reminded marchers that they chose the Peachtree Federal Building as a site of protest and the starting point of their march to Piedmont Park because it housed the offices of HEW (Health, Education, and Welfare institutions) which they said were "notorious for their oppression of gays."

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[3] “Gay Liberation Front,” *Great Speckled Bird*, June 7, 1971, 21.

[4] Steve Abbott, “The Christopher Street Story,” *Great Speckled Bird*, June 28, 1971, 1.

[5] Abbott, “The Christopher Street Story.”

GGLF activists invited Atlantans of all sexual and political persuasions to come out in support. The article "Y'all Come Out!" reiterated the plans for the day's events that included guerilla theater, speakers, and a rally in the park where people would "just get together in defiance of the city's attitude that would fence and lock the park against us."[8] The demonstrators addressed local gay community issues, specifically employment discrimination and social and cultural repression as directed at them from local religious institutions. They also indicated that the march and demonstration supported the hip and radical communities who were at the time increasingly policed by the city and subject to ongoing harassment as the city attempted to decrease the large population of young people who had come to dominate the Strip and Piedmont Park in the era.

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Steve Abbott, Untitled, *Great Speckled Bird*, June 21, 1971, 4.

[8] Y'all come out!" *Great Speckled Bird*, June 28, 1971, 5.

The march and rally at the Park represented the concerns of Atlanta's gay liberation activists as it joined in a national movement that proclaimed the importance of Stonewall as a turning point in their collective gay history. The Atlanta Christopher Street demonstrations were the first of their kind held in the Southeast.[9] In attendance were somewhere between 80 to 200 people, "Gaysexuals" as the pseudonymous writer "Cyclops" referred to them.[10] Among them were members of the gay community but also straight allies who endorsed the action. A week before the demonstration activists announced that it had been endorsed by three more radical political groups in the city: the Young Socialist Alliance, the Socialist Workers Party, and the Atlanta Workshop in Non-Violence. The political coalition of radical and socialist groups that emerged with the first gay liberation march in Atlanta foreshadowed a different direction in the movement that would unfold over the next two years. Socialism and the politics of revolution grew within gay liberation and created a division among gay and lesbian people who were more interested in the sexual revolution and its liberating effects on culture. At the march and rally these two communities of people overlapped, with gay revolutionaries, socialists, feminists, and others witnessing and embracing the freedom of being openly and proudly gay in public.

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[9] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 111; Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit and Rhinestones*, 67; Mims, "Drastic Dykes," 114.

[10] Cyclops, "Celebration…Very Gay," *Great Speckled Bird*, July 5, 1971, 2.

The 1971 Atlanta Christopher Street demonstration and march was one of many that year held across the country in many smaller cities. The *Carolina Plain Dealer*, a radical newspaper that served the Carolinas, reported that "We learn about marches across the country—10,000 in New York City, also Chicago, west coast. Now Atlanta. Gay South Rising Up. Powerful gay pride."[11] Gay and lesbian liberation activists used the physical revolt of a community in New York City as a symbol of revolution in gay and lesbian consciousness. Local gay and lesbian people who came out staged their own symbolic revolts and protests at pride parades, which functioned as bloodless Stonewall re-enactments when people took to the streets, acting out the popular protest cry, "out of the bars and into the streets." Activists made coming out of the closet a radical political statement and pride parades, marches, and demonstrations showcased their willingness to change the current social order. The commemorative marches and parades in the early years of radical gay liberation connected local communities to a wider national movement and thus ensured that the gay revolution continued and spread.[12]

This chapter looks at the first organized and publicized efforts of gay and lesbian liberationist politics in Atlanta. It looks at radical gay revolutionaries and liberationists in Atlanta, in the pages of the *Great Speckled Bird*, which became the primary home and voice for those organizing gay and lesbian liberation in the city. The *Great Speckled Bird* increasingly reported on the formation and activities of gay liberation efforts as they covered news of the creation and establishment of the GGLF in 1971 and the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (ALFA) in 1972. This chapter looks at multiple competing voices of early gay and lesbian liberation in Atlanta. It looks at the establishment of ALFA in the context of radical politics (specifically how some lesbian feminists related to Atlanta's socialist groups) in addition to their split from the gay male-dominated GGLF. A regional gay conference for "Southern Gay Militants" held in Athens at the University of Georgia in the fall of 1972 was an important turning point in the city's liberation movement and organizing around it impacted local activism. After the conference the GGLF declined and finally disbanded after months of inactivity in the summer of 1973. ALFA continued to grow and develop a new lesbian community in the city.

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[11] "Atlanta Gayday" *Carolina Plain Dealer* #22. DU, Sears Papers, Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones Research Materials, Box 115.

[12] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 111.

The fates of each organization showed that early tensions in the movement in its formative stage foreshadowed later divisions. Some GGLF members voiced disagreements about the meaning and direction of the movement that indicated an unstable foundation in a young organization. Two months before Atlanta's first gay march, Steve Abbott attended a National Gay Liberation Conference in Austin, Texas and came back disappointed in the prevailing desire to organize a movement based on committees and policies, rather than emotions and a desire for social revolution. In Atlanta the main issue that emerged at the end of the radical gay revolution period was the inability or decision not to build coalitions with other radical, socialist, and anti-capitalist activists. In some instances it was gay and lesbian activists who chose to move away from the left and radical politics and in other moments gay and lesbian radicals found themselves pushed out of movements through indifference or overt hostility.[13]

Marc Stein characterized a revolutionary period of gay liberation in the post-Stonewall years broadly defined by the achievement of "unprecedented mass mobilization and unparalleled social change."[14] These outcomes can be seen in the establishment of gay liberation groups throughout the country but also in the rise of gay pride celebrations that developed in tandem. Stein dates the revolution from Stonewall in 1969 to 1973, when the APA dropped homosexuality from its classification as a mental disorder. This era is now understood as more complex and it is well-acknowledged that on either side of the given years is a period of extended transition.[15] Gay liberation and lesbian feminism were influenced by specific political and social contexts and were part of the radical political movements that marked the era of the "Sixties." The fracturing of the gay and lesbian liberation in Atlanta was directly related to the impact of radical politics, and specifically to socialist and separatist tendencies in the movements. When the GGLF disbanded in 1973, it was because the group could not repair the breach between local activists who supported a more radical approach to gay liberation and those who wanted to participate in the system to enact a gay liberalist civil rights movement. As Marc Stein marked in his periodization of the era, these were not just local details, but features of the national gay and lesbian liberation movement.

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[13] Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 70.

[14] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 79.

[15] Ibid.

"Why Do You Stomp Us?": Gay and Lesbian Liberation Organizes, 1971-1972

In 1971 the *Great Speckled Bird* published over forty articles related to gay liberation, a majority of which were generated by local activists. While coverage increased, gay and lesbian liberation activists fought hard for their inclusion within the broader radical movement of Atlanta. The articles, coverage, and editorials that were voiced in public in the pages of the *Bird* reflected major divisions in the radical movement. Activists created a public discourse that showed the back-and-forth between gay liberationists, socialists, gay socialists, and readers themselves as group discussions evolved in the printed word. Many gay and lesbian activists and organizers worked for the *Bird* and wrote for the paper in multiple capacities, reporting on aspects of local city life and national politics and culture, as well as gay liberation and lesbianism and feminism. Their presence at the paper substantially increased coverage of the gay and lesbian community and tested the paper's commitment to radical politics as it extended to and included gay and lesbian radicalism for a number of years.

Atlanta's gay liberation movement, as documented in the pages of the *Bird,* marked a new era of visibility. The coverage of gay and lesbian politics and community news in the *Bird* reinforced Atlanta's reputation as one of the gay-friendlier cities in the Southeast. The *Bird* had a regional circulation in the thousands and was distributed throughout Atlanta and the Southeast. It was sold at bars, bookstores, and on the street corners of the city and was read by young people, radicals, and other counterculture and liberal Atlantans who may or may not have identified with gay and lesbian liberation. These readers got to read in detail about the liberation efforts of gay and lesbian Atlantans, which by its inclusion in the pages of the *Bird* located it in the context of the broader radical movement to revolutionize society.[16] In the pages of the *Bird*, articles, arts reviews, and political essays reflected the energy of the gay liberation movement and its growth in Atlanta. This new visibility helped to create a foundation for political activism.

The rise of the gay liberation movement in Atlanta was intimately tied to the radical newspaper community of the *Great Speckled Bird.* The *Bird's* coverage of the gay and lesbian movement peaked in 1972, with over seventy-five different articles about local and national events, people, and issues. These articles covered local activist groups, pride events, and provided a space for radical gay and lesbian critiques of mainstream and gay and lesbian arts and culture. The writers who appeared in the *Bird* created their own version of a gay caucus that acted as a radical minority voice within a community of radicals. The *Bird's* gay caucus included writers and activists like Steve Abbott, who dominated Atlanta's gay voice throughout 1971, and Bill Cutler, another local activist who wrote over fifteen articles related to gay issues in 1972. Vicki G. and Lorraine, two lesbian feminists involved with ALFA, reported for the *Bird* in almost a dozen different pieces during the period. The formation of ALFA in 1972 was an important enough event that it warranted a multi-page spread that outlined the group's political positions and educated the community about lesbian feminist issues.[17]

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[16] Gabb, "A Fowl in the Vortices," 108; Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 89; Huff, "A New Way of Living Together."

[17] Mims, "Drastic Dykes," 100-102, 260; Chapter 2, "Inventing ALFA: Rhetorical Conditions Enabling Emergence" in Heather Lee Branstetter, "An Alfa-Omega Approach to Rhetorical Invention: Queer Revolutionary Pragmatism and Political Education" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012)."

In the years after Stonewall, Gay Liberation Fronts, groups loosely connected through a general commitment to radical, Socialist, or Marxist politics proliferated across the country. In small cities, large cities, and especially in college towns, gay and lesbian people created groups to change their local communities but also to express their commitment to a national movement of gay rights activism. Marc Stein noted that one of the most obvious differences between the earlier homophile groups and the new gay liberation groups was the age of the activists. The homophile movement had centered largely around mainstream assimilation and respectability, important facets to a middle-class and mature community committed to achieving limited political goals. Gay liberation was in the majority a youth movement that was less committed to the tactics of an earlier generation.[18]

Gay liberation and lesbian feminism, when it emerged, created new intellectual, political, and social critiques of mainstream society but also of gay and lesbian communities before Stonewall. Gay liberation groups generally adapted radical gay liberation ideas for use in local communities. From their inception these organizations struggled to promote the politics of radical liberation within more local conservative and closeted gay and lesbian communities. In Atlanta, gay liberation activists challenged the supremacy and exclusionism of gay bars and lounges that remained committed to the quiet closet of accommodation that allowed some people the relative freedom to claim space in the city without directly confronting or upsetting the racist, sexist, and classist systems that ruled it. Since Atlanta had not developed an earlier political consciousness around homophile activism, those who supported more moderate civil rights activism joined with the more radical GGLF because there was no other viable alternative. The limited size of the community itself forced a tenuous alliance between radicals and moderates that proved to be temporary.

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[18] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 82.

The radical politics of the left and the student movement were represented in the early gay liberation groups that formed. The first Gay Liberation Front in the Southeast organized in Tallahassee at Florida State University in the spring of 1970 and immediately aligned itself with other radical groups on campus.[19] In an organizational announcement that heralded their formation, the FSU GLF proudly noted that they were endorsed by the Malcolm X United Liberation Front and Women's Liberation, though they had only existed for two months. GLF groups across the country joined in supporting a revolutionary movement and found an ally in the Black Panther Party after 1970 when activist Huey Newton came out in support of solidarity between revolutionary liberationist movements.[20] The FSU GLF claimed its place in the recent history of radical liberation as they honored and acknowledged their influences. "We salute the Black movement for showing us the way," they said. "We salute the Hip movement for helping us to tell the truth. It is OUR turn NOW!"[21]

GLF activists at FSU contextualized their place in the radical political movement of the era and through their historical placement as radicals in the South. They claimed "Tallahassee was the breakthrough in the South. We must now unite with our brothers and sisters in Miami, Jacksonville, and, yes, ATLANTA!"[22] By the end of 1970, only a few GLFs had organized in the Southeast: in Tallahassee, New Orleans, and in Louisville. Though limited in number, James Sears contended that the spread and formation of Gay Liberation Fronts was essential to the creation of a network of gay activism that lasted well past the revolutionary period and into the 1980s. Radical New York City GLF activist Jim Fouratt argued that gay liberation "was about forming a network together, dealing with the needs of the local communities."[23]

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[19] "Gay Liberation," *Great Speckled Bird*, June 29, 1970, 18.

[20] Emily Hobson noted that in the fall of 1970 "a few hundred" gay and lesbian activists attended the Black Panther Party organized Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia and among them were activists from Tallahassee. Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 31-33.

[21] "Gay Liberation," 18.

These early organizational efforts created a new network of political activists that shaped the gay and lesbian rights movement in the Southeast. As they formed each organization looked different in character and substance from the others. Sears noted that activists in Houston and New Orleans were more revolutionary and radical than in Charlotte or Atlanta, whose groups he said "espoused a social liberalism, seeking to work within the system."[24] Radicalism caused tensions within the established homophile movement in San Francisco, Chicago, and New York City as some gay activists rejected the more socialist and revolutionary politics that gained wider acceptance in the period.[25] Many liberal activists formed their own organizations, often modelled on the New York Gay Activists Alliance group that focused its energy on gay issues and introduced radical tactics like the "zap," which was when activists spontaneously confronted politicians in public and on the record about their positions on gay and lesbian rights.[26] In cities that did not have enough out gay and lesbian community members to sustain multiple types of activism, single groups gathered together radical, liberal, and moderate people who interpreted and translated gay liberation in different ways.

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 60.

[24] Ibid., 64; LaShonda Mims also comes to this conclusion in her comparative work on Atlanta and Charlotte's lesbian communities. Mims, "Drastic Dykes."

[25] Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*; Hobson, *Lavender and Red*.

Throughout 1970 Atlanta's gay and lesbian community came together in "consciousness raising" meetings. Activists Bill Smith and Berl Boykin joined with others early on in protest at the police harassment of the gay community. After a long year of talking, the group officially incorporated as the GGLF in 1971. They declared themselves with an official statement about who they were as a group and an organizational history written by newly out activist, Steve Abbott, titled, "Why Do You Stomp Us?" Abbott reported the GGLF was in its initial phase of organization and opened the piece with a reflection on whether or not Atlanta even needed a GLF.[27]

Steve Abbott discussed some of the issues brought up during early meetings, one of which was the concern that the GLF would be too radical to represent the politics of the gay community in Atlanta. Abbott related that "Some fear an Atlanta GLF will be a small band of fanatics who will jeopardize the Gay community by overhastily pushing dogmatisms, marches, and confrontations." To assuage fears, Abbott outlined the who and the what of the current group membership. He said they were mostly men "in our twenties though some are younger and some older" in various stages of coming out.[28] Some were married, some were part of a gay subculture, some radicals, and others closeted. Abbott himself was married at the time and a new father.[29] Like Miller Francis, Abbott came out after he was heterosexually married, a common set of circumstances as young men and women were influenced by the coming out politics of gay liberation. At the time, the GGLF was still figuring out who they were as an organization. The group's politics was not yet decided, but Abbott noted they were "not interested in pushing any particular "line" or manifesto at present."[30]

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[26] Donn Teal, *The Gay Militants* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971); Karla Jay and Allen Young, *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* (New York: Douglas Book Corporation,1972).

[27] Steve Abbott, "Why Do You Stomp Us?" *Great Speckled Bird*, January 25, 1971, 6.

[28] Ibid.

A month later, the GGLF reported their first official meeting was attended by over 100 people.[31] The publicity about the group's formation had no doubt impacted their visibility in the city and attracted more people who wanted to get involved. They covered a lot of ground at the meeting. They discussed feminism, lesbianism, and increasing the participation of people of color in the movement. Early organizers directed the meeting as Larry Fisher chaired it, Berl Boykin was named as head of the legal committee, and Steve Abbott was in charge of the publicity committee. Members shared reports on activities already underway while other committees on health, education, and theater were established. The GGLF had no less a goal than "to make Atlanta the most liberated Gay community in the country."[32]

The positive reporting on the gay and lesbian community's political organizing was not without some controversy. Steve Abbott's article about the first general meeting of the GGLF was titled “Gay Liberation Uncaged,” a reference to a disagreement between gay and lesbian activists and the *Bird.* The title referenced a current argument about editorial censorship at the *Bird* and how it restricted gay and lesbian liberation activism. In the previous issue the paper printed an originally untitled poem by local lesbian and feminist activist Vicki (Gabriner) but they entitled her work “Every Woman is a Caged Person.” Vicki wrote in to object to the editorial decision that she said deliberately obscured the real subject, lesbians, and that it undermined her very radical point that “Every Woman Is a Caged Lesbian.”[33] Vicki’s statement reflected the political movement philosophy developing around radical lesbian and feminist politics.[34] Vicki’s letter and the GGLF report appeared together in that issue of the *Bird*, a physical layout that reflected how the radical community saw lesbian and gay political issues as directly connected. The discussion prompted a self-reflective tone towards criticism from the gay and lesbian community that allowed for more dialogue between radicals. In the early 1970s, as radicalism became more politically specific (Socialist/Marxist/Leninist), the *Bird’s* reception of criticism became more rigid and ultimately rejecting.

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[29] Biblioqueers, "A Bit About Abbott," *Queerest. Library. Ever. LGBT Resources Blog*, San Francisco Public Library, http://queerestlibraryever.blogspot.com/2014/07/a-bit-about-abbott.html and Alysia Abbott, *Fairyland: A Memoir of My Father* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2014).

[30] Ibid.

[31] Steve Abbott, "Gay Liberation Uncaged," *Great Speckled Bird*, February 15, 1971, 6.

[32] Ibid.

As differences in radical politics appeared, so too did divisions of opinion on gay liberation among gay men and lesbian women. That spring, Steve Abbott related that conflicts and tensions had already arisen between people. At a meeting in March he reported that there was “a lot of talk about “sick” and “neurotic” homosexuals,” a subject and sentiment that clashed with radical and counterculture gay liberationists.[35] Some members wanted to promote sexual liberation in the form of "polymorphous perversity, for its own sake" while others wanted to discuss "the difficulties of men and women just coming out." Further discussions about the group's purpose included the consideration of an "aggressive slogan like "Gay is Good."[36] These divisions were not subtle choices in tactic but were deeply rooted in how gay and lesbian people chose to live out their liberation.

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[33] Vicki, “Every Woman is a Caged Lesbian,” *Great Speckled Bird*, February 15, 1971, 6.

[34] For a discussion of the impact and influence of the Radicalesbian position paper, “The Woman Identified Woman,” see Victoria Hesford, *Feeling Women’s Liberation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013) 145-50.

After the National Gay Liberation Conference in Austin that spring, Steve Abbott came back better able to articulate the problems he saw with the early direction of the local GGLF. In Atlanta, he said, "We formed committees, chairmen, organization. And as this straightness got a deathlock on meetings… Gay sisters and brothers who wanted to get personally involved but couldn't drifted away." The divide was between people who did not work for the same goals and therefore were unable to build a bridge. It was the difference between what Abbott called "Homosexual Liberation," which worked within the "straight world" and "Gay Liberation," which understood "straightness" to be intimately linked to sexism and racism.[37] These concerns continued to be addressed by activists as they organized for their first street action, a protest and demonstration to commemorate the Christopher Street Rebellion.[38]

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[35] Ibid.

[36] William Cutler, "Good Gay Times," *Great Speckled Bird*, March 8, 1971, 8.

[37] Steve Abbott, "GLF Conference: Changes," *Great Speckled Bird*, April 19, 1971, 4, 17.

[38] In contrast an early account of the formation of the GGLF and its participation in Atlanta's Gay Pride in 1971 portrayed the city and the group as less concerned with politics and more with "good times in the bars." Yet activists were also frustrated by the city's unconcerned and simple de-escalation of fights through bureaucratic denial as when activists tried to address employment discrimination they were told

The June 28th issue of the *Bird* carried multiple stories and articles related to gay and lesbian liberation.[39] One article, "Smash Phallic Imperialism," reprinted from *Lavender Vision*, a gay and lesbian newspaper out of Massachusetts, expressed ideas about sex and sensuality that reflected the deeper discussions being had about sexism within the movement. Steve Abbott's long article focused on "anti-Gaysexual attitudes" in the radical movement and was accompanied by an illustration drawn by Abbott that showed revolutionary icons Marx and Engels wearing dresses, holding hands, and carrying a banner that read "Gay Sex & the Left." Another article addressed changes at the local gay bar, "Chuck's Rathskellar," which was once as the "ex-patron" who wrote the report noted a "nice place" that was run "for Gays, by Gays." This seemed to be no longer the case as the ex-patron detailed increases in drink prices, the refusal to pay drag queen performers, and a new set of doormen who he described as "Four goons who looked as if the Gayest thing they ever did was beat up queers in the park." The coverage of gay liberation that year marked it as part of the radical movement in Atlanta and showed how these ideas impacted a local community. An invitation and update on the demonstration announced "Y'all come out" and ran with a picture that showed a table of activists, most likely set up in Piedmont Park, with a Gay Liberation Front banner and a sign that read "Be Gay! Be Proud!"[40]

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and confirmed that there was no written policy that barred gays or lesbians from positions. Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good,* 80-81.

[39] Sue Katz (lavender vision) "Smash Phallic Imperialism," 4, an ex-patron of Chuck's, "Chuck's," 4, Steve Abbott, "Gay Sex & the Left," 5, and "Y'all come out!," 5, all in *Great Speckled Bird*, June 28, 1971.

[40] Ibid.

The energy of the day was infused with the freedom of the sexual revolution and the power that came from a collective public coming out. Cyclops reported concern early in the morning, when only a small group of less than dozen activists showed up for the first part of the day's actions. However, his fears of low turnout were put to rest as women from NOW, YSA socialists, and *Bird* sellers added to the size of the crowd. At demonstrations and meetings, gay and lesbian people created a new community based on this shared experience. Gay activist, Steve Abbott thought that the philosophy of gay liberation allowed people to experience a radical emotional honesty and openness about their sexuality and gender.[41] This new movement aimed to liberate people from the dishonesty of the closet, which forced them to lie and pretend to be straight. Those who came out that day chanted for the repeal of sodomy laws, an issue that affected them directly and personally, but activists also aligned themselves with a broader radical protest movement.

At the demonstration those who had come out to "Be Gay" and "Be Proud" also saw skits in the "guerilla theater arena."[42] Political street theatre acts were popular in the radical movement during the period and it was an entertaining way to draw attention to political issues.[43] Gay liberation activists in Atlanta addressed the interconnected nature of their repressions and challenged people to think about how sexuality and gender were used by the state as deadly tools in support of violence and oppression. Cyclops recounted three skits performed at the event and each one reflected a different aspect of anti-gay and lesbian repression and heteronormative support. In the first skit, actor activists depicted soldiers who killed peasants in Vietnam, a clear reference to the My Lai Massacre, to affirm their "straightMANhood." Next, gay and lesbian people fall as a cop knocked them out with the "Awful feared Words (Queer! Lessie! Fag!)." They were resurrected with the chant "Gay is Proud." In the third skit, "experts" on the "Slick Cavett Show" aggressively interviewed a straight couple. They asked "How long have you been this way?" In 1970 the Dick Cavett Show, a late night talk show, was the subject of protests from gay liberationists and more liberal activists after guests made homophobic jokes.[44] Cavett invited gay rights activists onto the show in attempt to de-escalate the planned protest; apparently Atlanta gay liberationists thought that the activists were not treated fairly.[45]

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[41] Steve Abbott, "GLF Conference: Changes."

[42] Cyclops, "Celebration…Very Gay."

[43] Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 29; Justin David Suran, "Coming Out Against the War: Antimilitarism and the Politicization of Homosexuality in the Era of Vietnam," *American Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (September 2001): 468-69.

By the end of the year, the divisions among radicals about the revolutionary promise of drag and the embrace of gay male social community had come under more intense criticism from some radical gay liberationists. The mood had turned more serious. "Campy Simplex," an activist who identified himself as "a Gay person, a revolutionary anarchist, and an ardent admirer of *The Great Speckled Bird*" wrote into the paper about his disappointment with their decision to publish an article by Diamond Lil about a recent trip to California.[46] Diamond Lil's re-emergence at the *Bird*, was the first in almost a year and her reception showed a changed political environment. Campy Simplex argued that

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[44] Self, *All in the Family*, 219-220.

[45] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 109.

[46] Campy Simplex, "Dear *Bird*flock," *Great Speckled Bird*, December 27, 1971, 9.

Diamond Lil's article was better off in a gay magazine like *David*, a gay male entertainment and soft news magazine from Florida, which was "panting for exactly this sort of campy, sexist, crypto-elitist, Sunday-Brunch-Drag-Show-at-the-Snottiest-Gay-Bar patter." These tensions in the movement only increased as rigid political barriers emerged and sides formed between socialists and almost everyone else.

The next summer Atlanta's gay and lesbian community celebrated their second Pride march in June. That month the *Bird* exploded with gay rights as they covered events related to "Pride Week" and articles were contributed by a variety of activists. The *Bird* addressed issues of radical politics among members of their own staff, who not coincidentally were some of the most active political organizers in the city. Political discussions and confrontations among *Bird* people became centerfold spreads and major news stories as the radical community invited readers into the conversation. Long simmering disagreements between gay and lesbian *Bird* writers and socialist *Bird* writers engaged the broader community.

Two major discussions dominated the *Bird* that summer that detailed the divisions in the radical political movement over lesbian feminism, gay liberation, and socialism. In the first public disagreement, at issue was the *Bird's* consideration of the work of women at the paper. Vicki (G.), who had written other articles about lesbianism and feminism for the paper, directly asked the *Bird* to consider its own sexism. In a long piece that featured an open letter to the paper and a collective response, "Vicki Writes About Women and *Bird*women Reply," showed hardening lines on the sides of socialist women, who refused to concede any ground in the argument and seemed to accept the possibility that compromise was impossible. In the second major public disagreement and discussion the

*Bird*women made the unprecedented decision to run a response editorial to an excerpt from gay liberation activist Bill Cutler's gay pride speech. The response "Socialism Frees All," was immediately criticized as an attack on gay liberation. The tensions and arguments in the paper reflected internal issues in the city's radical community and the gay and lesbian liberation movement that only continued to grow.

Vicki's letter to the *Bird* addressed the dominance of socialist women at the paper and the perceived invisibility of lesbians and feminists in the pages.[47] *Bird*women had early on confronted sexism at the paper and worked to address the roles of women on staff and in editorial and writing positions. When Vicki sought to address how lesbians were ignored or dismissed, it was reasonable to imagine that the paper would respond with thoughtful engagement. They did. Vicki's issues with the paper stemmed from the lack of women's visibility, which included the work they physically performed in the production of the newspaper but also addressed their lack of a political voice. Her letter used the example of publicizing the women's press collective that helped the *Bird* turn out emergency editions after the paper's home office was firebombed. The *Bird* house burned and the paper was only able to salvage a fraction of their materials.[48] They were a victim of a wave of repressive and violent tactics used in a backlash against the city's radical and hip community in the era. Vicki's letter to the *Bird* asked the women who wrote for it to make a bigger and better effort to have their voices *as women* front and center.

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[47] Vicki, "Vicki Writes About Women and *Bird*women Reply" *Great Speckled Bird*, June 5, 1972, 14-15.

[48] Huff, "A New Way of Living Together," 172, 187-188; Candy Hamilton, "Bird Firebombed," *Great Speckled Bird*, May 15, 1972, 2-3.

The *Bird*women responded to Vicki with blunt declarations about this difference being caused by “different political perspectives.”[49] They said Vicki articulated a different kind of politics, “While we would agree that men are oppressive to women generally… we don’t agree that changing that is the key to liberation.” Most of their response to Vicki was structured around the difference in political views and an irreconcilable difference. They said that ultimately it boiled down to the fact that they believed “Full liberation for women and other oppressed people only becomes possible with the building of a socialist society.”[50] One of Vicki’s more specific criticisms was the *Bird* had very little content about lesbian women. She considered that this was possibly because there were no lesbians working for them, but she also noted that “who is straight today may be lesbian tomorrow, as I myself found out.”[51] In an attempt to answer her questions about sexism and sexuality, the *Bird*women included a short reaction at the very end of their response to Vicki about the low lesbian visibility in the paper. They minimized the importance of the question by offering to do better—they were open to working with lesbians and having more lesbian content in their pages—but, they countered that “we don’t think that men have separated us from Vicki and other lesbians. It seems clear from this discussion that *Bird*women have a basic political difference with Vicki.”[52]

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[49] Anne, Becky, Stephanie, “*Bird*women Respond: Socialism Frees All,” *Great Speckled Bird*, July 3, 1972, 9.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Vicki, “Vicki Writes About Women.”

[52] Anne, Becky, Stephanie, “*Bird*women Respond.”

As the feminist consciousness of women writers at the *Bird* developed, so too did feminism impact women who joined the gay liberation movement. When lesbian feminists battled for their place in the pages of the revolution, they also fought a similar front with men in gay liberation.[53] The GGLF had a women's group and when they became more involved with Gay Pride that summer, they decided to form their own organization, the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (ALFA). This group would address their specific needs as lesbians and feminists in Atlanta and lasted for over two decades, finally disbanding in 1994. Vicki Gabriner, a founding member, wrote a community history for the organization's newsletter, *Atalanta*, that traced its lineage to a radical and revolutionary time in Atlanta. Vicki was not a native Atlantan, but a radical activist who had roots in the anti-war movement and relocated from the Northeast in 1970, attracted in part by the city's reputation as a hipper, more radical place, but also because of her work with the Venceremos Brigades.[54] She was active in Atlanta's radical political scene when women at the *Bird* developed a "womyn's caucus," which led to the establishment of the group Atlanta Womyn's Liberation."[55] Vicki remembered that ALFA formed, as many other lesbian feminist groups had in other places, when it became clear that "Atlanta Women's Liberation was too straight and the Gay Liberation front was too male."[56]

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[53] Hobson, *Lavender and Red*; Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*; Enke, *Finding the Movement;* Stephanie Gilmore and Elizabeth Kaminski, "A Part and Apart: Lesbian and Straight Feminist Activists Negotiate Identity in a Second-Wave Organization," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 1 (January 2007): 95-113.

[54] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 187-89; Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 31; Ian Lekus, "Queer Harvests: Homosexuality, the U.S. New Left, and the Venceremos Brigades to Cuba," *Radical History Review Issue* 89 (Spring 2004): 57-91.

[55] Vicki Gabriner, "A Hystory of the Atlanta Lesbian/Feminist Alliance, 1972-1978," *Atalanta* (December 1980). Sears Papers, Southern Research Materials, Box 116.

In the summer of 1972, Atlantans celebrated Gay Pride Week and the Bird covered events with a two-page center spread. The paper reported on the rally and demonstration and included articles about liberationist politics as they related to the local community. One article addressed the problem of sexism in Atlanta's gay bars, another highlighted local efforts to organize a group for lesbian mothers who were dealing with custody issues, and one article provided a short history of gay activism in the city.[57] The week after Gay Pride Week the *Bird* printed excerpts of local GLF activist and *Bird* staffer, Bill Cutler's, Pride speech. In what some activists interpreted as a seemingly unnecessarily aggressive move, the *Bird* also printed a rebuttal to his speech entitled "*Bird*women Respond: Socialism Frees All."[58] Their response was prompted by a portion of Cutler's speech that objected to socialist revolutions when they failed to account for gender and sexual liberation. He specifically questioned a commitment to revolutions that upheld regressive structures and cited the example of the Cuban Revolution, along with some other countries, and their continued repression of gay men and women.

Some people at the *Bird* advocated hardline socialist and anti-capitalist views that minimized support for the sexual revolution or gay liberation. The *Bird*women's reply to Vicki about the lack of lesbian visibility in the paper presaged their reaction to Cutler's

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[56] Susan Wells and Vicki Gabriner, "How to Start a Lesbian Organization," 1977. Sears Papers, Southern Research Materials, Box 116.

[57] Dave Bryant, "Sexism in the Gay Bars," Diana, Phil Lambert, and Bill Smith contributions to "Gay Pride Week," *Great Speckled Bird*, June 26, 1972, 14-15.

[58] Anne, Becky, Stephanie, "*Bird*women Respond."

Pride speech, in which they disregarded the nature of gay oppression and minimized what it meant for people who were subjected to anti-gay sentiment and laws. The *Bird*women who responded to Cutler and to the gay rights movement in general, argued that socialism was the only route to true freedom because any freedom in a capitalist system was merely an illusion.[59] Activists continued to debate the issue with responses from lesbian feminists, former *Bird* writer Miller Francis, straight staffers of the *Bird*, and from Bill Cutler himself as they addressed their concerns. Twelve lesbians collectively said they were "shocked, hurt, and angered" when they read "Socialism Frees All."[60] The women reflected on the personal politics of the situation and acknowledged that "It is very painful to some of us to confront you, whom we thought our friends and allies, especially you women; but we must, especially since we are leftists."[61]

The debate evoked a variety of responses from the gay and lesbian community. It was clear that there was not one single prevailing political philosophy that united activists under one banner. The responses, though, showed that gay and lesbian liberationists were not willing to let heterosexism go unchallenged in the radical and left community. The dozen lesbians who signed their names to a collective statement argued that to insist on a party-line revolutionary style of politics alienated many people. They emphasized that there was an entire community of gays and lesbians who may not have been "political" in the sense that they participated in radical movement politics, but were political because "to survive in the United States (and the world) as a homosexual is a highly political act."

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[59] Ibid.

[60] Marilyn, Jennie, Lizzie, Jane, Vicki, Peggy, Helen, Lorraine, Elaine, Arlene, Kathy, and Maude, "Lesbians Respond" *Great Speckled Bird*, July 10, 1972, 4.

[61] Ibid.

Miller Francis joined the conversation with a complex set of opinions; he agreed personally on some accounts with gay liberationists (heterosexism at the *Bird*) and disagreed with them on others (the adherence to political analysis that centered on class and socialist revolutions).[62]

Miller Francis also considered his personal experiences as a radical and gay man who worked for the *Bird* and as a community activist for years. He said "I am writing as an ex-*Bird* staff member (of 3 years experience) to protest against the persistent heterosexist attitudes and politics that have permeated your otherwise progressive institution since its very first issue."[63] Francis recounted that an editor cut a single paragraph from his first review that related the subject's homosexuality, deeming it "inessential." These issues likely persisted and factored in Miller Francis's gradual disengagement with the paper. He said, "As a veteran of Bill Cutler's present struggle to survive and function as a homosexual within the *Bird*, it is sad to discover that little has changed since I left."[64] Bill Cutler responded to the *Bird*women with a detailed analysis of gay oppression in the Cuban Revolution because that was what prompted the women's response in the first place.[65] Cutler's article displayed his radical movement credentials and he was well-versed in the literature and politics of revolution.

The articles generated in this controversy underscored that there was a contingent of radical gay and lesbian leftists committed to socialism, but that they were fighting for a place in a movement that had refused to address its problem of "straightness."[66] The problem, these critics argued, wasn't socialism, but the inability of straight socialists to engage with gay liberation. The lesbians addressed their concerns to "the straight press and straight people" but especially to straight radicals. They called for an intervention in the movement's direction and warned of a growing impatience in gay and lesbian liberation. They said

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[62] Miller Francis Jr., "Revolution is also Gay Consciousness!" *Great Speckled Bird*, July 10, 1972, 6-7.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Bill Cutler, "Revolution is also Gay Consciousness!" *Great Speckled Bird*, July 10, 1972, 7, 20.

> We homosexuals are finding ourselves alone and may be forced into fighting single issues for homosexual civil rights unless you straights wake up. Stop telling us we are not right-on revolutionaries and realize that our oppression *is* your oppression and all oppressions must be fought together or we will lose.[67]

The debate prompted members of the *Bird's* editorial staff to reevaluate their positions.[68] In a statement from the greater *Bird* collective titled "Criticism Prompts Self-Criticism," they admitted to a "lack of gay consciousness." Though the exchange rendered a change in "our heads and our hearts," the *Bird* staff struggled to implement a more inclusive internal community philosophy. They drew an outline of who was part of the group and who was not as they cast gay, black, and female in the role of other consistently. The *Bird's* straight sexuality was unstated but implicit as they noted "It's hard (structurally) to know how to give gay people the coverage/support/solidarity that they demand." While the *Bird* acknowledged some issues, they discounted others. They viewed the intense criticism directed at them, in part, as a stage in what they called the revolutionary process of self-definition. Those involved in a liberation movement, they said, experienced a moment of "intense anger" focused on the "most immediate oppressor." It had happened before they said

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[66] Ibid.

[67] "Lesbians Respond."

[68] The *Bird*, "Criticism Prompts Self-Criticism" *Great Speckled Bird*, July 10, 1972, 5.

> The *Bird* supported the Black movement when it was anti-white. The *Bird* supported the women's movement even when the women made mistakes. Both those movements were allowed to progress through self-definition (Blacks defining Black liberation, women defining women's liberation).[69]

The *Bird* saw Black liberation, women's liberation, and gay liberation as parallel movements to which they played a supportive role, though often it was a critical one that bordered on paternalistic.

As radicals debated the incorporation of gay liberation and lesbian feminism into a broader and straighter movement, they also engaged in important conversations about politicizing a wider community of gay and lesbian people. The divisions that existed between gay and lesbian activists in the radical camp was just one part of the conversation. At the *Bird*, activists continued to engage straight and gay radicals in discussions about class, gender, and sexuality. A new debate erupted over the publication of "Out! Out! Damn Faggot," an article written about anti-homosexuality in the socialist movement as experienced by a gay man who participated in a Venceremos Brigade in Cuba.[70] The article caused an uproar in editorial meetings and reflected the staff's admittedly low "general level of consciousness about Gay oppression." Bill Cutler and other staff decided that the discussions were important enough to share with the readers so that they all might benefit.

The debate showed multiple layers of political reflection. Radical gay liberationists critiqued cultural and social components of the urban gay male world that they thought represented a repressive system, like that of the bar underworld and its embrace of camp culture and drag queens. Bill Cutler revealed a twist in the debate that complicated things, in his piece appropriately titled "Gayness" in the *Bird* or "Camp" in the Socialist Camp." In addition to the discussion about the Venceremos Brigade piece a local review of a film festival was also discussed as problematic. Cutler related that there was a negative reaction from straight *and* gay radicals who objected to the "camp" tone of both articles. As a gay person and a radical, he offered some personal opinions on the debate. In a critical history of camp as a form of satire and protest within gay male culture, Cutler argued that "camp is central to most Gay men's consciousness of their own Gayness." He said of the film festival review that the author's "campy asides are the sort of out-front "faggoty" flourishes the double-dyed straight *Bird* has rarely allowed itself to indulge in, and as diversions I welcomed them."[71]

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Ian Lekus, "Queer Harvests"; Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 31; Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 86-88.

In his final estimation Bill Cutler acknowledged that it seemed like Gay Liberation as a movement was only welcomed when "seemly and decorous." He determined that gay men would have to give up the "old bitchy, Bette Davis kind of camp" as they developed a political consciousness. Unfortunately he engaged in some victim blaming when as he said the clash of "Gay style and socialist conviction" kept allies away. This, he concluded, was the "source of much of straight socialists' distrust of Gay men and reluctance to work with them." Atlanta's radical gay community had argued these points before. Campy Simplex had ironically displayed considerable skill at dishing out acerbic criticisms of camp culture as he advocated for its abandonment. He aimed his wit at a favored scapegoat of radical activists who thought drag was a genre of mimicry and masks. Simplex argued, as did Bill Cutler, that camp and drag often veered from its radical political potential into mere imitation and sometimes reinforced "the worst features of "straight" society." Campy said

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[71] Bill Cutler, "'Gayness' in the *Bird* or 'Camp' in the Socialist Camp," *Great Speckled Bird*, September 24, 1972, 10.

> the freedom not to be conventionally masculine that Lil celebrates turns into the most abject mimicry of conventional femininity- smirking, simpering, wrist-flapping, back-biting. This is not counter-culture but American culture with a vengeance.[72]

The "Atlanta Contingent": The End of Gay Liberation, 1972-1973

By the fall of 1972 the *Bird* staff and readers had expressed opinions that the newspaper didn't cover the gay movement enough *and* that it was covered too much.[73] The inclusion of gay and lesbian liberation politics to such an extent was a source of tension at the newspaper. Some gay activists thought there was not enough representation of their movement in the pages of the newspaper. Other *Bird* editors disagreed and argued that a commitment to socialism, Marxism-Leninism, or class revolution informed their politics more so than gay liberation. Fights between straight socialist radicals, gay and lesbian radicals, and those who identified as gay or lesbian radicals and socialists taxed the young movements as people showed signs that they were burning out.

In the midst of transition in Atlanta, activists publicized their plans for a mass meeting of "all gay militants in the South."[74] The *Bird* carried the news that the GGLF and the Committee on Gay Education, a student group at the University of Georgia in Athens came together to organize and call for a regional conference to be held at UGA in Athens "for the purposes of writing a constitution and electing leadership for a Southwide gay activists organization."[75] When activists met in Athens the conference showed the size and growth of the gay liberation movement throughout the region and highlighted important internal divisions. The conference was convened to combat an apparent turn in the movement towards moderation and away from radical liberation. Activists wanted to reformulate and renew their energies in radical struggle as "Southern Gay Militants." Organizers of the conference felt that gay liberation had become depoliticized. They declared

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[72] Campy Simplex, "Dear *Bird*flock."

[73] Charlie Shivley, "Letters on Gay Subjects, One," and Paula Stratton, "And Two," *Great Speckled Bird*, July 31, 1972, 9.

[74] Lorraine, "Call for Southern Convention of Gay Militants" *Great Speckled Bird,* October 16, 1972, 7.

> The gay movement is in retreat. A year or so ago, many gays were shouting "Out of the closets and into the streets!" Now, it appears, the acceptance of traditional gay roles is spreading throughout the gay ghettos.[76]

Just a few weeks before the conference Atlanta's gay community suffered from a violent loss when local drag star, and recent Miss Gay Atlanta, British Sterling, and her roommate were murdered. For some of the more radical voices the murder of British Sterling and Klaus Smith was a clear example of the specific issues that plagued Atlanta's gay community and how the personal was political. Steve Abbott covered the death of his two friends in an angry yet resigned report.[77] He related the sad reality of how the murders were either ignored by the mainstream press or important details were omitted (the fact that the two murdered men were gay) or misrepresented (they were not victims of a robbery gone wrong). Famous in the gay world, British Sterling was the first black Miss Gay Atlanta. Though she deserved the honor, Abbott hinted at the idea that the "Atlanta Gay Establishment" in an effort to "undercut its racist image" had awarded British Sterling the crown. Abbott wrote that Sterling faced discrimination and fought hard to become famous "in the racist, sexist atmosphere of Gay bars where blond prince charmings are the ideal" and where to be Black and Gay rendered one "invisible."[78]

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[75] Ibid. and Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones,* 107-109.

76 "For a Southern Convention and Association of Gay Militants," Sears Papers, Box 251; Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 114-115.

[77] Steve Abbott, "British & Klaus," *Great Speckled Bird*, October 30, 1972, 18.

The murders of British and Klaus were the subject of multiple pieces in the *Bird* as the two were publically mourned by the gay and lesbian community. Sterling was a native Philadelphian who came South in the armed services and found his way to Atlanta and decided to stay for college. Sterling and his roommate Klaus were attacked by the men picked up while cruising, but only after they had spent the night together. The *Atlanta Journal* and *Constitution* left out the details of their sexuality in typical disregard for gay and lesbian sexuality in the period. A poem by "Babalu Bebe Mbutu" placed British Sterling's death as a result of the context of a gay community that upheld racism, classism, and gender discrimination. In "for british: to kill a mockingbird" Mbutu criticized the racist and classist dimensions of drag, especially as it was created, produced, and consumed in Atlanta, and specifically as these issues played out in the life of one black queen and gay man who lived and died in the city.[79]

Lendon "Bebe Mbutu" was a local activist who moved from Atlanta sometime in the early 1970s to San Francisco and in both cities he was active in the street, hippie, and radical political and countercultural scene. Back in Atlanta he occasionally wrote for the

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[78] Steve Abbott, "British & Klaus."

[79] Babalu Bebe Mbutu, "for british: to kill a mockingbird," *Great Speckled Bird*, October 30, 1972, 19.

Great Speckled Bird.[80] Mbutu's style of gay liberation was more focused on the radical sexual revolution when in San Francisco where he was one of just three black members of The Cockettes, the radical gender bending guerilla theatre group.[81] In Atlanta, Bebe Mbutu took a hard look at how race and class impacted the real life of Robert Lyons, who performed as British Sterling. His poem for British spoke of life as a black gay man and the system of oppressions he navigated in Atlanta.[82]

He regarded the tragedy of the murder of British Sterling/Robert Lyons in light of the life he lived in the gay community. He indicted the white gay male community as "they mourn your stabbing while they ignored the butchering of your life." Robert Lyons was a

> ghetto escapee, doing white folks time in the army,
> doing white folks time in college,
> doing white folks time in buckhead.[83]

Mbutu charged the white gay male community with creating a token star to assuage their guilt over systemic racism. He noted that "all that white folks love, all that degreed education, all that fine buckhead living" had not effected how his death was ultimately reported as "just another dead black man on a list long as history."[84]

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[80] Scott Smith, "In The Frunchroom: Lendon Sadler," *The Frunchroom: A South Side Reading Series from The Beverly Area Arts Alliance* (April 25, 2017) https://thefrunchroom.com/2017/04/25/in-the-frunchroom-lendon-sadler/ .

[81] "Lendon Bebe Mbutu, Black Fire" *The Cockettes Paper Doll* book. Julia Bryan-Wilson. *Fray: Art + Textile Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017) 57-59. Kembrew McLeod, "Prairie Pop: Flashback to '70s San Fran drag with Former Cockette Lendon Sadler," *Little Village Magazine* (June 14, 2016). http://littlevillagemag.com/prairie-pop-flashback-to-70s-sanfran-drag-with-former-cockette-lendon-sadler/ .

[82] Glenda Elizabeth Sherouse, "The Politics of Homosexuality In the Twentieth Century Black Freedom Struggle (PhD diss., The University of South Carolina, 2013), 187-88, ; Mumford, *Not Straight, Not White*, 88-97; Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*, 103-104.

[83] Mbutu, "for british."

The deaths of British Sterling and Klaus Smith were more than a tragic personal loss to Atlanta's gay community. Their deaths became symbolic for radical gay activists who worked at the *Bird* and who aligned with the socialist/Marxist/Leninist politics at the paper. The week of the conference the *Bird* published a piece written by "blanche dubois (marxist-leninst)" about revolutionary socialism, the gay liberation movement, and the Atlanta gay community as it was represented in the deaths of the two men. In "Reflections on the Death of a Queen," Blanche Dubois considered the politics involved in how the local gay community was structured, much in the same way that Bebe Mbutu addressed racism and classism as they remained unspoken components of the greater gay community's reaction to the murders.

The article by Dubois was an intricate and complex rumination on local politics. It compared Atlanta's gay community to that of the homosexual and burlesque community depicted in the recent film version of the musical *Cabaret*, which linked "decadence with a refusal to recognize the slow, numbing process of impending fascism." For Dubois, the parallels between pre-fascist German decadence and "Amerikan decadence of the 70s" as seen in Atlanta were explicit. Sometime after the movie came out, Dubois related that one "gay brother" held a "cabaret party" where there was much liquor, some hard drugs, and hundreds had participated in celebrating the "divine decadence" of another problematic era.[85]

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[84] Ibid.

[85] Blanche Dubois, "Reflections on the Death of a Queen," *Great Speckled Bird,* November 13, 1972, 4-5.

The article made the party symbolic and symptomatic of the problems within Atlanta's gay community. As Blanche Dubois reflected on the internal decay that some gay socialists and Marxists saw in the gay liberation movement, the writer also re-engaged in the debate about camp and the place of the urban gay subculture in gay liberation.[86] Dubois listed the negative details of the *Cabaret* party as evidence of a state of decay—the liquor and hard drugs were part of it—but so was drag. Dubois heavily criticized the current embrace of drag and made an over-simplified argument that capitalism forced working-class gay men into one of two reductive roles essentially, the "butch" street hustler or the "fem" drag queen.[87] From this perspective, the murder of British Sterling was a potent example of how systemic issues made local problems. Dubois hammered the point and concluded that "What brings *Cabaret* and Atlanta together is the murder of "Miss Gay Atlanta." What more chilling symbol can we have of the death of Atlanta's image as a "haven" for homosexuals, a myth that even gay liberationists seem to hold onto."[88]

The gay subculture was at the heart of the problems within the gay movement according to Dubois. Arguing that the movement had "from its very inception been led, defined, and controlled by, of, and for the interests of white, male, middle class homosexuals" they called for a new direction in the movement.[89] Dubois was a self-proclaimed "marxist-leninist" and explained the failure of the movement in the language of revolution and stated that "its failure to *proletarianize* its essentially white, male, bourgeois consciousness" had limited its potential. The new direction included moving out of the current sites of gay organization and consciousness ("the campus, the gay bar, and the gay liberation organizations") and into developing a working-class consciousness that examined how class structured "traditional gay institutions as camp and drag." Dubois was committed to the revolution and made the aggressive argument that gay liberation needed to abandon its current course as a separatist movement and join in the larger, broader, and global struggle for "revolutionary socialism."[90]

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[86] Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 26-28.

[87] Dubois, "Reflections on the Death of a Queen," 6.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid., 18.

Just a few weeks later, over the weekend of November 10-12th, activists from almost "every state in the confederacy" gathered in Athens, Georgia for a "southeast-wide convention of gay militants."[91] GGLF activist Bill Smith later reflected that the conference was an important moment in the local gay liberation movement. All the issues discussed in the pages of the *Bird* about socialism, gay liberation, and the limits of radical politics were also widely debated at the gay conference, with similar explosive reactions and tensions that resulted in a feeling of disunity rather than unity. Smith remembered that at the conference

> the conflict between gay men and gay women, drags, cosmic drags, anti-drags, the socialists, liberals, Marxists, non-marxists, liberal democrats, system and non-system people, the organizationalists, the communalists, or non-organizationalists, the political and the non-political, was voiced loudly.[92]

Blanche Dubois' article made an impact on Atlanta's radical gay *Bird* staffers. In a review of the convention, Atlanta activist Lorraine, noted that she and others in Atlanta participated in “small group discussions” about a *Bird* article that “gave a Marxist analysis of gay liberation.” The group was “eager to present these ideas and to have discussion around the issues brought to light in the article.” Lorraine and some others were disappointed with the conference and she reported that it had looked much like what Dubois had described, a group of about sixty people who were “predominantly white, male, and middle-class.”[93] A small minority, to which she belonged, she identified as an “Atlanta contingent” who believed that there could be no liberation “within the present capitalist system. The system needs to be changed radically, to become socialist.”

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[90] Ibid., 19.

[91] Lorraine, "Gay Conference," *Great Speckled Bird,* November 13, 1972, 7.

[92] Bill Smith, "Gay is Gone," *Great Speckled Bird*, July 23, 1973, 7.

Lorraine’s “Atlanta contingent” proved unwilling to compromise their politics and eventually walked out of the conference. The group put forward a motion to exclude “pro-capitalist ideology” from the convention, which was overwhelmingly voted down by the crowd. They chose to leave the convention rather than to continue to work with a group committed to “pro-capitalist ideology.” In a correction to her review in the next issue of the *Bird,* Lorraine clarified that the “Atlanta contingent” that walked out of the conference was five people who were “non-GLF people from Atlanta.” Other criticisms of the conference noted the lack of diversity. Lorraine reported seeing only a handful of women and almost no people of color in attendance. That weekend she “heard a lot of racist, sexist, and most destructive classist statements from many gay people.”[94] The conference left her questioning the radical potential of the newly created Southeastern Gay Coalition.

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[93] Lorraine, “Gay Convention” *Great Speckled Bird,* November 20, 1972, 8-9.

[94] Ibid.

The conference was heated and the aftermath messy. Afterwards, activists came back to their respective local communities and processed the first regional meeting of Southeastern gay militants. The experiences of radical gay activists at the conference mirrored the struggles at the *Bird* as they discussed and debated their commitment to socialism. These conversations affected both the *Bird's* direction and the gay liberation movement. There was a vocal contingent of socialist or Marxist/Leninist identified gay radicals who wanted the gay and lesbian movement to embrace a broadened class-based analysis to their politics. Gay radicals called on straight radicals to work on their anti-homosexualism and confronted gay people about their support for capitalism and its enforcement of racism and sexism.

The Gay Caucus of the *Bird* further articulated their commitment to socialism by the end of the year. At the convention some points of major disagreement surfaced but what it really came down to was that some radical gay activists had an orientation towards socialism and class as their primary political identity. They were committed to liberation but they were unwilling to compromise anymore about its political orientation. Since the Southeastern Gay Coalition was still forming and not yet settled in its purposes and goals, the Gay Caucus highlighted that there was still hope that it would become "an organization devoted to making revolutionary changes." However, they were clear about what they would not support in an organization, saying "We do want to struggle with our Gay brothers and sisters to end our oppression, but we don't want to work in a Gay version of NOW."

By the time of second meeting of the Southeastern Gay Coalition, the organization had already undergone some significant changes. The group's newsletter the

Lavender Wave reported that the women decided to organize separately from the men and indicated that "the decision came as a result of communication problems arising at the meeting, but was not attended by the anger as such splits sometimes are."[95] In a position paper developed by the lesbians, the women agreed with the reform group caucus in that the SEGC should serve primarily as a communications network in the region. They limited the scope of their interactions with the group and instead favored separate lesbian organization. They said

> Women in the group had deep reservations about working within the SECG because of the way men relate to us. Men are sexist; gay men are sexist. We feel women do not come to conferences and gay liberation meetings because we are always surrounded by the gay male power struggle and the evidences of that struggle.[96]

Activists attested to the power struggles of the movement in Atlanta's GGLF. Dave Hayward, a member of the GGLF at the time of the conference remembered that sometime in the fall of 1972 a "schism" developed in the group. On the one side was Bill Smith, who had "a zeal for business."[97] As a leader he made sure to get the group incorporated and helped to organize public events. Severin, a member who performed "cosmic drag," represented a more radical approach to sexuality politics. Hayward remembered Severin's cosmic drag as gender bending and provocative. He performed with a mustache and hairy armpits but wore a long evening gown to sing "I'm tired of straight men fucking me over."[98] Hayward described a meeting and final confrontation between Bill Smith and Severin as "total, like, nuclear fallout." He said "Gay Liberation wasn't the same after that." The group did not survive the confrontation as members took sides and eventually Severin and his supporters left the organization.

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[95] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit and Rhinestones*, 109; "Feminists Divide," *Lavender Wave* (February 1973), DU, Sears Papers, Box 251.

[96] "Lesbian Caucus Position Paper." DU, Sears Papers, Box 251.

[97] Max Clure, Transcript of "Panel on Gay Activism," (June 13, 1991) 4, DU, Sears Papers, Box 115.

[98] Ibid.

After the conference and back in Atlanta, the quality of the meetings and the work of the GGLF suffered. Smith remembered that many women left when ALFA was formed. Not long after the conference most of FLAME (Feminist League Against the Macho Empire), the group headed by Severin, also left. Bill Smith admitted that he stopped going to meetings too and resigned from his position as treasurer in the spring of 1973. Writing an organizational obituary, Smith, active in the GGLF since its formation, described a gradual decline since the Gay Conference in Athens. He reported that after Pride in the summer of 1973 only "two people attended the last meeting" and that "they voted to officially end operations."[99] The end of the GGLF was not a surprise nor was it wasted effort. Bill Smith noted that organizations founded from it, like ALFA and MCC, were strong and healthy. The GGLF may have ended, he said, but other activists carried on within the "framework of their personal convictions and experiences, for the continued growth of the Gay Movement."[100]

"Lesbian is a Word that Scares Most People"

On February 26th in 1973 ALFA celebrated Susan B. Anthony's birthday by holding an open house event. They sent announcements to the *Atlanta Journal* and *Constitution* for inclusion in their coverage of other celebratory events held around the city in her honor. Both newspapers refused to print the notices. ALFA formulated a response to what they saw as the silencing of the lesbian community in Atlanta. Just two weeks after their open house and with no reason for why their announcements weren't printed they contacted the major daily newspapers. Vicki Gabriner signed a letter for ALFA, in which the group objected to how easily they were disregarded. She said "It is a humiliating experience for us as lesbians to be told essentially that our very existence is not recognized by the *Journal*. We have tolerated this kind of humiliation and oppression too long."[101] Jack Spalding at the *Atlanta Journal* succinctly dismissed ALFA's concerns in a short letter that neglected to engage with their political concerns. His response was terse and in just a few lines he explained

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[99] Bill Smith, "Gay is Gone," *Great Speckled Bird*, July 23, 1973, 7.

[100] Ibid.

> Whether a story runs depends on a number of things, including timing, space, and the personal judgement of the editors. Newspapers also are rather slow in taking up new ideas.
>
> Your complaints were about yesterday. Things should be better tomorrow.[102]

The dismissive tone pushed Gabriner to make personal contact with Jack Spalding.[103] Gabriner said they talked on the phone but came to no resolution. He wouldn't give her a concrete answer then as to when the papers would print information about ALFA events and months later they still wouldn't. In the summer, ALFA activists restarted their campaign to get access to mainstream daily press. In an attempt to open the doors of communication ALFA members tried to set up a meeting with another editor, who refused to take the meeting or even to speak with them. The women said "We

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[101] Vicki Gabriner for the Atlanta Lesbianfeminist Alliance, "To the Editor," March 6, 1973. DU, Sears Papers, Box 116.

[102] Letter to Vicki Gabriner from Jack Spalding, March 14, 1973. DU, Sears Papers, Box 116.

[103] Letter to Jack Spalding from Vicki Gabriner, June 8, 1973. DU, Sears Papers, Box 116.

"understand" why there is difficulty in printing our announcements. Lesbian is a word that scares most people."[104]

The fight between ALFA and the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* was rather symbolic. Gabriner said the newspapers "are a cosy [sic] little family, a nuclear one at that, with daddy at the head and everyone else in subservient positions, and homosexuals, as usual, in the closet."[105] Their fight for inclusion was based on the importance of coming out and how gay and lesbian people gained access to mainstream culture as a visible community in Atlanta.[106] She pointed out that the papers denied ALFA visibility because they were a "family newspaper." This blatantly ignored that "all us *queers* have mothers and fathers, some of us have children, and besides, we are human beings just like everyone else." It became clear that Jack Spalding was no friend or ally. If anything, the prolonged discussion increased his hostility. His second letter to Gabriner was longer than his first, but not by much. He simply told her no, "There's a time for everything and the time to comply with your request has not come." He ended the conversation before it could be continued any further. He told her, "I appreciate your offer to call upon me, and of course will be happy to see you if you wish, although your mission will be a waste of your time and mine.[107]

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[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 109.

[107] Letter to Vicki Gabriner from Jack Spalding, June 12, 1973. DU, Sears Papers, Box 116.

ALFA sent announcements to the *Atlanta Journal* and *Constitution* about their plans and activities for the annual Gay Pride Week celebration in June.[108] Neither paper printed event calendars for the week from the GGLF or ALFA. It seems likely that in a related incident the *Atlanta Journal* took out some of its anger on gay and lesbian liberation where they could. At the Gay Pride March the crowd heard the story of the recent firing of local gay activist, Charlie St. John, who had until very recently worked for the *Journal*. St. John, who was a member of the GGLF "was fired from the *Atlanta Journal* for putting press releases about Gay Pride Week in reporter's boxes while he was on lunch break."[109] At the Gay Pride March on June 23 about 150 people joined in from across the Southeast in what Elaine Kolb, an organizer for the event from ALFA, said was an effort to "show the world that we are Gay and Proud and Angry."[110]

That summer saw the last coordinated efforts of a coalition of gay and lesbian activists in the period. Not long after Gay Pride, gay community activists and ALFA members came together to protest the local mainstream newspapers. A group of about thirty people picketed the newspaper's office to protest their response to ALFA's concerns and the firing of Charlie St. John.[111] In a twisted and ironic finale, or as it was reported in the *Bird*, a "grand gesture of liberalism," both newspapers covered the picket. It even garnered "about three paragraphs about it in the Sunday paper."[112]

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[108] Vicki, "Still in the Closet," *Great Speckled Bird*, June 18,1973, 24.

[109] Elaine Kolb, "Gay Pride March," *Great Speckled Bird*, July 2, 1973, 28.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Paula, "ALFA Demands Equal Rights," *Great Speckled Bird*, July 16, 1973, 2.

[112] Ibid.

The end of the GGLF came after a year of intense growth and change. That year GGLF grew in its activism and in building a community. As it did, it experienced an emergent division between men and women, radical and liberal, and socialist and capitalist. All this activism led to direct confrontations between radicals and eventually culminated in an unrecoverable break between gay and lesbian liberationists. Gay and lesbian liberation emerged from the city's radical, hippie, gay, street, and university political scenes. It was a community united briefly that supported a range of political views. Diamond Lil pushed the political radicals to acknowledge the gay male world around them. Babalu Bebe Mbutu directly challenged white men to see how racism and classism impacted the gay community. Each added some texture to Atlanta's smooth liberal gay rights activism as they represented more radical and working-class voices of gay liberation.

The demise of GGLF created opportunities in the city for other organizations and endeavors to thrive. The women of ALFA continued their activism separately but still in cooperation with what remained of the gay male liberation moderates or reformists. Before the 1972 conference, Blanche Dubois challenged the gay liberation movement to develop a new class consciousness and predicted the movement's decline if it did not. Dubois wondered what would happen if they stayed on their current path, "Will the coming years see gay liberation degenerate into small separatist cliques of upper middle class homosexuals, "free" to exhibit their "gayness" within the comfortable confines of their economic class, or at best, second class participation in liberal capitalist politics?"[113] Many gay and lesbian activists embraced leftist politics after the revolutionary period but moderated it to fit their lives as it became apparent that no physical revolution as imagined by the more radical and socialist among them was forthcoming. Gay liberation changed people and as Emily Hobson noted “in its wake radicals were building a gay and lesbian left.”[114]

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[113] Dubois, "Reflections on the Death of a Queen," 18.

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[114] Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 69.

CHAPTER 3

“COME OUT SLUGGING”:

BUILDING A LESBIAN AND GAY COMMUNITY, 1974-1976

Come Out Slugging

In 1976 *Quest*, a national feminist journal, published a piece by ALFA founding member Vicki Gabriner titled “Come Out Slugging.” The essay documented how ALFA built a new kind of lesbian community in Atlanta, largely through their efforts and success in politicizing softball. Gabriner’s essay reflected the radical newness of the idea and asked important questions about the relationship between lesbianism and feminism, the social and political. She and many ALFA women thought it was possible to build a community that considered both as integral to their identities and considered their mission within the contours of lesbian communities. She said “To build a lesbian movement, to fortify ourselves for survival in a hostile environment, to create massive social change, to create lesbian-feminist institutions, to build a power base, we need to ask ourselves: Where do lesbians hang out? What is important to them/us?”[1]

One thing that was historically important socially for many lesbians in Atlanta was sports and specifically, softball. Many lesbians already played softball in city leagues and therefore it seemed like a natural place to start organizing around lesbian feminist politics.[2] Gabriner's discussion of the positive effects of the growth of softball in ALFA reflected an optimistic mood. By 1976, two years of softball seasons organized by ALFA deeply impacted the lesbian community in Atlanta as more lesbians became engaged with lesbian feminist politics and through softball came to support ALFA's other work. "ALFA's growth was one of the most important spinoffs of the softball season. Our energy was contagious."[3] Gabriner recalled that ALFA "entered her prime in the summer of 1974," a feat directly connected to the group's ability to reach out and grow its members' community.[4] Through these efforts they developed a new women's community that made the personal and social, political.

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[1] Vicki Gabriner, “Come Out Slugging,” *Quest* (Winter 1976), 53.

Atlanta's lesbians were drawn into ALFA's orbit because they were involved in so many different kinds of activities. In 1975 ALFA's size had grown to such an extent that it was able to support three different softball teams in their season.[5] One ALFA member wrote that "When I first moved to Atlanta two years ago, the first thing I heard about was the ALFA softball teams. The first event I went to was a Red Dyke Theater benefit for the ALPHA Omegas."[6] ALFA softball developed as a statement about lesbian feminism and Vicki Gabriner was one of the most outspoken advocates for its politicization. In "Come Out Slugging," she said

> Softball has been one of the most powerful and energizing activities of the ALFA organization. This has been true on several levels: 1) it has affirmed our lesbianism; 2) it has reinforced and developed

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[2] Mims, "Drastic Dykes," 37-38, 53-54, 111; Sears, *Rebels*, *Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 177-181; Chenault, "An Unspoken Past," 147-148; Daneel Buring, "Softball and Alcohol: The Limits of Lesbian Community in Memphis from the 1940s through the 1960s," in Howard, ed., *Carryin' On*.

[3] Gabriner, "Come Out Slugging," 56.

[4] Gabriner, "A Hystory."

[5] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 179.

[6] "Lesbian Softball Revisited," *Atalanta*, June 1977, 4. DU, Sears Papers, Box 116.

> positive attitudes about our bodies; 3) it has strengthened our ability to function collectively; 4) it has allowed us to reach out to women who otherwise would not be active politically, in some instances meaning that we were able to cross class lines; 5) it has built ALFA as a political organization; 6) it has strengthened the lesbian-feminist community in several aspects.[7]

Marc Stein's periodization of gay liberation ends transitionally in 1973 with a political and moral success—the American Psychiatric Association's decision to no longer consider homosexuality as a mental illness.[8] Having won this important battle, activists moved on to other projects and developed new strategies to fight the constant attacks on their somewhat limited gains. The main political thrust of liberation was transformed from radical change to gay and lesbian liberalism. Stein characterized gay and lesbian political activism in the period as being "less revolutionary in its goals, less committed to radical coalitions, and less interested in liberating everyone's same-sex desires."[9] This assessment has generally left undervalued the work that radical lesbian feminist groups like ALFA continued to do throughout the decade. Many lesbian feminist groups thrived in the country after 1973, though they were no longer associated with gay liberation or a broader radical political movement. Women developed new publications and journals that created a national lesbian feminist print community but also organized locally as they established collective households, women's community centers, and softball teams.[10]

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[7] Gabriner, "Come Out Slugging," 54.

[8] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 9.

[9] Ibid., 115.

[10] Anne Enke, "Smuggling Sex Through the Gates: Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of Space in Second Wave Feminism," *American Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (December 2003): 635-67; Enke, *Finding the Movement;* Stephanie Gilmore, and Elizabeth Kaminski, "A Part and Apart: Lesbian and Straight Feminist Activists Negotiate Identity in a Second-Wave Organization," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 1 (January 2007): 95-113; Heather Murray, "Free For All Lesbians: Lesbian Cultural Production and Consumption in the United States during the 1970s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15, no. 2 (May 2007): 251-75;

When local gay liberation fronts and other radical groups ended their associations as activists groups, many formed new organizations or joined in different movement causes as individual activists. Atlanta's social gay and lesbian communities exploded in the 1970s with a new visibility and outness. At the same time, and after the collapse of the GGLF, political organization among gays and lesbians suffered because no moderate or liberal activist alliance came together to unite communities. Some activists continued to work together in short-term alliances and smaller groups. ALFA prospered at mid-decade but they redirected their efforts towards community building instead of radical politics. While no large organization existed that solely focused on politics, different groups and individuals advocated and educated gay and lesbian communities about the politics of sexuality.

Atlantans rallied in 1973 to keep the *Great Speckled Bird* going after they came close to closing. The paper continued to publish until 1976, but its coverage of gay and lesbian news declined in this period and they only occasionally printed pieces about gay and lesbian activism. The decrease in coverage in the *Bird* reflected the general lessening of radical politics in the city but also stemmed from the paper's increased commitment to socialism and later to internal shifts that refocused the paper on local news and political coverage.[11] The disappearance of gay and lesbian voices in the *Bird* was also a result of the establishment of the *Atlanta Barb* in 1974, the city's first gay newspaper, which changed its name to *The Barb* in 1975 to reflect a wider regional community.[12] *The Barb*

Kristen Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

[11] Huff, "A New Way of Living Together," 198-204; Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 89.

[12] *The Barb*, April 1975, 1. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

was a revolutionary first step in creating an out gay community and at one point had a distribution network that encompassed over 10,000 readers in the Southeast. It reinforced the establishment of a community that was unapologetic in its sexual declaration. The paper ran for only three years but it was an important center for continuing political activism in Atlanta's gay community.

This chapter looks at how gay and lesbian communities evolved after the gay liberation revolution. As in many other places, gay and lesbian people living in Atlanta socialized as they engaged with politics in the 1970s. In the post-revolutionary period, Atlanta's gay liberationists transitioned into gay liberals and lesbian feminists engaged more with separatist philosophies at the end of the decade. But political activists continued to push broader gay and lesbian communities to engage with politics, whether or not it was radical, moderate, or liberal.[13] They also engaged in the social politics of sexuality by openly coming out at their jobs, to their families, and built a public network of resources and support for other gay and lesbian people. Most organizations were predominantly led by middle-class white gay and lesbian people but people of color were not entirely invisible.[14]

Since its earliest formation, gay liberation in Atlanta acknowledged that it lacked diversity and struggled to reflect the city's population. This continued to be an issue throughout the 1970s and as more people of color came out and into the gay community they pressed for gay and lesbian politics to address racism within their own ranks. In a reflection of the city's place in the Bible belt, Atlantans saw the expansion of religious gay and lesbian groups like Integrity for Episcopalians, Dignity for Roman Catholics, and groups for Lutherans and Methodists in addition to the Atlanta Metropolitan Community Church started in 1973. Possibly because of the good example of organization and activism that ALFA set for the city and the effect of a community newspaper, a larger gay and lesbian community evolved at mid-decade.

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[13] Self, *All in the Family*, 235-237; Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 119-21.

[14] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 123-125; Mumford, "The Trouble with Gay Rights" and *Not Straight, Not White*.

"Building Our Community": Lesbian and Gay Communities in Atlanta

Some radical lesbian feminist organizations disbanded at the end of the gay liberation era, but that was not the case in Atlanta. ALFA, founded in the summer of 1972, grew and eventually moved into a house that operated as a lesbian community center for the next two decades in the Little Five Points neighborhood. As a small community of political lesbians who identified as feminists and radicals they said "we are only slowly learning to form strong ties with the people we can most depend on—other lesbians."[15] ALFA's politics was out front as an organization for lesbians and feminists, but it never adhered to a specific ideology. Later in the decade, the most active members moved towards a more political interpretation of lesbian separatism but the group—from its original design—maintained the need for a separate space for women to organize around their sexuality. With theater groups and competitive softball teams, ALFA attempted to create and provide for other women a community and culture for lesbians in Atlanta. One of the founding members, Vicki Gabriner said that ALFA women "defined our lesbianism not only in personal, but also political terms, and saw that as the central motivating factor in our social and political activity."[16]

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[15] "Lesbians Respond."

The lesbian feminist community in Atlanta underwent a de-politicization of certain kinds of radical or leftist politics but remained committed to what Marc Stein regarded as a turn towards "cultural feminism, which celebrated female values, encouraged women's autonomy, and explored lesbian separatism."[17] Women established bookstores, libraries, community centers, and sports teams that focused on the values of radical and lesbian feminism.[18] The Little Five Points neighborhood became popular with lesbians in this period because it was close to universities but was still an affordable "lower middle class section of Northeast Atlanta."[19] Its proximity to Emory University and Georgia State University was an important point as the university connected many young student activists to the local lesbian community.[20] In the early 1970s, as one woman put it "I had heard that Little Five Points was just crawling with lesbians."[21]

Many women who moved into the neighborhood had recently come out as lesbians or were in the process of coming out. In Little Five Points these women banded together physically and created a new community of collective households, often settling in apartments that took up entire houses. From this neighborhood and the collective community of lesbians and feminists came the establishment of ALFA. In an early introduction to the city about who ALFA was, what they were doing, and why, Diana Kaye noted that one of the reasons the group started was because there was no longer a Women's Center in Atlanta. She related a personal story to attest to some of the harsher realities of living life as an openly lesbian woman. Kaye said that less than a year earlier she "ran away from home" and escaped "the whole marriage—military—officer's lady—reactionary—sexist scene."[22] She came to Atlanta hoping to work with the Women's Center and when she found that they were defunct she was "very grateful to be taken in by a Lesbian collective." An important part of the organization of the Atlanta Lesbian/Feminist Alliance was to "help women such as me make good their escape."[23]

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 125; Enke, *Finding the Movement;* Gilmore and Kaminski, "A Part and Apart;" Murray, "Free for All Lesbians;" Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement.*"

[18] Ibid.

[19] Gabriner, "A Hystory."

[20] Mims, "Drastic Dykes," 101; Huff, "A New Way of Living Together," 200-201, 351-352.

[21] "Anne" quoted in Chesnut and Gable, "Women Ran It," 254.

In political statements reprinted in the *Bird*, ALFA touched on many aspects of radical, lesbian, feminist, and gay liberation ideas of the period.

> **ALFA'S FUNCTIONS**
> We are a political action group of gay sisters. We are the large coordinating group for smaller consciousness raising groups and an umbrella group for Women's projects and gay Women's projects. We will serve as a communications center for all these groups. We intend to provide alternatives for ourselves and all sisters that will free Women to live outside sexist culture. We aim to reeducate the non-homosexual community, society in general, by being visible and vocal at every opportunity. We aim to reach out to all sisters in order to establish solidarity. We intend to work with gay brothers to further our mutual goals of gay liberation. We intend to initiate demonstrations and public actions to emphasize our demands .
>
> **ALFA STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**
> We believe in Women. We believe in Lesbians. To Lesbians, women come first in every respect of life. The worldwide oppression of Women by prevailing social and economic structures is reality to us. We recognize this but refuse to submit to it any longer. We will lay down a basis for action. We call for an end to the heterosexist supremacy in government, culture, family, lifestyles. We need, want, are actively seeking out the involvement of all Women—all Lesbians.[24]

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[22] Diana Kaye, "Lesbians on the Move," *Great Speckled Bird*, August 21, 1972, 15.

[23] At the time the group was reported as the Atlanta Lesbian/Feminist Alliance or Atlanta Lesbianfeminist Alliance, which reflected its dual nature and identification of members as both lesbians and feminists. By 1973 the organization was officially called the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance, a name that indicated a new unification of identity.

[24] Kaye, "Lesbians on the Move."

By the time of ALFA's official public coming out the group had already staged their first action. Lorraine, Rita, Tish, and Diana reported that ALFA members attended a performance and panel discussion of a local theater production of the play *The Killing of Sister George*.[25] The play depicted what they thought was a "mutually destructive relationship between two women" and the panel discussion held afterwards offered an opportunity to engage with "non-homosexuals among the audience." The five panelists included an ACLU lawyer, a theater critic, the director, a psychiatrist, and an ALFA member, Rita Fellers. Rita was the only female panelist and she was able to push the discussion towards "Lesbians and their oppressions" and away from a specific conversation about the individual characters in the play. ALFA women participated in the night's events by asking questions and pushing back on some of the responses from panelists and audience members. ALFA members said "their first action together found their dedication and sisterhood cemented by evening's end."[26]

This feeling continued as the group grew and evolved their mission over the next year. By October of 1972, ALFA had realized a very important early goal in its organizational mission when it opened its doors to the lesbian community as a women's center.[27] ALFA had a house on Mansfield Street "(just north of Little Five Points off Moreland Avenue)" where a combined living collective and community center would be literally split between upstairs and downstairs. Community activities that they envisioned in the downstairs space included creating a library focused on women's and lesbian literature, a place where meetings and "rap groups" could be held, safe space for film viewing, counseling, and social events.[28] Their energies ran the gamut of social community building strategies. They were less explicitly political but instead related the politics of lesbian feminism as the creation of a collective community of women. ALFA envisioned a community that would grow naturally but they also wanted to contribute to its construction by developing activities that would create a sense of connection between women. Counseling services, consciousness raisings, softball and football, and artistic development were all ideas that addressed similar goals of building community, which seemed to be ALFA's most all-encompassing vision for their group in the 1970s.[29]

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[25] Lorraine, Rita, Tish, Diana, "The Resurrection of Sister George" *Great Speckled Bird*, August 7, 1972, 5.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Lorraine (for ALFA), "ALFA House Open" *Great Speckled Bird*, October 2, 1972, 14-15.

ALFA as an organization said founding member, Vicki Gabriner, was always an "umbrella organization."[30] It was founded as a "non-hierarchical cooperative structure" that reflected the interests and wok of active members. Although membership hovered around 100 members for a number of years, Jan S. noted that in 1977 when members discussed the purpose of the organization, that it was the small number of active members who gave it their direction.[31] Some members were concerned that if the group opened itself up to membership of non-lesbian women that straights would take over. Jan S. regarded the concern as an overreaction, suggesting that if the group only wanted to be a social organization they would have to get "more than the "usual" half-dozen" active members to agree. The core group of active women, as one member stated, had early on decided to encompass lesbian women who had politics that ranged "From Marx to the Great Goddess."[32]

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[28] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 110.

[29] Branstetter, "An Alfa-Omega Approach," 60-63; Mims, "Drastic Dykes," 100-104; Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 181-182.

[30] Gabriner, "A Hystory."

[31] Jan S., "The Debate: On the Purpose of ALFA," *Atalanta*, July 1977, 2. DU, Sears Papers, Box 116.

While there were just a few members who gave the group its general direction, there were some core ideas that shaped the organization in its first decade. Two of the major concerns that Gabriner cited as fundamental to the group was the fact that kept a house active and open as a women's center and that they stayed connected through the distribution and creation of the newsletter, which started in 1973, but was named in 1977, *Atalanta*. Around 1973 and 1974, Vicki Gabriner reported a "low period" in which the group had no house, but they eventually found a new home on McLendon Avenue in the Little Five Points neighborhood.[33] During the low period, ALFA was sometimes criticized for its acceptance and promotion of social and cultural lesbianism. ALFA as an organization was not always explicitly political and often chose to let its existence as a group speak to the politics of recreation. After the GGLF disbanded in the summer of 1973, ALFA underwent an extensive discussion of their own group mission and vision.[34] Longtime ALFA member Vicki Gabriner credited the success and longevity of the group in part due to the fact that in Atlanta there was really only one group dedicated to organizing in lesbian community, ALFA. She compared Atlanta's lesbian community to Washington D.C. and Boston, who had no comparative lesbian organization and noted that in these cities, lesbians were leaders in other feminist organizations. In Atlanta, though, there were limited options for political activism, which was "both positive and negative."[35]

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[32] Gabriner, "A Hystory."

[33] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 137-140.

[34] Branstetter, "An Alfa-Omega Approach," 74-89.

Having re-established their collective household and community center, the women of ALFA rebounded in 1974. That winter ALFA marched with other women in coalition in favor of the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment and was able to bring nationally known lesbian activist Rita Mae Brown to town for their Susan B. Anthony celebration.[36] In a physical sense than the limits of political activism allowed lesbians in Atlanta to create a community in Little Five Points that centered around ALFA and other lesbian collective households. From the Little Five Points neighborhood and ALFA sprang offshoot lesbian collectives and groups.[37] Before ALFA existed, feminists and lesbians had already started to congregate in Little Five Points where the Sojourner Truth Press Collective, a women's publishing center was located. Womansong, a feminist musical performance group predated ALFA but other groups came after like and Red Dyke Theatre, both often played at local houses and events for ALFA all over the city but especially felt at home in Little Five Points. The neighborhood also became a centralized lesbian community in the city because of the early establishment of a Women's bookstore that opened in 1974 and is still operating in Atlanta, Charis Books and More.[38] Charis became by the end of the decade closely and intimately connected to the lesbian community in Little Five Points and Saralyn Chesnut and Amanda Gable examined the history of the bookstore and its evolution from open-minded Christian to inclusive and accepting and eventually to lesbian feminist over its first few years.[39]

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[35] Gabriner, "A Hystory."

[36] Alice, "ALFA Celebrates Her Seventh Birthday," *Atalanta,* August 1979, 1-2. DU, Sears Papers, Box 116.

[37] Chesnut and Gable, "Women Ran It," 257-263.

[38] Ibid.

The Little Five Points neighborhood connected lesbian women to a place in the city. Atlanta's lesbians formed a community not based on any one political ideology but like many gay male communities, very much based on their physical occupation of a right to a place in the city. As lesbians took over Little Five Points they confirmed their power and place in the city and asserted their presence when they created new organizations, groups, and artistic endeavors. Vicki Gabriner remembered the period and considered the meaning of community for lesbians who lived and socialized in Little Five Points. She said about community that

> I do not mean a vague sense of community. I mean that hundreds of ALFA dykes live within blocks of each other. We run into each other not only at lesbian-identified events, like the womyn's bars, social gatherings at each other's homes, political meetings, and concerts, but at the local supermarket, health food store, inexpensive Chinese restaurant, bookstore, laundromat, karate class, feminist therapy center or lesbian chiropractor.[40]

The lesbian community in Atlanta's Little Five Points was able to develop their community by establishing a neighborhood that was friendly toward them because they dominated it. ALFA women, largely white and middle class, were able to buy their own homes. When Gabriner wrote her "hystory" of ALFA she amended her article in 1980, originally written in 1978, to note the reference to home ownership and its relative affordability in Little Five Points was "the most dated comment in this article."[41] Less than ten years from its establishment in Little Five Points, the lesbian community was already priced out of the area due to the gentrification of the neighborhood.

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[39] Chesnut, Gable, and Anderson, "Atlanta's Charis Books and More."

[40] Gabriner, "A Hystory" and quoted in Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 181.

[41] Gabriner, "A Hystory."

One of the most important new ways that ALFA organized lesbian and feminist women was through the establishment of softball teams sponsored and associated with the group.[42] James Sears related the detailed history of the growth of ALFA softball teams as they incorporated all different kinds of lesbian women, from the bookish and uninterested like members Elizabeth Knowlton who cheered form the stands to the skilled and athletic women like Karla Brown who had to adjust to a newly politicized softball. Karla Brown, an African-American woman, joined ALFA without any strong sense of awareness or commitment to feminism. She was younger than most of the middle-class white women who made up the organization of ALFA and she struggled to connect with them as "My interests just weren't theirs."[43] Brown related how political softball looked in reality as "ground rules weren't just developed on the field but discussed *at length* at ALFA meetings."[44] Brown was athletic and enjoyed playing so she came to the meetings but stayed for the game and she said "the softball team really helped me identify with some of the philosophies of feminism." Long time ALFA activist, Vicki Gabriner, believed that "a political woman is not only of meetings and demonstrations; softball is one of the things that women bring to 'politics.'"[45]

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[42] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 177-182.

[43] Ibid., 138.

[44] Ibid.,181.

[45] Ibid.

ALFA's success with organizing around softball led them to new endeavors. The Dykes for the Second American Revolution (DAR II) was formed in 1974 with "about 15 women for whom ALFA did not fulfill political needs."[46] The DAR II group was a lesbian feminist group with socialist and leftist politics and members were keenly aware of their own racist and classist (nearly all white and middle-class) issues when it came to organizing, recruiting, and reaching out to a broader coalition of women for new membership. DAR II ceased to exist sometime in1977 just as the softball leagues vanished from ALFA and politics re-emerged in the Atlanta gay and lesbian community in a major way.[47] ALFA struggled to address their inclusivity in the organization throughout their history and in 1977, Gabriner listed succinctly that "ALFA's membership is 115, basically white, middle class, in the 18-35 age group."[48] These women attempted to reconcile their ideals with their realities and in groups like DARII they directly confronted their own racism and classism and how they failed to reach out to other members of the lesbian community who were people of color.

At mid-decade the lesbian community in Atlanta had grown to include hundreds of women visibly living together in Little Five Points. ALFA initiated different projects and activities from social to the political. In her study of ALFA's origins and rhetorical politics, Heather Lee Branstetter said ALFA "critiqued traditional institutions of power and engaged in activist and educational work that sought a revolutionary restructuring of our social and political sphere as they attempted to build more ideal new models within their own organizational structure."[49] In 1975, ALFA sponsored what they called the Great Southeast Lesbian Conference over the May Day weekend, with a theme of "Building Our Community," as reported in pre-conference registration. Event organizers hoped that the conference would draw between 500 and 600 lesbian women to Atlanta. The *Bird* reported attendance at 325 with 254 women registered from eighteen different states, with many women from Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida. Over the course of the weekend twenty-six workshops were held by the women and covered such various topics as "Socialist Feminism," "Ways We Can Transmit Lesbian Culture With Words," and "Lesbian Separatism."

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[46] Gabriner, "A Hystory" and excerpt from Susan Wells and Vicki *Gabriner*, "How to Start a Lesbian Organization," in *Atalanta,* August 1977, 3. DU, Sears Papers, Box 116.

[47] Gabriner, "A Hystory."

[48] Wells and Gabriner, "How to Start a Lesbian Organization."

Sharon Evans and Kathy Ellison reported on the Great Southeastern Lesbian Conference, identified later with a more out theme, "Building a Lesbian Community" for the *Great Speckled Bird*.[50] They related a change in ALFA from two years earlier when it was "mostly rage" to their current incarnation that expressed "love for all women, consideration for everyone's oppression and the calm logic of, "What needs to be done for us to be healthy and free?"[51] Conference organizers and participants asked "How do we really build a community?" Evans and Ellison played the devil's advocate and noted that a broad and lofty goal such as "Building a Lesbian Community" might "generate much or nothing." They did recognized that the conference offered evidence of change and the potential to build a "grass roots organization" in which "regional networks will develop.” The *Bird’s* socialist leanings were well-covered in a section that discussed a lesbian’s relationship to capitalism, as they related “it is not that lesbians want to bring down the system as much as to be ready for its end.” In a review of a socialist workshop, they reported that “lesbians do not participate in the nuclear family which guards the systems of private property, class structure, and consumerism” and therefore “lesbian households challenge the capitalist patriarchy.” While capitalism, collectivism, spirituality, and community building were central to the conference there were some glaring omissions.

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[49] Branstetter, "An Alfa-Omega Approach," 91-92.

[50] Registration/Advertisement for "The Great Southeast Lesbian Conference." DU, Sears Papers, Box 116; Sharon Evans and Kathy Ellison, "Coming Together at ALFA Conference," *Great Speckled Bird*, June 5, 1975, 6.

[51] Evans and Ellison, "Coming Together."

The major points of criticism about the conference were that the issues of separatism and racism and how these issues needed to be further addressed and discussed in the lesbian movement as they built a community. One of the major goals of the conference was to encourage contact between communities regionally and nationally. The Great Southeast Lesbian Conference held in Atlanta was likely an inspirational event for the re-establishment of a Southeastern Gay Coalition. In 1976, activists in the Southeast reorganized and held their first coalition regional conference, this time in North Carolina, and with the impetus for the re-organization coming from there too. The Great Southeast Lesbian Conference brought hundreds of lesbian and bisexual women together in Atlanta for a weekend charged with political, social, and cultural issues. The conferences exposed weaknesses and strengths in the community and revealed new directions and also a desire to cooperate collectively with more people in the movement.

Atlanta's gay male community during the gay liberation years centered around physical "gayborhoods," as many urban gay communities were in the era.[52] In Atlanta the gay neighborhood was influenced by and part of the hippie and counterculture that flooded the city in the late 1960s around Piedmont Park, the Strip, and 14th Street. These areas, in addition to being active sites of congregation and protests for straight hippies, were also places that gay men cruised and congregated. In the early 1970s, the area known as Midtown, housed gay bars and headshops, and was a neighborhood long populated by gay men in Atlanta. *David*, a gay entertainment magazine from Florida, published a map of the city's gay geography in 1971 in a regional tour of the city that emphasized how good gay life was in Atlanta. The map focused on the Downtown and Midtown areas where fourteen different gay businesses, which included bars, bathhouses, and bookstores. The map showed a city that offered multiple gay spots, and most of them located in Midtown.[53]

In a 1976 newsletter for the Carolina Gay Association, an organization formed at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, Atlanta was designated as a "nominee" for the "Gay Capitol of the South." The author recounted a recent trip to "Hotlanta" and reasoned that "one may go out nearly anytime of the day or night, any day of the week, and have a great time."[54] Gay men did have numerous options for social entertainment in Atlanta at mid-decade, just as they had five years earlier and even for decades before the gay revolution. The bars, lounges, and clubs, changed over the years but Atlanta's reputation as a gay mecca in the Southeast was well-deserved. In 1974 the *Atlanta Barb*, a newspaper dedicated entirely to the gay community started to publish. The publication of the *Atlanta Barb* helped to create a community of gay men (mostly) but expanded to include the lesbian community too with a paper that was dedicated to covering the gay community and what they called "homophile" organizing still.

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[52] For recent discussions on the development of gay and lesbian neighborhoods in San Francisco, New York and Chicago see Hanhardt, *Safe Space;* Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout.*

[53] Chenault and Braukman, *Gay and Lesbian Atlanta,* 60.

[54] "Atlanta—The Gay Capitol of the South," *Lambda* The Newsletter of the Carolina Gay Association, December, 1976, 6. Lee Mullis Papers, Box 42, The Front Page Records, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

The *Atlanta Barb* filled a hole that developed for news of the gay and lesbian community when coverage declined substantially at the *Great Speckled Bird.* In February of 1973, the *Bird* announced that the next issue would be the last. The political fights of 1972 made many of the staff weary and almost half the staff announced they were leaving the paper and could not find replacements. Atlanta's *Bird* readership and community responded to save the paper and keep it going for another three years.[55] Had the *Bird* been the only source for Atlanta's gay and lesbian people to read about their community they would have been disappointed. Articles about gay and lesbian activism in this period were infrequent and the more substantial pieces reflected the tone of the newspaper as it covered issues the gay community had with the police and how gay and lesbian politics continued to interact with socialist politics.

The *Atlanta Barb* introduced itself as the "groovy newspaper serving Atlanta and neighboring cities."[56] Ray Green started the paper but it was later sold to Bill Smith, the well-known local gay activist, in 1975.[57] The newspaper in its first edition already claimed a circulation of over 5000.[58] In an announcement on the front page entitled "Open Letter to Readers" the Editor thanked "the Lounges" and the Metropolitan Community Churches (nationally) as advertisers and as sites of distribution. The *Atlanta Barb* was built from familiar and traditional networks within gay communities and they distributed the newspaper mainly in gay bars and through gay churches. The *Atlanta Barb* took advantage of the popularity and ubiquity of the MCC as a distribution site and was able to tap into a vast Southeastern gay community. The points of distribution and communities showed the cross section of people who the paper marketed itself to—out people—wherever they were in Atlanta.

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[55] Huff, "A New Way of Living Together," 201-204.

[56] Mims, "Drastic Dykes," 63-65.

[57] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 154, note 8, 350-51.

Ray Green spoke directly to Atlanta in his first issue as he charged the community at large with the task of supporting and sustaining the paper. He said "this is your newspaper and the success will depend on you."[59] The *Atlanta Barb* started out primarily as a social, entertainment, and arts style gay community newspaper. It was printed on different schedules throughout its short span but it started as a monthly paper that covered the local gay community nightlife and, after Bill Smith came on board, more local and national gay and lesbian political news. During its first year of publication the front pages featured articles on drag queens as well as reports about city affairs and police harassment and they featured a "stud of the month" photograph. Some regular columns focused on regional gay entertainment news like the "Chattanooga Chatter" and there were regular local gossip columns, one written by Billy Jones as Phyllis Killer. These features sustained a sense of small-town community that generated outward into the regional Southeast. The paper was primarily oriented towards gay men and covered multiple aspects of the gay male community. The paper reported on some aspects of lesbian life, with women noted in religious and political activism, but ALFA was not much represented in the paper. *The Barb* added a section on national news and in 1975 reported on gay communities in New Orleans, Jacksonville, and Miami. The *Atlanta Barb* changed its name about six months after they began publishing in August of 1975 to better reflect their regional expansion. They were no longer the *Atlanta Barb* but became just *The Barb*.[60]

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[58] Chenault and Braukman, *Gay and Lesbian Atlanta*, 70; *Atlanta Barb* Vol.1 No. 1, 1974, 1. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

[59] Ibid.

Under the direction of local activist Bill Smith, the *Atlanta Barb* pushed the gay male community to address issues of gay rights when many would have chosen to disengage from politics. Former GGLF treasurer Bill Smith was the editor and publisher of *The Barb* for most of its existence. For the three years that the paper published, it was the major voice of the gay community in Atlanta.[61] In the spring of 1975, he wrote in his "Editor's Notebook" column that he joined the paper after the publisher and founder, Ray Green, asked him to write a political column one year earlier.[62] In the second issue of the paper he was introduced as someone who was "active in Atlanta politics for several years."[63] Smith's regular column, "Community Activities," covered the "laws and actions of the CRC that affect our lives in the gay community of Atlanta."[64]

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[60] *The Barb* Vol. 1 No. 7, August 1974, 1. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

[61] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 277.

[62] Bill Smith, "Editor's Notebook, *Atlanta Barb*, Vol. 2 No. 3, 1975. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

Eventually the paper expanded its coverage of local, national, and political news. *The Barb* was originally geared towards the gay, urban entertainment and social scene, but with the addition of Bill Smith it succeeded in mixing business and pleasure. Smith's influence at *The Barb* politicized the gay male community using the same strategy that ALFA used to organize women through softball. Gay and lesbian activists made politics a priority in existent social gay and lesbian communities. *The Barb* and ALFA exposed more established and non-political gay and lesbian communities (the bar scene, the drag entertainment network, city softball teams) to political news and pushed hard to make the gay community more aware and engaged in a struggle for civil rights.

"*Gay Life in Atlanta": Mainstream Encounters with the Gay and Lesbian Community*

Bill Smith originally criticized the early paper because it was too focused on gay social affairs, bar news, and entertainment. Green extended to Smith an offer to come and make the paper better by providing articles on political and community events that were unrelated to Atlanta's gay urban nightlife.[65] Smith eventually purchased the newspaper and became the editor and publisher for a number of years. The relationship seems an appropriate metaphor for how that gay and lesbian community in Atlanta was generally throughout the 1970s—mainly focused on building a social community but open to political activism. Over the next two years Bill Smith reported on gay politics in the pages of the newspaper. Smith often reported on his own work as gay political activist through his position on the city's Community Relations Commission.

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[63] Bill Smith, "Community Activities," *Atlanta Barb*, Vol. 1 No. 2, 1974, . AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Bill Smith, "Editors Notebook," *The Barb* Vol. 2 No. 3, 1975, 1, 2. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

The gay newspaper covered the community in ways that Atlanta's more mainstream newspapers ignored or denied. As editor of *The Barb*, Bill Smith was an important voice for the Atlanta gay and lesbian community as they got more exposure in the mainstream press. In the spring of 1975 the *Atlanta Journal* and the *Atlanta Constitution* ran a series of three articles over multiple days and across papers about Atlanta's gay community. The three-part series written by Ron Taylor informed readers of the "lifestyles of Atlanta's homosexuals."[66] "The Gay Life" appeared on May 11th, "Gays Find Giving Up Secrecy a Difficult Choice" on May 12th, and on May 13th the final installment appeared, "Gay Can Be a Sad or Dangerous World." The articles were in-depth and Taylor researched the community and interviewed a number of gay men and gay women. Taylor wrote about gay people who were out in public and active in gay politics, women who were partially out to family, friends, and professionally. He also included a fair amount of coverage that showed gay men and women at gay bars throughout the city.

The articles came out in the midst of a mainstream popular pseudo-boom in community studies of gay populations. Martin Meeker traced how mainstream American press and periodicals like *Life* magazine and *Time* had published numerous articles about the gay male urban world in San Francisco and New York.[67] In 1967, *Look* magazine published an article called “The Sad ‘Gay’ Life,” an idea and a name that was liberally borrowed and transformed when Ron Taylor and the *Atlanta Journal- Constitution* updated it for their local readers in 1975.[68] The series was not met with overwhelming support from the gay and lesbian community. In its wake a new group, the Atlanta Gay Coalition, “formed to help educate and work with the media to improve coverage of gay people.”[69] Bill Smith did an interview with the *Great Speckled Bird* about the articles and the response from the community. He told Bill Hippler at the *Bird* that he thought the series painted the gay community in Atlanta in a stereotypical way and “dealt far too much with the sensational and negative aspects of life.”[70]

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[66] Ron Taylor, "Gays Find Giving Up Secrecy a Difficult Choice," *The Atlanta Journal*, May 12, 1975, 1A, 8A,"Gay Can Be a Sad or Dangerous World," *The Atlanta Journal*, May 13, 1975, 1A, 10A, "The Gay Life," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution,* May 11, 1975, 10A, 11A.

The first article, “The Gay Life,” was published in the Sunday papers and the editor inserted a note that introduced the series as ongoing and the product of a serious investigation into the gay community in Atlanta. “The Gay Life” introduced readers to real-life gay and lesbian people who lived in Atlanta. He detailed how the city in recent years became a new center for gay and lesbian life in the Southeast. He said “Both gays and police officials agree that Atlanta now rivals New Orleans as the gay mecca of the Southeast.”[71] At mid-decade Atlanta’s lesbian and gay communities supported multiple church organizations, lesbian softball teams, women’s organizations, and an alliance that produced pride celebrations annually. Lesbian and gay social life in the city offered numerous opportunities, which included over a dozen gay bars, book stores, and dining establishments that created vibrant gay neighborhoods. Ron Taylor interviewed two women who attended the MCC, with an estimated congregation of over 130 gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. He even interviewed Bill Smith, who at the time of printing, was in the midst of a transition to his new position as owner and publisher of *The Barb*.

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[67] Martin Meeker pinpointed a 1964 *Life* magazine expose entitled “Homosexuality in America” that kicked off the genre. Meeker, *Contacts Desired*, 151.

[68] Ibid., 190.

[69] Bill Hippler, “Gay Life in Atlanta: An Interview with Bill Smith,” *Great Speckled Bird*, June 12, 1975, 6.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Taylor, “The Gay Life.”

Though Taylor quoted numerous people within the gay community he also interviewed officers and vice detectives as counterpoints. Officers who were quoted clearly connected homosexuality to other criminal actions and Taylor made a point by including the seamiest details of some people's lives, which included "young men who strip naked and perform sex acts in the bushes of Piedmont Park." Others who were potentially criminal were "the drag queens," who he defined as "men dressed as women, who trick men into homosexual acts by posing as female prostitutes."[72] These details supported negative stereotypes about gay sexuality as sick, criminal, and predatory.[73] The next article in the series, "Gays Find Giving Up Secrecy a Difficult Choice," took a softer, more sympathetic approach. The story detailed different perspectives on the coming out process and an open lifestyle, including mental health aspects, professional repercussions, and personal consequences.[74]

It seemed as if Taylor and his editors planned a story arc that included a sad ending though. Rather than conclude the series on a more positive note, the final article,

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[72] Ibid.

[73] Capo, "It's Not Queer to be Gay," 131; Meeker, *Contacts Desired*.

[74] Taylor, "Gays Find Giving Up Secrecy a Difficult Choice."

"Gay Can Be a Sad or Dangerous World," was a reminder of the most sensational and sexually shocking. Taylor included details about the gay underworld that he had left out from the earlier articles. He reported on "tea rooms," (public restrooms used for public sex) and on drag queens like local celebrity "Rachel Wells, or whatever his name is, who really does look like Raquel Welch."[75] The last piece in the series relied heavily on interviews with Vice Detectives from the Atlanta Police Department as it extensively focused on roadside or public sex between men. Officers repeated stories about entrapment and harassment of gay men in city bars and parks. It was clear that whether or not men were engaged in sexual acts, the police and the threat of intimidation were never far when a gay man cruised for a casual hookup. Taylor reinforced the stereotypes by highlighting local gay drag performers and gay bar owners and the relationships between younger and older men in the community. He gave one officer the space to dehumanize gay men as he described them as wild animals. This police officer related stories of busting gay men in the parks, "Sometimes they look at you like you're not there. Other times, they'll jump out of bushes and from behind trees. Or you'll see them peeping out like scared rabbits." The officers routinely treated gay men in such a manner, or even worse completely disregarded their emotional well-being or value as a human being. Officers mocked those they arrested who they said "cried like babies." Worst yet, detectives and journalist Ron Taylor cruelly added that after an arrest for homosexual-related crime "one man eventually blew away his own face with a shotgun."[76]

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[75] Taylor, "Gay Can Be a Sad or Dangerous World."

[76] Ibid.

Gay rights activists charged that the articles were overly and unnecessarily focused on the negative or stereotypical representations of gay men. Both the city's alternative newspapers responded to the *Journal* and *Constitution* articles. Bill Smith did an extensive interview with the *Great Speckled Bird* and then reprinted it in *The Barb.*[77] The *Bird* interview addressed the gay community's reaction to the articles but also broadly discussed the Atlanta gay community in general. Bill Hippler and the *Bird's* perspective still showed some of the leftover divisions in political perspective that drove the radical and gay and lesbian communities apart. Hippler's questions belied an ignorance of the history of gay organizations in Atlanta and some of his questions highlighted how far removed from gay activism was the *Bird's* radical perspective. Hippler criticized the Atlanta gay community as being too conservative and churchlike, too enamored of the gay bar scene, and not political enough.

What Bill Smith portrayed in his account of gay life in Atlanta at mid-decade, was a city that was in most respects, "too busy to hate." Smith detailed an active religious gay community, a bar scene that was safer from police harassment and entrapment, and gay bars that catered to women and black people. By the mid-1970s, James Sears said gay and lesbian people entered "another phase of building queer communities in the South."[78] He also argued the "second activist wave washed up against southern social sensibilities and a flourishing bar and bath scene, and found its energy dissipated in eddies of gender difference, racial separation, and political indifference." Bill Smith acknowledged much of this in his contemporaneous account of Atlanta's gay community. He admitted the community had some major issues, including racism and sexism, but pointed out that "at least in this city male and female gays sit down at the same table and talk."[79]

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[77] Hippler, "Gay Life in Atlanta;" Bill Smith, "Editors Notebook," *The Barb* Vol. 2 No. 6 , July 1975, 2, 12·. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

[78] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 157.

For many gay men and women migration to larger cities became an important part of their life experience. This was no different in the South. Some gay men and women set off for New York or California; others created a route to Atlanta or navigated networks in their home states. In Atlanta there were opportunities for a robust gay or lesbian social life and this attracted many people to the city. But the social life in Atlanta catered mainly to white, middle-class men, many of whom were still only partially out of the closet. This led to a more conservative social community. The bars that advertised in the *Barb* in the mid-1970s reflected old tensions between the more conservative and closeted gay business community and the out political one as well as the variations of community that were maintained by class.[80] There continued to be multiple gay communities that catered to working class and urban cultural gay life, bars like the Sweet Gum Head, owned by Frank Powell, had a cast of drag queens who made it the "Showplace of the South." The Cove, also owned by Powell, prominently stated "No Drag Shows" in its advertisements.[81] The difference between clubs and crowds reflected the internal divisions within the gay male community, between working class, middle-class, or between black and white.

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[79] Ibid.

[80] Mims, "Drastic Dykes," 64-65.

[81] *Atlanta Barb*, Volume 1 No. 2, 1974. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

As the *Bird* interview implied though, Atlanta's gay community could be a conservative one. Organizations and activists had a complicated relationship with traditional gay male urban culture, as it relied on the gay bar as the primary source of social and cultural community, and gay bar owners in Atlanta tended towards the non-political. The Atlanta gay bar in this period was not a place where politics was incorporated or supported into the urban and social community; it was contested and actively discouraged. The politics of gay liberation and radical revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s called for a revolution in society that would affect all aspects of social and political culture. Many of the most radical activists argued against traditional family structures like marriage and monogamy. Part of this criticism that was specific to gay culture was the idea that certain aspects of gay culture reinforced gender norms. These intellectual ideas influenced activists in Atlanta in the same ways that they affected gays in cities like New York and San Francisco. Radical gay liberationists failed to see the cultural value in the bars and leveled heavy charges of heterosexism at such popular gay entertainment as drag and the camp aesthetic.

Bill Smith and many liberal gay activists in Atlanta never fully subscribed to the radical gay politics of gay liberation as they related to the destruction of the major social and political systems. His early incorporation of the GGLF signaled that he was no anarchist or revolutionary, but instead a committed reformist. His political commitment to moderation had not changed in the ensuing years. In 1975, he told the *Bird* that if "rural Republicans" believed that small government would protect him than he would work with them.[82] Both Bills agreed that the MCC was the biggest gay institution in

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[82] Hippler, "Gay Life in Atlanta."

Atlanta and that they embraced the social gay bar community with drag shows and benefits. It was a relationship that was congenial and beneficial for the clubs, because they could quietly lend support for politics that they approved of and conservatively moderate or minimize the radical politics of a gay liberation.

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* series about gay life in Atlanta provoked an outcry of rebuttal from the gay community. In a succession of events that led directly from the *Journal-Constitution* articles, Atlanta's gay community formed a new organization called the Atlanta Gay Coalition, which sought to organize a response to the articles and work with the media for better representation. In the months that followed the expose on Atlanta's gay community, the Vice Squad increased their harassment of the gay community with a new campaign that resulted in 18 people being arrested on a Sunday in August.[83] The issues between the city's gay community, the police, and the city's political infrastructure escalated. Bill Smith reported on how things looked from the city-side and the inside as a member of the Community Relations Commission (CRC). Smith was appointed to the CRC after Charlie St. John left in 1973 and had represented the gay community and advocated for moderate and liberal reforms.

By the spring of 1976, Atlanta's urban and racial politics intersected with gay politics. In March Smith's editorial column gave the insider's look at city politics and how race affected the work that was being done in the gay community. Smith reported that the City Council eliminated nearly half of the paid staff positions on the CRC and voted to reduce its budget by a third. Smith made the argument that the vote to cut the budget and thereby reduce the effectiveness of the CRC was the product of white racism on the City Council. He broke it down by the numbers: nine black members had voted against the cuts, nine white members voted for the cuts. The tie-breaking vote was cast by Wyche Fowler, who was white. Smith angrily noted that the next year would likely see Fowler making the campaign rounds and championing " the white liberal cause." He warned the gay community to not forget that Fowler had "voted against the only organization in the city that has raised a major voice in defense of gay people, in defense of people."[84]

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[83] "Atlanta Vice Hot in the Park," *The Barb*, Vol. 2 No. 7, August-September 1975, 1. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

At mid-decade Atlanta's gay community was a dynamic part of the city. Though there was no GGLF anymore, former members remained active in the gay community. Some wrote for the *Barb* and *Bird* and others advocated for gay rights from other organizations like the Georgia ACLU or from religious organizations. Political causes were often taken up by Bill Smith, the second openly gay person to serve on Atlanta's CRC. As the editor of *The Barb* and as a representative of the gay community and the city of Atlanta, Bill Smith was invested in reporting on the news of the city as it related to the gay community. His own personal commitment to gay political activism made *The Barb* a weekly newspaper that covered urban politics well in addition to adding local personal and human interest with news about social and entertainment events in the city and the Southeast. *The Barb* was important to the Atlanta gay community as a place to address contemporary issues and fight back against negative stereotypes as reported by Atlanta's two major daily newspapers, the *Atlanta Journal* and the *Atlanta Constitution*.

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[84] Bill Smith, "Editor's Notebook, *The Barb*, March 1976, 2, 14.

Bill Smith thought that Atlanta's progressive reputation and liberal policies were promoted through the establishment and work of the CRC.[85] 1976 was an active year for the gay community and Smith was an advocate for that community from his position as "second Vice-Chairperson."[86] Smith and *The Barb* made the case in numerous articles that metropolitan issues affected the gay community. City laws and public ordinances that related to regulations of public spaces, like parks or even city sidewalks, could be used to target gay populations, as they were in 1975 as Atlanta's vice squad interpreted loitering laws broadly in "areas known to be frequented by homosexuals."[87] Two articles in the June 1976 issue of *The Barb* showed just how far the gay and lesbian community had come in the last year. In one the Mayor accepted an award from a gay community group and the other reported on the planned festivities for Gay Pride Week that year. That year included the return of the march or parade that had been absent from festivities the last two years.[88] In the upper left corner, the biggest headline read "Atlanta Mayor Wins Phyllis Killer Award," an awards showed put on by the gay male community every year since 1968, held to honor (mostly) gay businesses, gay entertainment, and work being done in the gay community. The awards show was the idea of local drag performer Billy Jones and drag stars of Atlanta provided the entertainment for the awards show. The story ran with a large photograph of Mayor Maynard Jackson holding the award in his office when it was presented to him by John Augustine, the manager of the Sweet Gum Head.

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[85] Ibid., 14.

[86] "Atlanta Mayor Wins Phyllis Killer Award" *The Barb*, June 1976, 1. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

[87] "Atlanta Vice Hot in the Park."

[88] "Atlanta Mayor Wins Phyllis Killer Award" and "Gay Pride Week '76 Celebration," *The Barb,* June 1976, 1. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

The other article announced the events of the Gay Pride Week Celebration and highlighted the parade and increased publicity surrounding the event that year. Atlanta's first official gay pride march was held in 1971 and activities around Gay Pride occurred annually since then but in 1974 and 1975 there were no parades or marches.[89] In 1974 *The Barb* reported that past Gay Pride marches were more political and stressed visibility and equality rights, but that year "more emphasis is being placed on bringing gay people together as a community."[90] On Saturday June 26, in the year of America's Bicentennial, about 300 of Atlanta's gay community marched along Peachtree Street and rallied in a demonstration at Piedmont Park.[91] They celebrated a week-long festival of gay and lesbian community actions, workshops, and cultural and social events.

Gay Pride Week and the Gay Pride March were the products of an alliance between multiple groups in the gay and lesbian community. Atlanta Gay Pride was in its sixth year and the community was re-organizing and re-establishing cooperative efforts between groups as gay rights liberals and civil libertarians joined with lesbian feminists and local gay Christians to celebrate their movement. ALFA member Judy Crosby, an organizer for the Atlanta parade, urged her ALFA sisters to attend the rally and make it a success. She spoke directly to her community. "You were instrumental in helping me get where I am. Yes you…all the other gay people in the world. To show my love and gratitude, I will be marching for you and, hopefully, with you in the Atlanta Gay Pride

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[89] Bill Smith, "Editors Notebook," *The Barb* Vol. 2 No. 3, 1975, 2; "Gay Pride Week 76 Celebration," *The Barb*, June 1976, 1. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

[90] "Atlanta Celebrates Gay Pride," *The Barb* Vol. 1 No. 5, 1975, 1. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

[91] Margo George and David Massey, "Gay Pride vs. Citizens for Decent Atlanta" *Great Speckled Bird*, August 1976; Mims, "Drastic Dykes," 116-117.

Week Parade on June 26."[92] However, she also spoke to some serious divisions in the community about the Gay Pride Parade and its place in the lesbian community. "I'm sorry about not being able to play conventional politics right now, but all of my energy is being channeled into new expressions of sexuality."[93]

Saturday was an important day for the organizing committee and the gay community, not just because it capped off a successful week of activities but also because it was officially proclaimed by Atlanta's Mayor, Maynard Jackson, as Gay Pride Day. The Gay Pride Day march came at the end of a week of activities focused on gay and lesbian social, religious, and political life in the city. "The Gay Pride Committee is organizing the Gay Pride Week celebration to emphasize two things: solidarity among the gay community and the need for legislative change to eliminate discrimination so that, as myths and stereotypes are shattered, change can come about." [94] The official proclamation, timed to coincide with the week's activities and the march, was a big win for the local movement. The substance of the proclamation clearly originated and was articulated in the language of the gay rights movement. The endorsed ideas reflected shifts in the gay rights movement as it emphasized community building and organized political reform.[95]

The organizing group for the week had managed to get Atlanta's first black Mayor, Maynard Jackson, to openly and publicly support the gay rights movement. It was an important progressive step and symbolized for Atlanta's gay and lesbian activists the possibility of a beneficial coalition relationship between the city's black political liberals and the gay and lesbian community. Jackson's proclamation urged people to recognize that "all citizens deserve basic legal rights" and that human rights applied to "all citizens in equal fashion."[96] Mayor Jackson's positive endorsement through the proclamation defended the rights of gay and lesbian Atlantans who had worked hard over the past few years to push for social and legal changes in their treatment. The proclamation represented a victory for the movement and a literal seal of approval.

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[92] Judy Crosby, "Don't Frown on My Parade," *Atalanta*, June 1976, 5. DU, Sears Papers, Box 116.

[93] Crosby, "Don't Frown on My Parade."

[94] George and Massey, "Gay Pride vs. Citizens for Decent Atlanta."

[95] Mims, "Drastic Dykes," 115-17.

That summer the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention met in Norfolk, Virginia from June 14 through the 17th and passed twelve resolutions related to faith and national policy. Abortion and homosexuality were special topics of concern to the SBC in the late 1970s and in 1976 the SBC passed the first "Resolution on Homosexuality."[97] The resolution was mild compared to later language as it "urged churches and agencies not to afford the practice of homosexuality any degree of approval through ordination, employment, or other designations of normal life-style."[98] In Atlanta, less than two weeks after the SBC passed their first resolution against homosexuality, a group who called themselves Citizens for Decent Atlanta launched an anti-gay rights campaign that attacked the Mayor's support of the gay and lesbian community in Atlanta. The CDA demanded that Jackson revoke the Proclamation and stop supporting gay and lesbian rights in the city. They viewed these actions as an unacceptable liberalization of city government as it condoned a person's right to same-sex sexuality.[99]

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[96] Ibid.

[97] "Resolution on Homosexuality," Southern Baptist Convention, Norfolk, VA, 1976, http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/606/resolution-on-homosexuality

[98] Ibid.

Jackson's proclamation of June 26 as Gay Pride Day provoked a strong reaction from some conservative and Christian Atlantans who initiated a local backlash against gay rights activists and their somewhat limited progress. Mary Ellen, a member of ALFA, wrote in an article for *Atalanta* that the controversy that exploded in Atlanta was not an isolated incident. She said "it's sobering in its implication of the climate of increased repression and hostility that is facing the homosexual population of this country."[100] The CDA launched an expensive ad campaign in the daily newspapers condemning the Gay Pride Day Proclamation and the Mayor's support of the gay and lesbian community generally.[101]

Citizens for Decent Atlanta was often misnamed in reports from the period and since then as Citizens for a Decent Atlanta. The slight difference suggests an imagined community self-identified as "Decent Atlanta" positioned against an indecent gay and lesbian community. Citizens for a Decent Atlanta implies an action oriented quality, but Citizens for Decent Atlanta was actually about declaration, much as coming out and Gay Pride was also about declaration. They were a group of Christian, conservative, and decent people who lived in Atlanta and they had rights too, so they said. Some critics at the *Bird* thought that CDA was racially motivated and represented white, conservative, and wealthy Christians in Atlanta and the suburbs.[102] Critics rightly pointed out that it seemed like an attempt to reclaim city politics and government for those who were white, conservative, wealthy, and Christian. It was implied that some thought control over Atlanta was ceded to black Atlantans first and then to gay and lesbian people.

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[99] Heather R. White, *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Tina Fetner, *How the Religious Right Shaped Lesbian and Gay Activism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Self, *All in the Family*. Michael Stewart Foley, *Front Porch Politics: The Forgotten Heyday of American Activism in the 1970s and 1980s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013).

[100] Mary Ellen, "Pride Week—1976—Celebration and Opposition," *Atalanta,* July 1976, 5. DU, Sears Papers, Box 116.

[101] "We Protest," *Atlanta Journal*, June 26, 1976, 12A and July 6, 1976, 7-B and "We Need Your Help," *Atlanta Daily World*, July 11, 1976, 10.

It was Mayor Jackson's literal "seal of the City of Atlanta" affixed to the Gay Pride Day Proclamation that the CDA used as a legal justification to launch their campaign against gay and lesbian rights. The group's attempt to stop the proclamation in court failed. The lawsuit was not kept secret but it was also not widely publicized. When they could not stop it legally they turned to public opinion and launched a publicity campaign to get their message out to Atlanta. The CDA ran ¾ page advertisements in the major daily newspapers, the *Atlanta Constitution*, the *Atlanta Journal*, and the major black newspaper, the *Atlanta Daily World*. On Saturday, June 26, two bold headlines focused the advertisement vertically; on the top in bold block print read "WE PROTEST" and on the bottom "WE BELIEVE" was typeset in a smaller size. In protest the CDA claimed they spoke for "the majority of Atlantans" and questioned the authority of the Mayor, "we challenge the right of our Mayor unilaterally to affix our city's seal of approval to a sexual orientation…"[103] Under the "we believe" section the CDA charged that the Mayor's proclamation was "a travesty and an example of supreme bad taste" and called for Jackson to "rescind this embarrassing proclamation."

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[102] George and Massey, "Gay Pride vs. Citizens for Decent Atlanta."

[103] "We Protest."

The CDA ads showed up in the papers just in time to give an extra boost to publicity that year for Gay Pride Day. The controversy immediately generated media interest. The *Journal* ran an accompanying piece about the controversy, "Gay Day Stays, Jackson Says," in the same issue that the ads first ran.[104] The article outlined some basic points that contextualized the ads and the proclamation and reflected the politics of sexuality, conservativism, and race in the New South city that was famously too busy to hate. Over the next several weeks the CDA, gay and lesbian rights activists, Mayor Jackson, the Georgia ACLU, the Atlanta SCLC, Atlantans, and suburbanites were all drawn into a conflict that escalated from threatened restraining orders to public shaming campaigns as pastors preached against the Mayor and gay Christians protested in worship. For three weeks in the summer of 1976 gay and lesbian Atlantans experienced a first major wave of an organized conservative backlash against the progress of the gay rights movement locally.[105]

The CDA represented the Atlanta conservative backlash against gay and lesbian rights but it was not spearheaded by any one person, nor did it appear to be extensively coordinated or organized. The article that accompanied the first ad in the *Journal* reported that the group was made up of "seven people, all Atlanta Residents."[106] It was reported that the men, who remained anonymous throughout the controversy, knew each other as businessmen and may have met through a local Christian business organization.[107] The CDA itself never went on record and publicly identified themselves. When the group was unable to stop the proclamation legally they attempted to publicly shame Mayor Jackson by calling for his resignation from their pulpits and in the court of public opinion. A group that called themselves the "Gay Christians" formulated a response to the religious attack.[108] ALFA members related that this group apparently wanted to protest inside the church, by attending services, and they had rejected ALFA's offer to picket or join the protest. ALFA reported that it seemed like they alone wanted to control the response and protest from the gay and lesbian community. ALFA members rejected that attempt to control them and picketed the church outside while the "Gay Christians" quietly and respectfully protested by going to the enemy's church to worship.[109]

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[104] John York and Ann Woolner, "Gay Day Stays, Jackson Stays," The *Atlanta Journal*, June 26, 1976.

[105] George and Massey, "Gay Pride vs. Citizens for Decent Atlanta"; Mims, "Drastic Dykes," 116-17.

[106] George and Massey, "Gay Pride vs. Citizens for Decent Atlanta."

Atlanta had a large religious community and that was reflected in the fact that Atlanta also had a large gay religious population. That gay religious community had come to the attention of local conservatives in the area and had prompted one local Methodist minister, in 1975, to allegorize that "just as the blight has killed the elms and the chestnut trees, the beetles are boring into the pine trees, now the homos are gnawing at the church doors."[110] The protest at the church was a religious and moral protest first for these Gay Christians, and a political statement second. Bill Smith spoke with a local MCC pastor, Howard Wells, in Atlanta about the CDA situation in 1976. Wells, in good humor, remarked that “they are preaching against us from their pulpits. We must be doing something right.”[111] Smith hedged a less optimistic interpretation and forecast trouble with the Baptists, who he said were “the hardest of people with which to deal…Without logic or reason, this is the way the Baptist world is.”[112] The CDA campaign against gays and lesbians failed without any support from city hall as Mayor Jackson reaffirmed his support of the Proclamation and the community.

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[107] George and Massey, "Citizens for Decent Atlanta."

[108] ME, "Pride Controversy Continues," *Atalanta*, August 1976, 3. DU, Sears Papers, Box 116.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Taylor, "The Gay Life."

The press reported that the CDA was supported from the suburbs, inferring that it was a movement that didn’t come from the city. Mayor Jackson made a statement that a lot of the letters in support of CDA were from outside the city limits and came in with “Smyrna postmarks.” Jackson framed the backlash and conservatives as outsiders and not real city people, though many of them self-identified as such. One outspoken member of the group told a reporter that “I tend to think of myself as an Atlantan…even though I live in Sandy Springs.” His statement reflected the idea that CDA was a movement about declaration and rejection. The group wanted to get it in the public record that they objected to the progressive steps Atlanta’s city government made and that they believed they had a right to voice their political opinion about it. The pitched themselves as the other side in battle. They were decent and the rest of Atlanta was immoral.

The CDA controversy provoked Christian conservatives, including those who were gay. When “Gay Christians” protested a vocal and prominent Southern Baptist minister by attending a church service and ALFA women picketed outside the church they drew more attention to gay and lesbian politics. Atlantan Dave Hayward, a gay rights activist, local historian, and journalist remembered that the CDA controversy and the "opposition galvanized us." Another activist, Liz Throop, said the CDA was "this very visible villain, these wealthy people who were running these full page ads directly attacking us." Throop realized, along with many others, that the CDA attack was "real different than just the sodomy law or something kind of vague," it was personal. The counter protest to the conservative backlash was supported by a local coalition and drafted activists from a well-established gay and lesbian urban population that had over the last two years been becoming increasingly politicized.

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[111] Bill Smith, “Editor’s Notebook,” *The Barb*, August 1976, 2. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

[112] Ibid.

That fall the *Barb* carried news of a new organization formed from the events of the summer, Gay Pride Alliance.[113] Gil Robison reported on the group's activism, which reflected a renewed sense of political liberation and an emotional reaction to the conservative threat. The Alliance was a "Crying out for the rights of gay people, a voice born of thousands of years of oppression from the state and established religion, in imprisonment and condemnation." The Alliance started to do some traditional political work as they sent out surveys to congressional candidates related to their political stances on "gay civil rights."[114] Activists continued to build relationships with City Hall and that fall they felt supported and thankful that Mayor Jackson refused to concede to the demands of the CDA. His continued support of the local gay community was an important success for Atlanta that would be impacted by a wave of conservatism that swept the country, especially as it focused on gay and lesbian civil rights.

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[113] Gil Robison, "Gay Pride Week Spawns New Group," *The Barb*, September 1976, 1. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

[114] "Gay Pride Alliance Questions Candidates," *The Barb*, November 1976, 1. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

Save Our Children

Gay Pride Alliance seemed born from liberation and protest, but their activities seemed to be more aligned with the reformist and liberal gay rights activism of the period. In Miami, FL the gay business community and the homophile activism of an earlier generation continued into the 1970s. As the Alliance in Atlanta was not finding candidates receptive to their questions, in Miami the local gay rights political group, the Miami Dade County Coalition For the Humanistic Rights of Gays, celebrated a big win.[115] That fall they endorsed thirty-two winning candidates in local election primaries and they achieved a real victory with support from city council candidates on gay rights. Their election activism helped them achieve the support of enough city council members to introduce an anti-discrimination measure. The city council passed the new ordinance that added sexuality to existing anti-discrimination laws. The passage wasn't secure as it required another review before it could be implemented and in the meantime it drew the attention of local Christian conservative political activists.

It was becoming clear to many that the gay rights movement and its progress would be negatively impacted by the introduction of conservative evangelical morality politics. In Atlanta, Smith said the CDA was "not particularly the real problem. They unleashed the Baptists. The Baptists are now a larger problem than the political seven."[116] Bill Smith's opinion would prove to be an accurate assessment of the coming political conservative backlash.[117] In Miami, a reactionary coalition of conservatives and Christian political activists succeeded in repealing the council passed anti-discrimination bill. The first six months of 1977 were dominated by news of an epic new battle between gay rights and conservative Christians as Anita Bryant, a Christian activist, singer, and minor celebrity led a new organization, the group Save Our Children (SOC) in a campaign to repeal the ordinance. SOC was supported by numerous conservative populations in South Florida. It appealed not just to white, middle-class Protestants, but united Cuban Catholic communities, Southern Baptists, and those who decorated their cars with "kill a queer for Christ" stickers.[118]

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[115] "Coalition Candidates Win," *The Barb*, November 1976, 1. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

[116] Bill Smith, "Editor's Notebook," *The Barb*, August 1976, 2. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

[117] Self, *All in the Family*; Fetner, *How the Religious Right;* Faderman, *The Gay Revolution;* Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 138-42.

Many of the domestic social issues that dominated the era related to the family; abortion, women's rights, and gay and lesbian rights all motivated many conservative Christians to politicize their religious morality.[119] Control over the family was a cornerstone of the anti-gay rights campaign launched in Miami. They developed a rhetoric of opposing the ordinance based on religious morality and the idea that the sanctity of the home was threatened because the government had usurped the parent's control over the education of their family.[120] Unlike Citizens for Decent Atlanta, SOC had a visible leader who came forward and became a national symbol for a new era of Christian conservative political activism. Florida orange juice spokeswoman and Christian activist Anita Bryant attended the Northwest Baptist Church in North Miami led by the Reverend William Chapman. As a member of the Southern Baptist

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[118] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 226-45.

[119] Self, *All in the Family*, 331, 362-64.

[120] Patrick McCreery, "Miami Vice: Anita Bryant, Gay Rights, and Child Protectionism" (PhD diss., New York University, 2009); Gillian Frank, "'The Civil Rights of Parents': Race and Conservative Politics in Anita Bryant's Campaign against Gay Rights in 1970s Florida," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 22, no. 1 (January 2013): 126-60.

Convention, Chapman would have agreed with the SBC's new resolution against homosexuality, passed the previous summer. Before the anti-discrimination measure finally passed in city council, Chapman urged his congregation to act against it. He preached that the new law would allow gay people the freedom to be teachers, which meant inevitably that openly gay and lesbian people would be able teach their children.[121]

The ordinance passed in December of 1976 but Bryant and SOC immediately responded with a new plan to defeat the measure. The group effectively organized a coalition of other conservative community activists and collected more than enough signatures to initiate a recall. In the summer of 1977, anti-gay rights activists won the repeal of the measure with over 70% in favor of the repeal. In response to their defeat, gay rights activists mounted an effort to recall the recall but were ultimately unsuccessful. Anita Bryant's victory in Miami publicized the power of conservativism and the Save Our Children campaign went national. She and the organization aided successful efforts to recall local codes and ordinances that protected gay and lesbian citizens in Kansas and Oregon, though they were defeated in California. [122]

At their summer congress one year after the Southern Baptist Convention passed their first resolution against the gay rights movement, members passed another resolution that reasserted their stance against "deviant moral behavior."[123] The failure of the gay rights campaign that was charged with fighting Bryant and SOC spurred many more gay and lesbian people into political activism for the first time. Anita Bryant and Miami became a turning point in gay and lesbian history as young activists were newly politicized by the major backlash movements that sprang up across the country. The CDA controversy moved some local young activists to action for the first time, but the conservative group faded from public view quietly and was nearly completely forgotten about after Miami. Anita Bryant and Miami became a driving force in compelling gay and lesbian people into engagement with politics because her success and support seemed to threaten not just Floridians but all gay and lesbian people everywhere.

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[121] Foley, *Front Porch Politics,* 86; Anita Bryant, *The Anita Bryant Story: The Survival of Our Nation's Families and the Threat of Militant Homosexuality* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1977) 14, 16-17.

[122] Eaklor, *Queer America*, 170; Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 139-140; Self, *All in the Family*, 246-247; Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout,* 124-125.

[123] "Resolution on Homosexuality," Southern Baptist Convention, Kansas City, Missouri, 1977, http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/607/resolution-on-homosexuality

The Gay Pride Proclamation signed by Mayor Jackson was not a binding commitment to gay and lesbian people but it was a solid declaration of support and an affirmation of their rights and equality. The wave of conservative backlash that Anita Bryant unleashed affected Atlanta too and what had been a growing progressive relationship between the Mayor and the gay and lesbian community cooled. In the summer of 1977, Mayor Maynard Jackson did not sign a Gay Pride proclamation but instead a "Civil Liberties Day" proclamation.[124]

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[124] Chenault, "An Unspoken Past," 168.

CHAPTER 4

“AFTER MIAMI WE’RE ALL AFRAID”: GAY RIGHTS IN THE CONSERVATIVE BACKLASH, 1977-1980

Democrats at the Magic Garden

In October of 1977, Bill Smith reported that members of a new organization for local gay activists interested in politics met at the Magic Garden Disco to rate local Democratic Party candidates.[1] Ron Zappi, the owner of the Magic Garden, “donated the night’s door receipts of over $400 to the First Tuesday group.”[2] The First Tuesday Democratic Club was organized as a direct reaction to Anita Bryant’s successful campaign with Save our Children to overturn Miami’s gay rights non-discrimination ordinance. The name for the group “was taken to commemorate the date of the Dade County Referendum held on the first Tuesday of June 1977.”[3] One local politician had told Gil Robison that “Frankly, I’m afraid. After Miami we’re all afraid.”[4]

Dave Hayward, a gay rights activist and local history advocate, remembered the divisions between political activists and the gay bar community in the early 1970s.

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[1] Bill Smith, “Gay Democrats Rate Candidates,” *The Barb,* October 1977, 1. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273. Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones,* 277, 304.

[2] Ibid.

[3] “Council Candidates Meet Gays” *The Barb*, September 1977, 1. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

[4] Bill Smith, “Democratic Gays Organize,” *The Barb,* August 1977, 1. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

Atlanta gay bar owners did not support early efforts of organizing from within their bars.[5] In 1972 the *Great Speckled Bird* coverage of gay pride week included an article about bar owners that charged them with being mafia owned and if not anti-gay rights then at least pro-status quo. Hayward called the atmosphere at the Cove, a popular gay bar, sexist and recalled that management at and the Sweet Gum Head barred activists from handing out leaflets about gay pride.[6] When he related the story to a later activist in the 1990s, the younger implied that "back in the 70s you were probably fighting for the right to have gay and lesbian bars." Gil Robison, another active gay rights political organizer in Atlanta, set the record straight, "I said no they were fighting us, they were throwing us out on our butts!"[7] He added that bar owners thought activists were "needlessly stirring up trouble." He said "I got a talking to, a lecture from a bar owner about that very subject. It was 76."[8] A year later, gay bar owners were more receptive to political organizing within their doors.

For many the failure of the local gay community in Miami to stop the anti-gay Christian conservatives led to an increased awareness of political issues and local activism. This chapter looks at the wave of gay and lesbian political activism that followed in the wake of the Miami defeat. It considers how that setback forced the gay and lesbian rights movement to develop new initiatives to combat conservative attacks. As more gay people embraced the idea of coming out and connected it to political awareness, a more diverse coalition of voices spoke out against discrimination. Most gay and lesbian people in Atlanta were not motivated to join political organizations, but in the immediate years after Anita Bryant and Miami, many more joined organizations and became activists.

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[5] Dave Bryant, "Sexism in the Gay Bars" *Great Speckled Bird*, June 26, 1972, PG.

[6] Bryant, "Sexism in the Gay Bars."

[7] Gil Robison, "Panel on Gay Activism," June 13, 1991, 7. DU, Sears Papers, Box 115.

[8] Ibid.

By the end of the decade, many Southeastern cities had gay and lesbian communities that were visible in their social and entertainment life and sustained, if inconsistently, a rights movement. In Miami, New Orleans, Richmond, and in North Carolina's Triangle area, gay and lesbian communities started to develop their own local and regional activist movements.[9] Atlanta's gay and lesbian community was the most urban in the Southeast and developed like many other cities after Stonewall where gay and lesbian politics emerged in city halls, councils, and other city governments throughout the 1970s.[10] When gay liberation hit the Atlanta streets it was the first open political activism around sexuality in the city. After its short life and early death, the gay community was left without a coalition gay and lesbian political organization. Gay and lesbian people came together to organize the annual pride celebrations and ALFA continued to be active, but there was not a year round group that united lesbians and gays in Atlanta.[11]

Atlanta's gay and lesbian community in the 1970s was characterized by an explosion in community outreach efforts. Gay newspapers, softball teams, lesbian feminist collectives, community centers, regional networks, and urban social and cultural networks created new communities of gay and lesbian people. In the summer of 1976, the battle between Gay Pride and the CDA kicked off a major renewal in gay political activism in the city, but it was only after Anita Bryant's victory in Miami that the city's gay and lesbian community started to organize around politics in earnest. In Miami, Christian activists effectively challenged the liberalization of attitudes towards sexuality. Anita Bryant and the Save Our Children campaign against gay-rights swept triggered a wave of similar successful backlash politics in other communities across the country.[12] Atlanta's experience with the CDA offered a different view into what might have been possible had local gay activists been more involved and in control of shaping the response to local conservative and anti-gay Christian political activism.

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[9] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*.

[10] Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout;* Stein, *City of Sisterly*; Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities*; Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A;* Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good*; Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life & Times of Harvey Milk* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2008).

[11] Robison, "Panel on Gay Activism."

Marc Stein called the 1970s an "era of conservative backlash," which by the end of the decade produced a political stalemate that was "unstable and unsatisfactory" to gay rights activists.[13] Michael Foley said the "decade long fight over gay rights essentially resulted in a draw" and Robert Self said activists ended the decade on the "defensive" fighting an "opposition prepared to push back against any victory, no matter how small."[14] The conservative backlash to gay rights began before Bryant and Miami in reaction to increased political activism and mainstream visibility. This chapter uses 1977 as a defining point in the gay rights movement and the conservative backlash.[15] It explores the immediate aftermath of Miami and how Atlanta's gay and lesbian community responded to the new threat with increased political organization and community activism.

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[12] Self, *All in the Family*, 243-46; Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 139; Fetner, *How the Religious Right;* Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*.

[13] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 142.

[14] Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 93; Self, *All in the Family*, 247.

[15] Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout,* 124-25.

Between 1977 and 1980, Atlanta activists formed new organizations that reflected the tremendous growth of the city's gay and lesbian political community. The First Tuesday Democratic Association, formed in the summer of 1977, lobbied for civil rights and reform through the system and from within the stronghold of southern Democratic politics. In 1978, gay and lesbian activists combined their Gay Pride march with a protest of Anita Bryant, who was in the city for the Southern Baptist Convention. Gay groups raised enough money at the event to revive an older project and establish a new Atlanta Gay Center with a physical community center. In 1979, black gay activists founded the Gay Atlanta Minority Association, which sought to address racism in the gay community. That year Atlantans also organized for the first national March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian rights, which reflected the energy and activism of the era. All of this growth was a direct result of the Miami defeat as gay and lesbian rights activists became motivated to fight the conservative backlash.

"The New York of the South": Gay and Lesbian Community Politics

Gil Robison said that Atlanta activists first organized within the Democratic Party because it "has historically been more supportive of civil rights and individual freedom." Robison, a founder of First Tuesday, also said the Democratic Party "was the major political party in Georgia."[16] The group focused on issues that affected gay men and women locally to politicize the gay community in Atlanta. An early agenda from the one of the first meetings listed activities planned for the fall of 1977 that included voter registration drives and holding a public forum for local candidates that addressed gay rights.[17]

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[16] Smith, "Democratic Gays Organize."

Bill Smith, Editor and publisher of *The Barb* reported on First Tuesday's formation and endorsed their mission as he thought they had the "potential to become a potent force." Smith acknowledged that First Tuesday "made political history in Atlanta" with their new organization but he also thought they made some "errors." One of those errors was the rating of Mayor Maynard Jackson as "unacceptable" in a campaign candidate rating guide. That fall, after meetings and fierce debates among members at the El Matador Lounge and the Magic Garden Disco, the First Tuesday Democratic club rated local candidates on a scale from "most acceptable" to "unacceptable."[18] Bill Smith thought the errors First Tuesday made in their political analysis was due to their "newness to the political scene."[19] Mayor Jackson's unacceptable rating was, Smith posited, "based on a bit of over-reaction to the bitterness felt in the gay community over the Mayor's apparent retreat from his courageous defense of gay rights in June of 1976."

Bill Smith worked to promote compromise and incremental steady progress as the most effective strategy for change. Four years after the end of the GGLF he still advocated from the moderate position. His ability to work within the political system was made evident in his role in Atlanta's gay community throughout the 1970s and until his death in 1980.[20] He worked on the Community Relations Commission since 1973 and was instrumental in getting Mayor Jackson to issue the Gay Pride Day proclamation in 1976. After the heat of Miami and the protests and controversy of the battle with Atlanta's Baptist preachers and the Citizens for Decent Atlanta, Mayor Jackson backed away from his former advocacy. He issued a "Civil Liberties Day" proclamation in 1977, which *The Barb* criticized in addition to his actions surrounding the announcement. It was reported that Jackson did not approach anyone from the gay community about the proclamation and when his team finally did show it to someone from the gay community, they released it "despite heavy criticism from that source."[21]

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[17] "Gay Democratic Club Agenda," July 14, 1977. AHC, ALGHT, Box 46.

[18] Smith, "Gay Democrats Rate Candidates."

[19] Ibid.

Bill Smith's knowledge of politics extended statewide and he had no issues with calling out politicians by name and in print when he disagreed with them. In an editorial statement about the special election to fill the 5th District House seat left vacant by Andrew Young's appointment to an ambassadorship, Smith urged his readership, in an unconventional move, to not vote for Democrat Wyche Fowler. Smith implied that rumors of his "being a closet part of our community" had "deluded" people. Smith unequivocally came out against him, stating "Wyche Fowler is a threat to gay rights."[22] Smith's opposition to Fowler was rooted in early battles with the local city politician. In the spring of 1976 Fowler voted to cut the staff and the budget of the CRC, which Smith heavily criticized in his editorial space.[23] Just a month before that Fowler was front page news at *The Barb* because of an incident for which he came under sharp criticism. Gay activists claimed the city's idling ordinances were used disproportionately to punish openly gay and lesbian people in the streets. *The Barb* ran several stories about the recent police activity in the park that led to more arrests of gay people on the streets. Activists claimed "over 100 gay persons were arrested during the summer of 1975 under Atlanta's idling and loitering and loitering ordinance."[24] In response to a petition the gay and lesbian community wanted to submit in support of a repeal of the city's idling and loitering ordinance, Fowler told Bill Smith, "I don't operate by petition."[25]

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[20] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 67, 277.

[21] "Mayor Hedges on Gay Pride Proclamation," *The Barb,* August 1977, 1. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

[22] Bill Smith, "Editor's Notebook," *The Barb,* March 1977, 6. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

[23] Bill Smith, "Editor's Notebook, *The Barb*, March 1976, 2, 14. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

Despite the opposition apparent in Wyche Fowler's public rejection of gay and lesbian rights, Bill Smith continued to work with the city. Smith was an early advocate of gay activists working behind the scenes to move forward ideas that supported a productive relationship between the gay community and city hall. He criticized First Tuesday for being hyper-critical of the current political administration and objected to a rating system that accorded similar ratings for candidates based on a response or "no response" to questionnaires. He argued that candidates who supported gay rights and those who were opponents were given identical ratings. Their ratings ignored actual voting records and the nuances of political statements and instead relied on how the candidates responded in writing and in person. First Tuesday was different in that it emphasized getting politicians to be on record about their support for gay rights. Smith concluded that First Tuesday's ratings made it "apparent that behind the scenes support is no longer enough."[26]

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[24] "Fowler Rejects Petition," *The Barb*, February 1976, 1. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

[25] Ibid.

First Tuesday was the first of its kind in the state and marked a turning point for the gay rights movement in the city and the region. In the summer of 1978 Gil Robison and Diane Stephenson were elected to the Fulton County Democratic Executive Committee. Robison recounted their strategy to work within the Democratic Party because "Democratic clubs in San Francisco and L.A. and other places were being very successful in bringing the gay agenda to the Democratic Party and mainstream politics."[27] However, party politics in Georgia were more complicated. Starting a new Democratic club wasn't straight-forward, as county committees were in the midst of mergers in attempt to integrate. Robison said that Fulton County only recently joined together what had previously been black and the white democratic committees. Instead of creating a new group, the gay and lesbian Democrats were encouraged by state party officials to run individually for seats. Seven First Tuesday members ran and campaigned "solely in gay bars, papers, and organizations." Robison and Stephenson were elected, which he pointed out meant "we could count 1% of the total votes cast were gay, we knew that for a fact."[28] Three years later, First Tuesday dropped its affiliation with the Democratic Party. Activist Liz Throop said they became disenchanted with local Democratic party politics and said “I think the Democratic Party in Georgia is very different from the Democratic Party in California.”[29]

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[26] Smith, "Gay Democrats Rate Candidates."

[27] Robison, "Panel on Gay Activism," 12; Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 133-34; Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout,* 109-10, 153-54; Self, *All in the Family*, 235-36; Steve Endean and Vicki Lynn Eaklor, *Bringing Lesbian and Gay Rights into the Mainstream: Twenty Years of Progress* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2006).

[28] Ibid.

In 1978 the Southeastern Gay Conference was scheduled to meet in Atlanta, for the first time outside of its home base in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. In its third year, activists changed the name to the Southeastern Conference of Lesbians and Gay Men (SECLGM). The Atlanta conference attracted “650 gay men and lesbians” which was “slightly less than the previous year’s attendance in Chapel Hill.”[30] In 1976 the Carolina Gay Association, a student organization at the UNC- Chapel Hill, held the “first annual” Southeastern Gay Conference.[31] Over three hundred people came from at least eleven different Southeastern states for a long weekend in early April. The first conference was an enormous organizational effort and success and the next year attendance soared to nearly seven hundred.[32] The SECLGM met annually for the next fifteen years in different cities across the Southeast. The conferences reflected the concerns and positions of gay activists and allowed communities the space to address local, regional and national concerns. Gay and lesbian people worked to develop constructive conversations and confronted major issues within their own movement. They did not always succeed in attaining a solution or compromise that worked for everyone.

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[29] Liz Throop, “Panel on Gay Activism,” 13.

[30] Southeastern Conference of Lesbians and Gay Men, “Conference Report 1978.” DU, Sears Papers, Southern Research Files, Box 251.

[31] “Southeastern Gay Conference Held,” Eastern Gay Alliance Newsletter, Vol. I Ed. 6, March-April 1976. DU, Front Page Records, Lee Mullis Papers, Box 42.

[32] Tom Carr, “The 3rd Annual, Etc. …A Personal Perspective,” Program for 3rd Annual Southeastern Conference of Lesbians & Gay Men, Atlanta, March 31-April 2, 1978, 6. Program of the Third Annual Southeastern Conference of Lesbian and Gay Men Rainbow History Project, Digital collections, http://archives.rainbowhistory.org/items/show/1348. Cited hereafter as 3rd Annual SECLGM Program.

The Atlanta conference was a conflicted event from start to finish. It began with arguments and walkouts and also ended that way.[33] During planning sessions some Atlanta gay religious organizations withdrew their support entirely. Franklin Abbott, an organizer from Atlanta, remembered that gay religious activists "were outraged" when the women's caucus wanted to hold women-only panels for things like spirituality and sex.[34] Those who opposed the closed workshops and caucuses left the conference as they declared the gendered panels "discrimination" and vowed to boycott the conference.[35] Early and intense disagreements about organization created a divisive atmosphere around the conference, which reflected divisions in Atlanta's growing activist community. Rifts related to the conference and regional politics between religious and conservative, gay men and lesbian women, traditionalist and radical faerie, came to open and public confrontations. Despite these major upsets, many gay men and lesbians worked together because, as the Conference's "Women's Caucus" argued, it was an opportunity to "create some solidarity around gay issues."[36]

The Atlanta conference in 1978 was widely critiqued and remembered for its drama. Tom Carr, one of the original North Carolina organizers who later moved to Atlanta, said there was "a lot of moaning & wailing & gnashing of teeth. Along the way, the Equal Rights Amendment got rolled into it and it was quite a situation."[37] James Sears noted the extensive involvement in the conference from ALFA women and how they compromised on major women's movement issues in order to support a broader gay rights movement. For some women, to hold the conference in Georgia became problematic because it was a non-ratification state; for lesbian feminists the state was opposed to women's equality and supporting the conference (and by extension, Georgia) was not an easy decision.[38] ALFA activist Vicki Gabriner addressed the conference and asked the many gay men in the audience to support the ratification of the ERA as "an opportunity to speak for the woman inside each of you."[39]

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[33] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 301-2.

[34] Franklin Abbott, "Once Upon a Time in Atlanta," *RFD* 157, Spring 2014, 30-31; The Women's Caucus, "Southeastern Gay Conference Update," *Atalanta*, January 1978, 1. DU, Sears Papers, Box 116.

[35] Women's Caucus, "Southeastern Gay Conference Update;" Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 302.

[36] Women's Caucus, "Southeastern Gay Conference Update."

Divisions between gay men and lesbian women dominated the news around the conference. ALFA women reported that early meetings showed women outnumbered by men four to one in a group of about fifty people. Because there were only a reported dozen or so women at the meetings, the women formed a caucus to make sure their concerns were represented. The Women's Caucus wrote into *Atalanta,* ALFA's monthly newsletter, in an attempt to correct the record about "rumors that have spread about the conference." They said men and women seemed to disagree on a number of issues because of "longstanding different views on the world," which "keep gay men and women apart."[40] An example of some of the issues they encountered was when a member of Dignity, the organization for gay and lesbian Catholics, objected to the decision to close the women's caucus to men. During a discussion where Dignity members were present, the women decided the caucus was "exclusively for women," which they said "seemed perfectly logical to us."

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[37] Tom Carr, "Panel on Gay Activism," 13.

[38] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 302-3.

[39] Ibid., 303.

[40] Women's Caucus, "Southeastern Gay Conference Update."

Members of Dignity felt otherwise and raised the issue again at the next planning meeting. Women learned that Dignity and other Christian gay religious organizations also objected to "exclusionary workshops," like meetings for "all-women, all-black, all-handicapped." The women's caucus reported that the whole steering committee voted on what most thought was a solid compromise—to allow the workshops, but to limit the power of the minority caucuses by restricting them to an advisory role rather than a voting power. This, however, was not a compromise that everyone accepted. After the decision, the women reported that "the male co-ordinator and three gay organizations: Dignity, Tempo, and Integrity withdrew their support for the conference."[41] There was "devastation throughout" and Dave Hayward said that Dignity activist Frank Scheuren "openly pledged to defeat the Conference" when he left a meeting.[42]

The women's caucus wanted to set the record right about who caused the divisions. They said "Rumor about town has it that the women working on the conference are being separatist and therefore discriminatory." This couldn't be true as they were literally "working on a conference with men that is for all gay people."[43] There was a fair amount of confusion about the details of the conference even in the midst of it. An activist named Richard from West Georgia remembered "a lot of curiosity" about a group

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[41] Women's Caucus, "Southeastern Gay Conference Update."

[42] Dave Hayward (Bryant), "Panel on Gay Activism," 20.

[43] Ibid.

"of very strange people" called "faeries." Richard's group of friends was "peeking in the door to see what these people in dresses were doing." Their presence at the conference was part of a general feeling that "there were weird things going on in all the rooms."[44]

The conference was remembered as the scene of weird and emotional outbursts. It was also the inspiration for many more. That summer, inspired by the community he found at the conference, Mikel Wilson called for "A Celebration of Gay Men," a weekend event held at his North Carolina farm as "a time/space/place for sissies/faggots/gay men mainly from the S.E."[45] Franklin Abbott related that this celebration of gay men grew from the turmoil of the conference. He recalled that "at the closing circle the women declared a caucus and left the room en masse." After the women left he described an epiphany, because "separated from the women we had for the first time our own circle."[46] Ron Lambe also remembered how the women's walkout affected the gay men as it influenced the formation of a men's group. His recollection reflected what became a common trope about angry lesbian separatists, as he said there was "a big uproar when the women marched out because they felt they were being unfairly treated by the men."[47]

This recollection memorializes an imagined moment wherein the men reacted to the women's separatism by initiating their own separatist movement. At the conference, radical gay men had multiple opportunities to meet in separate and sex-segregated space. It is not likely that as Abbott claimed the first meeting of men alone was at the final meeting, symbolically framed by the women's walkout. The conference that year featured a number of panels that were open to men only, including Mikel Wilson's presentation, "Gay Rural Communities."[48] Wilson's talk included a "main goal" of establishing a "network of communication, etc., for rural gays in the Southeast." Another presentation at the conference given by Dimid and Dean Hayes focused on "sissie/queer/effeminist/boy love" and sought to "bring together gay males to explore the revolutionary Sissie consciousness, discover the political implications, and possibly create a network for communication and support."[49] It is likely that a discussion about radical gay male regional organization and community building took place in either or both of the two panels dedicated to those topics.

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[44] Richard, "Panel on Gay Activism," 19.

[45] Ibid., and "A Celebration of Gay Men," ca. 1978. DU, Sears Papers, Box 136; Sears, *Rebels*, *Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 307.

[46] Abbott, "Once Upon a Time in Atlanta."

[47] Timothy Andrew Saunders "Paganism and Gay Spirituality: A Survey of Radical Faeries in Asheville, North Carolina," *Interfaith Online*, http://archive.is/T9pK8#selection-295.0-300.0, accessed on December 30, 2016.

The ways that gay activists Franklin Abbott and Ron Lambe remembered the conference as it related to the organization of a new group of radical gay men celebrated some strains of separatist activism in the era and reflected other sexist stereotypes about women's liberation activists. It was commonly insinuated that women, mostly the radical kind, were the cause of separatist and divisive gender issues in the gay rights movement.[50] Some ALFA members decided that it was no longer worth the effort and disengaged from local and regional political organizing when it was led by middle-class gay white men. The next year at the conference, once again back in Chapel Hill, the women's caucus reported seeing "familiar faces from the S.E. lesbian network" but noted a distinct lack of ALFA women.[51] Alice offered some insight into the mystery of their disappearance. She reported that though they had worked together for the conference, the aftermath was some women "vowing never to do so again once it was over."[52]

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[48] 3rd Annual SECLGM Program, 19.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Self, *All in the Family*, 227-288; Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout,*145-149; Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 91-98,

The 1978 conference was written about contemporaneously as a controversial, contentious, and angry meeting. The conference brought activists in Atlanta together who were engaged in the politics of community building but what constituted community was in flux. Heidi, a member of the Conference Committee, in "Welcome, Y'all," an introduction in the program, touched on the controversies surrounding the conference. She offered the optimistic assessment that the difficulties were a learning experience and activists "gained a sense of respect and increased our understanding of each other." The conference offered local activists a chance to show and help others initiate their own successful movements. First Tuesday activists Gil Robison and Diane Stephenson presented on political lobbying and grassroots campaigns in a workshop called "Shaking the Legislative Beads" and Robison and other First Tuesday members led a workshop called "How to Take Over Your Local Government."[53]

It was important for the Southeast to have an organized and networked community of activists because Heidi said, "our struggle" was "qualitatively different." She argued that "A long history of racism, sexism, and anti-gay bigotry" helped to produce "a nation-wide anti-gay campaign by a reactionary woman from this very region,

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[51] Margo, "Sissy Faggots, Lesbian Republicans, and Many In-Between Find Unity in North Carolina," *Atalanta,* May 1979, 13-14. DU, Sears Papers, Southern Research Files, Box 251.

[52] Alice, "ALFA Celebrates Her Seventh Birthday," *Atalanta*, August 1979, 1. DU, Sears Papers, Box 116.

[53] 3rd Annual SECLGM Program, 9, 14.

Anita Bryant."[54] Tom Carr, in a personal welcome to the conference, remembered 1977's meeting in "the midst of the greatest turbulence ever experienced by the modern Lesbian/gay liberation movement." This turbulence went unnamed by Carr, but was obviously understood by the community. He said ultimately that "I believe she will have *helped* us much, much more than *hurt* us."[55] After Anita Bryant, the Save Our Children campaign, and the defeat of gay rights in Miami, the country's gay and lesbian population became politicized in a way they hadn't been Stonewall. Miami was widely recognized as a turning point regardless of city, state, or region.[56]

In the summer of 1978 the Southern Baptist Convention met in Atlanta and instead of a Gay Pride March that year activists organized an Anti-Anita protest held at the World Congress Center where the SBC met. As a member of the SBC and as a national symbol of religious political activism, Bryant was scheduled to appear at the Convention. That year the Baptists passed a "Resolution on Commendation of Anita Bryant," which honored Bryant and reaffirmed their stance against same-sex sexuality.[57] Dave Hayward remembered an intense energy in the crowd outside the convention center at the protest. He recalled feeling that if they saw Anita that "all hell was going to break loose" as "there was such a ferocity there because things were so polarized."[58] *Cruise*, an Atlanta gay bar magazine, estimated that there were around 2500 people at the protest, while other sources estimated between 1800 and 2000.[59] Activist Maria Helena Dolan who moved to Atlanta in 1976 and immediately joined in the activist community opened her speech at the protest with a powerful expression of the rebirth of radicalism. She roused the crowd, saying " I COME TO YOU TODAY AS A DEFIANT DYKE!" In response to her declaration, Hayward said "people went WILD, I mean they went crazy there was like a ten-minute demonstration—screaming, and yelling, and roaring."[60]

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[54] Heidi, "Welcome Y'all," 3rd Annual SECLGM Program, 2-3.

[55] Carr, "The 3rd Annual, Etc.," 6. Italics in original.

[56] Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*.

[57] "Resolution on Homosexuality," Southern Baptist Convention, Atlanta, GA, 1978, http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/744/resolution-on-commendation-of-anita-bryant.

[58] Dave Hayward, "Panel on Gay Activism," 18.

Around the same time, gay author Edmund White travelled across the country investigating (mostly male) gay life in some of the biggest and most vibrant cities in America for his travel book *States of Desire* published in 1980.[61] White's guide to the Southeast, "Florida and the South," subtitled "the Masked Cadre," covered Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Tennessee. He included small cities and resort areas in Florida, like Fort Lauderdale, Coconut Grove, and Key West, in addition to bigger cities like Miami, New Orleans, Memphis, and Atlanta. White and his gay friends painted Memphis as a backward town and lonely place. In New Orleans, the city's gay community came across as a historic remnant of the city's sinful past. One local considered that "gay activism is social, not political" in New Orleans.[62] Miami's gay community faced a dilemma in the face of conservativism as "gays won't come out in Miami because the city is hostile to them; the city remains hostile because no one will come out."[63]

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[59] Ibid. and "Anita Bryant Greeted by Atlanta Gays," *Cruise,* June 16-22, 1978, 8-9. AHC, ALGHT, Box 19.

[60] Hayward, "Panel on Gay Activism," 18.

[61] Edmund White, *States of Desire: Travels in Gay America* (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Plume, 1991).

[62] Ibid., 237.

[63] Ibid., 208.

Edmund White said Atlantans liked to call the city the “New York of the South,” which cast them in a more cosmopolitan contrast to the conservatism of other places in the region.[64] Yet White’s report on the South begins and ends with stories about conservative gay men, even and especially in Atlanta. When White visited Atlanta he was toured around by a white architect who lived in an apartment downtown. His tour included driving through affluent Buckhead, “an area of imposing mansions and velvety lawns.”[65] White asked his tour guide about the Gay Pride parade in the city to which he replied “Isn’t it a shame that only the freaks march?”[66] It was quite a contrast in opinion about the state of Gay Pride in the city, compared to those who attended events in the period. It characterized the divide between many of Atlanta’s more closeted and conservative gay and lesbian communities and those who were political and activist in their orientation.

The coalition responsible for organizing the largest pride event up to that point in 1978 not only drew people to the combined protest/pride celebration, but they also raised money for a new organization. They used the proceeds of their fundraising, “a few thousand dollars left over,” as “seed money” for the establishment of the Atlanta Gay Center (AGC).[67] Just before Thanksgiving, a group of activists in Atlanta formally established the Atlanta Gay Center.[68] The first Board of Directors, the controlling authority of the organization, included gay activists from multiple Atlanta groups. Two directors gave their affiliation with Dignity, others were active with the Gay Rights Alliance and the First Tuesday Democratic Association.[69] The board, its membership, and its volunteers were mainly white and middle-class and had a vocal religious representation; eight of its ten original directors were men.

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[64] Ibid., 249.

[65] Ibid., 247.

[66] Ibid., 249.

[67] Robison, “Panel on Gay Activism,” 18.

[68] Atlanta Gay Center, “Agenda,” November 14, 1978. AHC, ALGHT, Atlanta Gay Center Records, Box 47. Hereafter cited as AGC Records.

A core group of movement leaders emerged in the gay community in this period who influenced the city throughout the 1980s. Members of the first temporary steering committee of the AGC included many of Atlanta's busiest gay activists. Frank Scheuren was former president of Dignity and founding member of First Tuesday, Gil Robison worked for *The Barb*, Gay Rights Alliance, and was also a founding member of First Tuesday. The committee included Gay Rights Alliance members Victor Host and Linda Reigner, who was also in ALFA, and the first Executive Director, Diane Stephenson, was also active in First Tuesday.[70] Between 1978 and 1982, the AGC had three different directors and the board's membership changed multiple times, which reflected the challenges and instability of the organization from its earliest history. The members involved and their diverse activism around gay and lesbian rights and community organizing often caused intense arguments, debates, and professional burn-out.

Promotional literature outlined that the AGC would focus on four different areas of community services. They wanted to be a resource center for information on local gay and lesbian communities, they planned to provide physical and mental health services, a legal referral service, and they hoped to serve as a recreation center.[71] The Center was an organizational social community group and a physical location for people to meet and socialize. The AGC had some important successes that represented the types of activities supported by the center as community programs. They hosted a gay mental health crisis hotline that was staffed by trained volunteers from the local community. There were separate committees for education, socialization, and the arts, which produced and sponsored events and talks. By far the most successful and popular program that the center sponsored was a free VD clinic.

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[69] Atlanta Gay Center Promotional Materials, June 1979. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records, Box 47.

[70] Atlanta Gay Center "Temporary Steering Committee," January 1979. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records. Box 47.

Frank Scheuren, the Chairman of the Board in 1979, declared in a promotional letter that the center was coming out as a "human service delivery organization."[72] In a brochure, they described a range of services that included providing educational materials about sexuality, physical and mental health clinics, legal counseling and referrals, and social events.[73] The AGC took on different projects over the years but certain factors remained consistent. The group's membership was minimal and their financial stability suffered. They relied heavily, if not primarily, on a volunteer staff to help run the day to day work of the center. Without a consistent level of staff commitment to the programs they suffered from a classic case of trying to do too much with not enough money or staff. Internal criticism of leadership and mission was matched by intense feelings from some members of the gay community.

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[71] Ibid.

[72] "Dear Friend of the Gay Community," June 1979. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records, Box 47.

[73] Atlanta Gay Center Brochure, undated. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records, Box 47.

The first few years of its existence the AGC looked like a reflection of its Director and the Board. Diane Stephenson, the first the Executive Director, focused on a more spiritual and mental health approach to sexuality and gay rights, rather than being overtly political in their programming or activism. Under Stephenson the AGC focused on mental health, community awareness, and especially on "developing needed services and activities for the gay community."[74] This non-political approach to relating to people about their sexuality was not everyone's style and some people in the city questioned how a gay and lesbian community could exist without it being political. In a letter to the Center's newsletter, one reader ranted that

> I am not interested in attending an open house, joining a men's social group, being part of a natural child workshop, learning the art of self-defense, going to any one of the six different "church" meetings scheduled for August or participating in endless "discussion" or "debates" about what we should do next.[75]

It was not enough that none of their current programs mattered. He continued his tirade with a charge of what they should be— "a political lobby and nothing more!"[76]

The political turn at the end of the decade in lesbian and gay communities indicated a new era in the movement as activists founded organizations and devised strategies to work against the conservative backlash. In this energy the gay and lesbian community witnessed the election of Harvey Milk to the Board of Supervisors in San Francisco in 1977 and his assassination a year later in the wake of the defeat of the anti-gay Briggs initiative in California that would have effectively outlawed openly gay and lesbian people from teaching in the state.[77] Milk's assassination was a catalyst for organizing the first National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights held in October of 1979.[78] The event was discussed at various points throughout the 1970s and more recently after Miami but many national organizations were slow to lend the idea the support it needed to get off the ground. The first March was opposed early on by activists who thought the timing wasn't right. In the South, some were against the March because they wanted more time to organize within their respective communities. Margo George, an organizer and activist from Atlanta said "there was a lot of discussion about whether the energy and money that it would take to organize such an event would be better expended at the local level, doing local projects."[79]

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[74] "Atlanta Gay Center: An Idea Whose Time Has Come," promotional materials. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records, Box 47.

[75] "Reader's Point of View," *Atlanta Gay Central*, September 1980, 2, 8. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records, Box 47.

[76] Ibid., 8.

That summer Atlanta's "Lavender Anniversary Celebration" commemorated ten years of Gay Pride, dated back to the "Stonewall Revolt, the dawn of our present lesbian/gay pride movement."[80] That year the Georgia/Alabama March Committee took up the funding and organization of Pride "when it became apparent that no other group was planning a Gay Pride Day, we decided to act." But the committee recognized that the national March and Gay Pride combined politics and pride, and that not everyone in Atlanta was supportive of this dual mission. Organizers alerted people to the fact that they would promote the March but said "we do not wish to force the issue down anyone's throat."[81] Pride and politics were aspects of the gay and lesbian movement that included a range of possibilities and levels of commitment. In Atlanta one could be socially and community oriented and at the same time be politically involved to a limited degree.

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[77] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 139-41.

[78] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 52-53.

[79] Margo George quoted in Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 390.

[80] 1979 Lavender Anniversary Gay Pride Day Materials. AHC, ALGHT, Box 60.

Activism around the March continued despite the fact that some members of the Southeastern coalition opposed it in its earlier stages.[82] Ray Kluka was a regional organizer with the Georgia March Alliance from Atlanta and advocated for more inclusion and diversity at the March. Organizing for the March expanded political activism into pride and gay bars, where more people engaged with the gay rights movement. Activists held fundraisers for the March and the National 3rd World Conference with the support of some gay bars and religious groups. They held a carwash at local gay bar Bulldog & Company and a "Dinner Disco" at the Phoenix Unitarian Church.[83] Kluka specifically made an attempt to reach out to "Transpersons" and reported that a national "Transpersons Caucus" formed and the "Atlanta delegation had ardently supported these measures."[84] The March on October 14th drew around 100,000 to 200,000 gay and lesbian people to the streets of Washington D.C.[85] Enough Atlantans went to Washington D.C. to march that they chartered several busses for the trip.

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 300, 389-90 n3.

[83] "National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights and National Third World Lesbian/Gay Conference" Fundraiser Flyer, August 25, 1979. AHC, ALGHT, Box 62.

[84] Ray Kluka for the Georgia March Alliance, "An Invitation to All Transpersons," *Gaybriel*, September 7, 1979. AHC, ALGHT, Box 33.

[85] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*; "1979 and 1987 March Notes," National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, October 11, 1987 Program (Atlanta, GA). AHC, ALGHT Box 62.

“An Uncertain Peace”: Divisions in Atlanta’s L/G Communities

The post-Anita growth in political organizing was reflected in the first national March on Washington. This period saw the emergence of organizations for people of color like the National Coalition for Black Gays and the emergence of new visionaries like the Combahee River Collective.[86] Over the March weekend the “National 3rd World Lesbian/Gay Conference” was held from October 12-15th. Atlanta’s gay and lesbian community mirrored the national scene as diverse gay and lesbian communities organized to better represent their needs in the broader movement.[87] Until this period, Atlanta’s black gay men and lesbians worked in political organizations that represented parts of their identities; in white-dominated gay groups and in straight-dominated civil rights or liberation groups. After an intense experience with a real-life moment of the slogan “the personal is political,” Greg Worthy helped to organize other black gay people in the community and was a cofounder of a new group, the Gay Atlanta Minority Association (GAMA).[88]

Greg Worthy related in an interview with a new Atlanta gay magazine *Gaybriel* that after he participated in the 1978 protest of Anita Bryant and combined Pride event, he felt “gay unity” as he “walked down the street holding the hands of blacks, whites, lesbians.”[89] He later reevaluated those feelings of unity and progressive alliance in the gay community after a disturbing night out on the town. Worthy’s celebration with his fellow marchers was cut short when he was barred from Backstreet, an all hours club, where his white friends went for the after party. Worthy later became the "Public Relations Person" in a five-person committee that would seemingly guide the growth of GAMA. In *Gaybriel,* the group explained their mission and history as "working toward social and political change in Atlanta for black gays and other gay minorities." The group's "top priority" was to "openly attack the separatism practiced by many local gay bars and adult entertainment centers."[90]

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[86] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 122-23, 153-154; Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, 121-28; Mumford, *Not Straight, Not White*.

[87] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 295-97.

[88] Ibid., 297, n23 388, n28 389.

[89] Ibid., 297.

In *States of Desire,* Edmund White introduced the Atlanta gay community with a story about a community divided by race. For black and white gay men in Atlanta, "the two worlds are utterly separate" but each desperately wanted to know about the other. [91] White reported occasional cross racial interactions in the South, like at a party in Memphis, where one black gay man reported that he knew some white men who only slept with black men but that "in the gay world, the races seldom mix."[92] Reflecting the lasting and enduring presence of segregation black and white gay communities were two groups that sometimes overlapped. Segregation and discrimination worked to the benefit of white gay bar owners and businesses because the city's white gay community still showed evidence of internal racism.

In the 1970s, gay businesses boomed in Atlanta, and almost all of them were owned or managed by gay white men and catered to gay white men.[93] These clubs, bars, restaurants, and book stores had policies in print and off the record that made sure their business clientele remained white and male. An increase in the opportunities for the white gay community did not equally represent an improvement for Atlanta's black gay community. More white gay clubs, bars, and lounges enacted policies and practices to keep black people from venues or limited the number of black people they admitted in an evening. These policies included requiring extra pieces of identification from black patrons, known as "carding," and limiting the amount of black people within the club lest it "get too dark." Other practices included restricting entrance to the venue based on the privilege of being a "private" club that required membership, subject to management's discretion in setting rules for admittance. These rules in effect worked against people of color with regulations that included dues, fees, or even required sponsorship from another club member.[94]

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[90] "GAMA- Gay Atlanta Minority Association," *Gaybriel*, August 3, 1979. AHC, ALGHT, Box 33.

[91] White, *States of Desire*, 241.

[92] Ibid., 228.

[93] Mims, "Drastic Dykes," 124-126; Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 291-92, 295, 297.

All these policies were created in Atlanta's gay bars and clubs to keep black gay people—and lesbians—out of the clubs. In 1975, Glen Billings, originally from Cincinnati, posed as *The Barb's* "Stud of the Month" and gave some opinions about race in Atlanta's gay male community.[95] He was asked to "give his impression of life and racial attitudes in Atlanta as he prepares to leave our city." Under the headline, "Black, Beautiful, Gay and Proud," Billings said that interracial social mixing occurred with "more ease" in Cincinnati and that white gay men in Atlanta stereotyped and pre-judged black gay men. He related a story about white men who questioned his choice of cigarettes and claimed an obnoxious ignorance and bewilderment when he contradicted their racist stereotyping. They said “you don’t smoke Kools? I thought all blacks smoked Kools?”

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[94] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit*, *and Rhinestones*, n23 388; Mumford, *Not Straight, Not White*, 177-79;

[95] "Black, Beautiful, Gay and Proud," *The Barb*, March 1975, 2. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.273.

When asked about “ID checks,” Billings related that his entrance to bars was never questioned when he was with white friends, but when he was alone he’d been asked for multiple identification cards. However, he corrected himself mid-answer and related that this was the case in the past but some things had changed. Recently he and his white friend were asked to provide additional ID at the Bayou Landing, a popular gay club. Billings said “I’ve gone to that bar since it opened and I’ve never had such a hassle!”[96] The doorman denied his student ID card but in a brave outburst of angry protest Billings went in anyway. He said “I was going in and didn’t even pay the dollar cover charge.”

In 1979, the sometimes controversial gay community gossip writer Tom Oosterhoudt wrote for *Gaybriel*, a weekly entertainment magazine in Atlanta. In his column “Wicked Whispers and Other Bull” he noted that local bar magazine *Cruise* printed a letter about discrimination in the gay bars. One of the publishers, a well-known community member, Richard Kavanaugh, denied that racism was the problem and instead insinuated that the black man was refused entrance to the bar because of his clothing, having not met the required dress code. Yet Kavanaugh had recently admitted that he “like many other Atlanta gays have seen this carding going on.”[97] Oosterhoudt raged at the gall of Kavanaugh to deny racism on one hand and acknowledge it elsewhere. He implied that Kavanaugh’s slippery stance was linked to his relationship with advertisers, the businesses in the gay community who enacted racist policies.

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[96] “Black, Beautiful, Gay and Proud.”

[97] Tom Oosterhoudt, “Wicked Whispers and Other Bull,” *Gaybriel,* April 30, 1980, 9. AHC, ALGHT Box 33.

In the same gossip column, Oosterhoudt related two other incidents that shed light on the many levels of denial and omissions about racism in Atlanta’s gay print and media. He reported that GAMA, the first black gay organization in the city, made it into the news because two of their members were rumored to have aroused the ire of local adult, gay bookstore, After Dark. Oosterhoudt reported that local activist and lawyer Gil Robison was thrown out of the bookstore because he gave legal advice to GAMA. It was implied that the expulsion of Robison was an effort to silence his support. The lawyer became involved with the group after they obtained legal advice from him regarding an earlier episode of racial discrimination at After Dark, where GAMA member Greg Worthy was also thrown out of the store. The manager reported that Worthy “started making a big commotion about them being racists and was so loud and obnoxious he was thrown out.”[98] Black gay activists in Atlanta organized to fight as part of the gay community but also to fight racism in the gay community. GAMA was the first group in the city that sought to address the needs and concerns of gay people of color as they confronted their allies and often challenged their friends to change.

By the end of the decade Atlanta’s gay and lesbian communities had multiple opportunities to engage politically without necessarily having to be directly tied to party politics. In 1980, Marty Elliot, Editor of the AGC’s newsletter, unequivocally shut down an angry reader’s call for more electoral politics at the Center by citing its non-profit status. Elliot personally responded to the letter’s heavy criticism of “ego-massaging

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[98] Oosterhoudt, “Wicked Whispers.”

extras" by stating that "the Center is prohibited by law, due to its non-profit status, from having any association with politics."[99] The reader's letter reflected many of the criticisms of the AGC's community politics. He outlined the many ways in which his social and community needs were met outside the Center and referenced all the privilege of being a white, wealthy, and educated gay man in the city. The perks of living in Atlanta were many—"In gay life there are bars, baths, toilets, fine restaurants, gyms, jogging, discos, art galleries, movies, theaters, cabarets, other homes, etc. In fact, we may be the most over-entertained segment of the entire population."[100] This point of view was not uncommon and messy divisions and arguments occurred in Atlanta's gay rights community about tactics, motivations, egos, methods, and what gay rights meant to the people who made up the movement.

Atlanta Gay Center Director, Diane Stephenson's approach to activism and the projects she spearheaded showed her interest in making a connection between the personal and the political. She led the Center to engage in politics through social and cultural means. One of the most significant projects at the AGC during her time as the Director was the work she did for the Georgia Families Conference in 1980. In January of 1980, Stephenson presented her report "People Who Are Gay and Family Members" for a pre-conference hearing in Gainesville, Georgia.[101] The AGC was selected by the governor's commission with an appointment of two representatives to attend a conference of 400 delegates at a statewide conference on families and social work. Howard Walters, Chairperson of the AGC Board issued a statement that provided some history about the state conference as it was related to The White House Conference on Families, which was "a significant event effecting public policy decision-making."[102]

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[99] "Reader's Point of View," *Atlanta Gay Central*, September 1980, 8. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records, Box 47.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Diane Stephenson, "People Who Are Gay and Their Families," January 29, 1980. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records, Box 48.

The Georgia Conference on Families met in Athens that spring. The 400 delegates "debated the issues and made final decisions, by parliamentary procedures, regarding those policy statements which would be a part of Georgia's recommendations to the White House Conference."[103] The *Central* reported a successful conference for gay and lesbian activists Howard Walters and Diane Stephenson, who

> were able to have the definition of "family" rewritten to include homosexual families and have the definition adopted by the entire Conference. This was quite an accomplishment in view of the strong element who still cling to the illusion that family means: husband, wife and 2.5 children.[104]

The victory was short-lived. The official proceedings and the final list of delegates revealed that as Stephenson wrote "a large segment of the population of this state has been ignored."[105] Homosexuality was removed from the definition of family and it was not included in any of the policy recommendations. In a letter to the state coordinator, Stephenson charged that the elimination of homosexual from the definition of family was deliberate. She angrily vented that "once again it appears that the reasonable efforts of a minority group have been thwarted." Stephenson knew the omission was no error of "oversight" but was "deliberately planned."[106]

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[102] Howard Walters, "Statement," undated. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records, Box 48; Self, *All in the Family*, 333-35.

[103] Ibid.

[104] "Governor's Conference on Families," *Atlanta Gay Central*, May 1980. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records, Box 47.

[105] Letter from Diane Stephenson to C. Rand Humphrey, May 23, 1980. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records, Box 47.

In response to her charges, Stephenson received a letter from Governor George Busbee himself less than one week later. Busbee's personal attention to Stephenson's letter was a forceful push back against lesbian and gay rights activism. He took full responsibility and credit for removing the recommendations that included homosexuality. Calling it "my decision," Busbee aggressively ended the issue. "Let me assure you that Georgia will carry no recommendation regarding homosexuals. Sodomy and homosexual marriages are illegal in Georgia. A recommendation of this nature is unacceptable and I will not allow it to be included in our recommendations."[107] Busbee's tone formalized the end of an attempt to reframe discussions of sexuality in the context of the social family unit at the state policy-making level. He emphasized that until gay people could marry legally or the state decriminalized sodomy, "Georgia will not condone these practices."[108]

It was an unexpected turn after the earlier success and it proved to be too much for some members of the Atlanta Gay Center. Howard Walters resigned his position as Chairman of the Board of Directors in June and by September Diane Stephenson decided to leave her position as the Executive Director.[109] On June 4, the day before the White House Conference on Families convened, First Tuesday and the AGC held a joint press conference. In addition to Center representatives Walters and Stephenson, Atlanta activists Ray Kluka, Liz Throop, and Greg Worthy, as well as others met with invited representatives from the offices of Wyche Fowler and Governor Busbee.[110] Fowler was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in the special election of 1977, despite all of Bill Smith's opposition. In a joint press release issued two days before the press conference, Stephenson, on behalf of the gay community represented through the Center, demanded three things: the repeal of sodomy laws, state funding of human sexuality education, and the establishment of an "Office of Gay Concerns in the Department of Human Resources."[111]

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[106] Stephenson to Humphrey, May 23, 1980.

[107] Governor George Busbee to Diane Stephenson, May 29, 1980. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records, Box 47.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Marty Elliot, "A Tribute to Diane," 1 and "Walters Resigns," 8, *Atlanta Gay Central*, September 1980. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records, Box 47.

Over the next two years Atlanta's gay community pursued some of these goals aggressively while others were transformed and renegotiated. What hope activists had about working through the Democratic Party and through the existing channels of power at the state level dimmed. The First Tuesday Democratic Association officially broke ties with the Democrats and became the First Tuesday Association for Lesbian and Gay Rights sometime in 1980.[112] In part due to election year politics but also probably due to the gradual realization that the Georgia Democratic Party was still conservative. They continued efforts at the state level, but renewed their activism in the local community.

The conservative backlash unleashed political campaigns, but it also contributed to what many gay and lesbian activists pointed out was a violent and deadly backlash. Events in the late 1970s, like the assassination of Harvey Milk and other violence directed at gays and lesbians created an urgent need to protect communities.[113] There was a new commitment to address police harassment and to better the relationship between the gay community and the police in an effort to decrease crimes directed at the gay community and to help victims of crime in vulnerable communities. As has been shown in other cities, often the violence came from the police.[114] Terry Sparks, a gay rights activist and writer for Atlanta's new gay paper, *The Gayzette*, charged that local cops and by implication, city and state politicians, selectively and harshly enforced regulations and laws against the gay and lesbian community. Sparks said the state of relations was worse after the election in 1980 because "they don't like gay people personally and because they're getting the signal from Reagan and from the "Moral Majority" that it's perfectly fine not to like gay people politically."[115]

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[110] Walters, "Statement."

[111] Press Release, June 2, 1980. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records, Box 47.

[112] "You Should Know What First Tuesday Association for Lesbian and Gay Rights is Doing For You!" undated. AHC, ALGHT, First Tuesday Association Records, Box 49. Hereafter cited as FTA Records.

Issues between the Atlanta police and the gay and lesbian community became more frequently addressed in the city's gay newspapers and print media in the summer and fall of 1980. First Tuesday, the AGC, ALFA, and GAMA took up the "frustrating" problem of gay and lesbian inaction by making it a chief concern of their activism. They formed a coalition that sought to create an open dialogue between the gay community and the police. Members of the group would tackle issues of police training, community relations, and police harassment. Their most immediate problem was an increase in targeted harassment of gay spaces in the city and historic cruising areas, like Piedmont Park. The park was subject to heavy policing in the hippie era, and before that gay men who cruised there came under heavy scrutiny too. John Howard showed how the Park, in post-war Atlanta, became subject to new codes as city officials increased lighting in the area to discourage all kinds of sexual activity.[116] In the early days of Gay Liberation, the park's use by the gay community was a central conflict and source of political activism. City Council members spoke out, for, and against regulations on the park that attempted to close the park to vehicle traffic after certain hours, sought to limit the park's pedestrian access, and imposed curfews on the area.[117]

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[113] Hanhardt, *Safe Space*; Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities;* Marcus, *Making Gay History*.

[114] Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*.

[115] Jack Nichols, "An Entrapment Victim Speaks Up: Gayzette Interviews Terry Sparks," *The Gayzette*, December 18-24, 1980, 7. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.270

As a public gay space, Piedmont Park was a constant source of tension. The park and its trails were the setting for the third installment of "An Uncertain Peace: Atlanta's Gay Community and Police Abuses," a series of articles written in 1980 by James Moody for *Cruise*.[118] "An Uncertain Peace" was an important series that looked at issues of conflict and tension between the gay and lesbian community and Atlanta's Police. "Part III" focused on crimes committed against gay men and reported on stories of violence and harassment of gay men in Piedmont Park and in the Midtown area. In a comparison of two attacks with different outcomes, Moody contrasted and described the complicated angles of police relations with the gay community. Two gay men were attacked in the Piedmont Park, one on the wooded trails and one in the open. Both were robbed but thought the real motivation was homophobia. The victims believed their assailants were looking to do some gay bashing.

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[116] Howard, "The Library, the Park, and the Pervert."

[117] Huff, "A New Way of Living Together," 247-49.

[118] James Moody, "An Uncertain Peace: Atlanta's Gay Community and Police Abuses," *Cruise*, June 6-12 1980, 14. AHC, ALGHT, Box 19.

Piedmont Park was a known gay male space in the city because it was associated with cruising culture. Moody described the location of the secluded tree trails within the park that were often used by gay men for romantic and sexual encounters. He said "along the eastern boundary of Piedmont Park is a set of trails, hidden from the rest of the park by trees, bushes, and steep, somewhat rugged terrain." Some people used the trails for recreation, hiking, jogging, and others for the "cover under which men can—and do—meet for sex with one another."[119] In the spring of 1979, one gay man was clubbed by two men and robbed of the change in his pockets. After cruising the area in the afternoon, he encountered "two teenage-aged boys" who "walked up and down the trails, clubs firmly held in their hands, looking for an opportunity to use them." He tried to walk past them, as he "figured they were out to beat up some gays."[120] Instead they asked for a cigarette, an excuse to stop him, and clubbed him once in the head and demanded his money. The victim, Tony, debated and considered his options. Report the crime or go home? He considered this carefully as his assailants threatened to kill him if he went to the police.

Tony decided to report the crime to an off-duty officer at the Park's patrol station. He told Moody that the officer took him seriously and "was genuinely concerned." The officer followed him to the area of the crime and found one of the attackers who ran into the woods. Both of the men were eventually arrested that day and Tony expressed thanks for the help he got from the officer. Robert H. had a very different experience in the Park when he was jumped and beaten by three men as he jogged one evening. Robert said he noticed the "rough-looking boys" but "was in a very open area" and "didn't think of anything happening right there where anyone in the park could see." They beat him and attempted to rob him, but he had no money on him. He thought "they just wanted to beat a 'queer' up and I happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time."[121]

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[119] Moody, "An Uncertain Peace," 14.

[120] Ibid., 15.

Unlike Tony, Robert decided not to report the crime to the police. He said friends had reported similar crimes and "would end up getting hassled themselves." Moody recounted the story of a hair stylist who had a large gay clientele whose business was robbed multiple times. He said "six of those times I called the police. They even bothered to come only twice."[122] After being abducted from his shop and held up at gun point, Ken waited for "about an hour and half" for the police to come. The officer who investigated the crime saw a *Cruise* magazine on a table and asked if the "place was a gay business." Ken wondered if that was the reason his case remained unsolved over a year later. Moody acknowledged that many crimes were not solved, but that fact was made worse because many crimes were not reported to the police. Moody noted the gay community didn't report crimes because they heard of other people's bad experiences or they feared exposure or public outing related to the police records.[123]

Publishers of the gay press faced increased harassment too. In the summer of 1979, after a round of local media stories about "teenage male prostitution," gay magazine publishers in Atlanta were arrested for the "sale and distribution of obscene materials." A local news story called, "Boys for Sale," included multiple photographs of

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[121] Moody, "An Uncertain Peace," 15.

[122] Ibid., 16.

[123] Ibid.

Cavco, Inc., the publisher of *Cruise*. The report included a disclaimer that noted to citizens that Cavco "was not involved in printing child pornography," but the damage done by association was deliberate and effective. *Cruise* said that an editorial soon afterwards "called on aroused citizens to help stamp out boy prostitution." They charged that the County Solicitor's office arrested them in an attempt to "clean up this problem" by attacking *Cruise*, a "most visible target."[124] The magazine announced the formation of the "Gay Community Committee for *Cruise*" to solicit financial support and to "Strike a Blow for Gay Rights and the Gay Press."

The leaders of gay rights organizations found the situation of political apathy and the real fear and intimidation of the community "frustrating."[125] The series "An Uncertain Peace," showed how the gay community was prey to criminals who counted on their vulnerability. Gay men who cruised for sex in public parks or gay bookstores engaged in illegal acts and ran the risk of being charged with sodomy if caught by the police or beaten or robbed by partners. When they were assaulted, robbed, or otherwise harassed, they felt their circumstances keenly. If they were an out person they could risk reporting the crime, but they might also become the victim of police harassment. If they were not out, many did not report a crime because it would expose their personal and private lives. Robert said he did not report the robbery because he "felt like I had been through enough without causing myself any more problems."[126]

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[124] "The Gay Community Committee for Cruise" *Cruise*, June 24 1979. AHC, ALGHT, Box 19.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Moody, "An Uncertain Peace," 15.

In meetings between Public Safety Commissioner Lee Brown, Police Chief Napper, and gay right activists, Department of Public Safety representatives insisted that the behaviors of gay men were at the root of issues of entrapment and harassment. At an early meeting Brown suggested that if sexual activity took place in public areas, like the bookstore, than he had a duty to police the area. He asked the gay activists, "Are you recommending that I stop enforcing the law in bookstores?"[127] As Moody documented, the public areas that the gay and lesbian community claimed were under increased surveillance. At the general membership meeting of the First Tuesday Association, on July 1, the sixth item on the agenda was titled "Police Problems" and it listed seven separate issues.[128] To be discussed at the meeting was:

> 1) Harassment in Avondale
> 2) Police harassment of two lesbians
> 3) Police harassment at Numbers
> 4) Bookstore closings
> 5) Polygraph exams for Recruits
> 6) Frank Scheuren meeting w/ Comm. Brown
> 7) Gil Robison and Diane Stephenson meeting with Mary Davis and Lee Brown."[129]

In an early success, gay activists with the help of strong allies, were able to change the Atlanta police policy that required recruits to submit to questions about their sexuality. Gay rights activists saw the elimination of the questions from the polygraph exam as a "minimum first step in improving police/gay community relations."[130] Atlanta

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[127] Terry Sparks, "Atlanta Gays Confront Commissioner Brown," *The Gayzette*, December 25-31, 1980, 8. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.270.

[128] "Agenda," First Tuesday General Membership Meeting, July 1, 1980. AHC, ALGHT, FTA Records, Box 49.

[129] Ibid.

[130] "Police Harassment: An Analysis," *The Healthy Closet*, November 1980. AHC, ALGHT, Box 10.

City Councilwoman Mary Davis spoke with the AGC about her meeting concerning questions given to police recruits about same-sex sexuality. She introduced herself as someone who had worked on the issue for the past two years. She had only recently been given a memo from Commissioner Brown that related what kinds of information the police department asked about same-sex sexuality and why. The questions to recruits concerned sexual activity and intoxication, which Davis and her gay community advisors related to "blackmail, the bugaboo of many gay people."[131]

The harassment of lesbians and gay men at the bar Numbers was detailed in First Tuesday's newsletter, *The Healthy Closet*, which used the tag line, "the only healthy closet is the voting booth."[132] James Moody reported on the meeting between Frank Scheuren and Commissioner Brown and the specific complaints addressed. One of the topics was the arrest of two lesbians for sex charges at the bar Numbers under "somewhat shady circumstances."[133] According to Scheuren, police officers "used abusive language against the bar's patrons, pledging, among other things, to "close down that faggot bar."[134] The gay and lesbian community in Atlanta did not see a decrease in harassment despite the meetings with Public Safety representatives. In November, First Tuesday reported on the raid of a gay bar called P's, which "was the latest in a couple of years of increased police harassment and intrusions into gay environments," but the first raid on a gay bar in years.[135]

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[131] "Homosexual Question Removed from APD Employment Form" *Atlanta Gay Central*, September 1980. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records, Box 47.

[132] James Moody, "Commissioner Brown Meets with Gay Rep," *The Healthy Closet*, August 1980. AHC, ALGHT Box 10.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid.

The harassment of people in gay places had disastrous effects on businesses. The local gay press related that "a year ago Atlanta had three gay bookstores. Today there are none."[136] First Tuesday said the bookstores were targets of raids and undercover entrapment stings in the months leading up to the raid of P's. They charged Atlanta's police and Hinson McAuliffe, the Fulton County Solicitor, of a targeted campaign to close the gay bookstores. As police increased arrests in and around the bookstores, McAuliffe "moved to have them declared public nuisances, using the arrest statistics as evidence that crimes were being committed on the premises." The report noted the same tactics were being used on bookstores still open in Fulton County and wondered about the implications of a raid on a gay bar. They asked, "one wonders where it will end."[137]

Arrests for sodomy or more commonly, solicitation of sodomy, hinged on the work of undercover officers and entrapment of gay and lesbian people in public places, like parks, bookstores, and bars. As part of the press conference related to the Georgia Families Conference in June of 1980, the AGC prepared a statement about sodomy.[138] In the statement, "Some Facts About Sodomy," they gave the legal definition of sodomy, which made no distinction of the sex or gender of its practitioners. It was illegal for heterosexuals and homosexuals to engage in the practice "as defined by Georgia law" as

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[135] "Police Harassment: An Analysis," *The Healthy Closet*, November 1980. AHC, ALGHT, Box 10.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid.

[138] "Some Facts About Sodomy," The Atlanta Gay Center, June 1980. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records, Box 47.

"oral or anal intercourse." Despite this fact, the "sodomy law is inequitably enforced in Georgia; most arrests for its violation are made of gay people."[139]

Jack Nichols, a local gay activist and writer interviewed fellow activist and writer Terry Sparks for *The Gayzette* community newspaper about his arrest for solicitation at a gay bookstore.[140] Sparks was the victim of entrapment and his emotional state after the arrest suffered. He was paranoid and suspicious of other men's intentions. He felt ashamed to be charged as a sex criminal. Sparks offered a stark warning and publicly highlighted an increasingly severe situation in the gay community. When he went to court there were four other men who faced similar charges. The AGC and First Tuesday had over thirty documented complaints too. Activists knew these were low numbers because so many victims of entrapment chose to stay silent or were unaware of any way to document their cases. Sparks outlined the scope of the issue and what he thought would be the end result if action wasn't taken by the community to combat police harassment.

> The cops are peeking into the booths and finding excuses to charge people with sodomy…People are beginning to see that the bookstores are just a starting place for the cops. Once they got away with harassing bookstore patrons, they tasted blood. They then moved into the parking lots around some of the bars. And, of course, they are in the parks.[141]

Nichols asked if Atlanta would become a "gay ghost town of the 80s?" Sparks considered the present and thought it would get worse before it got better. He said "The question is, just how bad are gay people willing to see things get again before they do what's necessary?"

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[139] Ibid.

[140] Nichols, "An Entrapment Victim Speaks Up."

[141] Ibid.

We Are Everywhere United!

In 1980, Atlantans organized in an unofficial committee that looked much like other organizations in other cities that came together to create celebrations and commemorations of Stonewall every year all across the country.[142] But for the first time as an official committee they took a step forward when they established themselves as the Lesbian/Gay/Transperson Pride Committee.[143] Organizers recognized the somewhat radical step they took when they included "Transperson" in their organizational umbrella and the Pride committee's name. They said "Atlanta can be the first to boast an official coalition of all sexual minorities working together as one cohesive unit."[144]

The inclusion of transpeople in Pride events that year was reflective of the growth in diversity in organizing and especially from the influence of trans activists with the 1979 March on Washington. It also showed the inclusion of new voices within the gay, lesbian, and transperson community in Atlanta. That year two of the organizers, Greg Worthy of GAMA and Margo George with ALFA, made it a priority to include a wide range of people in the organization for Pride. To that effect they compiled a list of speakers that indicated how much political and social activism was going on in Atlanta in the new decade. The list included a number of local activists who might have been ignored or rejected by gay and lesbian activism in years past, like Kathy Green, a "preoperative male to female transsexual."[145]

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[142] McFarland Bruce, *Pride Parades.*

[143] "LGT Pride Week Background," 1981. AHC, ALGHT, Box 60.

[144] Ibid.

[145] "Available Resource People & Topics," 1980. AHC, ALGHT Box 60.

Trans activists had not yet emerged into a political community in Atlanta and their acceptance into the umbrella coalition sparked a controversial divide. Some gay and lesbian people did not want to extend the rights movement to cover transsexuals (a common naming convention of the era) because they thought it would impede their efforts at gaining mainstream respectability. Karen, a "preoperative transsexual," made a case for inclusion and movement politics with an article that year for *Gaybriel* titled "Why put the "Transperson" in "Lesbian/Gay/Transperson Pride?" She explained to the gay and lesbian community why it mattered to add "Transperson" to Pride and how she came to that conclusion. Karen became involved in the gay and lesbian community after working for the Atlanta Gay Center helpline. She started at the Center so that she might be able to help other transsexuals but she had come to find out that "gays and transsexuals are united in a number of ways: social and economic oppression, the burden of guilt, and the trauma of coming out."[146]

Maria Helena Dolan, who called herself an "incorrigibly Queer political," wrote a piece about Pride that year for *Gaybriel* too. Dolan's agreement to write the piece in support of the gay male magazine was done in a rash moment of "Queer solidarity."[147] The inclusion of transperson to the politics of lesbian and gay activism highlighted a division that emerged in the city between mainstream gay and lesbian people who objected to the broadening of the movement. Dolan pointed out that some people refused to acknowledge the "lesbian, gay, and transperson" in Pride and snidely remarked that the

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[146] Karen, "Why put the "Transperson" in "Lesbian/Gay/Transperson Pride?" *Gaybriel*, 1980, 42-43 (clipped file without date). AHC, ALGHT Box 60.

[147] Maria Helena Dolan, "When Queers Collide," *Gaybriel*, 1980, 54-55 (clipped file without date). AHC, ALGHT Box 60.

L/G/T theme had been interpreted by more closeted or conservative people as a generic party theme of "Let's Get Together." The chosen theme for L/G/T Pride was "We Are Everywhere United," which celebrated the global growth of the movement and International Gay Solidarity Day on June 28th.[148]

L/G/T Pride celebrated international cooperation, but Atlanta activists wanted to focus on local issues in the gay and lesbian community at home. Two problems, racism and sexism, divided the community throughout the decade. A copy of Marsha Davenport's Pride speech that year "We Are Everywhere United! (A Feminist Perspective)" written on stationary from the Feminist Women's Health Center in Atlanta focused on women reclaiming their "herstory" within the gay movement.[149] Davenport emphasized the importance of unity and the divide that was growing in the community. She said, "As long as we fight as single issue advocates, however, we will continue to lose one of our most valuable assets—our numbers." Davenport asked white people to consider the impact of their own prejudices and how they undermined unity. She personalized her experiences with gay activists.

> As a Black Dyke, I want to remind you that racism doesn't stop as we cross from heterosexuality to homosexuality. I feel enormous pain that I have to fight racism in my own community. Be aware of the intensity of the social conditioning that was taught us. Do you still think Blacks and other Third World persons are better athletes, dancers, love-makers, domestics; Are Black Dykes more "butch?"[150]

After Miami, Atlanta's gay and lesbian community was renewed with new organizations like First Tuesday, the Atlanta Gay Center, and GAMA. Some Atlantans became involved in activism around the first March on Washington, which focused gay and lesbian people's attention on politics. After the March, activists started to figure out their own priorities and how to change their systems locally. Activists returned to Atlanta and continued to organize their gay and lesbian communities wherever they could. Communities came together as they increased their efforts to address the issue of police harassment in the city. They documented instances of violence, harassment, and discrimination by Atlanta's police and in city hall.

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[148] "Lesbian/Gay/Transperson Pride Week: We Are Everywhere United," June 21-28, 1980. AHC, ALGHT Box 60.

[149] Marsha Davenport, "We Are Everywhere United! (A Feminist Perspective)" June 21, 1980. AHC, ALGHT, Maria Helena Dolan Papers, Box 76.

[150] Ibid.

Atlanta activists organized in special circumstances in this period. Not only were gay and lesbian activists faced with the challenge of a powerful and successful new conservative Christian politics but they faced a unique situation in Atlanta. From 1979 until 1982, the city was consumed by events and news of what was known as the Atlanta Missing and Murdered Children's Case.[151] The violence of the episode cast many of Atlantans citizens under highly charged surveillance as police attempted to solve the abductions and murders. As a segment of Atlanta that was already subject to increased police attention, the gay community became entangled in the cases as scapegoats, with the unfortunate outcome that they became the direct target of more intense police harassment during the period.

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[151] Chapter 3, "The Sorrow of a City: Collisions in Class and Counternarratives—The Atlanta Child Murders," in Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 94-130.

CHAPTER 5

"STONEWALL THEN, ATLANTA NOW":

GAY RIGHTS, THE POLICE, AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISM, 1981-1982

Activism or Apathy at Crazy Ray'z

In the summer of 1981, First Tuesday representatives gave a statement to the Public Safety Committee of Atlanta's City Council that documented conflicts between gay and lesbian people and the police. Since the winter of 1980, gay and lesbian people reported an increase in police harassment. First Tuesday told the committee about "Physical beatings of gay men by groups of police, entrapment for sodomy, entrapment for assaulting an officer and related charges."[1] The group's statement explained the widespread discrimination experienced and the impact on gay and lesbian Atlantans. They said

> We've seen gay people who have been arrested by police treated in a discriminatory manner, not only by the police themselves but persons in the jail and in the courts. We've seen hundreds of lives senselessly destroyed by the insensitivity on all levels of the public safety establishment, including Council, to the needs and concerns of lesbians and gay men.[2]

Police harassment that led to being arrested on a charge related to sexuality could and did ruin lives. First Tuesday emphasized that the needs of the community included sensitivity around issues of sexuality. A sodomy arrest carried heavy penalties that ranged from legal fines and incarceration to losing your employment or home if employers or landlords found out and disapproved, a not unlikely scenario when names were printed in news reports.[3] In addition to the economic damage, the fallout from arrests could jeopardize personal and family relationships and lead to social isolation and depression.

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[1] FTA Statement to the Public Safety Committee, August 11, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, FTA Records, Box 49.

[2] Ibid.

For these reasons, many people resisted coming out. Others rejected politicizing their sexuality on principle, preferring to treat their sexual lives as something privately held. Many gay and lesbian Atlantans were unwilling to come out in support of gay rights political activism because they were afraid it would draw negative attention to their lives or social communities. These feelings were understandable because of the real damage that being out could effect, not just for those arrested or targeted by the police, but for anyone who was out. Gay and lesbian people were unprotected by discrimination laws then, as they remain today, and could be fired from their jobs or evicted from their homes based on their sexuality. Gay and lesbian rights advocates drew attention to themselves as out people and risked the consequences.

A common refrain from activists in this period was that the gay community in Atlanta was apathetic to politics. In part this was due to the nature and extent of the oppression of the closet and the conservativism of the southern city in general. But some activists believed there was something else going on in Atlanta that worked against the advance of political gay rights in the city. Jack Nichols, a gay liberation and sexual revolution activist who was radical before Stonewall, lived in Atlanta and occasionally wrote for the *Gayzette* at the time.[4] In December of 1980, after a period of increased police presence in the city's gay adult bookstores led to multiple arrests in the community, he interviewed Terry Sparks, a local victim of police entrapment. In their conversation they considered the lack of outrage in the community around these issues. Nichols advocated for more involvement but concluded there was a jaded realism that permeated Atlanta's gay community. He said "I'd like to think that gay Atlantans are smart enough to know when to be laid-back and when to get active. When I've said this to some people, they've just looked at me and answered, "Don't you know that Atlanta's the capitol of Gay apathy?"[5]

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[3] Eskridge, *Dishonorable Passions*, 136-139.

[4] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 26.

Local gay activist Frank Scheuren wanted to change this feature of community life. To kick off the decade in style, he hosted an event in February of 1981 called "Apathy or Activism—Your Choice For the '80s" at a local gay bar, Crazy Ray'z.[6] Ted Binkley, the manager of Crazy Ray'z, told local alternative newspaper *Creative Loafing* that the "gay political movement in Atlanta was still in its infancy."[7] His willingness to have political activists engage his bar community showed that some gay business owners supported the gay rights movement. This was an important difference that indicated a change in the historic relationship between gay bars and gay rights activists in the last ten years. This change in the relationship between gay bars and gay rights was especially pronounced after Anita Bryant's crusade in Miami and the emergence of a strengthened conservative backlash with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. However, it was not universal and some gay bars and businesses continued to be a source of tension as they engaged with the politics of the movement on their own terms. It became apparent that some gay business owners supported the movement conditionally and that if a stance risked financial and economic gains or security they opposed it.

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[5] Nichols, "An Entrapment Victim Speaks Up," 5.

[6] "Activism or Apathy at Crazy Ray'z," *Gazette,* February 19-25, 1981, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.270.

[7] Marcia Darien Elvidge, *Creative Loafing*, July 11, 1981, (clippings file). DU, Sears Papers, Box 115.

Gay bars, restaurants, lounges, and communal public areas, like parks in the city, were essential sites of politicization, as they had been for decades. The continued harassment of gay men and lesbians in cruising areas and gay spaces was central to politicizing a broader social community. Atlanta's gay rights activists tried to engage the social community with newspaper articles and by cooperation and affiliation with local gay bars. A coordinator for First Tuesday's political forums, Jeff Strack, said police harassment was a major area of complaint and he got "dozens of calls a week about it."[8] The increase in police harassment of the gay and lesbian community was connected to the increased presence of police around the city. From 1979 until 1981, Atlanta was in the midst of an episode of deadly and racially charged violence and a widely reported on police investigation that failed to end it.

The Atlanta Missing and Murdered Children's Cases connected the murders of over twenty young black children and adults in this period in an investigation that took years to solve. The crimes started in 1979 when young black children were abducted in their local neighborhoods and later found murdered. In 1982, police charged Wayne Williams, also a young black Atlantan, with the murders of two adult men connected to the string of unsolved murders. With the conviction of Williams for two of the murders, the city implied his guilt in the others and closed the investigations.[9] During this period,

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[8] "Activism or Apathy at Crazy Ray'z."

[9] Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca,* 122-29.

Atlanta city officials and the police increased street patrols of the city and enforced curfews in an attempt to stop the abductions and murders. These measures were increasingly seen as ineffective. The murders continued and certain communities found themselves under more surveillance and policing, measures adopted by authorities under the guise of keeping people protected.

Atlanta's gay community came under increased surveillance when they were drawn into the investigation as the media and police linked the child murders to same-sex sex, without substantial evidence or proof. Theories that connected the murders to same-sex sexuality upheld homophobic and damaging stereotypes about gay male sexuality related to criminal sexual perversion and violence. The increased police presence to keep the city safe for its youngest and most vulnerable led to a bewildering increase in arrests in the gay and lesbian community. In the midst of the murder cases and the multiple unproductive investigations ongoing, one First Tuesday member found it remarkable that police "still have the manpower to put undercover agents in bars, arresting people for everything from public nuisance to public drunkenness to jaywalking."[10] Many activists believed that the police and the state were using the moment to eradicate the growing visible gay community.

Gay and lesbian Atlantans faced a period of increased repression in the early 1980s related to the Missing and Murdered Cases and were impacted by the national political outlook, which sharply turned conservative. This chapter looks at how gay and lesbian activists developed organizations that challenged police discrimination and harassment locally and increased activism in the community. Atlantans seemed to respond to Frank Scheuren's "activism or apathy" challenge with the formation of two new organizations that year, the Lesbian/Gay Rights Chapter of the ACLU of Georgia (L/GRC) and a local chapter of the national group Black and White Men Together (BWMT). This chapter focuses on the L/GRC and activism around issues with the police as it marked a transition in gay and lesbian rights politics and activism in the city. Gay and lesbian activists in Atlanta worked to end local community issues like police entrapment but also worked to address the root cause of the conflict—the state supported repression of gay and lesbian sexuality.

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[10] FTA Statement, August 11, 1981. In the mid-1970s, gay activists in Washington D.C. made similar arguments against police harassment and selective enforcement based on their objections to the city's use of funds to support vice details. Kwame A. Holmes, "Chocolate to Rainbow City: The Dialectics of Black and Gay Community Formation in Postwar Washington, D.C., 1946–1978" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011), 203-4.

"Gay Power and Politics": Gay Rights in the City

In the early 1980s, legal battles with the state and the local police were of primary importance to gay and lesbian politics in cities and communities across the nation.[11] In Atlanta, these fights took on a unique quality because of the heightened tensions related to the Missing and Murdered children's cases. Maurice Hobson described the city's African American communities as under intense and traumatic shock, helpless to stop a killer that targeted them, but divided by issues of class.[12] The murders created major disruptions as middle-class African American leaders, officials, and politicians were pitted against lower-income communities who demanded more action and support. Some mothers of victims fought for justice in new organizations that challenged official narratives and questioned the city's commitment to solving the crimes. Other groups took their protection in their own hands and patrolled the streets armed with baseball bats to draw attention to the continuing lack of safety on their city streets.

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[11] Eskridge, *Dishonorable Passions*, 218-225; Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*; Hanhardt, *Safe Space*; Robert Self, "Sex in the City: The Politics of Sexual Liberalism in Los Angeles, 1963–79," *Gender & History* 20, no. 2 (August 2008): 288-311.

[12] Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca,* 129-30.

The Missing and Murdered children's cases were understandably the subject of much media inquiry. There was sensational and exploitative media speculation about a possible sexual motive for the murders, and because most of the victims were male, gay men and their sexuality became entangled in the investigation. Gay activists charged that every time the media encouraged negative perceptions of gay people with a sensationalistic story, the local gay community experienced increase policing and harassment. Activists responded to the negative media attention with new challenges and confrontations. They used the unwanted spotlight on their community to publicly address civil rights violations that gay and lesbian Atlantans faced every day.

The inability of local police to solve the cases over the years eventually resulted in a national task force that coordinated over a hundred police officers and federal investigators and was supported by a 1.5 million pledge from the White House.[13] During the active period of investigations, Atlanta's gay spaces became sites of confrontation and control that were complicated by the ongoing violence of the murders. The city's gay and lesbian community experienced an increase in street harassment, entrapment, and busts for various offences at gay bookstores, bars, and baths. Members of First Tuesday and the AGC met with Public Safety Commissioner Lee Brown in January of 1981 to continue discussions begun in December about entrapment and harassment. Most of the meeting focused on what activists felt was a directed campaign to rid the city of gay adult bookstores. They argued that with increased police surveillance and more arrests, the police furnished local officials with the proof that they were public nuisances and could therefore close them down. Activists thought the police were working with Hinson McAuliffe, the Solicitor General for Fulton county, and they used "provocative sexual gestures" to get their arrests.[14]

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[13] M.A. Faber, "Leading the Hunt in Atlanta's Murders," *The New York Times*, May 3, 1981.

Lesbian and gay rights activists formed a new organization later that month, the Lesbian/Gay Rights Chapter of the Georgia ACLU with members from the Georgia ACLU and other local gay rights organizations.[15] Over the next two years the L/GRC played a major role in bringing forward actions against the police. The fight to end police discrimination and harassment in Atlanta was largely shaped by the L/GRC or as it was affectionately dubbed by some members, the "GayCLU." The group coordinated legal efforts to force the city to address police harassment and established a community council that brought together gay and lesbian activists with the police to dialogue about continuing issues. At first, the L/GRC focused almost exclusively on community concerns with the police and worked to educate people about their legal and civil rights when they interacted with the police.

The *Gazette* reported that about forty people attended the first meeting of the

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[14] "Police Committee Reports," *The Healthy Closet*, February 1981. AHC, ALGHT Box 10.

[15] "Gay A.C.L.U. Chapter Meets" *Gazette Newspaper*, January 29-February 4, 1981, 13. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.270.

L/GRC held at the Atlanta Public Library.[16] Many of them, it was noted, were "not active in any other gay-oriented endeavor or activity" before. This was an important point because one of the primary goals of the city's recent gay rights activism was to politicize and engage the broader gay and lesbian community. At the first meeting organizers established two subcommittees, one related to police harassment and the other focused on the media. Soon after the newly organized L/GRC sent a representative to a First Tuesday meeting to talk about the group's mission.[17] The meeting minutes reported the group's rep said they had a "strong commitment to getting it together" through a "close working relationship with Gay Social and Political Action groups." They told First Tuesday about general strategies to work in three different areas—legal, education, and media—with broader goals and issues related to the police, housing, and job discrimination. The group's media efforts would focus on organizations that were "working to build a better community."[18]

Not long after their formation, and before the group even officially elected officers or adopted bylaws, members of the media committee were at odds with representatives of other gay rights organizations in the city.[19] At the L/GRC monthly meeting in April, the formal procedure and process of organization was the main task at hand but members added a last minute discussion to their agenda. The extra topic under consideration related to a surprise press conference held that day and a public statement issued by the "Coalition of Homosexual Groups on the Child Murder Cases," which proved fairly controversial within the small community of activists.[20] Frank Scheuren was listed as the press contact on the release which stated his affiliations as an appointee on the Atlanta CRC and as President of the national association of gay Catholics, Dignity, Inc. Ray Kluka, Executive Director of the AGC, reported at the L/GRC meeting that he and Scheuren acted as the spokespersons for the coalition. Kluka told them that because of the press conference, the "Freeman Report Program," a show on the "Cable News Network," offered them a spot on the show that night and Scheuren had volunteered to represent the community.[21]

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[16] Ibid.

[17] First Tuesday Association, "Minutes—March 3rd General Meeting," March 3, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, FTA Records, Box 49.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Lesbian/Gay Rights Chapter, Meeting Minutes, April 8, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, ACLU Lesbian/Gay Rights Chapter Records, Box 55. Hereafter cited as L/GRC.

It seemed like an opportunity for activists to get their message out and correct the course of some of the worst speculation regarding sexuality and the murders. The police investigation was plagued by leaks which were compounded by false, misleading, and speculative reports discussed openly in the city's press and media. Eventually theories were floated that the murdered children's cases involved a "sexual angle."[22] At various points the local press reported on "homosexual sex rings," child pornography, and had suggested the possibility that the serial killer was sexually motivated. It was assumed that the killer was male and as the majority of the victims were male, it became a crime, for some, associated with same-sex sexuality.[23] L/GRC activists sought to defend the gay community from the damaging false connection to the murders, but they differed on the best way to do this.

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[20] Press Release, April 8, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, L/GRC Records, Box 55.

[21] L/GRC, Meeting Minutes, April 8, 1981.

[22] "Atlanta Gays Call Press Conference," *Gazette Newspaper*, April 9-15, 1981, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.270.

[23] "Gay Activists & the A.C.L.U. Confront Straight Press," *Gazette Newspaper*, April 9-15, 1981, 1. AHC,

The L/GRC meeting minutes noted that after Ray Kluka announced the news there was a heated discussion over representation. Some people thought having a woman on the show would diffuse the "issue of male sex." L/GRC member Jean Levine declined because she thought she wasn't "familiar enough" with how the issues related to the murder cases. Someone then suggested Maria Dolan for the role. Kluka responded that the show offered only one seat to the "homosexual community" and "set limitations precluded a third person." After this interaction L/GRC President Buren Batson "stated this was not really a matter for the body to decide" and moved the meeting on to other matters.[24] Ray Kluka, Frank Scheuren, and Maria Dolan continued the discussion about representation in the hallway outside the regular meeting. Dolan disagreed with the choice but eventually it was decided that Scheuren would do the show.

A week later Maria wrote a letter to Frank about that night and a bigger issue related to his personal activism. As a "concerned old friend" she felt it "personally/politically necessary" to address their recent confrontation.[25] The way she recounted the night's discussion, it was clear she thought Scheuren was determined to be the on-air talent. She objected to the fact that he, due to his association with the CRC, claimed to have "insider" knowledge about the gay community and the Missing and Murdered children's cases. She questioned some of his perspectives and in particular his

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ALGHT, Box 2.270.

[24] L/GRC, Meeting Minutes, April 8, 1981.

[25] Maria Dolan to Frank Scheuren, April 13, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, L/GRC Records, Box 55.

argument that he was a better representative because the cases were a “gay male issue.” Dolan said she regretted not calling him out in the moment “because you and I and everyone else have maintained it is not.”

The discussion over roles and representation continued and expanded to include Dave Hayward (formerly Dave Bryant) of the Media Watch subcommittee. The day after the meeting, Hayward sent a letter to his editor at *The Advocate*, the national gay news magazine, that related the circumstances of the public statement released at the news conference.[26] Hayward told the *Advocate* the statement was not representative of other gay rights organizations and some people objected to its general tone. The L/GRC Media Watch committee objected specifically to several points made by the “Coalition of Homosexual Groups” in their statement, though it was clear they directed their criticism at Frank Scheuren. They believed the statement judgmental and critical of “homosexual hangouts” and disagreed with “his use of the epithet “demented.” Hayward said Scheuren’s appearance on TV had given the local media an opportunity to use a gay representative to continue associating the Atlanta Child Murders with homosexuality. He said “the media picked up on his “homosexual hangout” comment and particularly on his designation of the murders as “demented sex.”[27]

Frank Scheuren was appointed to Atlanta’s Community Relations Commission at the beginning of the year, taking the place of gay activist Bill Smith who died in the spring of 1980.[28] Scheuren and Kluka had more political clout and access to city hall because of their work with the CRC and the AGC's police sensitivity training program. The press conference and public statement made an impact, whether the L/GRC approved or not. Hayward noted the committee's objections but conceded that Scheuren was also "the most visible gay spokesperson in the Atlanta community." He explained to the *Advocate* that the Media Watch committee wanted to cultivate other members of the gay and lesbian community as media and publicity representatives.

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[26] David Hayward to Scott Anderson, April 9, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, L/GRC Records, Box 55.

[27] Ibid.

[28] “A Sunset People Interview with Activist Frank Scheuren,” *Sunset People*, March 25, 1981, 26-28. AHC,

The purpose of the L/GRC Media Watch committee was to draw attention to common homophobic and bigoted stereotypes about gays and lesbians in the local press. They planned to monitor the local media for "fair and positive treatment of sexual minorities."[29] The same week that Scheuren and Kluka released the statement, the *Gazette* reported on how the committee worked to "confront the straight press." Media Watch members Maria Dolan and Dave Hayward, with Gene Guerrero of the GA ACLU, and Michelle Clad of the AGC met with editors at the *Atlanta Journal* and *Constitution* to discuss negative stereotypes and representations of gay and lesbian people in their reporting.[30] They voiced their concerns about recent articles that implicated and associated homosexuality with child pornography and the unsolved murders. Other organizations spoke out against the media's interpretation of the cases too. First Tuesday issued a statement titled "Homosexuals Made Scapegoats for Police Inaction," which

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ALGHT Box 22.

[29] Maria Dolan and David Hayward for the Lesbian/Gay ACLU Caucus, "Dear Broadcast and Print Journalists," March 9, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, L/GRC Records, Box 55.

[30] "Gay Activists & the A.C.L.U. Confront Straight Press."

questioned the recent angle that attempted to connect a “sex ring” to the murdered children’s cases through “speculation and inference.”[31]

First Tuesday’s statement considered the irresponsible reporting in Atlanta’s local media as having dangerous ramifications. They were concerned the media’s continued representation and equation of child molesters with homosexuality would increase “existing violence” on a vulnerable community that was subject to “violent attacks and lack of police protection.”[32] Many activists believed the negative stereotypes promoted in more “scurrilous stories,” like for example in “Street Kids Become Victims of City Homosexual Network,” effected the lives of ordinary gay and lesbian people.[33] This was felt in the increase of “police harassment of the gay community,” which the L/GRC discussed at their monthly meetings. Judd Herndon, an attorney who represented the L/GRC on the ACLU Board, told the *Gazette* that as he understood the police position the “street crackdown” was an attempt to produce new leads in the Missing and Murdered children’s cases. He questioned if the tactic would produce the desired results and added “Let’s hope they have better sources than that.”

When the L/GRC discussed the increase in arrests and harassment, they also communicated to gay and lesbian people how they could fight back. Judd Herndon reported that a male couple was detained outside the gay bar Jock’s on Peachtree Street apparently for the crime of embracing one another.[34] The two men filed a complaint and were subjected to a polygraph exam, which they failed. Herndon outlined a number of irregularities as the police distributed the results of the polygraph without informing the couple of their rights concerning the test. The L/GRC wanted to educate the gay and lesbian community about their rights and help them navigate the maze of the legal system. To aid their efforts they worked to increase the coverage of their own activities in local gay and lesbian press. They also worked with other groups in the city in this campaign. First Tuesday produced a pamphlet called "You and the Police: A Gay Perspective" which addressed issues of police harassment, prevention of street crime, self-defense, and a related community police issue from a different side—that of not reporting crimes within the gay community due to a fear of discrimination or harassment.[35]

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[31] “Homosexuals Made Scapegoats for Police Inaction,” First Tuesday Association, Press Statement. AHC, ALGHT, FTA Records, Box 49.

[32] Ibid.

[33] “Gil Robison’s Arrest in Park Sparks Challenge of Law,” *Gazette Newspaper*, May 21-27, 1981, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.270.

In addition to tackling the problem of education and awareness in Atlanta's lesbian and gay communities, activists were, some said, "hampered by an atmosphere of ignorance and apathy."[36] Around the 1980 national elections, First Tuesday dropped their affiliation with the Democratic Party and became a non-partisan political action group. In 1981, they increased their political presence in the city as it was a local election year and hosted candidate forums and distributed local election candidate ratings cards. The renewed energy around electoral politics was part of an emerging strategy of mainstream activism. First Tuesday activist Beth Coonan asked Atlantans to look to San Francisco as an example of the path to political power in her essay, "Gay Power and Politics," published in the group's monthly newsletter, *The Healthy Closet*. Though there were many in Atlanta who remained "unpoliticized or who have an inconsistent political philosophy," Coonan remarked that "A look at Reagan's cabinet should be enough to instill fear in all of us." This path, she said, was built from a coalition of people "fighting for social justice."[37]

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[34] Ibid.

[35] "You and the Police: A Gay Perspective" brochure, First Tuesday Association for Lesbian/Gay Rights, undated. AHC, ALGHT, L/GRC Records, Box 47.

[36] Rick Anderson and Tony Rome, "Dear Editor," *The Healthy Closet*, February 1981. AHC, ALGHT, Box 10.

Despite their scapegoating in the recent unrest and their longtime commitment to apathy, Atlanta's gay and lesbian community rallied for Pride that summer. The 1981 "Lesbian/Gay/Transperson Pride" organization released "amplified political demands" as part of the annual Gay Pride Week activities. The enhanced political activism focused on five areas: 1) the repeal of sodomy laws 2) an end to police harassment 3) passage of human rights ordinance 4) an end to racial discrimination (especially in local gay bars) and 5) passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.[38] In a press release about the political demands, gay activists emphasized some mainstream and middle-class values and issues. The issue that was given the most context and attention was the repeal of the sodomy law. Pride organizers devoted four paragraphs to it that addressed the law's interpretation and enforcement in Georgia and also included a short history of sodomy laws in the world. The demands that related to racial and gender discrimination only carried two sentences each about their context and importance in the movement.

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[37] B. Coonan, "Gay Power and Politics: It Works in San Francisco; It Can Work in Atlanta Too," *The Healthy Closet*, February 1981. AHC, ALGHT, Box 10.

[38] "Amplified Political Demands," Lesbian/Gay/Transperson Pride, June 21-June 27, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, Box 60.

Details in the statement about ending police discrimination showed that the gay community faced a considerable and noticeable threat to their safety with the increased police presence in gay spaces in the city. Activists stated that reports of "police abuses" had "increased dramatically" and that arrests came from "selective and heavy-handed enforcement of minor laws, such as parking violations, jay-walking and being in Piedmont Park after curfew." These kinds of arrests were almost normalized in relation to something new that they warned the community about. They said "for the first time in a number of years," cops had made arrests for solicitation of sodomy. They made these arrests by using tactics that activists claimed came very close to "entrapment," noting that officers posed as gay men in gay bars to get their arrests.

Pride's Amplified Political Demands included a commitment to fight racism and sexism, though they were also concerns that were literally last on the agenda. In an early draft of a press statement about LGT Pride in 1981, an activist with the Publicity Committee argued that the gay and lesbian rights movement needed to fight a dual front in order to succeed—one war with the "rest of society" and one with "our own internal selves." The statement read "We see the necessity for exorcising our own body politic/erotic of all the unwholesome, insidious "ISMS" current in America: racism, sexism, classism, fattism, etc."[39] They used the slogan "Openly United Together—OUT!" but in a later release toned down the internal criticism and cast their anti-discrimination position as "part of the new coalition for human rights."[40] They no longer exorcised the

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[39] "Openly United Together—OUT!" Lesbian-Gay-Transperson Pride Week, 1981, Press Release. AHC, ALGHT Box 60.

[40] Ray Kluka, "For Immediate Release" LGT Pride Committee Press Release, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, Box 60.

"insidious "ISMs" but instead considered their purpose was "to promote unity between people." They saw their work as fulfilling a "need for more love, understanding, awareness, and respect" in the community.

The shift in tone indicated tensions and disagreements in the community that were confirmed when the Gay Atlanta Minority Association boycotted Pride that year. The issue of racism within the social community was at the center of GAMA's protest. The group's boycott stemmed from the Pride Committee's willingness to do business with and be sponsored by bars and clubs that were known to have racist door policies and practices. Maria Dolan remembered Pride in 1981 as controversial for other reasons. Some people criticized the name of the event, which was more inclusive than some conservative community members would have preferred. Dolan recalled those who were "unhappy with this radicalism come to some planning meetings in their suits and express their opposition."[41] It is unclear if this was the same or a related protest to GAMA's boycott, but there were systems of prejudice at work predicated on classism and an emphasis on respectability politics that complicated Atlanta's local gay politics.

GAMA was not alone in protesting the racism and sexism apparent in the organization and planning of Pride and they found allies among Atlanta's more progressive and radical political activists. Either as a result of GAMA's boycott or the reason they protested it, Pride in 1981 was noticeably whiter than previous years. A list of speakers dated just a month before the event included the twenty-one activists invited to speak and identified their race alongside their activist credentials. Of the twenty-one speakers listed, nineteen of them were white in self-reported identification. The list also showed that women were not represented in parity; only eight women were included in the roster of speakers and of those only four were lesbians. The four straight women represented a range of liberal political activism in the city. The two black speakers that year were Nada Scott Smith who included a number of feminist organizations in her bio and Natalie Greer whose sexual orientation was listed as "Female Impersonator" and her credits included that she was the "reigning Miss GAMA," indicating that not all members boycotted.[42]

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[41] Maria Helena Dolan and Cal Gough, "Looking Back and Marching Forward: A History of Atlanta Pride," Atlanta Pride Program, 1993, 18. AHC, ALGHT, Box 62.

First Tuesday and the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance issued statements supportive of GAMA's protest. First Tuesday offered support for organizations that wanted to "end discrimination in the gay community" but did not specify how they would contribute to this goal.[43] ALFA issued a longer position paper written by two "white lesbian feminists" in an effort to educate their community. The ALFA women discussed in depth the subject of "Racism In Our Community" and in a section titled "How is Our Community Racist?" they outlined specific examples.[44] In relation to GAMA's protests about working with bars who were known to practice racial discrimination, they named some of the "worst offenders" in the city and included the popular gay bars Numbers, Backstreet, and Limelight. They said these bars had a history of racism that was well-documented in Atlanta's black gay community, but their racism was left unaddressed by the majority of the white gay community. What was worse, they alleged, was that instances of racial discrimination were sometimes covered up by the local gay press. They pointed to a recent case of discrimination involving the Limelight bar that the *Gazette* refused to cover, because, they said, the bar was a *Gazette* advertiser.[45]

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[42] "L.G.T. Pride Speakers 1981," May 25, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, Box 60.

[43] "Statement of Support for Efforts to End Discrimination," First Tuesday Statement, undated, ca. 1981. AHC, ALGHT, Box 46.

[44] Barbara and Sheila, "Racism In Our Community," undated, ca. 1981. AHC, ALGHT, Box 46.

Later that summer Miss GAMA Pageant organizers offered "uproarious and unending thanks" to ALFA, First Tuesday, the AGC, and the L/GRC in the program for the event. The program included an introductory statement about the group, who declared themselves "an organization with a purpose." GAMA's purpose was "to fight for social change, and work against racism, sexism, separatism, and homophobic attitudes."[46] Fighting these issues required a group effort and if gay white Atlantans did not organize in the struggle too they would not accomplish their mission. That fall the L/GRC started to plan a project aimed at eliminating the racist admission policies that were at the center of GAMA's Pride boycott. They developed a survey for distribution to local bars but some members suspected they wouldn't get honest answers or that some bar owners wouldn't support the initiative. By the end of the year the L/GRC abandoned the project or deprioritized it and focused their activism around the issues of police violence and discrimination against the gay community.

Activists from First Tuesday, the AGC, and the L/GRC fielded numerous complaints from the gay community about the police. First Tuesday's statement to the Public Safety Committee that summer showed how frustrated the community was with the uncooperative response from the city and the police.[47] They said they tried to address these issues with everyone from the "individual council representatives, to Lee Brown, to the Public Safety Committee." They singled out Police Chief George Napper as especially unwilling to work with them, stating that he "systematically avoided contacts with our community groups and spokespersons."[48] A few weeks later, members of the Public Safety Committee and Captain Mullis, who represented Commissioner Brown and Chief Napper attended the monthly meeting of the L/GRC.[49] This was an important step in building a better relationship, but some L/GRC members were angered that Brown and Napper were not there to hear them out in person. Members expressed that there was a growing anger in the community. Someone said there would be "violence and militancy" if relations did not improve and that "Atlanta will have its own Stonewall."[50] The comment was well-received as records indicated "The entire group burst into spontaneous applause on this point."

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[45] Ibid.

[46] 1981 Miss GAMA Pageant, Program. AHC, ALGHT, Box 46.

One of the ways that activists sought to end harassment was through building positive relationships between the community and the police. The AGC's Speakers Bureau started to work with the police in sensitivity training when Atlanta City Council representative Mary Davis, an important and longtime ally for the community, arranged a meeting with Police Chief Napper.[51] The Speaker's Bureau was a network of people who volunteered to share their personal stories about sexuality as a form of outreach. The AGC called the training a "major step in improving the relations between the police department and the gay community."[52] Less than a month after the angry outburst at the L/GRC meeting, Speaker's Bureau coordinator Mike Piazza noted positive interactions with the police. In a report to the AGC about their education programs, he said Jack Mowery at the Domestic Crisis Intervention program was "super supportive."[53] Mowery made an interesting suggestion that combined personal outreach with political clout. He thought that a personal appeal to sensitivity from Councilwoman Davis at a police rollcall in her district might have some impact. Piazza also reported that Napper personally called him to discuss expanding sensitivity training and "repeatedly emphasized that he wanted to be accessible to the Gay Community."[54]

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[47] FTA Statement to the Public Safety Committee, August 11, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, FTA Records, Box 49.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Lesbian/Gay Rights Chapter of the ACLU of GA, Monthly Business Meeting, August 26, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, L/GRC Records, Box 55.

[50] Ibid.

[51] "Speaker's Bureau to Train Speakers, Sensitize Police," *Atlanta Gay Central*, September 1981. ALGHT,

The AGC report showed some immediate steps taken by the police and the community to mediate the rising tension. However, Mike Piazza noted that some of the ideas, like Councilwoman Mary Davis's visit to the local police rollcall in her district, couldn't be implemented before the city elections that fall. The timing of the response from the police might indicate that new sympathetic relationship was influenced by electoral politics and the growing clout of the gay and lesbian community. The L/GRC took the lead in community organizing in this era but First Tuesday and the AGC continued to shape the activism of the moment. First Tuesday added to public statements

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AHC, L/GRC Records, Box 47.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Education Monthly Report, September 3, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, L/GRC Records, Box 48.

[54] Ibid.

and called for redress at Public Safety meetings and AGC initiatives like the police sensitivity training worked to promote social tolerance. The L/GRC was at the center of a renewed and active community of politically engaged gay and lesbian Atlantans and they made an impact. Whether it was for votes or for show, there was a thaw in relations between the gay community and the police.

A month later, gay and lesbian activists actully got what they asked for and met with representatives of the Department of Public Safety and the Bureau of Police Services. Members of the Georgia ACLU, the L/GRC, First Tuesday, and the AGC met with Commissioner Brown, Chief Napper, and Mary Davis, who was listed alongside community activists in attendance reflective of her position in the discussion.[55] The meeting reflected the reformist politics of the activists who worked within the system to address their concerns. It also showed they had made enough noise to draw the attention of people who had the power to change things.

First Tuesday member and political activist Beth Coonan advised Atlantans to embark on education campaigns as the best way to build a powerful social justice coalition.[56] She outlined plans for two types of broad education campaigns—one for gay and lesbian people and one for the "non-gay community." In the gay community activists focused on civil rights awareness and advocacy. They distributed literature and talked to victims of police harassment about their rights. Many gays and lesbians resisted politicizing their sexuality because of the dangers associated with coming out and Coonan acknowledged that "it often takes being the victim of police harassment one's self to become politicized." In the other direction, an education campaign focused on non-gay people should "take the mystique away from homosexuality/bisexuality, as perceived by heterosexuals."[57] Educating the non-gay community required a great leap forward in understanding for many straight people because it asked them to admit their privileged position in a society that enforced heteronormativity and rewarded heterosexuality.

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[55] Lesbian/Gay Rights Chapter Meeting, September 22, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, Box 63.

[56] Coonan, "Gay Power and Politics."

This education process between the gay and lesbian community and the non-gay community directly impacted relations with the police, the city, and the state government. These campaigns were only effective if people were willing to engage. Based on past meetings with police officials it was apparent that gay and lesbian activists faced some major impediments to straight education efforts. Earlier in the year, when gay activists met with Commissioner Brown in a similar meeting that addressed many of the same issues, a tense exchange occurred when activists suggested that recruiting gay police would aid community relations. They compared it to recruiting black officers and integrating the police force in that manner. First Tuesday reported that this was a line of reasoning that was not so easily digested as "Brown stated that his sympathies would not be obtained by a comparison with racial issues and wondered if the same question would have been presented to a white commissioner." At the meeting Ray Kluka pressed the subject and argued that it was "a *minority* issue" but Commissioner Brown would not consider the analogy.[58]

Gay and lesbian activists faced a deep divide in understanding when they met with straight officials. They argued their positions as a minority population that was subject to unfair police harassment and targeted for selective enforcement of the laws. Commissioner Brown refused to see how gay or lesbian sexuality was akin to racial identity in constituting a minority community. His resistance to the idea was most likely rooted in his understanding of the problems at hand, which he interpreted as matters of police jurisdiction and duty. At a meeting with activists in 1980, Brown and Napper defended recent arrests made in adult gay bookstores. They said the police had every right to arrest people for breaking the law, wherever it happened to take place, whether at the gay bookstore, gay bar, or in Piedmont Park. The police position was that gay men who solicited illicit sex were subject to the same laws as straight men who solicited illicit sex from women. Brown had asked the activists then, "Are you recommending that I stop enforcing the law in bookstores?"[59]

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[57] Ibid.

[58] "Police Committee Reports."

Some gay and lesbian activists suspected that the anti-gay attitude they perceived on the streets from the local police officers was tolerated by higher-ups and even supported in understanding. At the outset of the meeting with Commissioner Brown and Chief Napper in the fall of 1981, they outlined an agenda which addressed three related areas of concern: "the on-going conflict between the gay community and the Bureau of Police Services," the perception that BPS prioritized arrests for "victimless crimes," and the "selective enforcement of laws."[60] Meeting minutes revealed layers of resentment, frustration, and anger as activists shared a number of stories that showed discriminatory police practices. In a discussion about the use of plainclothes officers in gay bars, activists charged that "if not legally, it is morally entrapment." The police denied having a specifically gay-targeted vice detail, but during the discussion evidence was brought out that police practice on the ground conflicted with policy. Napper explained that officers were investigating other issues in the bars and denied any directive to target gay men specifically. However, activists were told by another officer that "if activities were slow on narcotics then young officers wearing tight pants would go in for entrapment."[61] Gay activists refused to accept Napper's explanation without challenging it. They said it seemed that some officers acted like they went in "for enforcement of homosexual practices," which led to the perception in the community that cops needed to have a "body count."

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[59] Terry Sparks, "Atlanta Gays Confront Commissioner Brown," *Gayzette*, December 25-31, 1980, 8. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.270.

[60] L/GRC Meeting Minutes, September 22, 1981.

Meetings between the gay community and the police usually included time devoted to specific cases of harassment and brutality and this one was no different. In a discussion about harassment in Piedmont Park, activists related a story that showcased what they were up against. They said an unmarked van approached a group of six men standing on a corner at 1:05 AM, five minutes after the official park closing time. Out of the van came plainclothes and uniformed officers who commanded the group of men to stop. They were "detained, handcuffed, searched, and placed in the van," which took them to a downtown station where they were charged with a violation of the park ordinance. One of the men reported that an officer said, "we're going to get those (deleted) queers out of Piedmont Park yet."[62] Gay activists wondered if the more tolerant views expressed in the meetings were not filtered down to the "beat officers."[63] They asked officials if they had "any control of the lower echelon of the BPS" or if they were reluctant to address the issue directly with officers who harassed gay men, in fear of "redneck reprisals." Their line of questions and confrontational tone showed that anger in the community had not subsided. Unable to effect any changes in the situation they said "the rage in the community towards the police is the highest its ever been."[64]

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[61] L/GRC Meeting Minutes, September 22, 1981; Eskridge, *Dishonorable Passions*, 232.

[62] Ibid. The expletive was deleted in the original transcript as it appears in the quote.

The meeting was a breakthrough moment in the relationship between the gay community and the police. Though Brown and Napper admitted that some officers might be anti-gay they "denied the existence" of what many in the gay community believed was an unwritten policy that encouraged officers to entrap gay men. Importantly, though, the police officials "acknowledged the possibility that individual police officers were engaging in unauthorized activities which discriminate against members of the gay community."[65] The police also denied that officers unfairly targeted gay and lesbian bars, but agreed to investigate and review complaints from the gay community. Activists won a significant victory in that officials agreed to take formal steps to address some of the issues. Commissioner Brown requested that the L/GRC coordinate an "Advisory Committee" that would meet regularly to address complaints and concerns in the gay and lesbian community.[66] There was a marked change in the relationship with the establishment of a standing committee that offered stability and continuity to the process.

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[63] L/GRC Meeting Minutes, September 22, 1981.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Lesbian/Gay Rights Chapter, Press Release, September 24, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, Box 63.

[66] Ibid.

Buren Batson, President of the L/GRC, wrote to Commissioner Brown just six days after they met to thank him for a "productive" meeting.[67] Batson expressed his appreciation for an approach that "demonstrated a good faith effort on the part of the Bureau to work with us." He was optimistic about the new committee and eager to get the ball rolling. He told the Commissioner, "we are considering only persons who, we feel, will make positive contributions to the resolution of our mutual problems." Less than two weeks later Batson wrote to Brown about a spike in arrests since their last meeting, an especially upsetting turn because they involved the same types of entrapment issues that had dominated discussions.[68] One officer even admitted that he solicited sodomy from a defendant.

Activists wanted another meeting soon and they wanted to address these specific instances. At the September meeting Batson said the police showed a desire to "foster a commitment to cooperation in solving problems" and restated his sincere thanks for that.[69] Batson informed Brown that the gay and lesbian community group was ready to meet whenever he was.[70] The L/GRC received official notification at the end of October from Commissioner Brown that, as he called it, the "Concerned Citizens of Gay/Lesbian Rights" would meet in the first week of November. Things moved very quickly in the days before and after this meeting. When the L/GRC received confirmation from Commissioner Brown about the date of the meeting, November 3rd, the new community advisory committee moved forward with their own plans.

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[67] Buren Batson to Commissioner Lee Brown, September 28, 1981. AHC, ALGHT Box 63.

[68] Buren Batson to Commissioner Lee Brown, October 10, 1981. AHC, ALGHT Box 63.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Batson to Brown, September 28, 1981.

The activists met at the AGC on November 1st to coordinate ideas related to the L/GRC and DPS/BPS meeting. In a memo from Buren Batson to the committee he thanked members for "consenting to serve" and outlined some of the general conditions of the committee's planned work.[71] He wasn't sure how often or for how long they would meet. But as he understood "the will of Chapter members," their primary task was to address police issues related to the "homosexual community." Batson related the group's mission as concerned specifically with the "homosexual community," which reinforced the single-issue advocacy stance the L/GRC supported at the moment. Other police matter considerations, possibly those related to racism, were not specifically going to be addressed, at least not immediately. At the pre-meeting meeting activists discussed and coordinated these ideas. To direct their efforts going forward they decided to form a new organization, the Police Relations Coordinating Council (PRCC).

Like other activist groups in the past in Atlanta, this committee failed to represent women and people of color. Despite the fact that a dozen or so community activists were involved, the PRCC was mostly made up of white men. Of the twelve people who received the first memo to the advisory committee, only two were women.[72] One was Jean Levine a longtime straight ally with the GA ACLU and the other was Diane Stephenson, former director of the AGC. Though race was not so identifiable, the majority of the people involved with the PRCC in its earlier organization were white and it is likely that no people of color were included. There was a noticeable absence of certain local organizations and neither ALFA nor GAMA were represented at the early meetings. Most members had affiliations or activism histories related to mainstream, middle-class, or moderately conservative gay communities. PRCC members included representatives of religious organizations (MCC, Unitarian Universalist), community activism (the AGC), the gay business community (the Atlanta Professional and Business Guild) and traditional electoral and civil rights activism (First Tuesday and the L/GRC).

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[71] Lesbian/Gay Rights Chapter, Advisory Group- Atlanta Bureau of Police Services Memorandum, October 29, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, Box 63.

[72] Ibid. The twelve people included in this memo were: Buren Batson, George Brenning, Layton Gregory, Gene Guerrero, Judd Herndon, Al Horn, John Howell, Ray Kluka, Jean Levine, Mike Piazza, Diane Stephenson, Jeff Strack.

By the end of November the PRCC had come further in articulating their mission. They would serve as a unifying body for "organizations which are either involved in the problems of police relations vis a vis the homosexual community, or which experience the impact of such problems."[73] A few weeks after they met, PRCC members Ray Kluka and Jean Levine outlined ideas related to the organization as they understood them. In a memo to the group, they tried to represent what activists talked about at the meeting but they also shared their own ideas about how they envisioned the work of the new organization. They wanted the PRCC to be a place where community activists shared information and exchanged ideas. The group would coordinate efforts in an attempt to minimize overlap in activism and they hoped it would be a place where they could resolve conflicts with each other. They envisioned the PRCC as a centralized coalition effort that could delegate concerns to other community groups and create new activism where it was needed.[74]

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[73] Police Relations Coordinating Council, Meeting Minutes, November 23, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, Box 63.

[74] Ray Kluka and Jean Levine, Police Relations Coordinating Council Memorandum, November 16, 1981.

The activists were ready for their meeting with officials. Seven of those who attended the November 3rd meeting were also present at the AGC meeting the weekend before.[75] Despite their advanced preparation the meeting seemed guided by the police as they set an agenda around a number of "Police/Community Action Agreements." They explained to the activists that these were "informal contracts" that served as a "format" for what were essentially written plans that addressed specific tasks and delegated actions to the appropriate actor (community activists or the DPS). These agreements were to act as a "barometer of activities promised to be undertaken."

The group covered most of the issues discussed at the previous meeting and reported on updates. They discussed the AGC police sensitivity training program and learned the outcome of what turned out to be a very limited review of cases and complaints from the gay community. The only cases that were reviewed were those that Buren Batson wrote to Commissioner Brown about back in October. These included the extraordinary incidence of ten gay men arrested in Piedmont Park on a single day. The activists were also told that no formal complaints had been made yet.

Frank Scheuren, though a member of the PRCC, did not attend the meeting with the police. He must have been made aware of this discussion because he filed an official complaint, which focused on his treatment when he was arrested the day before the meeting.[76] His statement revealed a number of questionable and problematic interactions

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AHC, ALGHT, Box 63.

[75] Lesbian/Gay Rights Chapter Meeting Minutes, November 3, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, Box 63.

[76] Statement of Frank P. Scheuren, Department of Public Safety, Office of Professional Standards, Internal Investigations, November 2, 1981. AHC, ALGHT Box 63.

between him and police officers. It is clear that Scheuren interpreted the train of events that led to his arrest as homophobic and discriminatory. On the night of his arrest, Scheuren and his partner, Ken Bond, were stopped in a traffic blockade. The officer asked Bond, who was driving, where he was coming from and he answered from Sensations, a gay bar in the area. Scheuren viewed the officer's questions as homophobic and even though the couple was released from the traffic stop, he escalated the interaction. He had Bond stop the car and Scheuren got out and confronted the officer. Things only got worse as he had progressively aggressive encounters with multiple officers. The officer who Scheuren originally interacted with eventually arrested him for walking in the street, a crime committed during the confrontation.

Frank Scheuren's political activism tended towards personal involvement and was sometimes controversial. He was the primary actor involved in the statement about the child murders that the L/GRC Media committee members objected to in April. In regards to that, Hayward told his editor at *The Advocate* that Scheuren sometimes operated as a "one-man show."[77] When Dolan wrote to Scheuren after their heated discussion she pleaded with him to slow down.[78] In a passage heavy with the anxiety of the era, she worried about how "indispensable" he had made himself in the community. Claiming to be a representational voice was an "exacting obligation" that led to "personal burn-out" or worse. She frankly stated "You know what happened to Bill Smith."[79] Maria reminded Frank that they lived in "extremely volatile times" and there was a real chance that his activism could make him a "logical target." Dolan bluntly asked "Remember Harvey Milk?" She told Frank, "We need no more martyrs."

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[77] Hayward to Anderson, April 9, 1981.

[78] Dolan to Scheuren, April 13, 1981.

[79] Ibid. Bill Smith died of a reported overdose in April of 1980.

"Stonewall Then, Atlanta Now:" New Directions in L/G Rights Activism

The Advisory Committee did not meet again until February of 1982. Members deemed it a legitimate pause as the city transitioned administrations. At the outset activists admitted that progress was dependent on the cooperation of the city and it remained to be seen if Mayor Andrew Young's administration would stay committed to the current course.[80] Activists put off meeting until they had "a better idea of the stance of the new city administration." In the meantime, the PRCC was "developing its own agenda (as opposed to Commissioner Brown's)."[81] At the last PRCC meeting in November the group made some key decisions, like that future decisions would be made by consensus.[82] They also decided that two representatives from seven different gay rights groups in the city would form the council. The group included representatives from the AGC, ABPG, First Tuesday, L/GRC, MCC, ALFA, and members of the Advisory Committee. Only two women attended the meeting (of nine altogether) and neither was affiliated with ALFA, so organizers had yet to address their involvement with the council. GAMA was still notably absent from the record.

When the PRCC convened again members discussed a number of concerns in relation to activism regarding the police and reported on their own projects. The L/GRC and First Tuesday created and distributed posters and cards to educate the gay community about their rights in regards to arrest and police interactions. Frank Scheuren related that no progress had been made on his official complaint filed in November and Buren Batson asked to put the matter of his complaint on the agenda at the next Advisory Committee meeting.[83] It was reported that the police sensitivity training led by Mike Piazza with the AGC received negative reviews from the police after the first session but things had improved since then. Some people criticized the program as having "too many religiously involved persons involved in the training."[84]

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[80] L/GRC Advisory Group Memo, October 29, 1981.

[81] Police Relations Coordinating Council, Meeting Minutes, January 4, 1982. AHC, ALGHT, Box 63

[82] PRCC, Meeting Minutes, November 23, 1981.

At the next PRCC meeting, Mike Piazza, Jim Brock, and Carolyn Mobley presented on the police training.[85] Their course, titled "The Atlanta Gay Community," included five training objectives related to community relations. Some of the objectives were educational and meant to inform the officers about "the presence and size" of Atlanta's gay and lesbian communities and their specific "needs, expectations, problems, attitudes, and resources." Other objectives sought to improve relations between the police and the gay and lesbian people they interacted with. Activists hoped the training would "begin the process of dealing with prejudices which may adversely effect [sic] an officers relationship with and behavior toward the community."

This they addressed in two specific ways—by exposure and education. They wanted to help recruits "be more comfortable" interacting with gay and lesbian people and sought to "dispel some of the myths" that influenced hostile recruit attitudes. Carolyn

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[83] PRCC, Meeting Minutes, January 4, 1982.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Buren Batson to Commissioner Lee Brown, January 25, 1982. AHC, ALGHT, Box 63.

Mobley's participation in the police training was as a representative of "The Atlanta Lesbian Community." Mobley was active with the AGC and involved in the religious community and was well-known in the community as a singer. Taking advantage of her creative talent, her participation in the training took a folksy turn, as training documents noted "Carolyn Mobley will sing a song which conveys the feeling of oppression which women have experienced."[86] The outline noted that the recreational break offered another potential benefit designed to emphasize the sensitivity in the training. They said the song about the oppression of women "is designed to inform the recruits, but also to relax them in their relationship and understanding of where they are coming from."[87]

The AGC and the police continued to build their relationship and expand the sensitivity training that spring.[88] The Center reported that in February Chief Napper met with trainers Piazza and Brock and AGC Director Ray Kluka to discuss the program. Napper offered to expand the training sessions from one hour to two and made other thoughtful suggestions. He reiterated his support for the sensitivity training and told the activists that he would write a letter to recruits about the importance of the program. In addition, he would make sure that at future sessions there would be a commanding officer there to "make sure that hostile recruits do not desrupt [sic] the class."[89] It seemed that Napper was committed to improving relations between the police and gay and lesbian

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[86] Police Training Lesson Plan Draft, undated ca.1982. AHC, ALGHT, Box 63.

[87] Ibid.

[88] In 1981 the Illinois Gay and Lesbian Task Force presented to all cadets at the Chicago Police Academy and similar efforts to educate and sensitize the police to issues with the gay community were made by activists. Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*, 157.

[89] "Police Recruit Training to Expand," *Atlanta Gay Central*, March 1982. AHC, ALGHT, AGC Records, Box 47.

Atlantans and made unofficial reforms that attempted to change the attitudes of some of the more hostile recruits.

At the first meeting of the Advisory Committee in the middle of February the police sensitivity training was discussed in detail.[90] The police agreed that the program was important and needed. In one of the ten cases reviewed (at the request of the Advisory Committee in November) Chief Napper told the Committee there was one officer who he begrudgingly noted "may have made an improper arrest due to inexperience."[91] The officer was "personally counseled on the limits of proper procedure" and a general review of policy was instructed for all plainclothes officers. The AGC optimistically hoped that this kind of intervention might be ongoing. They reported in the Center's newsletter that "Officers who harass gay people are being pulled aside and given "counseling" regarding their problem."[92]

A general procedure review could be problematic, when many questioned the basic constitutionality of those procedures. Activists argued against what they saw as the most blatant examples of rights violations, like entrapment practices that included officers soliciting sodomy, but also questioned more subtle forms of discrimination. Gay and lesbian people felt targeted by the police when they set up roadblocks around gay businesses and neighborhoods or when these places and spaces attracted more police surveillance. The purpose of the increased police presence was sometimes left ambiguous or explained as related to other investigations, but to gay and lesbian people it seemed like they were the target and the purpose was to make more arrests for minor offenses, which they deemed an issue of "fair enforcement."[93] In addition to feeling like targets, they felt discriminated against when subjected to personal harassment from officers who used homophobic slurs and other demeaning language to describe them and their sexuality.

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[90] "Lesbian/Gay Advisory Committee," *The Healthy Closet*, March 1982. AHC, ALGHT, Box 10.

[91] Jeff Strack and T. Hoff, "Top Police Administrators Act to Improve Relations With Atlanta's Gays," undated ca. 1982. AHC, ALGHT, L/GRC Records, Box 55.

[92] "Police Recruit Training to Expand."

Back in November, Buren Batson considered how a procedural issue might prove much harder to fight. He was especially "concerned about a policy that does not violate constitutional rights."[94] Ray Kluka expressed skepticism about the police's ability to police itself on the conduct issues at the heart of their complaints. Police Chief Eldrin Bell told the Advisory Committee that he issued a memo about the gay and lesbian community and proper policies related to arrests but when Kluka asked to see a copy of the memo, he refused to share it. It seemed to activists that the police reiterated policies that were not obviously illegal or prejudiced, yet still allowed for the unofficial targeting and harassment of gay and lesbian communities. The policies defined the lines the police could not cross but left everything else open to interpretation.

Policy and procedure could be reviewed and amended. Police prejudice against gay and lesbian communities remained unstated and not written into work directives and therefore harder to correct by direct confrontation. The need to change the attitudes of recruits and officers could only be measured by what happened on the ground. At the end of January the L/GRC wrote to Commissioner Brown about their next meeting and expressed the opinion that relations were improving. However, it was noted that only "some members" thought this and only in "some areas."[95] If there was an improvement it was due to the efforts of the people involved in the Committee and the Public Safety officials who "manifested in their individual commitments to continued meeting and cooperation."

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[93] L/GRC Meeting Minutes, November 3, 1981.

[94] Ibid.

Activists knew the Committee's success was dependent on the cooperation and engagement of the police, which was influenced by the support personally shown by Public Safety Commissioner Lee Brown and Chief George Napper. The entire process was disrupted in March when Brown announced that he was leaving Atlanta for Houston, where he was offered the job of Chief of Police. First Tuesday representatives attended a "farewell tribute" for Dr. Brown, whose doctorate was in criminology. They reported that members of the Advisory Committee "feel that it is partially due to Brown's efforts that trust is increasing between this community and the force."[96] Brown involved himself in the process of community relations and seemed to genuinely support the efforts. In December of 1981, when the Advisory Committee was taking its final form, he wrote to Ray Kluka to personally request his membership on the Committee. He described how he viewed it as a group who "in conjunction with the law enforcement officials, identify problem areas and appropriate strategies for their resolution." In a personal statement that validated Kluka's activism, he said, "I feel that this is a most important need and respectfully request your participation."[97]

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[95] Batson to Brown, January 25, 1982.

[96] "Tribute to Lee Brown," *The Healthy Closet*, April 1982. AHC, ALGHT, Box 10.

[97] Commissioner Lee Brown to Ray Kluka, December 7, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, Box 63.

In addition to Commissioner Brown's support, Police Chief George Napper enjoyed a generally positive relationship with activists too. In early March he personally thanked L/GRC President Buren Batson for his efforts and, as he had at meetings before, opened himself up to more communication. He told Batson "it is important to know that at any time that you think I can be of service in helping to enhance relationships and communication between the Gay Community and the Bureau of Police Services all you have to is to let me know."[98] After Lee Brown left, the Public Safety Department and Bureau of Police Services changed under the new administration of Mayor Young. The relationship that gay and lesbian activists built with Commissioner Brown and Chief Napper took years to create and was severely tested the next year.

The Missing and Murdered children's cases closed when Wayne Williams was tried and convicted in February of 1982.[99] The years of violence created a deep wound in many communities in the city, including those of gay and lesbian people or "Queers" as Maria Dolan called her community.[100] That spring the *Gay Community News*, a national publication from Boston with a more radical perspective, published Dolan's "Atlanta Vertigo: A Dispatch From the Front," an essay about living through the "Nightmare." She related how the straight media portrayed the murders in sensationalist and heterosexist ways as they sought a "homosexual" motive. This led to the popular opinion from "Jane Q. Public" that "faggots were responsible" and "murder and molestation are our calling cards."

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[98] Chief George Napper to Buren Batson, March 3, 1982. AHC, ALGHT, Box 63.

[99] Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 122-25.

[100] Maria Helena Dolan, "Atlanta Vertigo: A Dispatch From the Front," *Gay Community News*, March 27, 1982, 5. AHC, ALGHT, Maria Helena Dolan Papers, Box 76.

This connection of sexuality to the murders exposed divisions in the gay and lesbian community too. When these theories were floated Dolan said they were "treated to the disserving spectacle of white male Gay "leaders" yapping to the newspapers about how the killer "probably was Gay."[101] Dolan voiced her opinion about Frank Scheuren's press statement and media appearances earlier that year and her reference to it again in "Atlanta Vertigo" showed she was not likely to forget the damage that some activists could do to the community. But a year's time shifted her criticism to the continuing issue of racism in Atlanta's gay community. Dolan recounted that at the time of the "Coalition's" press conference, GAMA asserted their right to speak for themselves as members of the gay community but did not have the same kind of clout or access to the media. Their statements were largely ignored by the press. For Dolan, and many others, the issue was racism and it affected how mainstream, white, and middle-class Atlantans lived, whether gay or straight.

The length of time it took the police to solve the murders prolonged, exposed, and exacerbated complex social community issues that were unique to Atlanta, the largest city in the Southeast. The recent violence against Atlanta's poor and working class black communities brought into stark relief that many issues of social justice remained unsolved. Maria Dolan argued that though the Missing and Murdered children's cases were the main story in Atlanta's press for years, commonplace violence against women remained a non-story. In a show of how interconnected the issues were, Dolan pointed out how violence against women was often racialized in Atlanta's media. She argued that the high rate of murders of black women went unnoticed in the city papers, but a recent attack involving black men and white women garnered a fair amount of space. The years of violence impacted Dolan in a new way. She said

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[101] Dolan, "Atlanta Vertigo."

> In my own life, the unthinkable has been shown to be entirely possible. So I vary my routes to work, accept fewer speaking engagements, have a fetish about door locks, and have overcome my aversion to firearms.[102]

Despite these changes, she felt compelled to believe in the possibility and the "illusions" of Atlanta. Among its many better points were the "wonderful Womyn, the Fairies, the multi-culturality" and other arts and entertainments. However good these things were, they were tinged with racism, sexism, and classism that divided the cities many communities. She compared it to living "under pallid clouds which may disgorge lighting any time."

"Stonewall Then, Atlanta Now" was Atlanta's Gay Pride theme in the summer of 1982. Activities that week were meant to make Atlanta's gay community "Shine with Pride." The week-long celebration culminated in a parade on Saturday June 26th.[103] The program listed the week's activities around the city, many of which were socially oriented like the opening celebration, an "L.G.T. Pride Carnival and Street Dance."[104] There were religious services, panel discussions, musical performances, softball games, and parties every day of the week from Saturday June 19th to Sunday June 27th. Almost every big gay bar in the city participated in Pride festivities that year, including The

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[102] Dolan, "Atlanta Vertigo."

[103] "Stonewall Then Atlanta Now," L/G/T Pride Week Program, 1982. AHC, ALGHT, Box 60.

[104] "Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!" Stonewall Then, Atlanta Now Pride Ad, *Metropolitan Gazette*, June 17-23, 1982. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.270.

Cove, Backstreet, The Armory, the lesbian bar the Sportspage Lounge, the drag bar Illusions, and Crazy Ray'z.

As a result of racial and class dynamics that mirrored the mainstreaming political movement, Atlanta's Pride celebrations in the early 1980s underwent a political softening.[105] There were numerous opportunities to engage with politics at various events throughout the week in Atlanta, but the march itself was transformed into a parade. For many people, both for and against the idea, Pride became more of a celebration than a political demonstration. Local activist Adrian Kimberly was angry with disappointment that it was not a more overtly political march and derided the "parade" value.[106] Kimberly called Atlanta's Pride a "cruel joke on the community played on the community by the community." The main source of Kimberly's anger at the parade was that it marked no change in the community related to their legal rights. The annual Gay Pride celebrations became just another party that masked their continued repression.

Adrian Kimberly railed against Atlanta's apathy as other activists had before. In the aftermath of the murders and in the midst of a publicity crisis earlier that year, Maria Dolan criticized the white gay male community for its "antebellum preppiness" exhibited by their "scornful, Scarlet Oharaesque [sic] hauteur."[107] Likewise, Kimberly mocked a stereotypical gay Atlantan's viewpoint on gay rights, politics, and the police. He imagined their internal Scarlet O'Haraesque dialogue would sound something like,

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[105] Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout,* 155; McFarland Bruce, *Pride Parades*.

[106] Adrian Kimberly, "A Letter From a Friend of the Editor," *Metropolitan Gazette*, July 1-7, 1982, 5. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.270.

[107] Dolan, "Atlanta Vertigo."

> It's dangerous, I tell you, downright dangerous to go riling up those cops and everybody with talk of "rights" and "equal protection" for us faggots. Why, they know we're lower than whale do-do, so why waste your party time trying to force 'em to change? They don't *want* to even consider that as human beings we deserve consideration, so why bother? Let's party![108]

In a statement that reflected a jaded acknowledgement that things would continue in Atlanta much as they had, Kimberly resigned himself to Atlanta's apathy. He said "But the partys [sic] go on!" So let's party. At least until the police get here with their billy clubs and handcuffs and drag us all away while the politicians look on approvingly."[109] The night before the Pride march the police did arrive with handcuffs when they raided the Club Exile, a private club located in the Peachtree Manor Hotel.[110] *Metropolitan Gazette* reported the police got "into the spirit" of Pride's theme that year, "Stonewall Then, Atlanta Now." The paper compared the raid at the Club Exile to the raid at the Stonewall thirteen years before in New York City. Four men were arrested that night in Atlanta—one couple for sodomy, which an officer witnessed during the raid. The other people arrested were two Club Exile employees, the manager and desk clerk, who were charged with operating a private club without proper licenses and for "maintaining a disorderly house."

Metropolitan Gazette reported that at eleven o'clock, "on the eve of the annual gay rights march," two officers in plainclothes attempted to take the public elevator in the Peachtree Manor Hotel to the third floor of the building where the Club Exile was located. The elevator was programmed to only stop at the third floor if it was called and the officers, apparently unaware of this safety feature, were forced to return to the lobby where they signed it at the front desk as "guests in the health club." After they signed in they were taken to a different employee-operated elevator and escorted to the Club Exile. Minutes later a dozen uniformed officers rushed into the lobby and attempted to get to the third floor too. The elevators were unavailable but the police told Carl Wilkerson, the desk clerk, to take them to the club or else be arrested for interfering with an investigation. They thought Wilkerson was stalling and denied him the chance to go back to the desk, where he could have alerted the Exile's patrons with a warning. The police found just two of the approximately twenty men in the club criminally engaged. One officer "allegedly" saw two men having sex and charged them with sodomy, which one of the couple's lawyer said was "a serious crime" that was psychologically "devastating." The lawyer implied a lot about his client when he told the *Gazette* that the typical sodomy defendant was one who had no prior criminal record and was "not emotionally prepared to deal with this like a hardened criminal would be."[111]

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[108] Kimberly, "A Letter From a Friend."

[109] Ibid.

[110] "Club Exile Raided by Atlanta Police, Four Arrested," *Metropolitan Gazette*, July 1-7, 1982, 10. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.270.

One *Metropolitan Gazette* source told the paper the raid was undertaken to prove to the public that the police were not providing protection to the Club Exile. The police told the manager, Gordhan Patel, that recent accusations from some gay businesses in the same neighborhood prompted Major Vernon Worthy to take action. The *Gazette* said that Worthy told the manager that "he was being arrested to prove that such rumors were untrue" and that he "owed him no favors." Some people in the gay community questioned whether or not the desk clerk, Carl Wilkerson, was the real cause of the raid.

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[111] "Club Exile Raided."

Patel blamed the raid on Wilkerson, who he said was scheduled to be fired that weekend because of arguments with hotel patrons and club members, but also because he annoyed the police by making too many emergency calls.

The *Gazette* noted that some of the theories and information surrounding the people and places didn't add up. It seemed important to them to note that just one week before the raid, Wilkerson had apparently filed a complaint with the police about a recent incident at Club Exile. He claimed that an officer "acted in an improper and homophobic manner" when he was called to the hotel to deal with an attempted robbery of one of the hotel's patrons. Wilkerson called the police after a guest and his partner went to their room, where the partner attempted to roll him. Wilkerson, who previously worked security for Club Exile, held the hustler for the police. When the officer arrived, he arrested both alleged criminal and victim for simple battery rather than address the attempted robbery of the gay man.[112] Wilkerson claimed the same officer had "exhibited homophobic attitudes" when called to the club in earlier instances.

Homophobic attitudes in the police were well-documented by gay and lesbian activists and were at the center of recent activism with the Advisory Committee, the L/GRC, and the PRCC. *Metropolitan Gazette* reflected that many in the gay community felt like the city was on the cusp of a revolution. They compared the Club Exile raid to the moment of transformative rebellion after the raid of the Stonewall in the streets of New York City in 1969. That kind of protest in the streets was not how Atlanta's lesbian and gay activists approached the issue in 1982 though.

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[112] "Club Exile Raided."

After Lee Brown's departure Police Chief George Napper was promoted to Public Safety Commissioner. As the new administration took shape relations with the gay and lesbian community deteriorated. By the end of July, tensions had only increased, which prompted Buren Batson to write to Commissioner Napper regretfully and with "grave concern." In addition to the raid on the Club Exile there was a recent increase in entrapment arrests that involved undercover police and the solicitation of sodomy. Batson cautiously wanted to sort out the facts and give the police the benefit of the doubt. But he was clearly concerned that if community reports were true than there was "a violation of the trust which our community had placed" in the police and the city. Taking a moderate approach that exemplified Atlanta's political style, Batson preferred reform from within rather than protest, though he hinted at the community's anger and their potential. He told Napper that he wanted to "resolve through discussion what others have urged be resolved more radically."[113]

The increase in harassment and targeting of the gay community seemed "an abrupt reversal" from recent efforts to better police-community relations. Buren Batson thought Chief Napper committed to an "effective, efficient, and just police force" and someone who personally supported their efforts. Batson diplomatically offered that maybe Napper's "commitment has not been communicated effectively," but realistically considered that their efforts were "routinely and consciously subverted" by others. Batson was committed to a process of "negotiation, cooperation, and training" and his long letter to Commissioner Napper revealed much about his personal leadership style as well as internal movement divisions. He said some activists "jump to conclusions and presume guilt" where others took the time to "consider proper investigation and reflection." Batson's moderate approach faced significant strain because of the increased tensions though. Speaking for the L/GRC, he said their "willingness to restrain more reactionary elements and our patience in the face of continuing complaints and an apparent cavalier disregard for civil liberties" was reaching its limit.[114]

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[113] Buren Batson to Commissioner George Napper, July 22, 1982. AHC, ALGHT, Box 63.

A Perfect Case

Fighting the police locally was an important aspect of the broader movement to end restrictions on gay and lesbian sexuality that were maintained by the state.[115] Atlanta's local gay and lesbian activism was influenced by the way that the fight to end sodomy laws developed in the national gay and lesbian rights movement. Because there was no national agreement on sodomy (either in federal law or judicial decision) the movement was hindered by uneven progress in challenging individual state sodomy laws. Activists hoped to get a decision in their favor in the federal system, which would settle the matter for the rest of the states with sodomy laws. Challenging these laws took community resources and focused the energy of activism on local issues and fights.[116]

By the early 1980s many states had decriminalized or abandoned sodomy laws as they revised and modernized their criminal codes. In the places most associated with national gay and lesbian political rights activism, in New York City, San Francisco, Los

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[114] Batson to Napper, July 22, 1982.

[115] Hobson, *Lavender and Red*; Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*; Hanhardt, *Safe Space*.

[116] Eskridge, *Dishonorable Passions*.

Angeles, and Chicago, sodomy was decriminalized by the state either in judicial suits brought by activists or by state legislatures.[117] In Georgia, and every other southern state, sodomy remained illegal. In some states the acts involved were only criminal between same-sex participants. Atlanta activists challenged the state's sodomy law in federal court in 1983, in a case that eventually made its way to the Supreme Court. That year local and national gay rights activists got together to coordinate their efforts at striking down sodomy laws where they still existed and activists from Atlanta joined in the efforts.[118]

Lambda Legal coordinated the group of activists from different states who were all challenging different laws. Georgia's lawsuit originated in the arrest of Michael Hardwick, a gay man who lived in Atlanta, for sodomy in August of 1982. In the year leading up to Hardwick's arrest, activists made serious efforts to address problems the gay community had with Atlanta's police. The L/GRC had been organized and working for a year and half and they were seemingly no closer to resolving their concerns with the police. When Hardwick was arrested it gave activists an opportunity to challenge the sodomy law, in a seemingly favorable case. Hardwick was arrested for consensual sex practiced in his own bedroom and not in public, a fact which they believed would better support their challenge to the constitutionality of the sodomy law.

Terry Sparks, a local activist and victim of entrapment, called for the gay community to support anyone "willing to stand up in court and fight conviction" back in

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[117] Illinois was the earliest state to decriminalize sodomy in 1961; California in 1975 and New York in 1980. Eskridge, *Dishonorable Passions,*124-27, 200, 219-22.

[118] Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc., Memorandum to "Sodomy law litigator's conference participants," October 13, 1983. DU, Sears Papers, Box 115.

1980 before the L/GRC existed.[119] Finding people to stand up in court and face the repercussions of such a trial proved to be a real problem for the L/GRC. The two men arrested for sodomy during the raid of the Club Exile did not come forward publicly and the *Gazette* honored their privacy and did not print their names. The lawyer who represented one of the men implied that they'd never been arrested and now faced a felony charge, which would change the rest of their lives. When Michael Hardwick was arrested for sodomy in his own bedroom, it appeared to be another targeted and homophobic instance of the police harassing gay men.

Michael Hardwick and his partner were arrested for sodomy by Officer Keith Torrick in early August, just one month after Hardwick first encountered Torrick when he issued him a citation for drinking in public. Hardwick testified that on the night of July 4th he worked late installing insulation in preparation for a new disco opening at the Cove, a well-established, long-running, and popular gay bar in town.[120] He left work with a beer but threw it in a trashcan outside the bar because he decided wasn't in the mood. Officer Torrick saw him throw the beer out and made him get into his car where they argued for nearly twenty minutes. Torrick asked him what he was doing in the area and Hardwick told him he worked at the bar, "which immediately identified me as a homosexual, because he knew it was a homosexual bar." Hardwick said "he was just busting my chops because he knew I was gay." [121]

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[119] Nichols, "An Entrapment Victim Speaks Up," 7.

[120] Peter Irons, *The Courage of Their Convictions* (New York: Free Press, 1988, 2015), 393-94.

[121] Ibid. and Eskridge, *Dishonorable Passions,* 232.

On the morning of August 3rd, Michael Hardwick was again arrested by Officer Torrick. This time for having sex with another man in his bedroom. How Torrick came to be in his bedroom was another matter as activists questioned the legality of his entrance into the apartment. Hardwick's description of his arrest catalogued a host of irregularities that bordered on illegalities: questionable entry into his home, an invalid arrest warrant, and a pre-arrest beating at the hands of those he thought connected to the police. Torrick came to the apartment to serve a warrant related to the earlier citation, which he processed after Hardwick failed to appear in court. However, due to a mistake on the day and date written on the citation, the warrant was invalid by the time Torrick came to serve it. This didn't matter in the end as the officer said he entered the apartment on good faith, where he then witnessed a separate crime.

The warrant was issued because Michael Hardwick failed to appear in court. Officer Torrick went to serve the warrant that same day, which is how Hardwick was alerted to the discrepancy on the citation. Hardwick questioned why the officer came to his house looking for him on the day before his court date but it turned out the citation was filled in wrong. Hardwick paid his fine and was issued a receipt from the clerk just in case anything else happened but he thought the issue was behind him. Hardwick's account of his treatment when he and his partner were booked into jail confirmed that homophobia and harassment had influenced the interactions as Torrick made repeated comments to other officers and incarcerated people about the two men as "cocksuckers."[122]

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[122] Irons, *The Courage of Their Convictions*, 396.

Just days after his arrest for sodomy, Clint Sumrall with the L/GRC contacted Michael Hardwick for a meeting.[123] Sumrall told Hardwick they were constantly checking the court dockets for a case like his that could open the way for a federal challenge to the sodomy law. Hardwick eventually agreed to work with lawyers from the Georgia ACLU and said "one thing that influenced me was that they'd been trying for five years to get a perfect case."[124] Sumrall explained to Hardwick all the factors that worked against them in the past, from victims who did not want to come forward, or who dropped out for fear of losing a job, home, or family relationships. Many people over the years were arrested but Hardwick's circumstances made him a good test case as he was out to his family, worked in a gay bar, and willing to pursue the case.

That fall Michael Hardwick met with around ten lawyers from different liberal organizations and affiliations. For legal representation he chose John Sweet, who was with the ACLU, and Louis Levenson, who had served on the legal committee for the Atlanta Gay Center. The lawyers advised Hardwick it was possible that an unsympathetic judge could sentence him to up to twenty years in prison if found guilty of the sodomy offense. They planned to challenge the sodomy arrest but their strategy required pleading guilty to a related marijuana charge that stemmed from Torrick's search of his bedroom when he was arrested. Sweet and Levenson's representation drew suspicion from the prosecutor's office, who rightly thought they were attempting a bigger challenge.

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[123] Eskridge, *Dishonorable Passions,* 233.

[124] Irons, *The Courage of Their Convictions*, 396-97.

District Attorney Lewis Slaton declined to bring the sodomy arrest to court, which meant that Hardwick was unable to challenge its legality.[125] Slaton's delaying tactic was just one of many used over the years by city and county judicial officials to create additional burdens for gay and lesbian community activists. Journalist Peter Irons described DA Slaton in generally neutral terms, but also as someone who "kept a tight leash" on his men. This interpretation missed some important aspects of the local relationship between Slaton and Atlanta's gay and lesbian communities. Earlier that year, for example, activists issued a public letter to Slaton that criticized his homophobic "gaybaiting" turn in the prosecution of Wayne Williams.[126] It seemed that Slaton quietly maneuvered his way to the desired outcome that fall. At some point he told the press he was personally against adult consensual sodomy laws, though it was beyond his power to change the law.[127] Slaton did not bring the case to trial because the details around it presented some difficulties, but his failure to do so was not because he was a friend or ally to gay and lesbian rights activists. Slaton used the system to his advantage when he refused to bring charges to court and effectively stopped the activist challenge for the moment. For Hardwick it meant the case loomed over him for possibly four years (the legal length of time Slaton had to resolve the case) and the possibility that he could go to jail.

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[125] Irons, *The Courage of Their Convictions*, 396-397.

[126] Activists wrote on "behalf of all the citizens of Atlanta and of Fulton county who happen to be homosexual," to protest the prosecution's attempt to implicate homosexuality as a motive for the murders. The activists who signed the letter were: Buren Batson, Susan Martin, Frank Scheuren, Beth Coonan, Tom Drum, Mike Piazza, Jeffrey Cashvan, Eugene Gregg, and Eugene Loring. "Dear Mr. Slaton," *Sunset News and Interview*, February 25, 1982. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.206.

[127] Irons, *The Courage of Their Convictions*, 382-83.

CHAPTER 6

EQUAL JUSTICE:

ANTI-RACISM IN GAY AND LESBIAN COMMUNITY ACTIVISM, 1981-1983

Racism in the Gay Community

The L/GRC discussed a project that would address racism in the gay community in the fall of 1981, specifically how to combat discrimination at the gay bars and racism in the local social scene.[1] In a direct approach, an early draft of a letter to bar owners acknowledged that racism was a "recurring and thorny problem."[2] After several revisions, L/GRC member "T." addressed some of his concerns with the project in a memorandum to "Smokey" regarding the "GayCLU action against racism in the gay community."[3] He asked questions about what the group planned to do with the results of the proposed questionnaire and survey. T. was concerned that official complaints would be denied or dismissed by bar managers and owners when challenged on their racism. If legitimate grievances were denied outright, he wondered what kind of enforcement mechanism the group could wield to get bar owners to comply. T also worried that some people would interpret the project as the implementation of a racial quota system.[4] In his estimation, the current project did not serve the needs of the community.

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[1] Similar initiatives took place in Chicago and Philadelphia in this period. Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*, 150; Mumford, *Not Straight*, 177-78.

[2] Draft Letters, "Racism in the Gay Community," October 21 and October 7, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, FTA Records, Box 50.

[3] "T." was most likely, founding member, Tom Hoff, who was later President of First Tuesday, worked for the gay bar magazine *Cruise* and became the News Editor of a gay magazine, *Etc.* that began publishing in 1985 and continued to publish into the 1990s. D. Patrick Coleman, remembered "Tom (or T. as he's better known)" for his unique disposition. He had "a sometimes abrasive determination to follow anything through to the real facts." D.P.C. (D. Patrick Coleman) "Word, etc." *Etc.* V1 N5, 1985, 6. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

T recommended combatting racism by cultivating personal contacts and relationships with bar owners. He thought the official style of action and project-oriented approach would not be effective in Atlanta. T argued that solving the issue of racism was too complicated, though to others it probably seemed fairly straightforward. His arguments against the project showed how racism in the city was conditioned by class and reflected further divisions based on a status of professionalism and education. T sidestepped the issue of race and explained in the memo to Smokey, that

> I'm no longer certain that anyone can really do anything at all about discrimination in our bars. The issue is not so much racism as what's pretty and what's not pretty. I'm not sure you can litigate an aesthetic of good faith.[5]

The issue was racism, but the real problem was with the gay men who went to clubs and demanded white majorities.[6] He said "if the owners concerns of lost business are correct, then it's the general faggot that needs an education, not necessarily the bar owner."[7]

The L/GRC fight against racism in the gay community was de-prioritized that fall. T's memo to Smokey showed that there was a lack of will devoted to the project that affected its progress. The burst of organizing and activism around the police also shifted the focus of the L/GRC. Around the same time that members revised their plans on the racism project, a small group of men met on a "cold November evening" at Crazy Ray'z to discuss the formation of an organization that would make the fight against racism the center of its activism.[8] A month later an Atlanta chapter of the national group, Black and White Men Together (BWMT) held their first official meeting at the Atlanta Gay Center. BWMT was founded in San Francisco in 1980 as an interracial social community but each chapter was unique to its local community.[9] In Atlanta the group framed their organization in the context of urban boosterism and aligned itself with the city's new mantra.[10] They described their organization as an event when "an idea came to America's fastest growing international city."[11]

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[4] Memo from T., "GayCLU Against Racism in the Gay Community," November 17, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, FTA Records, Box 50.

[5] Memo from T.

[6] In the mid-1970s, Studio One, a massive and popular gay disco in Los Angeles faced similar criticism about door policies that were discriminatory but theoretically based on creating prestige and exclusivity in the gay consumerist market. See Andrew Joseph Henkes, "The Golden Age of Gay Nightlife: Performing Glamour and Deviance in Los Angeles and West Hollywood, 1966-2013" (PhD diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 2013), 68-71, 75.

[7] Ibid.

BWMT embraced a "three-way" organizational mission that included meeting the social, political, and educational needs of its members. Their founding marked a change in the city's black gay organizing and the growing divide between anti-racism activists and the city's mainly white middle-class gay political organizations. BWMT was compelled to pick up the fight and organize against racism in the gay community, an area where GAMA failed to make any real progress and the L/GRC retreated. That summer's GAMA Pride boycott and the abandonment of the L/GRC project were symptomatic of divisions in the community. When the L/GRC deprioritized the project to fight racism that decision likely influenced the formation of BWMT/Atlanta. BWMT's activism represented a new kind of interracial social and political community.[12] Early in the winter of 1982, they reported that at their first official meeting, eighty five men "met in warmth and friendly atmosphere" despite it being "one of the coldest days on record in Georgia."[13] By the summertime BWMT/Atlanta had grown into an active community, just six months old. The group met at planned social events, rap groups, and in established and working committees, which they reported on in a monthly newsletter.

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[8] Tom Hammond, "What is Black & White Men Together?" Chapter Information, Black & White Men Together Atlanta, http://www.bwmtatlanta.org/index.php/about-us/club-information . (Accessed on July 25, 2017).

[9] David Palmer, "Imagining a Gay New World: Communities, Identities, and the Ethics of Difference in Late Twentieth-Century America" (PhD diss., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2011), 256-58; John Charles Hawley and Emmanuel S. Nelson, *LGBTQ America Today: An Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009) 788-89.

[10] Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 140-41.

[11] "BWMT/Atlanta Arrives," *BWMT Newsletter*, February 1982, 1. Black and White Men Together Records, MSS 903, Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center, Box 1. Hereafter cited as BWMT Records.

In June the BWMT Political/Educational Committee started a project to fight discrimination in Atlanta's bars.[14] The Committee wanted to coordinate their efforts with other groups to fight common and pervasive forms of discrimination. These practices included multiple carding policies and "exorbitant admission and membership fees at the door." BWMT confronted the issue of racism in the gay community in two major battles the next year. One brought the issue of employment discrimination into public discussion and the other aimed at eliminating racist door policies at gay bars and clubs. Finding that negotiation and cooperation had reached an impasse with some bar owners, BWMT activists, in coalition with the L/GRC, proposed a solution outside the gay community that went straight to city hall. They drafted and successfully lobbied for the passage of the city's first anti-discrimination policies for bars.

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[12] "BWMT/Atlanta Arrives."

[13] G.H. "BWMT Comes Together For Warmth," *BWMT Newsletter*, February 1982, 2. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

[14] "Updates on the Various Committees Within BWMT/Atlanta," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, June 1982. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1; Mumford, *Not Straight*, 177-178; Palmer, "Imagining a Gay New World," 257-58.

The L/GRC and BWMT substantially changed the gay and lesbian community in Atlanta and shaped the politics of the decade. Gay rights activists launched campaigns and organizations that worked cooperatively to tackle urban issues and were sometimes successful in effecting real change. Conflicts with the police were the paramount concern of many gay rights activists during these years. Often it seemed that gay rights activists cared most about community-police issues, which left the issues of racism and sexism behind and deprioritized.[15] The organizations that formed in the early 1980s and their members crisscrossed divisions and group lines as they used their influence for the good of the community they advocated on behalf. Sometimes they fought against one another and occasionally fell to grandstanding and political power grabs.[16] These groups were instrumental in effecting change in the city and pressured politicians and the gay community to think about how politics affected their personal lives. Each of these organizations asserted the politics of sexuality as they created and interacted with the gay community.

"Can We Dance at the Armory?": BWMT and Anti-Racism Activism

The 1983 ordinances closed the large loopholes in public accommodations practices that allowed gay bars the flexibility to deny entrance to those who did not fit a desired "look," which most often in Atlanta meant they were black. The Club Exile admittance policies described in the press on the night of the raid in the summer of 1982 showed how the club protected the privacy, security, and safety of the gay men inside from criminals, homophobes, and sometimes the police. For these reasons the Club Exile restricted their clientele as a private club that required membership. The extra precautions ensured that only vetted people were admitted, but it also kept the clubs desirably "exclusive." These policies in effect allowed for de facto segregation in Atlanta's gay social world. Management and doormen often upheld unstated agreements about the number of black people they allowed into a club.

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[15] Timothy Stewart-Winter, "Raids, Rights, and Rainbow Coalitions: Sexuality and Race in Chicago Politics, 1950--2000" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2009), 285-88; Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*, 150.

[16] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*.

James Ford told members of the local group, Friends for Lesbian/Gay Outreach, about the different ways the city's gay establishments practiced discrimination. These included multiple carding requirements, security that harassed patrons, and a more ambiguous form of discrimination that used private restrictions as an excuse to refuse people of color and women entrance to certain clubs.[17] Ford described one night where he and a white friend went to the Locker Room Baths together but when they purchased memberships they were separated. His white friend was admitted but Ford was asked to have sponsorship from an existing member. Ford explained that his only contact had just purchased a membership and was inside. Management did not allow him to make contact with his friend and told him that since he technically knew no members he had to leave.[18]

Interracial couples who faced discrimination were an important source of energy for BWMT.[19] The group of mostly men used socializing as a primary means to politicize their community. GAMA organized for out gay black people in Atlanta but had to defend itself from the perception that it was a separatist group that excluded white people. BWMT organized around a distinct duality of black and white that proved problematic in different ways.[20] As the group continued to organize, members hosted potlucks and parties that were primarily social but also integrated political awareness and social consciousness into their conversations. Some members met in consciousness raising groups called "raps," which were informal and open-ended discussion meetings that encouraged black and white gay men to talk about political issues. These raps included local topics of concern like racism in the gay community and police relations as well as more personal discussions about interracial dating. The informal and social meetings allowed BWMT members the mental and emotional space to discuss complex and charged topics in a way that most of southern society did not encourage, even within the gay and lesbian community.

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[17] James Ford to Friends for Lesbian/Gay Outreach, September 5, 1982. AHC, ALGHT, FTA Records, Box 50.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Other BWMT chapters had different community feelings, some were more social than political. See Benjamin Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure and Social Movement* (New

Racial prejudice and class dynamics influenced a conservative wing of gay political and civic activism in the city. In Atlanta, a wealthy, educated, and successful group of gay business owners and some professionals modified gay rights initiatives to suit their more conservative politics. These, mostly, white gay male business owners and professionals were vocal in advocating their position as they asserted their right to speak on behalf of their gay community. Their position rested on the economic power they held in the social community of gay life in the city, namely as the voice of the gay bars and

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York: Routledge, 2011), 58-61.

[20] Jason Lee Crockett, "Narratives of Racial Sexual Preference in Gay Male Subculture" (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2010), 61-63.

other businesses that catered to the gay community and they represented a generally conservative gay community.[21]

GAMA boycotted a number of Gay Pride events in 1981 because they were sponsored by bars known to discriminate. Their boycott seemed divisive to some. After Pride in 1982, BWMT reported that no group boycotted the celebration in a "show of unity."[22] As a sponsored Pride week event, members Melvin Ross and John Eppes led a seminar on "Racism in the Gay Community," which drew around thirty people. BWMT's activism suggested a different approach from GAMA and reflected a moderate style. Over the next year, they relied on negotiation and community arbitration built through personal relationships and behind-the-scenes engagement. Members believed that discriminatory policies could be eliminated with discussions between management and community representatives, much like the Advisory Committee's approach to police relations. These methods were severely tested as bar managers, owners, reporters, and lawyers got involved and engaged in public battles over policies with activists.

Eric Caplan expected to get a "quick, quiet round of drinks" at the popular gay bar, the Armory, on the same day that Michael Hardwick was arrested for sodomy. He was disappointed to find a line for the club that he later learned was due to restrictions around membership cards. The Armory had no membership policy before and Caplan was angry about the change. The next day he sent an open letter to *Metropolitan Gazette* and BWMT about the deeper issues at stake in the discussion about gay clubs and private membership. Both printed it in their publications. Caplan was angry about the Armory's decision to go private because it implied an elitist enclosure. He said it was one of the few discos in the city that didn't charge and it "seemed like the last bastion on unrestricted dancing."

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[21] Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, 128-30.

[22] "L.G.T. Update," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, July 1982. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

He considered the justifications for the new policy. It could raise funds for the club or keep them competitive. Caplan noted that membership policies kept the "riff-raff" out, which he implied was a polite euphemism for racial discrimination. He said that the closing of the black gay club Jock's a year earlier increased the "number of black patrons" at the Armory. Though Caplan had only lived in Atlanta for a few months, he was already familiar with the city's style of racism. He explained in language that passively accepted the status quo.

> Tradition has it that many white customers are chased away by what they perceive as an abundance of blacks, in whom they find objectionable personality traits and no sexual attraction. In my experience this flight has not been an imagined phenomenon. So tradition also has it that stemming a tide of black influx is a necessity for gay business survival. The Armory, therefore, had merely acted in its own business interest by imposing membership.[23]

Admissions policies that kept women out of bars and limited or denied entry to people of color were reinforced by many prejudices that were commonly accepted in Atlanta's gay social world. The policies reflected the fact that many white gay men preferred a racially and sex-segregated community. Not all white gay men in Atlanta agreed with the continuation of such racism and discrimination. Eric Caplan was "saddened" that gay men in Atlanta "regularly condone such blatant racism."[24] He called them hypocrites for demanding political activism for gay rights, but on matters of race they were "cruel and discriminatory" in "our own pursuits."

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[23] Eric Caplan, "To the Editor," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, September 1982. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

[24] Ibid.

Eric Caplan's letter was an honest admission of his political and social limits. He stated "I abhor all forms of politicking" and declared himself no activist; he would not boycott or protest if called to action. He even confessed that in a few days he would probably return to the Armory and get a membership because he liked it there. Caplan thought he was not the only one and others like him were the "vast, silent majority of homosexuals" who functioned "by absorbing injustice, not fighting it." He knew his future Armory membership would be another injustice absorbed, one that represented a shameful capitulation to racism. He said it would always remind him of "one time I was not proud to be gay, one time I was ashamed of what I am." In a dramatic finale he closed his letter, "I cry for you Atlanta. I cry for you Armory. I cry for myself, for at times I am no better."[25]

The power of racism in Atlanta seemed immovable. Caplan's letter was a criticism of tactics, politicians, and gay rights community activists even though he didn't directly address any of them. His apathy and passivity showed that campaigns to educate and politicize the wider gay community on racism and discrimination were falling short. Just five days later, BWMT Co-Chairs, Melvin R. and Grieg L., in addition to Thos. Shipley, a "Concerned Citizen," met with the Armory's management to discuss community concerns about the club going to private membership.[26] The Armory addressed specific parts of Caplan's complaint and said that an invitation-only event held on the night of his visit was the cause of the long line that kept him from quiet drinks on a

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[25] Caplan, "To the Editor."

[26] Melvin R., Grieg L., Thos. Shipley, "Letter to Editor," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, September 1982. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

Wednesday night. In a report of the meeting, the BWMT community representatives felt positive about the Armory's commitments and "had no particular problems" with their explanations.

Other generalities the activists accepted on good faith. They pressed manager Greg Troya for answers on questions regarding a future membership policy. They believed him when he agreed that when and if the Armory decided to become private they would announce it in the gay press and enforce rules regardless of race. Just as Caplan had, BWMT recognized the rights of businesses to make policies that profited them but also suggested improvements to these policies that would ensure they not become discriminatory. Negotiation and cooperation was their preferred method of activism and they thanked Armory management for an "informative and responsive meeting."[27] They felt the meeting indicated the "beginning of greater intra-communication in the gay community" and contrasted their optimism with Caplan's negativity, stating that it was "one time we can be proud of what we are and not ashamed!"

Just a few weeks later there were new allegations about the Armory that showed less of a good faith effort to address the problem of racism. In an article about the meeting between BWMT and Armory management, *Metropolitan Gazette* noted that Grieg L., the white co-chair of BWMT, had fielded additional complaints since the meeting. He said they hoped to have had a longer peace, but Grieg believed the understanding reached between management and the community had been violated.[28]

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[27] Melvin R., Grieg L., Thos. Shipley, "Letter to Editor."

[28] "BWMT Confers with the Armory on Racism," *Metropolitan Gazette* Vol. 3 No. 34 reprinted in

Grieg shared that in two different instances black patrons were "told to buy a drink or leave the bar" but that white patrons without drinks "were not bothered." In addition, they were still hearing rumors about membership cards being sold despite reassurances from management that they were not. Troya explained to *Gazette* that membership cards were given to "the bar's old customers" to avoid the lines. He also countered that the increased crowd size forced them to become more competitive and to enforce new drink minimum requirements. The problem wasn't racism but that people didn't buy drinks when they came to dance. Troya said "There's no prejudice. We're just here to make money."[29]

There was more alarming news about the Armory by the time BWMT's October newsletter went to print. John Arthos, a white gay man, wrote to BWMT about an incident that happened late in September that left him feeling "personally very alienated by this developing situation."[30] One Friday night he was headed to the Armory and found himself in line behind two black men who were told by the door attendants that new policies required two picture I.D.s or one picture I.D. and an Armory membership card to be admitted. Arthos overheard and assumed he would be denied admission like the black men who were turned away because he did not have the multiple required I.D.s or membership card. Disappointed and wondering what to do with his Friday night, he lingered in the parking lot. To his surprise, the door attendants "started trying to get my attention by calling and whistling and gesturing to me to come in."

BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter, September 1982. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

[29] Ibid.

[30] John Arthos, "To the membership of BWMT," September 25, 1982, *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, October 1982. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

John Arthos said he reacted much like a deer faced with headlights. He "stood there blankly" playing dumb and "pretending I didn't see or hear them." However, he was not content to let events play out. Seeing one of the two men previously refused admittance nearby, he approached and told him what just happened. Together they found a spot out of sight from the attendant and watched the door. They saw several white men enter the club, seemingly only showing one I.D. Then two black couples were turned away and Arthos and his new friend caught their attention and drew them into their surveillance. The group saw more white people enter.[31] The racism they witnessed was "not a new experience for most blacks," but Arthos said he didn't "expect to see it so blatantly at the Armory."[32] The Armory's new policy was not unique but he was alarmed at how widely accepted open racism had become in Atlanta. Other bars had similar policies, like Backstreet, probably the most popular and well-known gay disco in town. Arthos wondered about Atlanta's future as additional bars were likely to implement more policies like these. He felt alienated by this event and what it symbolized. Underlined in his letter was the indictment that "We are not far from being a community from which blacks are totally ostracized."

BWMT co-chairs, Melvin Ross and Grieg Leonard, considered the last newsletter of 1982 a special issue. Members reflected on their one year anniversary and introduced the issue with a special essay, entitled "We Have a Dream," that highlighted the group's activism over their first year. The co-chairs said the newsletter was "a noticeable departure from our normal format" and focused on specific recent events "which demonstrate that Atlanta is now more racist than it has been in many years."[33] The issue contained detailed and forceful responses in the form of public letters addressed to specific people and the community where "racism was exhibited."[34] The co-chairs presented clear critiques, likely honed in rap groups and discussions over the past few months. The special issue newsletter was focused on BWMT's political activist voice because at the moment it was a particularly active period for political mobilization. The co-chairs asked fair but confrontational questions of the people and organizations who claimed to represent Atlanta.

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[31] Mumford, *Not Straight*, 177-178.

[32] Arthos, "To the membership of BWMT."

These moments touched on the local politics of sexuality and race and how they were represented in a national context. How Atlanta was portrayed abroad was a key issue for BWMT and they wanted to correct the record, highlight their activism, and draw attention to the glaring and unaddressed issue of racism in the gay community. BWMT continued to press the issue of racism and discrimination at the popular bar the Armory, which finally enacted a private membership policy that fall. In the article "Can We Dance at the Armory?" they reported that some people had already noticed the policy was used to keep black people out of the club.[35] They called out the Atlanta Business and Professional Guild and Tom Drum, the President, for recent unprofessional and racist comments made at national meetings.[36] In a letter to the Editor at *The Advocate*, they criticized a recent article about Atlanta because it failed to depict any person of color.

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[33] "We Have A Dream," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, December 1982. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

[34] "We Have A Dream."

[35] "Can We Dance at the Armory?" *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, December 1982.

[36] Co-chairs, "To Mr. Drum and ABPG Members," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, December 1982.

The article about gay life in Atlanta made no mention of the vibrant gay black community in the city, BWMT, or the "inter-racial community."[37]

Their final letter was addressed to the Mayor of Atlanta, Andrew Young and concerned comments made in an *Advocate* interview.[38] They took issue with the statement that Young could not make "a primary cause of mine" a "fight for sexual self-expression." They criticized him for equating gay rights with gay pride and asserted that the real issue was "civil rights!" They extended an invitation to the Mayor to meet with BWMT in an attempt to create a better dialogue between straight and gay black people in the city. They pointed out that recently Washington D.C. Mayor, Marion Berry, who was "very supportive of gay rights and gay issues" addressed BWMT when they met for their annual conference in D.C. The national conference was scheduled to meet in Atlanta in 1984, co-hosted and planned by the Atlanta and Memphis chapters. BWMT found it an "interesting contrast" that Berry was supportive when compared to Andrew Young's qualified and limited statements.[39] They hoped their letter would help the Mayor "re-think" some of his positions and when the national association met in Atlanta in 1984, Mayor Young would address their organization as Mayor Berry had.

Melvin and Grieg addressed the gay community with direct confrontations about racial discrimination in the local social scene and prejudice in gay community organizations. BWMT made sure their side of a developing story was documented in their letter to Tom Drum and the ABPG. The controversy began when ABPG representatives made negative public statements about BWMT at a gay and lesbian leadership meeting in Dallas. In what appeared to be an attempt to explain the absence of minority representation in the Guild, someone said that Atlanta's black gays were too busy with BWMT to join their efforts. Charles Stewart, a black gay activist and co-chair of the national BWMT organization wrote a letter to the National Business and Professional Guilds objecting to the characterization of Atlanta's BWMT chapter.[40] His letter drew their attention and the issue was discussed at a national conference that met in Washington D.C. in November.

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[37] Co-chairs, "To the Editor of the Advocate," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, December 1982.

[38] Co-chairs, "The Honorable Mayor Young," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, December 1982.

[39] Kwame A. Holmes, "Chocolate to Rainbow City: The Dialectics of Black and Gay Community Formation in Postwar Washington, D.C., 1946–1978" (PhDiss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011), 210-12.

Charles Stewart and BWMT/Atlanta's concerns were addressed but it was not in a way that resolved the conflict. At the meeting in D.C., the ABPG's Tom Drum reportedly defended the previously stated position and included the charge that BWMT "could not find time to meet with him or keep appointments."[41] BWMT immediately and vigorously objected to what they saw as a deliberate attempt to mischaracterize their organization and community. They countered that just recently, on November 11th, BWMT and the ABPG's Tom Drum were scheduled for a business meeting and even though Drum confirmed the meeting he "did not show up or cancel." BWMT's more political members were clearly frustrated with the local gay community and its failure to address racism and discrimination at home.

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[40] BWMT referred in name to the group as the National Business and Professional Guilds. This may have been a unique organization but it is also possible that the organization they referred to was the National Association of Business Councils, incorporated in 1980, which seemed to be a professional group and a gay and lesbian chamber of commerce. Their records indicate that sometime in 1983 the group was organizing around racism and they issued a "Racism Committee Report." National Association of Business Records, Finding Aid, GLBT Historical Society.

[41] Co-chairs, "To Mr. Drum and ABPG Members."

While BWMT struggled against indifference and outright racism, other parts of Atlanta's gay community flowered and the blooms attracted national attention. BWMT was acutely aware of how their city was represented outside of Atlanta. The co-chairs unleashed their anger, annoyance, and incredulity in their letter to the *Advocate* about what they saw as the whitewashing of Atlanta in a recent edition of their magazine.[42] They criticized the publication of a city feature by Ken Bond called "Southern Exposure: Atlanta and Its Blossoming Gay Community." BWMT's response to Bond's article was a local and national issue that struck at the heart of how racism worked in the gay community. They sarcastically thanked the *Advocate* for "a guide to the white and gay businesses of Atlanta," which represented the city as a "white middle-class haven." BWMT backed up their critique with evidence too as they pointed out that of twenty-seven people shown in the issue, none were black, and they added there were no women either. It was clear to them that the article was not reflective of a city with a "67% Black population," not to mention one that included women.

BWMT's letter to the *Advocate* was tinged with disappointment, because, as they said, it was "the single most important gay paper in this country." Articles like Bond's, that paid no attention to black people contributed to what they thought was a "distorted view of our city and the South in general." Part of the distortion came from the erasure of black people from popular depictions of the South. This was compounded and supported by journalistic and literary generalizations that left unstated the racial representation of the South as white. Bond's article heavily relied on the gay business geography of the city and its impact in Midtown to convey Atlanta's gay community growth. He reported in great detail on the work of the ABPG and quoted Tom Drum extensively, but failed to mention BWMT at all. In their letter to the *Advocate*, BWMT said they hoped future coverage of the city would show a truer picture of life in the "southern mecca" and not just "a guide of the city and organizations whose apparent purpose is only to perpetuate themselves."

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[42] Co-chairs, "To the Editor of the Advocate," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, December 1982.

BWMT's special issue newsletter showed that real problems of substance needed to be addressed in the community. The Armory article updated members on changes at the club and how management rolled out these changes. The Armory went private over the Thanksgiving weekend and now required a membership card or a three dollar admission charge. People said the admission charge "was not a fixed requirement if you were white." BWMT reminded people that it was not just the Armory, but other bars like Backstreet and Weekends, that "set the precedent in our community" with discriminatory practices like racial tokenism and selective admissions that constituted a "blatant violation of civil rights."[43]

Some bars practiced discrimination under the guise of private membership, which was why BWMT was generally against them. They acknowledged that other bars in the city, like The Cove and the Pharr Library, enacted membership policies without allegations of racial discrimination so they thought it was possible to have them and also not be racist. In a related and deeply troubling issue was the problematic use of the police to enforce discriminatory admissions practices at gay bars. BWMT said the "use of uniformed police personnel in enforcing and supporting such discriminatory practices implies the consent and acquiescence to such practices by the local governments who employ these police officers."[44] An incident with an officer working at Weekends led to an official complaint being filed. As others had found out before, their complaint was for the most part ignored. Activists inquired about the status of the complaint and were told it was apparently resolved when the police investigation found "that the badge number and name of the officer did not match."[45]

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[43] "Can We Dance at the Armory?"

That fall when James Ford wrote to Friends for Lesbian/Gay Outreach he detailed personal instances of discrimination he experienced in the four years he lived in Atlanta. He also commented on the problematic relationship of the police with gay bars who practiced racial discrimination. Ford recalled that black people would be turned away at the door to Numbers, a popular gay bar with drag shows, based on "improper ID." He pointedly enclosed the phrase "improper ID" in quotes to highlight the well-known but often denied racism that lurked beyond. Ford said that at Numbers, the decisions made by doormen and managers were enforced by an "off-duty Fulton County deputy sheriff who was the security guard who was so low-down and always helped the doorman to refuse anyone that he did not like, sometimes threatening arrest or using abusive language."[46]

When things with the Armory started to heat up BWMT held an open meeting to address community issues and the police. Allida Black and Mike Piazza with the Atlanta Gay Center and Buren Batson with the L/GRC came to the meeting. *Metropolitan Gazette* reported that one of the most "substantive results" was that BWMT was invited to have representation on the Police Advisory Committee, which up that point they pointed out was all-white.[47] Melvin Ross attended the next police advisory meeting in September but as he just joined was unable to contribute much to the conversation. That night's discussion revolved around "the effectiveness of the committee and suggestions for future courses of action." Even though new to the organization, Ross suggested that a roundtable format and follow-up meetings might be helpful. About a dozen members of the community attended the meeting and considered the deeper questions regarding their organization in the informal group. Interestingly, Tom Drum was unable to add to the discussion because as meeting minutes recorded, he arrived after that part of the meeting convened.

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[44] Ibid.

[45] "Can We Dance at the Armory?"

[46] Ford to Friends for Lesbian/Gay Outreach.

Joining the Police Advisory Committee was an important step in acknowledging and recognizing BWMT in the community of gay rights activists in Atlanta. It was also an important step in creating a network of activism that reflected their vision for the city. They declared "Yes, we too have a dream—our right to exist in an inter-racial community." The right to an inter-racial gay community was a central aspect of BWMT's philosophy and mission. They wanted to end racism in the gay community through interaction and integration. Ending discrimination in the bars was an issue where they could push the gay community to do better with a little help from the law. In November, Judd Herndon, a local lawyer and activist with the L/GRC and AGC, came to BWMT's general meeting where he talked about "fighting institutional racism on the part of local gay establishments."[48]

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[47] "BWMT & Other Community Members Meet About the Police," *Metropolitan Gazette* reprinted in *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, September 1982.

[48] "Gay ACLU Lawyer Speaks to BWMT," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, January 1983. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

The activists further discussed strategies to fight racism that could produce "concrete steps" and legal and enforceable measures. These included the possibility of "litigation against a gay bar (probably Backstreet or Armory)" and developing a response system for discrimination reports that would help groups evaluate and document incidents for "possible future legal action." A third option was based on a strategy recently effective in Washington D.C. Activists there passed a city ordinance that established uniform standards for bar admissions related to I.D. requirements and required businesses to post those requirements in a "conspicuous place." This strategy appealed to activists in Atlanta because it went outside the local gay community to resolve the issue and used local municipal politics to address racism. By the end of 1983, they had successfully lobbied for the passage of anti-discrimination ordinances aimed at Atlanta's gay bars.

BWMT developed as an organization dedicated to social, political, and educational missions in the gay community. At the end of 1982, the group had been together for just one year but made an impact on the city, similarly to how the L/GRC dominated activism in 1981. BWMT had a diversified strategy to engage the community. They frequently met for social events that included potluck dinners and game nights and in rap groups to discuss politics and issues of identity, racial and sexual, which were clearly geared to a community of middle-class and professional, mostly men. Fighting racism was at the heart of BWMT as an organization. They did so in political and educational campaigns but also in the social and support community the created as an organization. In an intimate and safe environment members were free to participate in difficult conversations that might have left them emotionally exposed and attacked in other settings.

In the spring of 1983, BWMT member John A. reported on the progress of the "Racism Workshop" which had met several times over the past months in small discussion groups of about five to ten people. Though formed to work through issues particular to "interracial relationships and settings" much of the discussions instead focused on "issues relating to black culture and the relation of blacks to the white world."[49] The centering of black people and culture in discussions did not mean the group suffered from a racial "imbalance in participation." The group viewed it as a reflection of the organic flow of conversations focused on the dynamics of black and white relationships in the gay community. As a group they agreed on some basic understandings of the dynamics that organized their relationships. The first related to a lack of awareness about black culture, politics, and economics by whites. The second related to problems within interracial relationships which they believed stemmed from "barriers created by white society against blacks." Other subjects addressed in the workshops were the "lack of participation of black gays in the political struggle," class dynamics in black society, the treatment of whites in black spaces, and how class impacted acceptance and tolerance of "variant sexual practices."

The group centered their discussions around these ideas but also created a middle ground where members addressed the impact of this system on them as individuals. Their plan was not to discuss the "reasons for the reality," but to assess how they felt as people,

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[49] John A., "Racism Workshop Report," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, April 1983. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

"black and white, in the context of this division." These discussions were essential in creating an ongoing dialogue between members who sought not just to reach planned and practical solutions to problems. The workshops allowed people to think about how they interacted with racist and classist systems. It was a unique approach that BWMT developed in countless chapters across the country. As they organized around practical and systemic problems they also sought change on a deeper more personal level.

The dynamic between personal change and political activism made BWMT a different kind of organization. It was similar to ALFA in that members seemed to think of themselves as part of a collective community engaged in a sustained consciousness-raising that resulted in living a revolutionized life. As ALFA developed in their first few years, a core group of women emerged who were committed to living their lives by their politics—lesbian feminism. In the same way, a core group developed in BWMT that also lived by their commitment to interracial activism, social, personally, and politically. BWMT was a distinct group dedicated to interracial organizing who engaged in activism on their own terms and politicized their community in their own way.

When GAMA formed in the late 1970s, the issue of racial discrimination at gay bars was one of the prime motivations to organize a group that centered race in gay civil rights activism.[50] Years later many of Atlanta's biggest and most popular gay bars had still not confronted or addressed racial discrimination. This led to the GAMA boycott of Pride events at those bars in 1981. Around the same time the police advisory group picked up speed, which likely influenced choosing one track of political activism over another, and support for anti-racism projects fell. BWMT picked up where GAMA left off in agitating for change, but instead of direct protest, they opted to negotiate and discuss their way to resolutions and compromise. When BWMT met with the Armory's management to discuss concerns about the club going private and recent allegations of racial discrimination, they kept an open mind. They took the Armory's willingness to meet with them as an understanding of good faith but they were later disappointed. It became clear that some of Atlanta's gay bars were willing to publicly commit to change but unwilling to actually change as they continued to enact policies and restrictions that allowed for racial discrimination. By the end of the year BWMT members, and especially the co-chairs, had reached a boiling point in their anger. With their special issue newsletter they addressed multiple controversial subjects, but especially read the gay community for not just being apathetic about racism but for supporting it.

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[50] Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 297.

"Equal Justice:" The Politics of Gay and Lesbian Reform Activism

BWMT introduced "Equal Justice," a column that addressed "various items of a legal and legislative nature" in understandable and relatable terms in the second issue of their monthly newsletter.[51] The column's writer went unnamed though he was identified as "a person connected with the legal profession in the Atlanta area."[52] When he introduced a series of articles on practical and professional considerations in gay relationships he noted the "topics are written with Georgia law in mind."[53] Some of the articles on joint property ownership, banking, and wills later became a pamphlet entitled

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[51] "Equal Justice," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, March 1982. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

[52] Ibid.

[53] "Equal Justice," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, June 1982. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

"Legalities for Lovers" that they distributed at national conferences.[54] The Equal Justice column was an important public service to the community because it offered the perspective of someone knowledgeable of the law and familiar with the bureaucratic systems. It offered a matter-of-fact and direct analysis of civil rights issues as they pertained to gay and lesbian people.

In the first Equal Justice column the author related a recent and horrifying example of what he called "one of the most frequently unreported crimes in the gay community, the crime of police harassment." One Sunday evening a friend of his who was "not effeminate" but "unmistakably gay" was stopped in a police roadblock on his way to Backstreet. Without cause he was arrested for driving under the influence and the police refused to administer a requested breath test. He was jailed and only released the next morning, with no charges or hearing. He was subjected to a civil rights violation and suffered a new trauma when he was raped multiple times in jail that night. The column outlined what options people in the community had to combat this kind abuse. These included filing suit against officers for civil rights violations or filing official and documented complaints with the appropriate systems and individuals.

In January of 1983, Equal Justice was devoted to a discussion of sodomy laws.[55] Sodomy as defined by law criminalized "acts considered by most to be natural and necessary to their personal growth and development." These laws were enforced on consenting adults with a range of sexualities, but "gays and prostitutes tend to be the most frequent victims of these laws." Observed by an officer in an act of sodomy and people were arrested and charged with a felony crime, which carried with it a possible prison sentence of from one to twenty years. An additional burden for gay men and prostitutes was the criminality of the pursuit of sodomy known as "solicitation," which led to entrapped Atlantans and was a source of constant disagreement between the police and community activists.

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[54] "Atlanta and Convention-Washington D.C.," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, July 1982. AHC, BWMT Box 1.

[55] "Equal Justice," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, January 1983. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

The BWMT member who wrote Equal Justice considered privacy a key issue in the debate about sodomy laws. He thought most people would agree with the sentiment that "What occurs between consenting adults in private should be of no one's concern except those individuals." However, and it was a point the argument hinged on, he said that most people would find some area of grey around the issue of what constituted "in private." Some people assumed "reasonable expectations of privacy" in certain public spaces, like in a private booth at an adult bookstore, with a "closed door to a public bathroom," or even at the baths. He pointed out the assumption of privacy was ill-conceived as many gay men were arrested in just these places for sodomy.

Equal Justice considered two cases that might have important implications because they further tested the limits of privacy protections. Both involved two gay male couples arrested for sodomy in their own homes, where they believed they had a reasonable expectation of privacy. He explained that when an officer observed a couple engaged in sodomy it rendered the context of an arrest. Most same-sex sodomy arrests were not made inside private homes, but in public places like on the tree trails at Piedmont Park or in a business, like in the police raid at the Club Exile. In the first example, a gay male couple was arrested for sodomy when an officer—from outside the building—observed the two men having sex in their apartment due to the fact that the couple's room was without curtains or blinds. The officer was called to the area to investigate a different matter but having witnessed the felony act, he arrested the two men for sodomy. Despite the fact that they were in their own home it was "determined not to be private."[56]

This decision did not bode well for the second case, which was not yet decided, but the Equal Justice column optimistically noted "the jury is still out." That case also involved two men arrested for sodomy, which they committed in what they assumed was the privacy of their own home. The details of the second case looked very much like Michael Hardwick's arrest, though the column did not mention any specific names or locations. The circumstances were described as such:

> The second incident involves two consenting adult males having sex in the bedroom of a leased house. The door to that room is not fully closed. A police officer, looking for one of the tenants at the house, is allowed on the premises by one of the roommates. He walks past the room and sees the sex acts being performed. Both participants are arrested for sodomy.[57]

Discussions about the limits and definitions of privacy as they related to sodomy arrests were an important aspect of advancing the conversation. The author reiterated that the "larger issue" was whether or not sodomy laws were still necessary. He considered them of "questionable merit in today's society." The issue of privacy was multi-faceted and complex, but sodomy laws were the real target. Making a direct connection to BWMT's interracial identity, the author said "Like the miscegenation laws, sodomy laws should be reevaluated."[58]

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[56] "Equal Justice," January 1983.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

After Michael Hardwick was arrested he could have faded back into the city, another victim of police harassment. Instead, he chose to be part of a civil rights challenge that exposed him and his life to the public and carried with it the possibility of a not insignificant jail sentence. He personally decided to risk coming forward when he met with local gay and civil rights activists who he believed capable of making a successful attempt to change the law. By the end of 1982, though, the state declined to present charges against Hardwick for his August arrest. Without any indication that District Attorney Slaton planned to indict Hardwick, it seemed the state successfully and passively ended the conversation.

The original plan required the DA to move first so that Michael Hardwick could be convicted of violating the state's sodomy law. Then the activists could challenge Hardwick's conviction making the claim that Georgia's sodomy law was unconstitutional. When Slaton simply didn't move, he forced the team of activists and lawyers to give away their plan. To push the issue Hardwick's lawyers sent a letter demanding his case be brought forward. Slaton said he would not bring Hardwick's case to court and even stated that he did not believe sodomy laws should be used against consenting adults acting in the privacy of their own home.[59] This positioning slipped around the real issue because it kept sodomy laws in place, where they would continue to be used to harass, marginalize, and criminalize gay and lesbian people.

The decision to not press the case against Michael Hardwick seemed yet another delaying tactic designed to continue the long, time-consuming, and costly process of legal activism. It also fit into what looked like a defensive strategy by the state to generally wear the activists down. Kathleen Wilde, a lawyer with the Georgia ACLU joined the suit in 1983 and represented Hardwick in the federal lawsuit. She described how the activist lawyers were out-maneuvered by DA Slaton. She said:

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[59] Irons, *The Courage of Their Convictions*, 382-383.

> The suspicion is that the ACLU's potential involvement and potential constitutional challenge were brought to the attention of the DA, who decided not to proceed with indicting the case. So, they basically frustrated any chance to fight the constitutionality of the statute in state court. So what we did was then begin to think about a challenge in federal court, and by we, initially it was George Brenning, Clint Summerall [sic], John Sweet, Louis Levinson and myself.[60]

Instead of dropping the case, which was the likely desired effect of the DA's strategy, the team decided to come out and openly make it a civil rights case.

On Valentine's Day in 1983, John Sweet and Kathleen Wilde filed suit in federal court.[61] Their complaint named Georgia State Attorney General Michael Bowers, District Attorney Lewis Slaton, and Public Safety Commissioner George Napper and initiated a direct challenge to the constitutionality of the state's sodomy law. Hardwick's lawyers argued that the law violated a constitutional right to privacy as outlined in the Due Process Clause and Georgians First Amendment rights to freedom of expression and association.[62] The lawsuit would be expensive and activists understood that one of the major obstacles they faced was funding. They started a new organization called Georgians Opposed to Archaic Laws (GOAL) to "coordinate and steer" fundraising efforts. These included raising $25,000 for court costs, legal fees, and "other costs necessary to provide for a professionally prepared case."[63] It was soon clear they would need the money to take the next step in the process.

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[60] "Wilde Hopeful About Hardwick Case," *The News*, April 25, 1985. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[61] Eskridge, *Dishonorable Passions*, 234.

[62] Ibid.; Irons, *The Courage of Their Convictions*, 385.

[63] Georgians Opposed to Archaic Laws, "Georgia Sodomy Law Challenge," undated, circa 1983. DU, Sears

Two months later Judge Robert Hall dismissed the challenge.[64] Attorney Kathleen Wilde said the judge issued a "three page, very perfunctory order" that upheld Georgia's sodomy law. By then the case had expanded to include a married heterosexual couple who joined the suit because they felt their rights to privacy were infringed on too, as the law applied to all people regardless of sex. Judge Hall cited precedent for his ruling, the 1976 Supreme Court case *Doe v. Commonwealth*, which upheld Virginia's state sodomy law. He said that "all the constitutional arguments made by Hardwick here were rejected in *Doe*."[65] Wilde explained that Hall "basically said that the decision upholding the Virginia sodomy statute was binding precedent, and that means the issue is closed, there is no constitutional issue pending and that all claims have been foreclosed."[66]

Many gay and lesbian legal activists thought *Doe v. Commonwealth* was not a settled matter of fact. The challenge to Virginia's sodomy law was never argued before the Supreme Court because they declined to hear the appeal. The decision to not hear the case left the lower court decision in place, which upheld the state's sodomy law. But there was some ambiguity around the absence of a direct ruling on the constitutionality of sodomy laws that left open the possibility for another challenge. Michael Hardwick related that in the early months of the case, their legal strategy was to keep the DA from becoming "suspicious" of their true intentions, but they had to rethink their approach

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Papers, Box 115. Hereafter cited as GOAL.

[64] Irons, *The Courage of Their Convictions*, 385.

[65] Ibid. 386.

[66] "Wilde Hopeful About Hardwick Case."

when he forced their hand. Hardwick's lawyers anticipated the federal suit would be dismissed and when it was, he said, they "assured me that was okay."[67]

What came next was a long wait as their case queued up in the docket of the 11th Circuit Federal Court of Appeals.[68] In July it was announced that GOAL was awarded a seven thousand dollar grant from the Chicago Resource Center in their effort to fund the challenge to Georgia's sodomy law.[69] GOAL was involved in extensive outreach efforts that summer, not just to fundraise for the cause, but also to educate the community and its many organizations about the current litigation and its implications. Members included George Brenning, Clint Sumrall, Gene Loring, Allida Black, and Mike Piazza, and other activists with ties to numerous gay and lesbian rights organizations in the city. The group declared that "GOAL's goals are the elimination of laws that restrict the private, personal lives of Georgia's citizens."[70]

The spring of 1983 was busy for activists in Atlanta. In the last week of April, the Southeastern Conference for Lesbians and Gay Men met for the second time in Atlanta. When the conference last met there in 1978 it was quite controversial as a site of heated discussions, arguments, and a boycott. It was much less controversial in 1983. Most of the biggest gay and lesbian organizations in Atlanta participated and activists presented on major issues in the community. Mental and physical health workshops covered AIDS, substance abuse, and building healthy relationships. ALFAns offered a "Lesbian

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[67] Irons, *The Courage of Their Convictions*, 385-86.

[68] Eskridge, *Dishonorable Passions*, 235.

[69] "Archaic Laws Get Hit From Chicago," *Cruise Newsmagazine*, July 22-July 28, 1983, 3. AHC, ALGHT, Box 32.

[70] GOAL, "Georgia Sodomy Law Challenge."

Herstory" panel. Maria Helena Dolan co-led a workshop on "Reviving Ancient Heresies," which covered "Tarot, Astrology, Wiccan circles," and more related to "matriarchal spirituality."[71] Franklin Abbott, a therapist and Radical Faerie, led multiple workshops and Allida Black co-led a panel on literature with the well-known gay author Armistead Maupin. Buren Batson, Judd Herndon, and Alan Robinson from New Orleans led a workshop on "Police Community Relations." Kathleen Wilde presented an "informational workshop" titled "Challenging the Sodomy Laws" that outlined the work of GOAL and the legalities involved in the current challenge.

BWMT Atlanta and Memphis split their leadership in two different workshops. Atlanta's Grieg Leonard and Joe Calhoun from Memphis led the workshop "BWMT and Its Role in the Community" while Melvin Ross and Irwin Rothenberg from Memphis led a panel that focused on "Outreach to Minorities." BWMT attracted national attention and positive praise and support from other gay activists that spring. In March it was reported that Mike Smith, co-founder of the original group in San Francisco, planned to visit Atlanta.[72] After his visit, Smith wrote to Grieg and expressed sincere and emotional thanks for the community he felt from his BWMT brothers in Atlanta. He enjoyed their "wonderfully loving" company and dubbed them "the love group." Smith also noted that "Atlanta has its politicians and its loud-mouths (though none can yet out-shout me)."[73]

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[71] 1983 Southeastern Conference for Lesbians & Gay Men, April 28- May 1, Atlanta, Ga, Program. AHC, ALGHT, Box 70.

[72] "Founder of BWMT to Visit Atlanta," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter,* March 1983. AHC, BWMT Records Box 1.

[73] "Mike Smith in Atlanta" *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, April 1983. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

In addition to the positive review from a national leader there was more good news. Lew Katoff, the new president the Atlanta Business and Professional Guild, met with BWMT members in March to address their concerns about racism in the organization.[74] Katoff wanted to show that he intended the organization to have a different relationship with BWMT and offered an "apology on behalf of the past president." Members did not spare him from having to awkwardly explain answers to questions he had not yet considered. Katoff, though, seemed sincerely committed to building a relationship with BWMT and people of color in the gay and lesbian community. BWMT gave the group a second chance because of "Lew's open mindedness and positive approach"

At the end of 1982 BWMT/Atlanta had reached their limit and expressed their anger, frustration, and disappointment in their newsletter that focused on activism. They issued a challenge to their friends and allies to do better and engage all of Atlanta, including gays and lesbians and black and white people. BWMT's outburst drew attention to their cause and the public confrontation seemed to work in getting a conversation going locally. Under new leadership, the ABPG and BWMT reached a reconciliation. BWMT's criticism of the *Advocate's* representation of Atlanta may have influenced Mike Smith's decision to visit the city. In May, Mayor Young met with members of the Pride Committee and BWMT to form a "gay committee."[75] He told the group he was willing to write and sign a "Pride Week Proclamation," a marked difference from the year before when he refused to sign the Proclamation passed by the city council.

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[74] "President of ABPG Warmly Received," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, April 1983.

[75] "Mayor Forms Gay Committee," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, June 1983. DU, Sears Papers, Box, 115.

The most obvious evidence that things had changed was that the Mayor said he was interested in setting up an "advisory board to give him direct input from Atlanta Gays." Melvin Ross was invited to be part of that advisory group and he planned on making BWMT's concerns heard. The predominant issue was police-community relations, but Ross wanted to address the issue of discrimination in gay bars. He wanted to know "why the City chooses to ignore the problem only because of the sexual nature of the people involved." The group presented an opportunity to advance BWMT's agenda and educate the metropolitan government about issues of racism that still existed in the city. Melvin Ross took advantage of the networking possibilities. He hoped that the new relationships and contacts would "give BWMT a continuing link into the mainstream political arena."

Grieg Leonard, a vocal political activist in BWMT, announced his resignation as co-chair over the summer due to an unexpected nomination to the international board. He had planned to step down in the fall anyway "to concentrate his energies on several specific BWMT priorities."[76] One was the recently formed "coalition on racism" that met in July at Grieg's house. The coalition included representatives from BWMT, the AGC, and religious groups like the MCC, Integrity, Unitarian Universalists, and Lutherans. The "new social action group" mostly focused on racism though they supported other social justice issues like "ageism, sexism, and nuclear disarmament." The sixteen people gathered into coalition reflected BWMT's outreach in the city. Seven represented lesbian and gay religious groups, five were from BWMT, Reverend C. represented the AGC, and three people did not list an affiliated organization. Carolyn Mobley, an African American lesbian who represented the MCC, was the only woman in attendance.[77]

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[76] "New Atlanta Co-Chair," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, August 1983. DU, Sears Papers, Box, 115.

BWMT/Atlanta mainly used direct negotiation rather than confrontation or protest to fight against racism. In the summer of 1983, the local group's more behind-the-scenes approach was complicated by a more aggressive action led from out of state. That summer Atlanta became a symbol of racism in the gay community when Mike Smith and the BWMT/San Francisco chapter produced a poster for national distribution that used a gay nightclub in Atlanta, the Saint, to illustrate their point. The poster became immediately controversial and Smith was introduced to how many of Atlanta's white gay men chose to address the issue of racism in the gay community. Mike Smith used his position as a gay white men to advocate against racism, which he believed was a white problem and white people needed to initiate the resolutions. It was a very progressive and for some possibly a radical stance on the issue and how deeply it impacted gay community relations.

The BWMT/San Francisco poster showed a picture of the staff of the Saint with a bold headline across the top that read "THIS IS A PHENOMENAL PHOTOGRAPH." At the bottom read the message "END RACISM NOW." In the center, a photograph of the Saint's staff showed nearly forty people smiling for the photographer and all of them were white. The caption underneath stated "Two- thirds of Atlanta's residents are Black but… they ain't at the Saint. What are the odds, all thirty-eight jobs to Whites, zero to Blacks? Less than one in a trillion."[78] National and local gay media picked up the story of the controversial poster and an ensuing clash between Mike Smith, the Saint, and the local gay magazine, *Cruise*.[79]

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[77] "Coalition Formed," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, August 1983.

[78] "Poster Creates Controversy," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, August 1983.

BWMT/Atlanta reported that Mike Smith was contacted by people in Atlanta and made aware of a backlash against the poster locally. Some of Atlanta's gay business owners and professionals took issue with it because it appeared to make them look racist, drawing negative publicity to the club. George Armbrister, a local businessman (and closeted gay man) who was the legal representative for the Atlanta gay bar magazine *Cruise* contacted Smith about the use of the photograph in the poster.[80] Smith told him he had permission to use the photograph, but the lawyer threatened to pursue court action if the group persisted in its distribution. The photograph used in the poster came from *Cruise* and Armbrister, *Cruise*, and the Saint claimed issues over fair use of the image. Armbrister referenced the nebulous legality of an alleged agreement that was only "verbally" negotiated when he threatened legal action. He said the poster "misrepresents the employment situation at The Saint and appears to stir up discrimination litigation in violation of federal law."[81]

George Armbrister was right to assume the poster would draw attention to the Saint's staff and their "employment situation." The poster was part of a national BWMT campaign that sought to address issues of racism in the gay community, one of which was employment discrimination. In 1982 BWMT/SF initiated a project to document employment discrimination in San Francisco's gay bars, which followed what they called a “textbook example of institutional racism.”[82] In a report on the project from early 1983, leaders addressed the lackluster reception the project had gotten in the gay community. They proposed a new more aggressive and direct protest so that “Racism in the Gay community would be “brought out of the closet.”[83]

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[79] Clippings: "BWMT Poster Draws Fire," Dion Sanders, "Bar Workers Integration Push Snarls on Use of Atlanta Poster," "Anti-racism poster ruffles feathers," Atlanta Anti-Discrimination Project and "The Saint" Poster. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

[80] "1991 Gay History Panel" and Transcript of "Panel on Gay Activism."

[81] George Armbrister to Mike Smith, July 7, 1983. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

The poster creators sought to emphasize that while they showcased a glaring example of racist hiring practices in Atlanta, what was truly “phenomenal” about the picture was that it could be from any gay bar in any community in the country. It was not meant to be a blatant example of southern racism. BWMT/SF spent over a year addressing the issue of racism in gay bars in their own city. In his correspondence with Atlantans opposed to the poster, Mike Smith included a hopeful summary of anti-racism projects in San Francisco, New York City, Washington D.C., and in Atlanta, to show how it was a national issue.[84] He implied that the fight between Atlanta’s gay media, bars, and BWMT was not unique to the region. George Armbrister made it clear in his communications with Smith that his clients resented and resisted the use of Atlanta and the Saint to make a point. Armbrister claimed that if the intention of the poster was to call attention to racism, than it was an inappropriate approach to solving the issue.

Mike Smith wrote back to representatives of *Cruise* and the Saint because he was concerned the local BWMT chapter was getting dragged into the fight. Smith feared retaliation against the local chapter and told his Atlanta correspondents they had taken “no active role” in the creation or promotion of the poster. Smith indicated he was disappointed in their response to the poster. His matter of fact approach to the obvious problem of racism in the gay community set him in conflict with gay bar owners who refused to come out in front of the problem. When managers and owners were confronted with their own racism and the institutionalized practices of racism, he said, they "react with predictable anger and frustration, resigned to their roles as villains, and await the inevitable."[85] He wished it could be different in Atlanta and echoed local criticism of the gay and straight community. He said, "Imagine getting the jump by acknowledging your institutional racism before Atlanta's black leadership gets around to acknowledging its institutional homophobia—another inevitability."[86]

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[82] Black and White Men Together- San Francisco, “Report of the Employment Discrimination Project,” February 1983, 1. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

[83] Ibid., 7.

[84] Mike Smith to Robert Swinden and Jack Cash, August 3, 1983. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

The Saint controversy showed that some of Atlanta's gay businessmen were willing to throw their weight around to get what they wanted. George Armbrister threatened Mike Smith with a lawsuit over the use of the Saint's photograph but when Smith produced a copy of the written agreement, he declined to take further action. *Cruise* claimed they only acted so aggressively because the Saint and one other bar had interpreted the poster and its association with *Cruise* as them "endorsing their (BWMT) campaign."[87] The bars response to what they thought was the magazine's support for the anti-racist campaign, was to cancel their advertising contracts with *Cruise*. When directly confronted with their own racism bar owners immediately reacted by exacting economic revenge on the gay community. The two bars eventually changed their minds and reconsidered their hasty action.

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[85] Smith to Swinden and Cash, August 3, 1983.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Clipping, Dion Sanders, "Bar Workers Integration Push Snarls on Use of Atlanta Poster." AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

The BWMT poster controversy did not generate a substantial amount of press coverage in Atlanta, though it did get written up nationally and examined elsewhere in more depth. This was probably due to the fact that *Cruise*, one of the city's longest running gay publications, was directly involved. Mike Smith seemed to understand the awkward position he put the local BWMT chapter in and told the Atlanta businessmen that he wouldn't hold it against anyone who told him "what goes on in Atlanta is none of my business."[88] The controversy over the Saint's staffing, *Cruise* magazine's aggressive response to the educational campaign of BWMT reflected the fact that the issue of racism was a long simmering flashpoint in Atlanta. There was mainstream political success in some ways but it seemed to only benefit certain parts of the gay and lesbian community.

The Friends for Lesbian/Gay Outreach created a "community survey" in 1982 that asked people to report racial discrimination at specific bars and asked them to identify what kind of discriminatory policy they witnessed. The survey asked participants to rate their response to a fairly strong statement about the impact of racism on the gay community, which read "Racial discrimination by Atlanta bars is part of the reason why black & other gays of color don't participate in proportion to their numbers in lesbian/gay community-wide events, for example Pride Week?" Respondents had four choices to describe how they felt. They could agree strongly or somewhat or disagree strongly or somewhat.[89] James Ford's letter was part of that project to document discrimination in Atlanta's gay bars. By the fall of 1983, activists documented over 150 accounts of discrimination in Atlanta's gay bars. They presented these to Atlanta's City Council, their ally Councilmember Mary Davis, and to members of the Liquor License Review Board.

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[88] Ibid.

[89] Ford to Friends for Lesbian/Gay Outreach.

Going public with their complaints and directly to the city cut out gay business owners who were unwilling to implement change. BWMT had attempted to negotiate and generally played according to their more conservative rules but found there was little to show for their efforts. Anti-racism and anti-discrimination activism in the gay community was stymied by business owners who were sometimes adversarial. They were more often ignored by a wider population who was apathetic about the issue of racism in the gay community. Activists were forced to find another way to make anti-discrimination and fighting racism in the gay community a priority. When they presented their complaints to City Council, a number of progressive allies supported their efforts. The complaints showed how necessary anti-discrimination laws were to ensure equal access to the social community for black gay and lesbian people in Atlanta.[90] Councilmembers Mary Davis, John Lewis, and Myrtle Davis co-sponsored the introduction of anti-discrimination ordinances that covered a variety of the most egregious practices. Three ordinances addressed "discriminatory admission policies, discriminatory membership requirements, and picture I.D. requirements at businesses which serve liquor." Melvin Ross said the laws were necessary because "People's basic civil rights were being violated by admissions policies."[91]

The passage of the ordinances was a major victory for the groups involved and for BWMT members especially who were outspoken about discrimination for years.[92] It showed that activists made important connections in the city and found more responsive allies. The passage of the ordinances was a group effort led by a few core organizations. Among those heavily involved with BWMT were First Tuesday, ALFA, and the L/GRC.[93] In a coordinated action, the groups supported each other and the cause by initiating projects to document discrimination. L/GRC, BWMT, and AGC member Judd Herndon was "one of the original people" to file a complaint. BWMT said Herndon "was responsible for coordinating the ordinance project." Herndon only officially joined BWMT that summer but by the time the ordinances were passed he was committed to the BWMT interracial vision.[94] In a statement to the community he expressed the hope "that these ordinances would help realize the dream of a free and open city, for citizens and visitors to Atlanta alike."[95]

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[90] "Discrimination Ordinance Introduced in City Council," *Cruise Newsmagazine*, September 30-October 6, 1983, 3. AHC, ALGHT, Box 32.

[91] Ibid.

[92] BWMT/Atlanta Statement to the Community, November 21, 1983. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

Early in December, GAMA wrote to personally thank BWMT for their work on behalf of the community.[96] Theo Thomas, writing for GAMA, commended the group and recognized their "courage, determination, and good will." He said their lobbying made "third world Lesbians, Gays, and Transpersons" subject to fair admissions criteria throughout Atlanta. It was a fight they tried to win but had met with little success. The letter from Thomas hinted at the differences between the organizations and he closed with a gentle statement about the necessity of the two kinds of organizations and the different roles they had to play. Thomas said:

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[93] Clipping, "Atlanta City Council Members Unanimously Pass Ordinances," *Cruise News*, November 25-December 1, 1983. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

[94] BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter, July 1983. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

[95] BWMT/Atlanta, Statement, November 21, 1983.

[96] Theo Thomas to BWMT, December 8, 1983. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

> As we work quietly and cohesively within our community to bring about social and political change, we are reminded of friends like yourself who do the same and make a good ongoing impact on gay community life and the community as a whole.[97]

GAMA had been quiet in the city for some time. Mike Smith published *Colorful People and Places*, a lesbian and gay guide for minority bars, organizations, clubs, and other similar resources in 1983.[98] Smith's resource guide only listed two current organizations for people of color in Atlanta, BWMT and Sisters, a "Black, Lesbian social, support group."[99]

GAMA was not just overlooked in *Colorful People and Places*, it was presumed dead. The group was one in a number of people and places listed under the section titled "The Past." The write-up about GAMA got some of the details wrong, including apparently their current state of existence. In addition it attributed their origins to the Third World Conference held in Washington D.C. in 1979 during the National March on Washington. The group actually started months before and in relation to local experiences with racial discrimination, a point that shifts their story from reacting to national catalyst to a more localized outgrowth of community activism in Atlanta. The guide highlighted political activism and the social community as it alerted people to the racial diversity of the crowds at local bars. In Atlanta, The Armory was listed as "Primarily White," Bulldog was "White, Black," and the Marquiette the "Le Quesy," an after-hours club that was possibly the "Oldest Gay establishment in Atlanta," was

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[97] Ibid.

[98] "New Gay Minority Guide Published," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, May 1983. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

[99] Mike J. Smith, *Colorful People and Places* (San Francisco, CA: Quarterly Publishing, 1983), 49. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

"Primarily Black." When bars and clubs across the country earned reputations for being primarily white or primarily black it showed that racism in the gay community was a national problem, not just a southern one.

Racial discrimination in the gay community in Atlanta was overlooked, ignored, or supported for a long time. Writing about their fight for anti-discrimination protections, BWMT said the gay community "acquiesced" to racist policies.[100] When the Armory decided to go private, it was the last straw. They said "The pattern became obvious." In response, they researched the city's codes on private club membership. They collaborated with other gay and lesbian rights groups in a campaign to document complaints of racial and gender discrimination and they present them to city council. They exposed how widespread discrimination was in Atlanta's gay community. Their hard work won them an affirmative city council vote in the passage of the ordinances.[101]

After the Parade

As the 1983 Pride season geared up Mayor Andrew Young gave an interview with *Cruise Newsmagazine* that showed how far he had come in addressing the gay and lesbian community and their concerns. He referenced past controversies, including that he refused to sign the Gay Pride proclamation passed by the city council in 1982. Young said his decision not to sign the proclamation was "in the community's best interest" because there were "conflicting interests of community representatives in the wording of the proclamation."[102] In 1983, he did sign the proclamation and in a gesture of goodwill, *Sunset People*, a local gay entertainment magazine, put him on the cover. The photograph showed Mayor Young holding a microphone and quoted from the resolution, signed on June 13th, part of which read

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[100] "Fighting Bar Discrimination in Atlanta," IABWMT Convention 84 Program, Atlanta, GA, July 2-7, 1984, 17. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

[101] Ibid.

> It must be the role of the government to protect the rights of its citizens and prevent discrimination. My administration is committed to that end. It is always a pleasure for the city of Atlanta to express its appreciation for the contribution of all its citizens, whatever their lifestyle.[103]

It was a forceful statement and was evidence of better relations with the gay and lesbian community in Atlanta. *Sunset People* recognized Young's advocacy and reported he was the "only Southern Mayor to sign and endorse Gay Pride Day."

Despite the success of the 1982 Pride celebration with the theme of "Stonewall Then, Atlanta Now," pride organizers made some subtle changes. The *Metropolitan Gazette* reported that some community members were unhappy with the "use of the words "lesbian" and "transperson" in the name of the group and the official name of the event."[104] At the Pride wrap-up meeting some new names for the LGT Pride Committee were suggested but it was reported that nothing was binding. It seemed that the critics won out with the newly named "'83 Pride Committee," which organized the celebration under the theme "Out Front, Out Loud, Outstanding." A publicity campaign for the event worked variations of the theme into advertising, with "Think Out," "Write Out," and "Step Out" campaigns that encouraged people to come out for the Pride Parade.[105]

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[102] Ken Bond, "Andrew Young: Interview," *Cruise Newsmagazine,* May 27- June 2, 1983, 1, 7. AHC, ALGHT, Box 32.

[103] *Sunset People*, June 23, 1983. AHC, ALGHT, Box 22.

[104] "Thousands March on Georgia State Capitol," *Metropolitan Gazette,* July 1-7, 1982, 7. AHC, ALGHT Box 2.270.

[105] Dolan, "Looking Back;" "Step Out" Pride Ad, *Cruise Newsmagazine,* June 24-June 30, 1983. AHC,

June was BWMT's annual membership renewal period and the group had two social fundraisers planned that month, both nights out at the disco Hot Lix.[106] In the same issue of the newsletter where these plans were highlighted, BWMT also reported the news that Hot Lix "has gone straight."[107] Some thought "the new bar on Cheshire Bridge, The Saint," was the reason Hot Lix didn't couldn't make it as a gay bar because it was unable to compete with the "plush ultra chic" styles of clubs like the Saint and Backstreet. BWMT lamented the "sea change" at Hot Lix, in part because the bar was "cooperating closely with BWMT in a number of ways, and showed every potential of becoming a welcome alternative to the segregated Midtown discos."

Gene H. represented BWMT on the Pride Committee that year and managed to network the groups for fundraisers. Despite its possible drawbacks, the Saint was the choice of venue for a joint benefit fundraiser for BWMT and Pride Week in the first week of June. Each group took half of the profits and the crowd was treated to entertainment provided by local performers.[108] A week later, possibly with funds derived from the benefit, a flyer advertising the march gave readers a very informative and humorous history lesson on Pride. The writer said that during "Pride Month" differences were to be celebrated, "we're homosexual, not homogenized!"[109] The topic of Pride and its place in the gay and lesbian community was a subject that united many with disparate ideas about

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ALGHT, Box 32.

[106] "Social Committee," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, June 1983. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

[107] "Hot Lix Goes Straight," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, June 1983.

[108] "Benefit," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, June 1983.

[109] "Out Front, Out Loud, Outstanding" Pride flyer, June 1983. AHC, ALGHT, Maria Helena Dolan Papers, Box 76.

its meaning.

Richard Kavanaugh, a longtime gay writer, publisher, businessman, and activist mused on the subject for *Cruise*.[110] Kavanaugh's essay rambled and discoursed on many topics, including how important it was to come out and live open lives as gay and lesbian people. The next step in the process was to "promote understanding" through a "positive image." In a passage fit for a pageant contestant Kavanaugh's sentiment was succinct, generally positive, and slightly vapid. He said that "true progress" would only be made when the "majority of the voting public" understood gay people. Straight people would change their minds about them when they understood that "the one thing gays want above all others is to be allowed to live our lives, not as pariahs and second class citizens, but as contributing members of society, free from prejudice and discrimination."[111]

Local writer Alexander Wallace wasted no time in calling the gay community back to reality after Pride that year. In "After the Parade," an article for *Cruise* about the growing fear around AIDS, he said that even though they just celebrated their right to live openly it was still not safe to come out of the closet.[112] A new era dawned as "AIDS threatens us with the Ultimate Closet—a coffin." Wallace was an outspoken and strident local voice for reporting on AIDS in the early years in Atlanta. His reporting reached an intense level of personal and emotional paranoia surrounding the unfolding AIDS epidemic. He was Atlanta's own Larry Kramer, a controversial, provocative, and brilliant anti-AIDS activist from New York City who was a critical voice for politicizing gay and lesbian people around AIDS.[113]

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[110] Richard Kavanaugh, "…And That's All Right," *Cruise,* V8 N24, July 1983, 37-39. AHC, ALGHT, Box 20.

[111] Kavanaugh, "…And That's All Right."

[112] Alexander Wallace, "After the Parade," *Cruise*, V8 N26, July 1983, 27-29. AHC, ALGHT, Box 20.

Alexander Wallace feared that not enough was being done in the local community to protect themselves. He feared the reactions of “pseudo-macho types, the red-necks, the hellfire-and-damnation radical right” when AIDS became epidemic. Wallace begged the community not to depend on their current allies because when faced with the fear of AIDS becoming widespread in the “general population” they might turn their back on the gay community. He was suspicious of the “intense homophobia” that lurked below the surface because he knew “how thin the veneer of tolerance and polite acceptance” was even among supposed allies. Wallace acknowledged that Kavanaugh’s point about working towards understanding and tolerance would be necessary. However, he was more invested in the idea for self-preservation and argued the gay community had to “educate homosexuals and assure heterosexuals.”

The AIDS epidemic impacted the community in different ways but the battles that came were complicated by divisions apparent for years. Activists continued their legal and social fights for gay and lesbian rights, ending police harassment, and working against racism and sexism. They developed new organizations that addressed issues with legal challenges and changes in city policy. Activists increased their visibility and the new organizations harnessed the power of Atlanta’s professional and economic elites to successfully lobby for change. Social commentary on gay lifestyles became more heated as the desire to portray a positive image evolved into a mainstream movement. In the early 1980s activists in the gay rights movement started to coordinate their lobbying in an effort to influence legislation and elections. These national trends were replicated on a smaller scale in Atlanta and other cities. But AIDS was not yet epidemic in the early years. By mid-decade AIDS had fundamentally changed gay communities everywhere and effected people of every color and class, closeted or out, which also fundamentally changed the politics of the gay and lesbian rights movement.

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[113] In 1983 Kramer’s infamous article “1,112 and Counting,” was widely republished. See Gould, *Moving Politics*, 92-100.

CHAPTER 7

"APATHALANTA":

ACTIVISM, APATHY, AND THE AIDS CRISIS, 1983-1985

Once More with Feeling

The international BWMT conference met in Atlanta during the first week of July in 1984. The timing made it possible for members who were in town for the conference to participate in Atlanta's Pride parade on July 3rd. Local BWMT member J.R. Finney said the added boost that year made it an "exhilarating experience."[1] BWMT/San Francisco member Brooks Kolb said the "spirit" of the convention in Atlanta continued to influence the group back home. At the San Francisco National Lesbian/Gay Rights March held just two weeks later, he said the BWMT "contingent expressed the most enthusiasm, noise, and general spirit of any group in the march."[2] Kolb thought this was "merely a re-performance" of the Atlanta parade where "BWMT brothers made up one quarter of the parade and covered an area of two city blocks." Finney felt like Pride was "truly "our" event" as BWMT "really made gay Atlanta sit up and take notice of who we really are."[3] Maria Helena Dolan also noted BWMT's presence at Pride that year in her regular article, "Slouching Toward Lesbos," in the recently founded but short-lived

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[1] J.R. Finney II, "Convention '84: An Emotional Experience," *BWMT/ Atlanta Newsletter*, September 1984. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 2.

[2] Brooks Kolb, "Atlanta Convention an Astounding Success," 1984. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 2.

[3] Finney II, "Convention '84."

Atlanta gay magazine, *Pulse*. She said they "had such good energy that they made the demo into a party." They added a personal touch to the longstanding chant "Gay Straight Black White" with the phrase "Together We Struggle, Together We Fight."[4]

BWMT's enthusiasm and contribution were felt by many but 1984's Pride was subject to intense criticism from some corners of the gay community. The theme that year was "Once More With Feeling." One pride marcher carried a sign that read "Once More With Crisco" on the front and "Swallow My Pride" on the back. Maria Dolan judged the sign low on her list, especially when compared to her favorite, "Avenge Oscar Wilde."[5] Year after year, Dolan lent her talents to Pride and revved up the crowds and likewise it seemed that year after year some Atlantans criticized the out and proud participants. That year guest editorials, letters to the editor, and even a poem charged Atlanta's gay and lesbian people with being apathetic. In *Pulse*, "Uncle Nell" lashed out at the small showing and even mocked them. Uncle Nell's commentary reflected the respectability politics of mainstream gay and lesbian political rights and implicated class divisions as influential to that movement.[6] He said "of the 3000 to 5000 participating, 4,999 of them seemed to be of the bar crowd" and they had turned the event into a "meaningless romp down Peachtree."[7]

Some white gay men lashed out at the parade in a way that contrasted with the experience of BWMT members who found it “exhilarating.” Michael Wilson wrote a poem to commemorate Pride in which he criticized everyone, whether they were in the parade, in the crowd, or at home. In “Pride Week Ditty: Take 84,” he wrote “Once more with feeling/ we take to the streets/ in nelly pumps and soccer cleats/ and wave to the third world briefcase geeks/ as if pride were a neighborhood ball.”[8] Wilson singled out many people who disappointed him. One of the communities that he specifically attacked was the politically moderate or conservative community of gay black men, “the third world briefcase geeks.” Wilson bristled at how non-political Pride had become in recent years. He attributed this to a conservative community who traded political demands for a bland pride celebration, which set Atlantans on a path “marching to freedom by way of a crawl.” His criticisms went beyond statements of political difference though and showed how easily politics was racialized in the city. Mayor Young’s hair was the butt of a final joke about Atlanta’s inability to defend themselves in political fights. Wilson wrote “Once more with feeling/ with a scandalous flare we trivialize/ our savoir faire and snag our pride / in Andy’s hair and call it/ a compromise.”[9]

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[4] Maria Helena Dolan, "Slouching Toward Lesbos: The Queer-Up Atlanta Celebration," *Pulse*, July 12, 1984, 20. AHC, ALGHT, Box 28.

[5] Dolan, "Slouching Toward Lesbos."

[6] Eaklor, *Queer America*, 171-174; Endean, *Bringing Lesbian and Gay Rights into the Mainstream*; Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good*; Urvashi Vaid, *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996).

[7] Uncle Nell, "Guest Editorial," *Pulse*, July 12, 1984, 5.

The class dynamics that influenced conservatism in the gay community in Atlanta did not just affect the white gay community. Since the turn of the twentieth century Atlanta was known as a “black Mecca” because of its many opportunities for education, social community, and civic life. In the post-World War II period an elite, educated, middle-class and wealthy community of black Atlantans entered local politics and held significant positions in the city.[10] A historically more conservative social and cultural community of black elites influenced politics well into the modern era in Atlanta. Maynard Jackson's two terms as Mayor in the 1970s were more socially liberal than Andrew Young's in the 1980s, who focused on the city's economic and business interests sometimes at the expense of the city's poor and working class African Americans.[11]

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[8] Michael Wilson, “Pride Week Ditty: Take 84,” *Pulse*, July 18, 1984, 4. AHC, ALGHT, Box 28.

[9] Wilson, “Pride Week Ditty.”

BWMT members who came out to Pride in 1984 believed their presence would make "gay Atlanta sit up and take notice." What some members of the gay community noticed was that the parade was not representative of who they believed to be the majority of the gay population in Atlanta—mainstream, middle-class, gay, white men. According to Uncle Nell the "closet queens" who didn't show up were the worst hypocrites. He said these queens enjoyed the gay social life but refused to lend support to the community by coming out for the parade. They were more interested in dancing, designer labels, and status. Uncle Nell aggressively confronted them with a scathing pep talk. He told them to "Get butch, you bunch of sissies, get off your Calvin Klein coated tushies, wipe the sweat out of your eyes with your oh so chic polo shirts and impress someone besides yourselves for a change."[12]

Uncle Nell's diatribe reflected an obvious awareness of the class issues that divided the gay male world.[13] These men did not come out to Pride because they already had education, wealth, and power as elite white men living in Atlanta. They did not think of their sexuality in terms of politics, power, or privilege so they expressed their sexuality in a conservative and closeted manner, with a general disapproval of not only the parade, but the sentiment behind gay liberation. In addition to social conservativism, class divisions affected both black and white gay and lesbian communities in Atlanta. These dynamics were evident in arguments that concerned middle-class and mainstream cultural understandings of morality and respectability, which became more important in gay and lesbian rights politics in the era of AIDS.[14] This chapter examines the rise of a generalized "mainstreaming" of gay and lesbian political leadership in Atlanta at mid-decade as the community shed its ties to the radicalism of an earlier era.[15]

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[10] Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*; Hornsby, *Black Power in Dixie*; Allen, *Atlanta Rising;* Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid;* Keating, *Atlanta Race, Class, and Urban Expansion;* Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn.*

[11] Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*.

[12] Uncle Nell, "Guest Editorial."

[13] Andriote, *Victory Deferred*, 17-21.

Movement organizations diverged on tactics, strategies, and even goals as they faced an increasingly hostile political environment compounded by fear and homophobia surrounding AIDS.[16] Atlanta's gay male community watched and observed the specter of AIDS for years before it really hit home. This chapter looks at how gay and lesbian political activism changed during the early years of the spread of AIDS. When AIDS finally made its presence known in the city, gay and lesbian Atlantans reacted. They formed organizations to raise money for the community and when it became apparent that the government would not aid in fighting the disease aggressively they worked to change that. Gay and lesbian organizations were many—and most—of the first systematic and non-systematic responders to the disease. They raised money for medical care and created education projects aimed at gay men to increase safe-sex awareness. These positive steps to mitigate the effects of AIDS on the gay male community were also contradicted early on and sometimes actively opposed by gay people who resisted attempts to tag the disease as gay because they feared a backlash.

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[14] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 87-90.

[15] Vaid, *Virtual Equality*; Endean, *Bringing*.

[16] Andriote, *Victory Deferred*; Inrig, *North Carolina and the Problem of AIDS*; Ronald Bayer, *Private Acts, Social Consequences: AIDS and the Politics of Public Health* (New York: Free Press Collier Macmillan, 1989).

As AIDS drew much of Atlanta's gay and lesbian community's attention, its political activism underwent substantial changes in the first half of the 1980s. Leadership in the movement suffered from lack of support, which many thought was in part due to its lack of diversity. Some leaders compounded the problem when they demanded that the community support them even though they alienated many. White, middle-class, and wealthy gay men occupied many of the leadership roles in the political activist organizations. Only those organizations that were founded explicitly for minorities, like ALFA, GAMA, and BWMT, found women or black gay and lesbians in the majority of positions of leadership or enjoyed diverse membership. Mainstream gay organizations had problems with making themselves available and supportive of Atlanta's diverse community and many felt excluded by a political movement that was predominantly represented as gay, white, and male. In the mid-1980s Atlanta's gay and lesbian community struggled to create a more diverse and broadly supported political community while they faced a major public health crisis that threatened their very lives.

"Bushes and Baths": Sexuality and AIDS in the City

Over the past decade Atlanta had grown into its reputation as the gay metropolis of the Southeast. In Edmund White's 1980 travel survey of gay communities across the states, he pointed out that many in Atlanta proudly called the city the "New York of the

South."[17] No doubt, this influenced many gay and lesbian people to migrate to the city. They came from towns and mid-sized cities in the regional hinterlands of the Southeast escaping their small ponds for the freedom of the big city. But it was not just Southerners who sought out Atlanta. People came from colder, harsher climates in the Northeast and Midwest seeking to maintain the freedom they experienced living in a relatively liberated community, just without the long snowy months of winter. In the early 1980s, Atlanta's African American gay and lesbian community was growing and attracting national attention, which added to the tides of gay migration.

Atlanta's gay and lesbian community grew and its businesses, organizations, and nightlife opportunities increased. The city's politics continued to disappoint a vocal segment of the community. After the low turnout for 1984's Pride celebration, one Atlantan added his voice to the chorus of critics. That fall, Nathaniel Burridge wrote a letter to the recently established Atlanta gay, arts and news magazine *Pulse.* He angrily chastised the community for their lack of community activism and awareness. He cut the city down with the assessment that instead of New York City, Atlanta was "more like Newark, New Jersey."[18] Burridge wrote to *Pulse* mainly because he wanted to voice his complaints about the publication, to their face, so to speak. Burridge had many critiques for the magazine and the community, but he specifically admonished the publication for their limited coverage of AIDS. *Pulse* covered topics that meant little to him and to which he deemed of minimal value to the community, for example he called local celebrity drag performer, Rachel Wells' advice column a "continuing stream of drivel from a drag queen." He implied that he was forced to read *Pulse* because it was basically his only option for gay news in town, though they didn't print much gay news. Burridge said "In the meantime, I am given bits of biased *hard* news from the *straight press* about the one issue that is—or should be—your scoop—AIDS. (Yes, I'm tired of feeling terrified and paranoid too, but it is my life that is at stake)."[19]

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[17] White, *States of Desire*, 249.

[18] Nathaniel Burridge, "Letter to the Editor," *Pulse*, October 14, 1984, 11. AHC, ALGHT, Box 28.

His criticisms may have been true. Local mainstream newspapers increased their coverage of AIDS from 1982 through 1984, with stories and reports that examined the disease's impact on the gay community.[20] In an *Atlanta Journal Constitution* piece from February of 1983, journalists Ron Taylor and Charles Seabrook interviewed Charles, a gay man living with AIDS in Atlanta. No comparative explorations of the impact of AIDS on such a personal and local scale had been published in Atlanta's gay media. Taylor and Seabrook said that

> homosexuals are understandably defensive about the disease, which for a time was informally called the "gay plague." Theirs is a subculture already plagued with stigmas from a larger society that regards their sexual habits as unconventional. To them, the prevalence of the disease in homosexuals… stigmatizes them further."[21]

The journalists shared an important insight into the gay community's uncomfortable relationship with the disease. That many gay men viewed an association with AIDS as an additional stigma sheds light on why the gay press and media did not give more coverage to the health crisis.

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[19] Burridge, "Letter to the Editor."

[20] Meredith Raimondo, "Dateline Atlanta: Place and the Social Construction of AIDS," in Howard, ed. *Carryin' On,* 331-369.

[21] Ron Taylor and Charles Seabrook, "AIDS: The Killer That No One Understands," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, February 13, 1983, 1, 14. Quoted in Raimondo, "Dateline Atlanta," 348.

AIDS had just barely started to impact the gay community in Atlanta In 1982.[22] Chris Church reported in *Sunset News and Interview* about a recent discussion held after a lecture on Kaposi's Sarcoma (K.S.) at the Atlanta Gay Center.[23] The lecture was given by a CDC researcher who was focused on "Gay related STDs" and Church's headline read "Kaposi's Lecture Sheds New Light," but ominously continued "It looks Like It Is Infectious." The lecture and discussion indicated there was already a level of awareness about the need for preparation in educating the gay male community about the signs and symptoms of what was becoming a deadly outbreak. It also related how little was known about how AIDS spread, or even what AIDS was in the early years.[24]

The lecture shed light on what some people called the "Gay cancer," because of its close association with K.S., which usually appeared in patients who were much older. The theory then was that younger gay men who developed K.S. had a compromised or suppressed immune system and thus the Sarcoma became an early indicator of something different, the "gay cancer." These young gay men, more importantly, faced a greater mortality rate than older men who developed it. The CDC researcher showed those in attendance slides of K.S. so that they would be familiar with its appearance and cleared some concerns, like the rumor that "Poppers" a popular recreational drug caused K.S. Things became heated around a discussion about the safety of anonymous sex and over the classification of a recent death in the community. It was pointed out that a local bartender suffered from K.S. but his death "was attributed to Pneumocystis Carinii, a pneumonia that often accompanies K.S." There was simply too much still unknown about what was happening, but K.S. they deemed to be the "strongest indication so far that the disease may be communicable among some individuals."[25] It was in this area of research that Chris Church assumed the "money and manpower" needed to be directed.

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[22] Raimondo, "Dateline Atlanta," 347.

[23] Chris Church, "Kaposi's Lecture Sheds New Light," *Sunset News and Interview,* March 4, 1982. AHC, ALGHT Box 1.206.

[24] Shilts, *And the Band Played On*; Gould, *Moving Politics*, 59-62.

Atlanta's Royal Court, a bar organization made up of owners, managers, and local drag performers held their "Second Annual Royal Gathering" benefit in January of 1983 for the new organization, AID Atlanta.[26] AID Atlanta, "a group of local professional people who have reacted to the deaths of friends due [to] A.I.D.S. by forming an organization to educate people about the disease," formed sometime in 1982. Its early founding linked it to other groups active at the time and the report noted they were working with similar organizations in New York and San Francisco. Less than a year old at the time of the benefit, AID Atlanta had already made contacts with the CDC and published two educational booklets. The organization continued to raise money in the community but Atlanta's gay community started to ask questions about their donations and where the money was to be spent. AID Atlanta clarified their process and how they distributed the funds when some voiced the opinion that their donations should go towards research funds and not to local AID Atlanta projects.[27]

There was a great deal reported about AIDS in 1983 and much of it in the gay community was filled with fear.[28] Some people started to feel saturated by a gruesome and morbid information overload. Maria Helena Dolan wrote that reading gay and non-gay news required steeling oneself to an onslaught of bad news and the experience "constitutes a grimly determined wallowing in near-hysteria."[29] She argued the wallowing didn't address the deeper issues related to the AIDS crisis. Dolan and many others felt that gay men needed to start a conversation about the practices that led to the spread of the disease, as it was then widely assumed and acknowledged to be infectious and related to sexual activity. Many behaviors of sexual experience common in the gay male community were coming openly under fire from within.[30] Dolan addressed AIDS in the context of The "Kharmic Laws of Cause and Effect." She linked it to an unhealthier aspect of urban gay culture, understood by her to be the fact that many gay men could not relate to each other without sex. Dolan used an example from a recent *Advocate* article that seemed to ask why that was the case—the answer was direct, "Because you're a ghetto rabbit, and you feel threatened by intimacy."[31]

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[25] Church, "Kaposi's Lecture."

[26] "Royal Gathering to Benefit AID Atlanta," *Cruise*, January 14-21, 1983, 36. AHC, ALGHT, Box 22.

[27] "AID Atlanta Spending Procedures Clarified," *Cruise News*, September 30-October 6, 1983, 3. AHC, ALGHT, Box 32.

[28] Raimondo, "Dateline Atlanta," 350-351; Shilts, *And the Band Played On*.

Ron Taylor and Charles Seabrook reminded the average Atlantan reading about AIDS in the *Journal* and *Constitution* that the crisis was complicated. The gay male community was "plagued with stigmas from a larger society that regards their sexual habits as unconventional."[32] The stigma around gay male sexuality was compounded by a backlash against a more overt sexuality commonly associated with popular aspects of urban and working class gay male culture. Diamond Lil described a new contagious disease working its way through the gay community called "A.N.S.," which stood for "Acquired Nelliness Syndrome."[33] She related its rapid spread and spoofed the sad state of misinformation around AIDS. Lil also addressed homophobic reactions by some in their own community who rejected openly gay cultural associations and gay social behaviors, seemingly out of fear of being associated with AIDS. "A.N.S.," Diamond Lil said, had spread far and wide in the community and not even "drag bars catering to Barbra Streisand and Shirley Bassey pantomime shows" were safe. She informed her readers of an alarming bit of hearsay, "where eye contact with certain wrist movements by performers has been known to contaminate the viewer on sight."

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[29] Clippings, Maria Helena Dolan, "Plague Zone" *Sunset People*, June 16, 1983. AHC, ALGHT, Maria Helena Dolan Papers, Box 76.

[30] Bayer*, Private Acts;* Shilts, *And the Band Played On*; William J. Woods and Diane Binson, *Gay Bathhouses and Public Health Policy* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2003); Jennifer Brier, *Infectious Ideas U.S. Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

[31] Dolan, "Plague Zone;" Brier, *Infectious Ideas,* 11-15.

[32] Taylor and Seabrook, "AIDS: The Killer," quoted in Raimondo, "Dateline Atlanta," 348.

At the 1983 Southeastern Conference for Lesbians and Gay Men held in Atlanta in the spring, multiple panels addressed AIDS and its impact in the community.[34] The first full day of sessions offered attendees an intense all day session that started in the morning with an "AIDS Symposium" with speakers Dr. James Curran, Dr. Lewis Katoff, and Dr. James Braude. In the afternoon there was a "Conversatory Hour" with PWA and friends that featured Dr. Lew Katoff, the new president of the Atlanta Business and Professional Guild. Local therapist Franklin Abbott led a workshop that focused on self-esteem issues and wellness for gay men who faced "an increasingly frightening health crisis" called "Keeping Well in a World That Wants You Sick."[35] That summer

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[33] Diamond Lil, "A.N.S. The Most Dreaded and Contagious New Gay Disease!" *Cruise Newsmagazine,* June 24-30, 1983, 10. AHC, ALGHT, Box 32.

[34] 1983 Southeastern Conference for Lesbians & Gay Men, April 28-May 1, Atlanta, GA, Program. AHC, ALGHT, Box 70.

[35] Ibid.

Alexander Wallace said the gay community had faced AIDS with "calm dignity and admirable restraint."[36] This changed as heated debates about gay male sexuality and AIDS erupted locally and nationally.

The syndrome changed the ways that people interpreted and felt about their sexuality. Taylor and Seabrook noted in their report on AIDS that gay and lesbian sexuality was deemed "unconventional" by a "larger society."[37] The gay and lesbian liberation movement rejected that idea from the start and stressed the freedom to enjoy sexual expression as openly gay and lesbian people. For many gay men in the 1970s, the club and disco dominated nightlife influenced an era of easy and prolific casual sex.[38] In the mid-1980s, as fear of AIDS spread, more gay men objected to certain sexual habits that they too increasingly deemed unconventional or dangerous.[39] As AIDS grew in its scope and devastation, many gay men struggled with their sexuality as they faced a disease that was seemingly incurable and very likely to kill if contracted.

Less than a month after Alexander Wallace's assessment of the dignified and calm response to AIDS in the gay community, Ken Bond reported for *Cruise Newsmagazine* about a local controversy brewing. Recent articles in the *Atlanta Journal* and *Constitution* had triggered a vocal response from some gay people who objected to opinions that were making it into the mainstream press.[40] The articles capitalized on the uncertainty and division caused by AIDS in the gay community. The *Journal* article "Foes Fighting All-Male Club, Citing Fears About AIDS" and the *Constitution* article "Gay Health Club Foes Fear Spread of AIDS" showed there were divisions in the gay community.[41] Robbie Tee, an assistant manager at the Locker Room Baths, wrote to the gay media to express his anger over the story of a gay man who campaigned against the establishment of a new gay "health club." Tee was annoyed that the gay community's dirty laundry was aired by an "unofficial spokesperson" in the "straight press."[42]

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[36] Wallace, "After the Parade."

[37] Taylor and Seabrook, "AIDS: The Killer," quoted in Raimondo, "Dateline Atlanta," 348.

[38] Downs, *Stand By Me*, 169-189.

[39] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 71-82; Michael Helquist and Rick Osmon, "Sex and the Baths: A Not-So-Secret Report," This report was originally published in the San Francisco gay and lesbian magazine, *Coming Up!,* in 1984 as a response to a secret report commissioned by the Mayor's office to have the police investigate the issue of sex in gay bathhouses. Woods and Binson, *Gay Bathhouses*, 153-55.

Robbie Tee's anger stemmed from opinions expressed over the opening of Club Amsterdam in the Virginia-Highland area. The proposed new gay health club was denied a business permit based on recommendations from the Atlanta License Review Board early in June.[43] The articles in the Atlanta newspapers focused on divisions within the gay community about baths and gave extensive coverage to a campaign against the opening of the club, launched by a gay Atlantan and Virginia-Highland resident and the hairdresser, Charles Barden, whose home was just 150 feet from the proposed new club.[44] But the debate went beyond just a single new bathhouse. In one of the reports a local gay man interviewed said that AIDS and the fear of becoming infected had changed his

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[40] Ken Bond, "AIDS Media Reactions Ruffles Feathers," *Cruise Newsmagazine*, July 22-28, 1983, 3-4. AHC, ALGHT, Box 32.

[41] Raimondo, "Dateline Atlanta," 349, 365.

[42] Bond, "AIDS Media Reactions," 4.

[43] "Club Amsterdam Denied Permit," *Cruise Newsmagazine*, June 24-30, 1983, 3. AHC, ALGHT, Box 32.

[44] John Lancaster and Connie Green, "Foes Fighting All-Male Club, Citing Fears About AIDS," *Atlanta Journal* (June 13, 1983), Connie Green and John Lancaster "Gay Health Club Foes Fear Spread of AIDS," *Atlanta Constitution* (June 16, 1983) in Raimondo, "Dateline Atlanta," 349, 365 fn. 75-76.

“lifestyle” and he no longer sought out the “bushes and baths” for casual sex. The phrase was a slight variation on the common and popular gay saying “out of the tubs, into the shrubs” and indicated a multiplicity of names to describe a popular sexual practice in the community.[45]

That year gay male communities elsewhere grappled with issues surrounding sexuality and gay sites of public sexual space.[46] Robbie Tee understood that gay men faced a health crisis but argued they needed to focus on finding a cure for AIDS. He objected to what he saw as community “Witch Hunts” driven by “our own ignorant opinions as to the breeding places for this disease.” Tee predicted a backlash that “could close gay baths and bars.”[47] In fact, such a backlash had already started. Ken Bond reported that in San Francisco, Louis Gaspar the owner of the Hothouse, one of the city’s most well-known bathhouses, decided to close. Gaspar shared his conflicted personal feelings about the bathhouse and its place in the community in the midst of the AIDS crisis. He said, “I don’t think that its where you have sex that causes AIDS but what you do,” which reflected another aspect of the AIDS and sexuality conversation that centered around safer sex practices. Despite this he concluded that the bathhouse was “part of the problem” and finally that “with the moral and ethical questions involved, I just couldn’t stay open.”[48]

In Atlanta, Robbie Tee and others thought closing the baths was the start of a backlash against gays. Ken Bond reported that "some activists fear such a backlash could lead to wholesale firings of gays and even gay concentration camps." In his letter to the paper, Tee said he feared "an effort to crush the economic base of the gay community without getting to the root of the problem of AIDS."[49] In 1981 and 1982, the police closed gay bookstores when they gathered enough evidence to prove that sex crimes took place in those establishments. The police ensured that the crimes were documented by using legal entrapment practices and by subjecting the stores to numerous raids. Gay bathhouses were subject to the same homophobic police surveillance but during the age of AIDS, they became a more controversial base in the gay economic boom of the city.

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[45] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 84.

[46] Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, 306-7, 317-18.

[47] Bond, “AIDS Media Reactions,” 3.

[48] Ibid., 4.

Maurice Hobson showed that during the crack epidemic black community leaders "found themselves in a quagmire."[50] It was a tricky issue to navigate because it was impossible to "discuss without putting black folk and black culture in an unfavorable light." Crack cocaine became in the 1980s "a new marker of class identity," which when combined with "racial uplift politics" divided elites from lower class and less educated black people. AIDS and the issue of public sex became, much like the crack epidemic, a thorny issue in the gay community that was complicated by an emergent mainstream political movement based on respectability politics and underlying class assumptions.[51] The closure of baths and sex clubs had a longer controversial history in the gay community, as many people disagreed on their value before the advent of AIDS. Men and women throughout the years questioned the value of places that encouraged casual sex and the pursuit of sexual pleasure exclusive of romantic or emotional intimacy.[52] Robbie Tee referenced the baths problematic reputation when he raged at the "incorrect spokespersons" who depicted the clubs as "big filthy homosexual pig pens."[53]

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 143.

[51] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 81-100; Andriote, *Victory Deferred*, 25-26; Stein *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement,* 156.

Robbie Tee's anger with the community erupted over the changing gay geography of the city and its economic landscape but a deeper debate was beginning as the easy sexuality of a previous decade came under heavier scrutiny from some in the gay community.[54] The new reality was that AIDS impacted local gay community politics, yet it was unknown how and to what extent it would become a factor in the gay rights movement. Robbie Tee criticized gay men who supported closing the baths and thought their open antagonism and disapproval reflected poorly on the perception of a united gay community. The controversy over the ill-fated Club Amsterdam showed gay men "discriminating against their own" who expressed opinions that damaged the community. Tee wondered if these divisions were just the beginning and asked how AIDS would affect the gay community in the long run, "will it bring us together, or tear us apart?"[55]

AIDS tore Atlanta's gay and lesbian community apart *and* brought them together. That summer Atlanta lesbians hosted a fundraiser for AID Atlanta, "AIDS: Together We Can Stop It!" at a local lesbian bar, the Sportspage. Peter Alberti, vice-president of AID Atlanta confessed it was his first trip to a lesbian bar. The event raised over $3,000 dollars and the support from the lesbian community “surprised a lot of gay men.”[56] Alberti thought it was a “historical event” in part because he believed there to be “very little cooperation between the women and men of our community.” That night, in a “spirit of pride and conviction” men and women hit the dance floor doing the ”Sportspage strut in unison.”

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[52] Larry Kramer's infamous 1978 novel *Faggots* was widely seen as an attack on the easy and promiscuous sexuality of the era. Larry Kramer, *Faggots* (New York: Grove Press, 2000).

[53] Bond, "AIDS Media Reactions," 4.

[54] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 83-84.

[55] Ibid.

Robert McFarlane of the New York City Gay Men’s Health Crisis group thought that AIDS compelled many white, middle class, gay men into political activism for the first time. For many it was the first time their sexuality impacted them in a negative way. He said, “For a white man with a graduate degree and a good job who can pass [for straight, discrimination was] not an issue. Never was. Until [AIDS] really got down to it, and you realized they want you to die.”[57] For many upper and middle-class gay men, white and black, AIDS could be denied after death (obituaries in the period often identified cancer as a cause of death without mentioning AIDS), but it loomed large in their lives. *Cruise Newsmagazine* reported that over 1600 cases of AIDS were confirmed by the CDC by the end of July.[58] Ken Bond reported on one Atlanta individual’s fight for his health as he was hospitalized for the third time that year. Richard Coley was thirty years old and lived in Atlanta for over a decade since leaving his home town of Cornelia, about an hour and a half northeast of the city. He told Bond that he was not “promiscuous” or “a fast-lane gay,” but he also wasn’t “celibate.” After his second hospitalization that spring, Coley's AIDS was confirmed by the CDC.

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[56] “Sportspage Benefit Nets 3000 for AIDS Research,” *Cruise Newsmagazine*, June 24-30, 1983, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 32.

[57] Quoted in Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 81.

[58] Ken Bond, “Optimistic, But Worried,” *Cruise Newsmagazine*, July 22-28, 1983, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 32.

AIDS forced gay men to examine their relationship to sex and how their sexuality had become literally dangerous and potentially lethal.[59] While non-gay people were being affected, AIDS was in the moment still seen as primarily and significantly an issue for gay men. Alexander Wallace's article "After the Parade" in *Cruise* that summer was near hysterical with fear. However, it was not a fear of AIDS the disease which he said would be conquered with science and "sufficient time and money."[60] Wallace feared those who were already homophobic and now feared AIDS. He was most concerned with the opportunities the crisis might render as it allowed people the authority to enact bad policy and practice towards gay people and those with AIDS. He said "Nurses refuse to handle AIDS patients, First Aid classes are cancelled, blood transfusions are refused, morticians decline to embalm the corpses of dead AIDS victims." These effects were already seen in Atlanta too. Ken Bond related that Richard Coley's room in the hospital was posted with a sign that alerted nurses and staff to be extremely careful with blood and other materials and Bond was required to wear a hospital gown, surgical mask, and rubber gloves in the room, though this was, they told him, for the patient's protection.[61]

In addition to the mistreatment of people with AIDS, the gay community was worried about mounting evidence that the CDC was not reporting accurate numbers.[62] Many gay men feared the real body count related to the disease was much higher than officials admitted. In August it was reported that the number of cases identified in state health departments in Tennessee and Texas were higher than the CDC's reported cases.[63] This was part of a bigger problem that national gay and lesbian rights activists were concerned with. In Atlanta, S. Christopher Hagin noted that Ted Weiss, a congressman from New York and chairman of a "House subcommittee investigating the AIDS epidemic" said he had "serious concerns about the scope and accuracy of our national surveillance system for AIDS." One of his staff said they were having trouble getting the CDC to admit there were issues with the official numbers.

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[59] Andriote, *Victory Deferred*, 3; Gould, *Moving Politics*, 71-100.

[60] Wallace, "After the Parade."

[61] Bond, "Optimistic, But Worried."

[62] Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, 244-46, 397-99.

Christopher Hagin reported that at the National Gay Task Force, Lance Ringel, thought the discrepancies in numbers were "outrageous!" There was much at stake in the numbers, as Ringel explained "to have the correct number of cases would help us in our lobbying to get the proper amount of funding for AIDS research and victims. These incorrect numbers hurt our lobbying effort."[64] Hagin questioned how the new conservative political era affected gay lobbying and especially how it affected AIDS lobbying. A congressional aide, who was gay himself but wanted to remain unidentified, spilled some insider gossip. He told Hagin that "Bob Bauman, our new brother, says Reagan is good on gay issues. If he is, why is his Administration lying about the number of AIDS victims?" The aide disbelieved Bauman's political insights and assurances in light of the proof he'd seen. He answered his own question and stated "I'll tell you why. Because Reagan does not care about gay lives and he does not want to spend the money."

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[63] S. Christopher Hagin, "AIDS Cases Not Reported," *Cruise Newsmagazine*, August 26- September 1, 1983, 4. AHC, ALGHT, Box 32.

[64] Ibid.

That fall news about AIDS became front page material in multiple issues of *Cruise News.* In September CDC researcher Dr. James Curran warned that the disease was likely to be more widespread than originally thought.[65] The CDC's numbers had increased since the summer and they now reported over 2000 cases of which 852 were fatal. Curran warned that underestimation was a serious factor because many people presented with more subtle forms of chronic infection or health issues. In the same issue it was reported that Atlanta city council member Mary Davis introduced a proposal to fund AID Atlanta's education efforts with 10,000 dollars from city funds. AID Atlanta coordinated travel to Washington D.C. to attend the National AIDS Vigil in October as well as planned and organized a local vigil to coincide with the national event.[66] The September 30th edition of the paper advertised the National AIDS Vigil on its front page and articles in the paper reported on some good and bad news for the community. Mary Davis's AIDS education funding bill was likely to fail because it lacked support in council or from any real lobbying effort outside the gay community. In much better news activists Caitlyn Ryan and David Harris secured a $40,000 grant for AID Atlanta from the Fulton County Health Department.[67]

AID Atlanta was also the subject of a longer article in the same issue that addressed recent criticism of the group. Some people in the community were concerned with the distribution of the funds raised in the community.[68] The group wanted to go on record to explain their process as many people assumed that raised funds would go directly to research. One of the main sources of the disagreement stemmed from the money raised in recent events like the Sportspage benefit and pledges collected for road races, where activists competed in running competitions to raise money from the community. AID Atlanta argued there was a greater need for money and resources to stay in the local community where it could be used for Atlanta projects that focused on education and the creation of health and hospice support systems for people with AIDS. Others wanted it to go directly to medical research. Susan Martin, with AID Atlanta and the ABPG, thought she hit on a good compromise. She raised $2000.00 in the Fourth of July Peachtree Road Race and decided to split the money between research and AID Atlanta.

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[65] "AIDS More Common Than Initially Thought," *Cruise News*, September 23-29, 1983, 3. AHC, ALGHT, Box 32.

[66] "Local Busses Head for Washington AIDS Vigil," "Mary Davis Introduces AIDS Education Proposal," *Cruise News*, September 23-29, 1983, 3.

[67] "AIDS Funding Held in Council," and "AID Atlanta to Receive $40, 000 From Health Dept.," *Cruise News*, September 30-October 6, 1983. AHC, ALGHT, Box 32.

Late in 1983 *Cruise News* and *Sunset People and Interviews*, both publications that attempted to cover more in-depth news about the city and its gay community ceased publishing.[69] Atlantans found themselves with limited options for media that carried local gay and lesbian community news, political commentary, and most dangerously, information about AIDS in 1984. Meredith Raimondo tracked how AIDS was covered in Atlanta's mainstream daily newspapers, the *Journal* and *Constitution*, from the first reports of a mysterious illnesses in 1982 to 1987 when it was widely covered. In this period, Raimondo noted several important shifts in coverage; a trickle of reports in 1982 turned into a tide with 127 articles related to AIDS in 1983.[70] This media peak was followed by a significant decline in coverage when fears about the possibility of the spread of AIDS into the general heterosexual population were resolved. As a result in 1984 there were only 87 articles related to AIDS. Then in 1985, reporting on AIDS exploded locally and nationally after actor Rock Hudson died from complications of AIDS. His death is generally recognized to be a major turning point in AIDS history, as the year the rest of the country "discovered" AIDS.[71]

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[68] "AID Atlanta Spending Procedures Clarified," *Cruise News*, September 30-October 6, 1983, 3.

[69] Palmer, "Imagining a Gay New World," 5-13.

Pulse magazine launched during Pride month in 1984, but it too failed to sustain itself past the end of the year. A weekly magazine, *Pulse* covered social and community news more than it reported on gay and lesbian politics but some readers welcomed any news in Atlanta. In August, their tenth issue proudly printed a letter from a new reader, who told them he'd only recently picked up the magazine but immediately "scrounged among my friends until I had acquired 5 of your first 7 issues."[72] The letter was titled under the headline "*Cruise* Founder Praises *Pulse*" and was from Richard Kavanaugh. He did not live in the city anymore and had only recently seen *Pulse* during his stay in town for the "Raft Race weekend." Kavanaugh had high hopes for *Pulse* and his assessment of the magazine's quality was much more positive than Nathaniel Burridge's, which came just a few issues later.

Richard Kavanaugh's good impression may have been influenced by his understanding about gay and lesbian print media and its important impact on local communities. He noted the recent deaths of the *Gazette* (due to "mismanagement") and *Cruise Newsmagazine* (competitive ad revenue) as contributing "to the apathy among the gay population there." His theory was based on personal anecdotal evidence too as he related that he collected publications from many other cities, like Norfolk, Denver, Houston, and Dallas. In all these places the papers reported on local and national news that Kavanaugh said "people in Atlanta never see" simply because there was no local paper. For the most part, gay political news was sporadic and limited in bar guides like *Cruise,* as editors included short informational reports peppered in that were generally lighter in tone than the substantive information that critics like Nathanial Burridge wanted.

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[70] Raimondo, "Dateline Atlanta," 347, 351.

[71] Raimondo, "Dateline Atlanta," 351; Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, xxi.

[72] Richard Kavanaugh, "*Cruise* Founder Praises *Pulse*," *Pulse*, August 23, 1984, 15. AHC, ALGHT, Box 28.

Nathaniel Burridge criticized a great many things about the new magazine *Pulse* in his letter published in October. He found the lack of reporting on AIDS especially frustrating and a dangerous disappointment. Burridge wrote his letter after twelve weeks of editions that failed to relate to him as "a homosexual living in Atlanta in 1984."[73] Up to that point in the magazine its most substantial treatment of AIDS came in recent coverage of a play written by Rebecca Ranson, *Warren*, which opened in August at Atlanta's Seven Stages theatre. Ranson's play was a personal tribute to her friend Warren who died of AIDS, whom the forty year old met in graduate school at the University of North Carolina fifteen years before. The two maintained a close friendship and working relationship in theatre productions and cofounded an organization called "Alternate ROOTS," which was described as a "coalition of southern community theatres."[74]

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[73] Burridge, "Dear Editor," 11.

[74] Aaron Taylor, "Warren" A Tribute By Ranson," *Pulse*, August 23, 1984, 17-18. AHC, ALGHT, Box 28.

Warren was a commemoration and celebration of Rebecca Ranson's close friend and helped her come to terms with his death.[75] Ranson told *Pulse* that she stopped writing the play at one point but ultimately finished it despite it being "very painful" because it was "part of the healing process for me." The magazine also reported that she was working on a book based on interviews she'd conducted with people on the well-known Ward 5B in San Francisco, the "AIDS Ward." The *Warren* stage was decorated simply with quilts handmade by a nurse on the AIDS ward who Ranson stayed with in San Francisco, a woman named Catherine Woodruff. Woodruff's quilts were "made with symbols of health care and death," which expressed "her way of dealing with all the death she sees."

The next issue of *Pulse* showed multiple photographs from the performance. The quilts, described as "abstract hangings," were the only visual aid on a "stark" set. [76] The quilts were more representational in the photographs but included human figures, a hospital bed, and several had bowls of various colors as central objects, which might have connected to Woodruff's work as nurse in the hospital. In October the AGC exhibited twenty of Woodruff's quilts that documented her work as a nurse and her relationship with a woman who had cancer.[77] Woodruff was only twenty-eight years old but told *Pulse* she started making quilts when she was just sixteen. The quilts dated to 1981, after she arrived in San Francisco from Iowa City, and from a time when she had some unique experiences "she needed to work out." Woodruff's story included connecting with a woman in Iowa City who was diagnosed "with a rare form of breast cancer," but rejected the estimation that she had months to live. Instead her friends "used methods like mind control" to help her and the woman lived for another two years. During that time Woodruff acted as a nurse and developed a relationship with the woman as they eventually became lovers. The quilts were a direct expression of her emotions and she said "I had some important things to say about my relationship and working with the sick." She used symbols like "bowls, crosses, and Jacob's ladder" that linked her personal traumas. The Jacob's ladder, she said, related to the symbolism of the twelve steps in Alcoholics Anonymous, of which she was a member. The ladder also represented the "progression of life and hope" that she hoped to convey with vibrant colors that contrasted with the "death and sickness" that was the subject.[78]

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Aaron Taylor, "Warren," *Pulse*, August 30, 1984, 8-9. AHC, ALGHT, Box 28.

[77] Ibid. and Aaron Taylor, "Quilt Exhibit at AGC," *Pulse*, October 14, 1984, 19. AHC, ALGHT, Box 28.

Aside from their coverage of *Warren*, *Pulse* reported on AIDS in Atlanta similarly to *Cruise* with updates on the organization AID Atlanta. In August there was a short piece about AID Atlanta's search for a new director after Caitlyn Ryan resigned. Ryan was moving to Washington D.C. later that year to become the new director of the National Lesbian/Gay Health Education Foundation. The announcement was positive and congratulatory noting that Ryan was "named by the Advocate as one of 400 achievers in the gay movement." *Pulse* included another detail that showed Atlanta's double loss of activists. They reported that Ryan would join her lover, another recently removed Atlantan—Allida Black, former director of the Atlanta Gay Center—in Washington.[79]

Nathaniel Burridge's letter, published in October, referenced twelve weeks of non-essential information in the pages of *Pulse*. In the thirteenth issue, *Pulse* increased their coverage of information about AIDS and carried multiple longer reports on STDs, AIDS, and even lesbian health concerns. Criticism of Atlanta's gay and lesbian media was not a new phenomenon but Burridge's letter seemed to be an appeal that was especially desperate due to the advent of AIDS. He and other gay Atlantans thought it was not a time for the local gay media to continue their apolitical dedication to culture and the social scene, an editorial policy that allowed them to sidestep many controversial issues that might have altered their profits over the years. *Pulse* may have immediately received Burridge's letter and attempted to make amends for their lack of coverage or it might have been that AIDS was finally impossible to ignore anymore. That fall *Cruise* also shifted direction when they abandoned their general non-political editorial stance and published a three-part series by Alexander Wallace called "AIDS: What are we going to do about it?"[80] In the coming months the gay community in Atlanta faced AIDS more directly and personally, when they witnessed the rapid onset of illness in a longtime community member, Layton Gregory, co-owner of the Club Bath Atlanta, and his equally sudden death related to AIDS in November.

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[78] Taylor, "Quilt Exhibit at AGC."

[79] "AID Atlanta Seeks Executive Director," *Pulse,* August 30, 1984, 16. AHC, ALGHT, Box 28.

By the end of 1984, AIDS became an inescapable reality. Atlanta's community of people with AIDS (PWA) had increased substantially and it was much harder to ignore the disease or relegate it to the background. Until then Atlanta's gay press tried hard to not let the disease become the most important story in the gay community. It was unfortunately becoming apparent that it would be the most predominant and painful feature of gay news for years. *Cruise* had not recently published anything of similar length or tone related to AIDS and Alexander Wallace's series represented a real turning point in the community. The articles focused on AIDS in Atlanta's gay community and outlined the threats facing them as they confronted it.

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[80] Alexander Wallace, "AIDS: What are we going to do about it?" *Cruise*, September 6-12, 1984, 14-16; October 4-10, 1984, 14-16; November 1-7, 1984, 19-20. AHC, ALGHT, Box 21.

In the first piece, Wallace summarized an interview with Dr. Jim Curran, a coordinator of AIDS research at the CDC in Atlanta. Wallace introduced the series by way of a metaphor as he compared his interview with Curran to an ideal doctor-patient relationship, only this time the patient faced a health outcome that was "especially the worst." Dr. Curran paid attention to Wallace and made sure he understood the scientific and medical terms he used in their conversation. He explained related side-effects and physical symptoms associated with the virus, which calmed Wallace who judged him to be fair and non-judgmental. He was an ideal messenger for breaking the bad news to the patient, who was in this case, said Wallace, "the entire gay community" and "the news is bad, guys…it's really bad."[81]

Alexander Wallace bluntly dumped the worst news out as he reported that cases of AIDS were up by 60% from 1983's numbers, and this was only current to the point of his writing in August. Over seventy percent of AIDS cases were reported in gay men and it was clear that the city was connected to its spread throughout multiple gay communities across the country. Wallace said it "particularly hits those cities we love best: New York, Los Angeles, Miami, San Francisco, Boston, D.C.—and Atlanta." In Wallace's second installment he detailed more staggering statistics associated with AIDS.

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[81] Wallace, "AIDS: What are we going to do about it?" September 6-12, 1984, 14.

"In Georgia, since 1981, there have been 80 diagnosed cases of AIDS and 42 deaths."[82] The astounding mortality rate was the source of major anxiety and fear in the gay community. He also described the experience of testing, diagnosis, and treatment as he related medical services and supports that people in the community could access. Importantly, he noted that it was not possible to be diagnosed with AIDS. Instead a diagnosis was made through a number of tests that eliminated a host of other possibilities. The one test that mattered, said Wallace, was the one at "Emory University Hospital" which checked if your immune system was compromised. The fact that Wallace was able to reference a specific hospital and mentioned that only about "half a dozen doctors" in the city were familiar with treating people with AIDS showed how small and limited Atlantans resources were for treatment.[83]

Many of Wallace's arguments about the apathy around AIDS were built on a criticism of gay male sexual culture. He never went so far as to say that gay men deserved AIDS but he did forcefully argue that gay men were responsible for its spread, stating that "fucking around" was "mortally dangerous." Wallace compared engaging in casual sex during the AIDS epidemic to willingly smoking cigarettes while knowing about the risks of associated cancer. He said no one really believed that smoking was safe and he chided men who disregarded their health and gave in to their addiction. Without even trying to quit they threw up their hands and declared "I simply must have a ciggy-poo!"[84] Wallace likened this attitude to the one that many gay men took towards casual sex and AIDS. He attacked a certain kind of gay male sexuality that proclaimed “Balling guys is what gay is all about! It’s what I came out of the closet to do! That’s gay lib, man!”[85] He wondered what it meant to be gay in the age of AIDS.

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[82] Wallace, "AIDS: What are we going to do about it?" October 4-10, 1984, 14.

[83] Ibid., 16.

[84] Wallace, "AIDS: What are we going to do about it?" September 6-12, 1984, 16.

> Is it a frantic disregard for every rule of life while we desperately disco our existence away? Is being gay that singular prowl in the dark for just one more trick—and that awful sense of loss in the daylight? Is being gay two lovers ignoring the rest of the world—safe, secure, immune, smug?[86]

Alexander Wallace thought there were too many people in the community who acted in self-destructive ways. This he connected to the city’s apathy in regards to activism in general and to AIDS awareness specifically. He considered this in light of the reality that the disease continued to spread because gay men continued to infect each other. In part, Wallace’s *Cruise* series was an indictment of the local community for their lack of financial commitment to the cause. In the third installment he told the story of AID Atlanta’s funding to illustrate the point. The new director, Ken South, said former director Caitlyn Ryan raised around $60,000 for the organization from Fulton County and a private group. Wallace angrily pointed out that less than $10,000 of the money raised came from the local gay community.[87] Wallace raged at the community’s “appalling lack of support” and alleged that two businesses who held fundraisers for AID Atlanta had not donated their contributions. He couldn’t decide whether it was caused by “the infamous “laid-back” attitude of Atlanta’s gay community, mass arrogance or sheer stupidity.”

Alexander Wallace was outraged and disappointed with the Atlanta gay community’s slow response to AIDS for over a year. By the time the series appeared in

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[85] Ibid., 14.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Wallace, “AIDS: What are we going to do about it?” November 1-7, 1984, 19.

Cruise in 1984, he was exasperated with the seemingly non-existent support for AIDS organizations and the fear and denial of an impending crisis. He blamed the gay community for not fighting as if their lives depended on it, which they so clearly did. Even though he advocated for better treatment, options, understanding, and education, Wallace, and many others like him, also blamed gay male sexuality for the spread of AIDS. In October of 1984, just as Wallace's second feature on AIDS appeared in *Cruise*, *Pulse* published a letter to the community from "People with AIDS." In it the writer said that "we have been ostracized, blamed, and damned by many throughout the community. We have been shunned in public and isolated because of fear and hysteria."[88] But the letter from a representative of People with AIDS stated simply, "times are changing."

The tendency toward writing about the staggering toll of AIDS by way of evidence in numbers was shattered for many in gay Atlanta that fall with the death of Layton Gregory. In the first week of November, after Wallace's in-depth multi-part series finished in *Cruise*, the gay and lesbian community lost one of its well-known community members, Layton Gregory, owner of Club Bath Atlanta and one of the co-founders of the Atlanta Business and Professional Guild.[89] Gregory's was the first high-profile death in the community and it would be felt in Atlanta's gay community for a "long time," said writer Ken Bond. Because of his status and connections to the gay business community and the gay media in the city, Gregory's death was publicly commemorated and covered extensively in the city's publications.

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[88] "Letter to the Community From People With AIDS," *Pulse,* October 14, 1984, 14-15. AHC, ALGHT, Box 28.

[89] Ken Bond, "Layton Worsens: Community Reacts," *Pulse*, September 20, 1984, 8. AHC, ALGHT, Box 28.

In the first week of September, *Pulse* reported Gregory's hospitalization with an "undisclosed illness," but did not specify AIDS.[90] Both the straight and gay media often reported deaths due to related illnesses and not AIDS, preferring to gloss over the virus while focusing attention on the memory of the person who died. This was an understandable and justifiable position as people in the community wanted to be remembered as individuals and not just another victim of AIDS. But the next week Gregory and *Pulse* went public with his AIDS diagnosis. Layton Gregory sent in a message of thanks to the community, who supported him and proved that "a loving family comes together in an hour of need."[91] *Pulse* reported on Gregory's recent illness and his strength throughout it as the "Southern Patriarch" had "brushed off death in a battle against AIDS."[92]

Layton Gregory's public and publicized struggle to maintain good health as opportunistic infections assaulted him gave the gay and lesbian community some intimate insight into what an AIDS death might look like in real life. Gregory's illness and death must have triggered an unwelcome hypothetical scenario as other gay Atlantans imagined their own sickness or even death. Layton Gregory recovered from his first serious trial, but quickly fell sick again and was hospitalized. *Pulse* used an illustration of Gregory in a tuxedo as the cover for the September 20th 1984 issue and ran it with an accompanying long commemorative article.[93] At press time, it was clear that the writer, Ken Bond, thought Gregory was near death. The piece conveyed the confusing, honest, and brutal reality that Atlanta's gay and lesbian community was watching one of their own die. The meaning of his life could be felt in the "stirrings of unity," which were the "manifest love of a falling leader."[94]

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[90] Ken Bond, "Layton Gregory Hospitalized," *Pulse*, September 6, 1984, 14. AHC, ALGHT, Box 28.

[91] D. Layton Gregory, "A Message for Layton Gregory," *Pulse*, September 13, 1984, AHC, ALGHT, Box 28.

[92] "Changing of the Guard: Layton Gregory Looks to the Future," *Pulse*, September 13, 1984, 17. AHC, ALGHT, Box 28.

Layton Gregory died on November 2 from illness associated with AIDS. The next edition of *Cruise* was dedicated to Gregory and they honored him with a cover photograph. Inside the magazine was a poem entitled "For Layton," written by his friend Harry. The poet called Layton a leader, a lion, and a pillar of strength but the poem was also partially a warning from beyond. The poem expressed that Layton's wish to the gay community would be to learn from his life and his death. Harry wrote:

> You can alter the course—that could lead to great pain,
> For your body's a temple—where the spirit does dwell.
> You can make it your heaven—and you can make it your hell.
> Take a vow in my name—that you'll make a new start.[95]

The poem conveyed the sentiment that Gregory, along with many other gay men, in part blamed their personal sexual behavior for AIDS.

"Apathalanta": Mainstreaming Gay and Lesbian Politics

The Atlanta Business and Professional Guild had undergone some significant revisions and transitions since its formation in the late 1970s. BWMT attacked the group for comments made publicly when they implied that BWMT prioritized other concerns over economic development in 1982. Since then new leadership at the Guild addressed its reputation as an organization that catered to and existed to serve the needs of Atlanta's gay white male business owners. Late in 1983 it was reported that a "professional" wing dubbed the "Buckhead contingent" attempted to take over leadership of the organization. Members narrowly voted in Ward Hill, "an architect and graduate of Georgia Tech," as Vice President and Susan Martin, an advertising associate to lead the organization in 1984.

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[93] Bond, "Layton Worsens: Community Reacts," September 20, 1984, 8.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Harry, "Layton Gregory," *Cruise,* November 8-14, 1984. AHC, ALGHT, Box 21.

The new leaders represented what was reported as a "growing schism" in the Guild between the business and professional sides. Hill, with the professional faction, won the position by a "slim margin" over Layton Gregory who represented the business side. Though he helped found the organization, Gregory confirmed reports of his attempted sidelining. Apparently the "Buckhead contingent" thought Gregory, who co-owned Club Atlanta, one of just two bathhouses left in the city, had the "wrong image."[96] The generally more conservative nature of the organization remained though. In March, Ken Bond reported that at a recent Guild meeting a discussion evolved on the gender divide in the gay and lesbian movement. Bond recounted how members addressed inclusivity in a more mainstream culture. He said "the gay community will be perceived to be splintered as long as we refuse to lump all our diverse factions under the term "gay." He recalled a local and recent example of when the diversity of the name had muddled the meaning of the event, parenthetically noting "remember Lesbian/Gay/Transperson Pride Week?"[97]

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[96] "Guild Elects Officers; Potential Split Averted," *Cruise News*, December 2, 1983, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 32.

[97] Ken Bond, "Gender Gap Studied at Business Guild Meeting," *Cruise*, March 9-March 15, 1984, 32.

In 1984 Pride Week was back to its pre-1980 naming convention of Lesbian/Gay and dropped the Transperson. It was a compromise that left out one part of the community at the expense of moving forward others. Melvin Ross, past co-chair of BWMT, was a member of the Gay Pride Week Committee's Executive Board that year. It is likely that some BWMT members were part of the more conservative group who objected to the inclusion of transperson, and possibly even lesbian, in the naming of the event. Melvin Ross cowrote the 1983 Gay Pride Day proclamation and presented it to the Mayor for his signature and in 1984 served on the Mayor's Gay Advisory Board.[98] Atlanta's black elite and politically powerful class transitioned into an era of neoliberalism in the 1980s and it seemed that BWMT evolved similarly. Maurice Hobson showed how while Young focused on making Atlanta "an international city," he left behind the city's poor as they faced a public health crisis with the spread of crack cocaine that impacted working class and poor communities profoundly with an attendant rise in crime and violence.[99] Some compromises on priorities and the city's interests were made using class distinctions that already existed in Atlanta's black elite community where associations with morality and respectability had guided politics for decades.

During the first week of December in 1983, BWMT celebrated its second anniversary with a birthday party, a banquet held at The Great Buckhead Saloon, and a special performance concert by Blackberri, a "gay black songwriter from San

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AHC, ALGHT, Box 32.

[98] "Expose," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, May 1984. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 2.

[99] Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 142-47.

Francisco."[100] Roger B., the white co-chair, reviewed the anniversary events in the first BWMT newsletter of the new year in "The Banquet, the Concert, and the Closet." Roger reflected on discussions and reactions from members related to what seemed like a low-key controversy. Some members were unhappy with the decision to hold their anniversary banquet at The Great Buckhead Saloon, a place "noted for a certain redneck ambiance."[101] Roger reminded members of the sage advice given them by Mike Smith when he visited in the spring of 1983 and told them to "protect our more closeted members." He concluded that "our responsibility to educate the redneck world is clearly tempered by our responsibility to provide privacy for our more closeted members."

That winter BWMT launched the Atlanta Anti-Discrimination Project (AADP) to continue their work fighting discriminatory admissions policies in the city's gay bars. The group reported in May that only ALFA responded to their calls to aid the monitoring process. No other Atlanta group had sent representatives. Without widespread community support the group was still able to accomplish some important work. They advertised the project in *Cruise*, applied for a grant to establish a discrimination response system, and initiated a complaint and conversation with the club Backstreet who they said failed to post appropriate signage in compliance with the recently passed city codes. In June the group was awarded a grant for nearly $2000 from the Fund for Human Dignity for the Discrimination Response System (DRS) Project.[102] The good news came just before the international BWMT conference held in Atlanta that summer and was highlighted in the program with a special article about the local project.[103] Three months later BWMT reported they had no “verifiable instances of discrimination” and “few complaints.” They cautiously engaged in hope noting “maybe things really have changed for the better” and that multiple carding, once so common a policy was now “a thing of the past.”[104]

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[100] "Up Front," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter,* December 1983, 2. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

[101] Roger B., "The Banquet, the Concert, and the Closet," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, January 1984, 1. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 2.

[102] "AADP Receives Award," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, June 1984. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 2.

In the early 1980s a more conservative lesbian and gay political movement emerged in Atlanta that stressed mainstream and middle-class values as they distanced themselves from a more radical past. The image of the gay and lesbian community became a central concern of mainstream organizations. As national leaders began to emphasize a more traditional strategy of political lobbying, they would do so in a fairly conservative political climate. This trend towards a more conservative and mainstream culture trickled down to local communities too.

Nathaniel Burridge’s letter to *Pulse* charged the magazine with a host of problems. He and his friends disliked the publication because it never printed “anything of substance.”[105] He claimed that *Pulse* was only interested in “the latest grease” or the “outraged outrageous drag queens trying to out lip-synch each other.” He said “rarely, if ever, has anyone expressed the slightest interest in the political ramifications of being gay… or where they think the homosexual fits vis-à-vis the current state of social/cultural attitudes.”[106] Burridge lobbed insults at the magazine and those in its pages as he pondered the dearth of "serious" news in the city. He bitterly mused that *Pulse* must have had no choice but to report on the "impossible-to-work-with bar owners and jealously-protected Freak Pageants" because they were, as far as he could tell, the only public gay figures in the city. Burridge was probably not surprised that *Pulse* was unable to make itself indispensable to the Atlanta gay community and ceased publication by the end of the year.

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[103] “Fighting Bar Discrimination in Atlanta,” IABWMT Conference Program, July 2-7, 1984, 17. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 1.

[104] “Discrimination Project Report,” *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, October 1984. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 2.

[105] Burridge, “Letter to the Editor.”

[106] Ibid.

The major lesbian and gay organizations in the city that worked on political issues did not have a visible presence in the city's local gay media at the time. *Cruise* and *Pulse* both focused on arts and entertainment rather than politics or activism. Burridge had lived in Atlanta for two and a half years and thought he knew the community well enough to criticize it. He called them collectively a "high-strung and confused community." It seemed that he did not know of or cared to credit local activists who had in the past five years worked to end police discrimination and harassment, legally challenged the sodomy law with Michael Hardwick's lawsuit, and successfully lobbied for the passage of anti-discrimination bar ordinances.

In other previous publications the lesbian half of the community was represented minimally, often even with just a single woman's contributions. *Pulse* took the unusual step to include two regular columns by women in their publication, which did not go unnoticed by some gay men in the community. Burridge dismissed columnists Maria Dolan and Leda Rita as "lesbians who have apparently not realized that the 60's are over."[107] When Atlanta's mostly male gay press sought out women in the early 1980s,

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[107] Burridge, "Letter to the Editor."

Maria Helena Dolan was most likely to be called on for a column or report.[108] Dolan dominated the press and worked hard to make sure that women were—at least in token view—represented in Atlanta's gay magazines and papers. If it weren't for Dolan's often lone voice, Atlanta's lesbians would have remained largely ignored in its print media. Dolan supplied columns with titles like "Sapphic Frenzy" and "Slouching Toward Lesbos" that offered one woman's perspective on Atlanta's social and political gay and lesbian community.

One of Maria Dolan's most revisited subjects over the years was sexism in Atlanta's gay male community. After Pride in 1984, she titled her regular *Pulse* column "The Art of Venting Spleen" and dialogued about the controversy over Pride's lackluster attendance. She wanted gay men to address their own sexism before they asked why women didn't show up to events. She argued that gay men held positions of power and influence over the movement because they operated in a sexist system. When gay men commented that "womyn are always angry," when they dished at the bar and called women "fish," and when certain gay men objected to women's only spaces, it contributed to a general "silencing" of women in the movement. She said "Silencing assumes a myriad of forms. Womyn are silenced when we're not taken seriously. We're silenced when our concerns go unaddressed, or are paid the meagerest lip service; or are coopted to display some man's 'correctness.'[109]

Maria Dolan argued that this silence contributed to a misguided sense of unity from some gay leaders. The "Universality of Human Experience" was male, she asserted and in the context of the gay and lesbian movement that broad historical assertion of maleness transformed into an image of "Gay" that "implies a mustachioed white man." Dolan seemed to point to the obvious—that lesbian women and people of color found it hard to see themselves in this image. The issue of how white and male the gay rights movement in Atlanta was continued to be a topic that generated much attention. Issues of racial and gender discrimination from within the community were obvious to many when boards, leadership, and organizations had all male, majority white, and overwhelmingly middle-class memberships.

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[108] Maria Dolan, "Opening Salvo—Hey Dick Your 5000 years are Up!" *Gazette*, January 15-21, 1981. AHC, ALGHT, Maria Dolan Materials, Box 76.

[109] Maria Helena Dolan, "Slouching Toward Lesbos: The Art of Venting Spleen," *Pulse*, August 2, 1984, 20. AHC, ALGHT, Box 28.

Groups like the Atlanta Gay Center, the Guild, and the L/GRC attempted to deal with the issues of racism and sexism in their official positions and organizational bylaws. However, most were still directed entirely by men or white people, which indicated the entrenched and systemic nature of racism and sexism. As a remedy to the loss of yet another gay publication the AGC stepped into the news business and launched *The News* late in 1984. Of the twelve staff listed in the first issue, all but one, "J.P.," were traditionally male names, though neither gender or race were identified. *The News* published biweekly and sometimes intermittently throughout the rest of the decade. The paper covered local and national news related to the gay and lesbian community, in addition to reporting on their own service work as a community center.

Local writers and journalists often worked across organizations and businesses to provide commentary, reporting, and analysis of the various actions and work of the Atlanta gay and lesbian community. *The News* was not "envisioned" as a money-making, entrepreneurial enterprise. It was, like *Cruise News* had called itself in 1983, a service to the community.[110] But *The News* aimed at being "a comprehensive and reliable dispenser of information to the total Metro-Atlanta gay/lesbian community" for another purpose.[111] Bill Gripp, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Center, thought the most vital contribution *The News* would make was to transform Atlanta into an "envisioned" community that was "informed, cohesive, and involved." Gripp admitted the community was not currently so enlightened but hoped the paper would help them achieve the "reality we all know is possible tomorrow."[112]

Race and gender had long divided the gay and lesbian community but issues of class and economic inequality most affected the mainstreaming of lesbian and gay political activism.[113] PACs, non-profit service organizations, and enthusiastic activists promoted a new type of engagement that determined commitment by dollars given or access gained. The advent and success of mainstreaming continued the marginalization of those who were less well-off financially or professionally because it erected barriers that could not be easily surmounted. As a political strategy mainstream organizations depended on conditions that assumed certain factors of privilege. One had to have the ability to contribute financially to these new fundraising groups, which meant having a certain amount of money available in your budget for political donations. Other new mainstream organizations emphasized educational or professional status in their political lobbying, which introduced another element of gate-keeping into lesbian and gay political activism.

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[110] "Notice," *Cruise News*, December 16-22, 3. AHC, ALGHT, Box 32.

[111] Bill Gripp, "Dear Readers," *The News*, December 6, 1984, 2. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Endean, *Bringing*; Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good;* Vaid, *Virtual Equality*.

The Atlanta Campaign for Human Rights (ACHR) organized as a political action committee late in November of 1984. Tony Armas, the acting co-chair who also served on the Board of Directors for the Guild, said their primary purposes for organization were the "security of our civil and human rights and the enhancement of the gay community's influence on local and state government's political and economic policies."[114] The ACHR raised thousands of dollars for local candidates, held candidate forums, rated local and state politicians, and hosted benefit dinners and gala events over the next few years. *The News* announced the group's formation as a progressive step in gay and lesbian Atlanta's political activism. In their formation they said "Atlanta is ready to shed its reputation as possibly the most politically apathetic large city in the country."

The ACHR regarded their organization as a profound change in the political activism of the city, stating that it "signals the coming age of our Atlanta Gay Community."[115] They modelled their organization after similar groups like those in New York and Los Angeles, which were non-partisan, nonprofit political action committees.[116] They too were non-partisan and raised funds to distribute to candidates who were friendly to or allies of the gay and lesbian community. They attempted to open up gay and lesbian politics in the state to Democrats and Republicans, a strategy they thought would "attract both money and energy." The ACHR planned on issuing ratings of candidates and using their solicited funds to directly contribute to campaigns. Founded by a group of "concerned Atlantans," they planned to have a fourteen member Board of Directors, "representative of Atlanta's lesbian/gay community" in place to guide the organization by the spring of 1985.[117]

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[114] "ACHR Attacks Local Gay Apathy," *The News*, December 6, 1984, 2.

[115] "Atlanta Campaign for Human Rights Seeks Support," *Cruise*, January 3-9, 1985, 30. AHC, ALGHT, Box 21.

[116] Ibid.; Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement,* 173-75; Eaklor, *Queer America*, 171-74.

Somewhat controversially the group offered Atlanta's wealthier gay and lesbians the opportunity to influence policy and politics without necessarily having to come out of the closet. In a move that proved popular but problematic they noted that "since contributions are private, anyone can give without the risk of public exposure."[118] Political lobbying became popular in Atlanta in the 1980s just as it gained traction and force nationally with lesbian and gay rights leaders and organizations.[119] Some people objected to the elitism of the ACHR's political activism, as their primary goals of fundraising and political lobbying did not attempt to directly engage the entire gay and lesbian community and made use of economic and professional privilege. While the ACHR assumed representation for a broader gay and lesbian constituency, they lobbied on behalf of only a certain segment of gay and lesbian Atlantans.

The ACHR was not the first political group that formed in Atlanta but it was significantly different from First Tuesday, founded in 1977 in the wake of the gay rights defeat in Miami. First Tuesday started its life as a group within the Democratic Party of Georgia because activists wanted to create a bloc within the ruling and incumbent political power of the state. They disaffiliated from the Democratic Party around 1980 and the Presidential election, presumably to appeal to gay and lesbian political activists who were too liberal for the Democrats or were contemplating becoming Reagan Democrats that year. When asked about the differences between the two groups, First Tuesday's vice president, Tim Forshay, said the key difference was that the ACHR would make direct contributions to candidates and expected to influence their policies and positions.[120]

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[117] "Atlanta Campaign for Human Rights Seeks Support."

[118] Ibid.

[119] Vaid, *Virtual Equality*, 74; Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 173-75; Endean, *Bringing*; Fetner, *How the Religious Right*.

Atlanta's gay and lesbian community was still divided by race, gender, and class and the new mainstream organizations complicated the scene further. The establishment of the ACHR in 1984 showed a growing division within Atlanta's lesbian and gay elite community as the group developed a moderately liberal and progressive professional agenda. Mainstream and middle-class activists contrasted with the more politically and culturally conservative wealthy white gay men who had dominated Atlanta's elite set for years. The new generation made an older community look increasingly out of step with the modern city. The ACHR seized on the potential of the growing mainstream out community and focused on a strategy that centered around lobbying and fundraising. A year later, one of its founding members, Dr. Stosh Ostrow, remarked that "we have money in this community; it's time we shook some of it loose."[121]

As the AIDS crisis impacted more communities across the country, local responses largely focused on the immediate needs of those affected.[122] Many communities raised money for those who were sick and needed care or promoted safe sex education campaigns that sought to limit the spread of what was by the mid-1980s commonly called AIDS and referred to as a disease. The idea that the urban world of gay bars and baths and the sexual culture they promoted was harmful to the larger gay community was an emotional and divisive argument that gnawed at people of all colors, genders, and classes.[123] Some people in the gay and lesbian community had come to the opinion that bathhouses were an irresponsible business venture in light of the public health crisis. The Atlanta gay baths that still operated in 1985 came under attack from city officials, the police, and even at the end of the year from the director of AID Atlanta.

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[120] "ACHR Attacks Local Gay Apathy."

[121] Gus Galvez, "AIDS Town Meeting Informative, Emotional," *The News,* December 2, 1985, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[122] Andriote, *Victory Deferred*; Inrig, *North Carolina*; Bayer*, Private Acts;* Brier, *Infectious Ideas;* Cathy J. Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

During the first week of February in 1985, the Atlanta gay community was subjected to a new strategy that attacked gay male space in the city under the auspices of preventing the spread of AIDS and other sex crimes. On Thursday, February 7th the city filed suit to close the bathhouses, enjoining them from operation for one year. They filed suit to close the baths with evidence of sexual criminality brought to light from a six-month long undercover vice investigation and with recent complaints about the businesses.[124] Charles Hunter, an attorney involved in the case pointed out to *The News* that some complaints even originated from within the gay community.[125] Atlanta activists responded quickly and just two days after the city's legal maneuvers became public, they met to discuss a response to the suit.

The ABPG released a statement which *Cruise* felt obligated to report on despite the assertion that it was an "Arts & Entertainment" magazine.[126] Making a rare but necessary step into local politics, *Cruise* declared they would not "bury their heads in the warm Nassau sand" when the constitutional rights of gay men were at stake. The ABPG's statement rejected all attempts to shut down the baths because of the perception that they contributed to the "health problem." They said it was an "ominous sign" of a further curtailment of their civil rights. Closing the baths was "persecution" and represented "selective enforcement of the worse kind." Noting that it was an election year, the *Cruise* editor cynically added that "using local history as the rule, there appears a nexus between local elections & official hostility toward our community."

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[123] Shilts, *And the Band Played On*; Brier, *Infectious Ideas;* Andriote, *Victory Deferred*.

[124] Helquist and Osmon, "Sex and the Baths," in Woods and Binson, *Gay Bathhouses*.

[125] "DA Files Suit to Close Baths," *The News,* February 14, 1985, 1,7. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

The lawsuit was just the opening salvo in a new campaign against the baths.[127] On Sunday, February 10th Atlanta police raided the only baths left in the city, the Locker Room and Club Bath Atlanta, which netted 10-12 arrests for alleged sexual crimes.[128] These arrests provided more evidence that the baths contributed to illegal sexual activity and were in violation of the laws and were therefore a "public nuisance."[129] As details of the raids on the bathhouses and the actions to close the baths by the city became known during the spring of 1985 the gay community was faced with the dilemma of pulling together a response from a divided community.

Closing the baths threatened how some gay men experienced freedom in their sexuality. But for others, as AIDS cases grew locally, closing the baths became an important emotional political issue that reflected their concern for the community. The Atlanta police and the city wanted the baths closed based on their conviction that they aided illegal sexual activity. The curtailment of the spread of AIDS provided a ready-made and convincing reason to close the baths. In the early 1980s, the Fulton county district solicitor closed gay adult bookstores with the aid of the police who raided the stores and entrapped and arrested men for solicitation of sodomy. It seemed likely that the bathhouses would go the same way as the bookstores. For some gay men the closure of the baths was a welcome step in that it did something different. One of the most repeated criticisms of the gay community's response to AIDS was that men had literally done nothing to change their behavior despite the worsening and deepening crisis.

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[126] "The Politics of Local Politics," *Cruise*, February 14-20, 1985, 5. AHC, ALGHT, Box 32.

[127] Woods and Binson, *Gay Bathhouses;* Andriote, *Victory Deferred*.

[128] "Police Raid Baths," *The News*, February 14, 1985, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[129] "DA Files Suit to Close Baths," 1.

Some activists saw the action against the baths as a clear violation of their constitutional rights. *The News* ended their report with a plea to the community to become more aware of local issues. They reframed the question of ignorance and awareness as a choice Atlantans had to make between inaction or activism. Activists had warned the community when the city closed the bookstores and they thought Atlantans needed to be alarmed now also. The invasions into privacy wouldn't stop at the baths and *The News* wondered where the state would draw the line to protect gays and lesbians, or if they would at all. Would they find cause to raid "the bars, the Gay Center, or maybe your apartment or house?"[130]

A month after the raid *The News* reported that The Locker Room settled out of court and agreed to make changes at the establishment. In the future the police would have free access to the club, which implied an honor-code type of arrangement but also ensured that the character and culture of the business changed. Club Atlanta sought a compromise of self-monitoring by gay male community members, to which surprisingly a judge agreed.[131] Club Atlanta sent county solicitor Charles Hunter, a list of five names as potential community monitors. He turned them all down. Mike Frusco, an aid to the owner of Club Atlanta, said that Hunter believed "that no gay person is able to monitor his activities and that no gay business is able to monitor its activities."[132] Hunter supported his claim with ads from a Damron book (a popular gay travel guide) and argued that all gay baths were basically just sex playgrounds.[133] Frusco also told *The News* about an extra dramatic twist in the story. Atlanta appeared to have its own gay Benedict Arnold who was working against the baths as an informant reporting on sexual activity. Frusco was told that he was "someone the gay community has trusted in the past and has now turned against the community." Whether or not it was personal, Frusco reminded the community of the stakes of the game being played. He said "the community needs to realize this is not a baths issue and could spread to bars and soon we'll all be wearing pink triangles."[134]

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[130] "DA Files Suit to Close Baths," 1.

Atlanta's gay and lesbian political community was forced to react and respond to a swift attack when the city took aim at the baths. The ABPG immediately organized and issued a statement that denounced the recent events. From that hastily thrown together meeting, activists in the city realized they needed to reconnect in order to have and to present a better organized community response in the future. That spring, activists formed the Metro Atlanta Council of Gay and Lesbian Organizations (MACGLO), in part, as a central clearinghouse for press and media contacts. Those involved with MACGLO considered it an important step towards unifying the diverse lesbian and gay rights movement groups in the city. MACGLO's membership ranged from fifteen to twenty groups which included "political, religious, atheist, service, business, sports, and social organizations," who attended regular meetings from 1985 until 1991 when the organization disbanded.[135]

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[131] "Saga Continues…Locker Room and Club Atlanta," *The News*, March 14, 1985, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Damron started publishing ads in 1974 and researchers Woods and Binson found that baths were the primary businesses to place ads in the guide. From 1974 to 1982 ads for baths increased reflecting a boom in business that declined significantly after 1982 and they noted that "After 1984 ads for the bathhouse chains in Damron almost disappeared." (66) Woods and Binson, "Number and Distribution of Gay Bathhouses in the United States and Canada," in *Gay Bathhouses*, 59, 61, 66.

[134] "Saga Continues…"

MACGLO honestly admitted that it had "barely survived its first months" in a press release that celebrated their first anniversary.[136] The organization was formed to "foster a greater front" among Atlanta's gay and lesbian organizations as they faced new challenges, like the attempts by the city to close the baths. During the summer of 1985, in yet another pride season, Atlanta saw the launch of a new gay and lesbian magazine called *Etc.*, which grew over the decade to be a popular and widely distributed publication throughout the Southeast. Just a month into the launch of *Etc.*, its news editor criticized some of the decisions made by MACGLO in a short report entitled "For the Organization that Dare Not Speak Its Name."[137] *Etc.* reported that the MACGLO agenda included a proposal for an “Anonymous” membership category designed “to protect groups who cannot be known as ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian.”

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[135] MACGLO Brochure, undated ca. 1990. AHC, ALGHT, Dick Rhodes Papers, Box 82; "A Conversation with Bill Gripp," *The News*, September 1991, 17. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[136] "Metro Council Celebrates First Anniversary," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, March 1986. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 2.

[137] "For the Organization that Dare Not Speak Its Name," *Etc*. V1 N4, July, 1985, 11. AHC, ALGHT. Box 1.

Etc. was willing to criticize the gay political community for its missteps. They introduced themselves as a vocal and outspoken critic of the status quo regarding apolitical arts magazines and conservative media policies that stemmed from too close connections to more conservative gay businesses in the city. *Etc.* was a different kind of publication and it wasted no time in picking at the weaker points in their community. They provoked conversation as they worked to engage gay Atlantans more broadly with community politics. *Etc.* writers were generally critical of closeted anonymity and argued that proposals like MACGLO’s only contributed to keeping gay and lesbian Atlantans needlessly in the closet. Longtime and experienced Atlanta activist, Ray Kluka, an advertising contact and contributor to *Etc.*, editorialized about the problem of the closet and how it was influenced by the relative ease of navigating a semi-open life in Atlanta. He said “in my early activist days I was fond of telling people that I respected their right to stay in the closet if, they judged their circumstances to warrant such a decision. No longer can I respect that decision.”[138] Kluka called hiding one’s sexuality a form of “senseless self-oppression” and urged the leadership in the community to “reject the concept of encouraging people to remain invisible as they go about their daily lives.”[139]

MACGLO did not reject the idea and “Anonymous” became a regular member organization that appeared on roll calls at meetings throughout the years. The policy caused controversy in the community and many opposed it as a concept immediately. In

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[138] Ray Kluka, “Words, Etc., ” *Etc.,* V1 N9, August, 1985, 6. AHC, ALGHT. Box 1.

[139] Ibid.

1991, after the demise of the group, Bill Gripp, himself a controversial and embattled leader at the Atlanta Gay Center recalled that the policy of anonymous group membership was always problematic.[140] In an interview about the Center and its relationship with the rest of the Atlanta gay and lesbian community, Gripp said that MACGLO "died of the weight of its own record of non-accomplishment." In regards to the anonymous policy he explained "Why should people who are in the closet be able to vote on issues about the gay community?" He continued, if "you don't have nerve enough to stand up and ask for it, why should you be able to dictate to other people how they should attempt to get it for you?"[141]

That fall, issues related to anonymity, elitism, and the attendant complications of privacy and the protection of the closet influenced criticism directed at the ACHR too. As they approached their first year organizational anniversary, the ACHR's work on behalf of the gay and lesbian community was tested in its electoral strength and political influence with local city elections. The ACHR came under heavy scrutiny for their lackluster performance in the recent city elections. Al Cotton reported for *The News* that the group made little impact and cited a confusing system of candidate ratings that led to "unfocused" recommendations. In addition, Cotton said that some of the ACHR's practices left a "sour taste from their secrecy over their contributions." He ultimately assessed the ACHR as "yet another ineffectual (and secretive) gay voice howling in the electoral winds."[142] However, playing Devil's advocate with himself, he also considered the possibility that they were "playing what it considers to be the politically smart closet game," which required a complementary "discretion" game."

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[140] After 1986 the Atlanta Gay Center sparred with numerous organizations in the community. In public battles they argued over internal Center politics, which included airing the details of verbal arguments and resignations within the board leadership and had significant disagreements with the L/GRC and Police Advisory Committee.

[141] "A Conversation with Bill Gripp."

Al Cotton's concerns over the ACHR's alleged secrecy and their possibly hidden agenda became the subject of an intense round of public debate in the pages of *The News* and *Etc.* ACHR founding members Dr. Stosh Ostrow and Lainey Richardson wrote to *The News* in defense of the organization and shared some criticism of their own with the community.[143] Ostrow called Al Cotton's article a "shabby piece of journalism" and an "editorial opinion" instead of a news report. He accused Cotton of borrowing liberally from "somebody else's inaccurate reporting—i.e., T. Hoff's article in "*Etc*." Dr. Ostrow argued that there was a self-destructive quality in the criticism and he refused to stand by and support Al Cotton, and presumably *The News*, when they "once again shoot ourselves in the leg." The community wasn't healthy, he said, it "seems to have fallen into a pattern of self-mutilation; whatever new group that comes along is seen as fair game for potshots by self-appointed critics." Ostrow and Richardson's letters showed a defensive and frustrated perspective. Richardson asked "why is it that new organizations in this city get blasted?" She considered it yet another example of how instead of getting involved, certain parts of the community chose to criticize from the sidelines. In their defense and to give the ACHR some of its due accolades she said the "ACHR grew out of a few individuals efforts to get Atlanta's gay community the political voice and power that it needs." Dr. Ostrow agreed with the sentiment and said it was a group with the "guts to start a local political action committee."[144]

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[142] Al Cotton, "ACHR and the Atlanta City Elections, What They Mean to Gays," *The News,* October 17, 1985, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[143] Stosh Ostrow, "Dear Editor" and Lainey Richardson, "Dear Editor," *The News,* November 3, 1985, 3. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

As the letters were printed in exchange with the articles and read by the community, individual arguments and positions became communal and part of an ongoing conversation about the politics of activism. Richardson and Ostrow argued the work of the ACHR was worthwhile and hard. They felt brave doing the work as it required outing themselves, itself a reflection of how the closet affected the privileged position of professionals. For many professionals in Atlanta being discreet about their sexuality was a necessity if they wanted to maintain their material lifestyles. The sense of worth and activist pride was a response to the very real threats that came with being out and openly gay as a professional in Atlanta. For a closeted gay or lesbian professional, one risked losing clients or even their practice under some circumstances if outed. That the ACHR formed through a "few individuals efforts" reinforced the elitism of its core membership, though. The defensive stances of members also hinted at deeper divisions growing in Atlanta's gay and lesbian community and the political organizations that represented them.

At mid-decade lesbian and gay communities everywhere were discussing and debating ideas again after a period of moribund inactivity.[145] People debated the merits of coming out and the damage or necessity of staying closeted. Gay and lesbian people started to reengage with the politics of the movement as they became generally aware that it was in the process of profound change as the community was finally and fully witnessing the extent of AIDS. For a few years Atlanta had a less active political scene as activist burnout and AIDS took its toll on the community. By most accounts in the activist community Atlanta should have had a gay and lesbian population of somewhere between 100,000 to 300,000 based on regional demographics, metropolitan areas, and rough estimates of the Kinsey 1-in-10 formula. D. Patrick Coleman, editorialized in *Etc.* about the lack of participation from this large population in community affairs, political forums, and elections. He noted "I was always told in journalism courses that negativism would accomplish nothing. My attitude towards the political consciousness of gay Atlantans is certainly negative. So much so that I've coined a name for us—"Apathalanta." It fits."[146]

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[144] Ibid.

[145] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement,* 146-47; Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 73-74; Gould, *Moving Politics*, 104-14.

The Politics of AIDS

Atlantans held a "Town Meeting on AIDS" in November of 1985. At the meeting were members of the recently established state "AIDS Task Force," which included people from Georgia's AIDS care community and state representatives. The task force was charged with investigating the issue of AIDS in Georgia and was asked to make recommendations on related legislative actions.[147] Members of the task force met with the community in the "town hall meeting" styled event on the theme "The Politics of AIDS." Representatives addressed recent political actions and recommendations of the state task force then a forty-five minute question and answer session with the audience of about 200 "(mostly gay men)" followed.[148] BWMT member Alonzo Wade said it was emotional but he was "pleased with the information disseminated."[149] Gus Galvez reported for *The News* that people spoke out "aggressively against apathy" and "vowed to help in any way they could."

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[146] D.P.C. (D. Patrick Coleman), "Words, Etc.: Is There Anybody Out There," *Etc.*, September 6, 1985, 6. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

[147] Raimondo, "Dateline Atlanta," 352, 365.

The speakers that night included a familiar roster of names. They included George Brenning, the Chairman of the Atlanta Gay Center, Dr. Stosh Ostrow, and the executive director of AID Atlanta, Ken South.[150] All were members of the task force and gave the community some much needed insight into the political process in an open and democratic way, a necessary intervention into a community recently charged with secrecy. Brenning told the crowd he thought the state task force struck a balance between "us, health care workers and political representatives." An attorney on the panel spoke about his concerns for potential employment discrimination. Dr. Ostrow spoke about inconsistencies and denials from insurance companies related to AIDS patients. The Reverend Ken South, Director of AID Atlanta, recounted the neglect of the federal government in a story about two diseases. He related that the swine flu epidemic with a mortality rate of just six people was granted an immediate allocation of "135 million dollars for research." In the three years since AIDS had grown into a deadly epidemic there were over two hundred reported cases in Georgia alone, but the government only pledged to fund AIDS with 126 million.

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[148] Gus Galvez, "AIDS Town Meeting Informative, Emotional," *The News,* December 2, 1985, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[149] BWMT/Atlanta, AIDS Education Committee Meeting Minutes, November 17, 1985. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 2.

[150] Galvez, "AIDS Town Meeting Informative."

The immediate effect of limiting funds was to shrink the ability of the organizations to continue doing their work. South broke it down further for the crowd, not softening the bad news. He told the Atlantans present what this meant in practical terms was that over sixty organizations were in competition for 155,000 dollars in prevention and education money. AID Atlanta got lucky and the prize awarded was the incredibly small gift of a $12,500 grant.[151] The meeting covered more than just medical and political updates as emotions ran high. Delores French, a nationally known prostitution activist, questioned speakers about the possibility of the baths being closed, a position advocated by the CDC in a recent memo. French expressed "shock" and "surprise" at this turn of events but others on the panel supported closing the baths too. Ken South said "he nor AID Atlanta could condone places that encouraged unsafe sex practices." When the baths lost support within the gay community it seemed likely that the task force would succeed in closing them. In the first week of January in 1986, *Etc.* reported that the task force did just that and voted in favor of closing Atlanta's remaining baths.[152]

At the close of 1985, Tom Hoff, reported the gay community's struggle for civil rights had "become enmeshed in the realities of AIDS."[153] Hoff announced that AID Atlanta would sponsor another town hall meeting about lobbying called "The Politics of AIDS II" early the next year. Those who advocated for mainstream political work saw lobbying as the most effective way to gain power and influence policies that would be favorable for the community. Hoff argued that working inside the system would see the gay community win for once. He concluded his year-end reflections with a call for the gay community to resolve to become more political, because they could succeed if they tried. He said, “despite all its failures, the system has and always will respond to its loudest elements. If there is one political axiom it is this: “The squeaky wheel gets the grease.”

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[151] Ibid.

[152] "Task Force Votes to Close Bathhouse," *Etc*., January 3-9, 1986, 8. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

[153] Tom Hoff, "Year End Reflections," *Etc.*, December 27- January 2, 1985, 6. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

Atlanta’s gay and lesbian community transitioned into a more mainstream era with the establishment of organizations like the ACHR and MACGLO. They represented an unapologetically mainstream community that worked for power within the existing system. Moderate and liberal gay and lesbian activists who were mostly white and middle-class guided the political activism agenda in the city for years. Groups like ALFA, GAMA, and BWMT formed to remedy the unequal power relations in the movement but they lacked the influence that groups like the ACHR and MACGLO were already starting to exert. By the end of 1985, lesbian and gay mainstream political activists promoted themselves as successful, well-adjusted, and respectable members of society and in their local communities. Many people agreed with the sentiment even if they lacked the political interest to become involved. As many critics of pride over the years claimed, the drags, the dykes, the leather queens and kings, had all embarrassed more mainstream gays in the past. But in the era of AIDS many more saw their unashamed and unabashed sexuality as a serious liability to the movement.

CHAPTER 8

"ALMOST FREE AT LAST":

DIRECT ACTION ACTIVISM, 1986

Circling the Jerk

On Sunday, February 9, 1986 between 350 and 500 gay and lesbian Atlantans met at the Midtown MARTA station. From the station they joined their hands together in pairs and marched along Cypress Street to their destination, the First Baptist Church of Atlanta.[1] There the couples split into separate lines and made their way around to the back of the building, "forming a circle of hope around First Baptist Church." The group was there to protest the comments of the Church's pastor, Dr. Charles Stanley, who was also the President of the Southern Baptist Convention. Dr. Stanley had made comments that "AIDS was a sign of God's displeasure with gays," in an interview published in the *San Francisco Examiner* in January. The protest, called "Circle the Church," was sponsored by the Atlanta Gay Center, whose organizers meant to create a "circle of hope" in an "expression of disagreement with his remarks."[2]

Etc. magazine took the opportunity to crack a joke and reported on the protest under the headline "Circling the Jerk."[3] The brief report hinted at deeper divisions over the demonstration and referenced a controversy centered on the "propriety" of a church protest, the importance of the size of the crowd, and cast suspicion on the organizers while also acknowledging that the protest was a success. *Etc.* pointed out that they withheld their judgment on the "organizer's motives," yet respected the "outcome." Demonstrators were given pink cloth triangles to wear at the MARTA station and J. Michael Clark with Bet Haverim, a Jewish lesbian and gay organization in Atlanta, related their significance. The pink triangles they passed out for protestors to wear, he said, "serve today as reminder of the dangerous extremes to which intolerance can lead."[4] AGC activist and minister Carolyn Mobley then led the group in several meaningful protest songs before they marched to the church. The protestors arrived after 10:30 when Sunday services were already underway. Outside, the media and a few church members and security met the non-confrontational demonstrators. In an article for *The News*, B. F. Hamerslough, couldn't resist an opportunity to point out a familiar criticism of other gay demonstrations, with the contrasting detail that "unlike many gay-related protests, suits, ties, and general "Sunday best" predominated."[5]

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[1] B.F. Hamerslough, "Circle of Protest," *The News,* February 28, 1986, 1, 3; John Walsh, "Anti-abortionist Heckles Church Demonstrators," *The News*, February 28, 1986, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[2] Hamerslough, "Circle of Protest."

[3] "Circling the Jerk," *Etc*., February 20-27, 1986, 11-12. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

The demonstration made an impact on Andrew Beierle, a volunteer with the Atlanta Gay Center who recounted his participation in an article for *The News*.[6]

> From the moment I approached the Tenth Street MARTA station and was handed a pink triangle, the symbol of Nazi persecution of gays, I knew that this time was going to be different for me. No more objectivity, no more reticence. When others sang out, I joined in. This was no time for self-consciousness. We were, as the lyrics said, singing for our lives.

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[4] Ibid.

[5] B.F. Hamerslough, "Circle of Protest."

[6] Andrew Beierle, "Circle the Church, A Meditation," *The News*, March 14, 1986, 3. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

Beierle described a personal history of "passionless" activism as a social safe-sex educator to combat the spread of AIDS. "Born white, male, and comfortably middle class—in short, among the most privileged in our society—I long remained immune to the anger and frustration that prompted others to protest their lot in life." It was AIDS that brought Beierle into the realm of activism, but the clinical, medical, educational model of volunteerism had not personally or emotionally moved him. The march spurred a "fervor" in him and he declared that "the day was a transfiguring one for me, and I suspect it was so for others. I am forever changed."

A new kind of activism emerged at mid-decade that was angrier and more confrontational as a response to continued government inaction on AIDS and was fully felt in 1986 in many communities.[7] However, the change was the result of a steady build-up of community feeling that exploded after the *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision was announced in June. Deborah Gould has shown that some activist organizations were less enthusiastic about the growing anger and protest direction of the moment.[8] The Circle the Church protest sponsored by the AGC was coordinated with the help of MACGLO and is a good example of the divisions and contrasting activist energies of the time. Later that year they would again work with the Center to stage a rally at the Capitol, in a demonstration held in protest of *Bowers*, just days after it was announced. The two protests and the two organizations were at odds over basic philosophical and political approaches that highlighted historic divides in the lesbian and gay rights movement, between radicalism and reform.

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[7] Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 155-65; Gould, *Moving Politics*, 114-15, 172-75.

[8] Ibid., 116-19, 157-63.

Less than a week after Atlanta's Pride, the gay and lesbian rights movement suffered its most significant setback since the Save Our Children campaign advanced across the country in 1977 and 1978. The *Bowers* decision transformed the movement as the news shocked communities across the nation.[9] In Atlanta, the decision resonated and rocked the community because of its local connection. The Supreme Court case involved well-known aspects of Atlanta's gay and lesbian community and their political struggle for equal rights. At the same time around mid-decade activists started discussions about organizing another National March on Washington. Some people had floated the idea for a number of years but activists decided to solidify plans with an exploratory organizational meeting held in New York City in July of 1986. They were set to meet just weeks after the *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision was announced. The decision changed the movement as activists came to New York angrier, outraged, and in disbelief. These emotions were already starting to manifest in certain communities of AIDS activists, but after *Bowers* a new era of direct action protest emerged. There was an explosion in activism and visibility for gay and lesbian communities everywhere. [10]

The *Bowers* decision was a pivotal moment that initiated a major transformation in the gay and lesbian rights movement.[11] In Atlanta, activists felt these shifts and joined in to shape the new movement. In the year leading up to the March on Washington held in October of 1987 there was a great energy of action towards the March. Activists formed March committees in their own cities to coordinate group and individual efforts. They planned fundraisers, supported education and publicity related to the March, which all spurred more activism all over the local community. The extraordinary growth and explosion of gay and lesbian rights activism, AIDS activism, and a popularized version of democratic politics initiated new forms of direct action and tactics.[12] This new activism produced one of the largest national civil rights marches in recent history and the largest for the lesbian and gay movement to that date.

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[9] Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good,* 536-39; Elizabeth Sheyn, "The Shot Heard Around The LGBT World: Bowers v. Hardwick as A Mobilizing Force for The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force," *Journal of Race, Gender and Ethnicity* 4, no. 1 (May 2009): 2-30.

[10] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 86-91.

[11] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 121-45.

In Atlanta the reenergized community formed new organizations like the African American Lesbian and Gay Alliance (AALGA) that sought to make the gay and lesbian political community more representative of the city's diversity. AALGA grew out of older political battles with racism in the gay community but their formation contributed to an expanded coalition of activists working towards a centralized goal. The growth in community activism led to new divisions too and by the end of the year activists were openly addressing conflicts in the pages of the gay press. A rift developed between activists at the Center who started to exhibit a more confrontational style of politics and mainstream activists who pushed a more conservative and moderated accommodationist approach to gay and lesbian politics. Locally the political divide in the movement played out in controversies related to the main gay and lesbian political and activist organizations in the city at the time, between the Center, the ACHR, and MACGLO. Nationally, a similar story was unfolding as some activists started to develop a more aggressive and confrontational form of political activism related to AIDS.

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[12] Arthur D. Kahn, *AIDS, The Winter War* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2005) 3-8.

"*Almost Free at Last": Activism, Alliances, and Apathy*

In 1976 Atlanta gay and lesbian activists staged a protest at the Wieuca Road Baptist Church. Some gay Christian activists dressed appropriately and attended service without disruption. Outside ALFA members and other supportive community people joined in a louder picket. They objected to pastor, Dr. William Self and his vocal role in local politics as a supporter of the conservative group Citizens for Decent Atlanta. Ten years later gay and lesbian Atlantans reignited political activism in the city as they marched from the local MARTA station to protest at the First Baptist Church. This time they objected to Dr. Charles Stanley's statements about AIDS as a judgment on gay sexuality from God. In a newly politicized climate many of Atlanta's lesbian and gay community were unwilling to keep quiet when attacked.

The Circle the Church protest was the first major political action held since the burst of activism in the late 1970s and it indicated a new wave of activism locally and nationally. The gay community acutely felt the panic that surrounded their sexuality caused by the advent of AIDS. At the Circle the Church protest one anti-gay counter protestor wore a surgical mask and apron, presumably making a statement about contamination, AIDS, and those within her physical space. By the mid 1980s, many conservative and religious leaders like Jerry Falwell, Jesse Helms, and more locally, Dr. Stanley, made public and widely accepted statements about AIDS that blamed the gay community for the spread of the disease. AIDS was, they said, the fault of the gay person who paid for the sin of his sexuality with death.[13]

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[13] Self, *All in the Family*, 383-85; Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, 415-418; Ashley Ruth Lierman, "The Plague Wars: Encounters Between Gay and Lesbian Activism and the Christian Right in the Age of Aids" (PhD diss., Drew University, 2009), 74-79, 82, 221.

This interpretation was not met with universal acceptance from religious leaders and especially not from Atlanta's large religious lesbian and gay community. Protestors assembled together after the church demonstration just a few blocks away at the Academy of Medicine, where they filled past capacity a room that seated over two hundred people.[14] The audience listened to a panel of speakers that emphasized the religious and spiritual dimensions of the protest and demonstration. Speakers included Michael Clark of Bet Haverim, Rev. Carolyn Mobley with the AGC, Rev. Bruce Hill of the MCC, Rev. Ken South, the Executive Director of AID Atlanta, and the Rev. A.B. Short of the Oakhurst Baptist Church.[15] After the speakers finished, the question and answer period yielded just one question from the audience and then "the proceedings took on the air of an evangelical testimonial."[16]

Reverend Short read from a letter that his congregation at the Oakhurst Baptist Church sent to Dr. Stanley in response to his statements on AIDS.[17] They disagreed with Stanley on three specific points. His interpretation of disease as a punishment from God was an "inaccurate view of God," one that required the admission that God might also use "cancer and heart attacks and Alzheimer's" as punishment. They emphasized their second point extensively as they believed that Dr. Stanley's statement was "poorly disguised hostility toward people who are gay." They believed gay people were a minority and "theological words could easily be used to justify prejudice and hatred." To guard against this sentiment people needed to act in accordance with "Jesus' attitude" and with compassion as he had ministered to "outcast lepers and brought them into the community." Their final argument against Dr. Stanley was more practical as they thought his statements would "polarize further the Southern Baptist Convention." They said "political manipulation" might motivate some in the "troubled politics of the SBC," but that "Mr. Stanley" did not "speak for all Southern Baptists."

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[14] Hamerslough, "Circle of Protest."

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] T. Melvin Williams and Nancy Hastings Sehested, "An Open Letter to the Rev. Charles Stanley, President of the Southern Baptist Convention," February, 2, 1986, *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, May, 1986. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 2.

Though Dr. Stanley did not represent all Southern Baptists, he did represent many.[18] Those who agreed with Stanley and supported his stance in other Southern Baptist churches were the face of religious hostility towards gay and lesbian people and had proved to be an active and successful adversary.[19] But sometimes in Georgia support came from unlikely sources. That the Rev. Short gave his support to the gay community by adding his representative voice to the chorus of protestors showed that there was room for dissent and hope. The gay community noted Short's presence as it "represented a face of Southern Baptist Christianity which many gay people seldom see, that of loving acceptance."[20]

The Circle the Church demonstrators were not all motivated by the religious or emotional politics of the moment. The panel also included Buren Batson and George Brenning of the L/GRC who represented more secular concerns. After the panel discussion, one woman in the audience said that because she "looked like a lesbian" she wasn't hired for a job.[21] That "experience had raised her consciousness about the discrimination gay people of both genders face" and inspired her to join in the demonstration. Ending employment discrimination was always on the gay and lesbian rights political agenda, but like other political efforts in the era, it stalled as AIDS overtook the community and demanded more energy and resources.[22] Things changed that spring when Atlanta's gay political lobbyists succeeded in getting the City Council to pass two pro-gay measures. One measure expanded the city's anti-discrimination policy to include sexual orientation and the other struck at discrimination in providing access to services that the city regulated.[23] Reporting on the introduction of the equal rights ordinances in January *Etc.* heralded the news with a headline that referenced Atlanta's civil rights history and cheekily poked fun at gay and lesbian Atlanta's slow progress towards equality, they announced that Atlanta was "Almost Free At Last."[24]

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[18] Self, *All in the Family*, 384; Lierman, "The Plague Wars," 220-24.

[19] Fetner, *How the Religious Right*.

[20] Hamerslough, "Circle of Protest."

When the City Council passed the two resolutions it was heralded in the gay press as being of extraordinary importance. This time the headline in *Etc.* announced "Free At Last! Atlanta City Council Adopts Civil Rights Protections for Gay Citizens!"[25] The successful lobbying work of gay political activists Chris Hagin and Gil Robison was greeted with uncharacteristic optimism in *Etc.* but *The News* noted the bills passed "quietly" and "provoked very little debate." *The News* was more skeptical about the meaning of the ordinances and the manner in which they were passed as they were "squeezed in on a heavy agenda."[26] Supporters of the bills who spontaneously clapped at their passage at the City Council meeting were "quickly told" by Council President Marvin Arrington that "there would be no demonstrations." Atlanta's urban liberal coalition might include gay and lesbian people, but only quietly and without demonstration.

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 164-65; Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good*; Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*.

[23] In a list of cities that had passed anti-discrimination or gay rights ordinances by 1986, Stewart-Winter listed Washington, Detroit, Minneapolis, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, in addition to noting that in 1986 both New York and Chicago took up the issue. New York passed their ordinance while "gay Chicagoans faced defeat," yet no mention was made of Atlanta's passage. Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout,* 167; Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good*, 526-30.

[24] "Almost Free At Last," *Etc*., January 31-February 6, 1986, 8. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

[25] "Free At Last! Atlanta City Council Adopts Civil Rights Protections for Gay Citizens!" *Etc*., March 7-13, 1986, 8-9. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

It was an active spring in Atlanta's gay and lesbian communities generally. The *Journal of AID Atlanta* devoted the May issue to the central concern of "AIDS in the Black Community."[27] The issue highlighted an often ignored population when it came to receiving medical, professional, and social supports.[28] Several contributions to the issue came from members of BWMT. One article by two black gay Atlantans, D. Teague and C. Jones, entitled "The Lack of Organization Among Black Gays in Atlanta" articulated discussions that many people were having at the time.[29] The bold premise and point of the article faced head-on what the authors considered to be an unbelievable fact. "It is difficult to understand why there are no active organizations for gay blacks. Let's repeat that: there are no organizations for gay blacks in the city of Atlanta." In a city that was a "mecca for gay blacks" they pointed to the much-talked about apathy as a cause. They even suspected Atlanta's black gay community might be more inclined to apathy "since, as a group, they have never had a voice: If one has always been speechless then one might assume he will never be heard."

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[26] "Atlanta City Council Passes Anti-discrimination Ordinance," *The News,* March 14, 1986, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[27] "AIDS in the Black Community," *Journal of AID Atlanta*, May 1986, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203

[28] Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness;* Inrig, *North Carolina;* Mumford, *Not Straight*, 171-74; Dan Royles, "'Don't We Die Too?': The Political Culture of African American AIDS Activism" (PhD diss., Temple University, 2013).

[29] D. Teague and C. Jones, "The Lack of Organization Among Black Gays in Atlanta," *Journal of AID Atlanta*, May 1986, 3. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

Duncan Teague's own story about his relocation to Atlanta in 1984 reflected the changes that the city's black gay and lesbian community underwent in the period.[30] As many Atlantans did, he counted his history as part of a migration. He came in 1984 for many reasons but ultimately "the calling-card for me was the abundance of African-American gay life here." A gay cousin invited him out from his Mid-western home and "began my story about being Black and gay and an Atlantan." His cousin's friends and partner, introduced in the kitchen of their home together, were part of a "circle of friends" who were "African-American, college-educated, attractive, and had good jobs."[31] It was a social network that reflected his own desires and enticed him to into choosing Atlanta, over L.A. or Houston.

Teague and Jones were both members of BWMT, seemingly alluded to in the article as one of a number of "party" groups that "don't offer anything in the way of political or support activities." The authors argued that the lack of organization among African-American gays in the city stemmed in part from a decision to self-segregate based on a protectionist and defensive stance due to a history of racist exclusion in the gay and lesbian community in Atlanta. Those who did not organize asked "why should we have anything to do with them, they don't want us around anyway?"[32] Other factors complicated gay and lesbian political organizing in the black community. Many feared the same repercussions of coming out that were voiced in the white gay and lesbian community—that their membership in organizations would be made public and there would be "problems on the job, with family, etc."

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[30] Duncan Teague, "Viewpoint," *Crossroads*, May/June 1992. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 5.

[31] Ibid.

There was also the "misconception" that the black gay community faced no "overt discrimination," which would have forced them together to fight an "outside pressure."[33] Jones and Teague reminded the readers of some of their own gay Atlanta history and told the story of the hard work that BWMT/Atlanta did as they fought against racism in the gay bars, which resulted in standardized admittance rules and the first anti-discrimination ordinances passed by the gay community. That BWMT had done this work was evidence of the lack of organization as they narrowed in on the fact that "BWMT stepped in to fill the void where blacks should have stepped in."[34] The battle against racism in the gay bars was waged by the only group at the time who had the organizational strength and desire to fight, the interracial BWMT. BWMT/Atlanta emerged at the end of 1981, in a year that saw many gay and lesbian people in the city politicized and active in new organizations. From the beginning the group was established not as a specifically political or activist organization but as a social group that sought to bring people together that would also work towards eliminating racism in the gay community.

By 1986, BWMT/Atlanta was five years old and had changed over the years.

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Teague and Jones, "The Lack of Organization," 3.

[34] Ibid.

Some of the changes in BWMT were organically derived due to the nature of the leadership and the community at its core which created the organizational culture; different years might have more political, social, or conservative members which shaped the group's current community feeling.[35] The co-chairs' influence on the organization was clear and in its first years BWMT was much more political when Melvin Ross was a vocal and visible presence advocating and working to politicize the community. In 1984, co-chair J. R. Finney confidently claimed that BWMT was "one of the most highly regarded Gay organizations in the Atlanta area."[36] The group gained this reputation because they dealt with "unpopular issues" that forced people to change their "attitudes, actions, and accountabilities to the community they serve." As Finney related their successes in political activism, he expressed his own disbelief, that "when the decision was made for BWMT/Atlanta to venture into the arena of political action, after intense debate, the motion to do so was passed by only one vote."[37]

It seemed that politics and confrontation had fallen out of favor in BWMT/Atlanta at mid-decade. The article by Teague and Jones also underscored how recent fluctuations in the popularity and involvement with the national organization of BWMT (NABWMT) affected the local group's ability to meet the needs of its community. It was not inevitable that, as Finney thought, BWMT would continue to be the "premier Gay organization in this city addressing the issues and concerns of people of color."[38] In 1984, when Teague moved to Atlanta, BWMT optimistically called themselves the International Association, proudly noting they included a chapter in Brazil. That year, Atlanta hosted the international conference, which saw a surge in activity and connection with the group. Over fifty local (Atlanta and Georgia) members of the community attended the conference.

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[35] Mumford, *Not Straight*, 139-40, 174-179; Crockett, "Narratives of Racial Sexual Preference," 61-63.

[36] J.R. Finney, "Why Should BWMT/Atlanta Involve Itself with the AIDS Home Front (Hospice) Project," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, February, 1985. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 2.

[37] Ibid.

The next year the group was once again the National Association and Atlanta's attendance at the national convention in L.A. became the subject of much controversy. In L.A. some members of the Atlanta chapter displayed the confederate flag at an event and not surprisingly this was seen as controversial and offended many BWMT members from across the country. What was more surprising was that the Atlanta chapter defended their flag display and seemed to dismiss the concerns of their BWMT brethren. Atlanta co-chair Ken Marshall thought it was not controversial and even called it "much ado about nothing." He offered an alternative interpretation of events and concluded that the real threat to their organization came from the over-used charge that they were not "politically correct."[39]

The incident at the convention seemed to complicate Atlanta's relationships with other chapters as well as with the national structure. Problems with the national association were not just unique to Atlanta in the period, though. At mid-decade, local BWMT chapters and national officers engaged in some significant public fights and discussions that contributed to the alienation of some member chapters. Atlanta's BWMT chapter devoted a fair amount of time to the discussion of their relationship with the national association and how best to maintain their independence within the larger organization. Divergent strategies were only part of the problems, as local chapters debated even whether a national leadership committee should exist and to what extent they should direct the policies and statements of the community of groups who made up the NABWMT. These issues were much discussed in Atlanta between 1985 and 1987 and showed the local chapter's distinct political voice, which sometimes differed from the direction of national leadership. The intense debates probably affected how effective and involved BWMT Atlanta members were with the organization as it struggled to define itself and address the concerns of its members.

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[38] Ken, "Are We Politically Correct," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, December, 1985. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 2.

[39] Ibid.

John Nicholson, editor of the BWMT/Atlanta newsletter, considered an important difference in how they as an organization worked in comparison to other groups. Members considered how they built relationships with allies in emotional and personal bonds. He said "to those of the inner circle, this is called Outreach, to the likes of you and I, it is called Reaching Out."[40] BWMT expanded its efforts at "reaching out" and in May they announced that Duncan Teague was elected as the first chair of the new AIDS Education Committee, a coordinated effort between BWMT and AID Atlanta.[41] The group focused their outreach on "Black men who practice some form of homosexual sex." To expand their potential community they chose to "work through the civic, religious, and social channels of the black community, where the men at risk can be found."

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[40] John Nicholson, untitled, *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, April 1986. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 2.

[41] "Minority AIDS Outreach," *BWMT/ Atlanta Newsletter*, May 1986. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 2.

BWMT's Atlanta chapter worked mostly within the gay and lesbian community.[42] The group had not made a significant push towards addressing homophobia in the black community since their early work with the city council and Mayor Young in 1982 and 1983. In 1986, BWMT was the only organization in the city for black gay men, which struck at the heart of the Jones and Teague article. The only group for black gay people was also, by its definition and rules, an interracial group that required co-leadership of black and white chairs. This fact underscored the point that many in Atlanta were coming to—that the city needed an organization devoted specifically to the black gay and lesbian community.[43] Some parts of the community called for a similar organization that would emphasize co-gendered socialization and activism instead of the single-sex and interracial emphasis of BWMT.

In their article on the lack of organization in the city Duncan Teague and C. Jones listed a number of needs not being met in the black gay community. The social and emotional support that members of BWMT experienced was an important point of comparison for some of its black members. The lack of an organization for black people meant that they were unable to enjoy a shared collective experience of being black and gay in Atlanta. They stressed the need for an alternative social connection outside the bar and for the importance of a group that could speak for the community on issues that addressed them specifically. Teague and Jones called for an organization to be formed that was “built around political, social and economic concerns rather than exclusively put in place to conduct parties and other social gatherings.”[44]

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[42] Buring, *Lesbian and Gay Memphis*, 113-16, Mumford, *Not Straight, Not White,* 146, 175-79.

[43] Mumford, "The Trouble with Gay Rights," 72; Stewart-Winter, "Raids, Rights, and Rainbow Coalitions," 302-3.

In a history of their beginning the African American Lesbian/Gay Alliance (AALGA) expressed the idea that their organization’s origins story was best understood as an interpretation of the mood of the community when they came together.[45] AALGA became an organization over the course of 1986 as people came together, in part, due to “the frustration of dealing with racism and tokenism in the predominate lesbian/gay community.” This immediate issue resulted in many conversations that brought to light another common feeling—that of a “profound need for more than what was available.” Across Atlanta these conversations occurred in “living and dining rooms” and “in several places all over the city at around the same time.” AALGA advertised in *The News* and early meetings drew between twenty and forty people. For about five months they met and discussed “their concerns about being both Black, lesbian and gay in Atlanta.” Members made use of their organizational and activist experience gained through years of working within the white gay and lesbian Atlanta community, but focused on the needs of their particular community. These conversations formalized in “AALGA’s first meeting.”[46]

Atlanta’s Gay Pride event remained a source of concern in the community as 1985 proved as unimpressive as past years. KC Wildmoon wrote to *The News* and offered some advice to the Pride committee. She criticized their lack of publicity and inclusion of the lesbian community and other diverse parts of the city's gay and lesbian population. If they wanted their numbers to reach "7000 or 70000" they needed to "improve public relations tremendously to do it." She sarcastically closed her letter, "Good Luck."[47] Three months from Pride, *Etc.* reported that Atlanta "faces the prospect of a quiet, no-frills gay pride week in 1986."[48] The annual Pride celebration that year sought to capitalize on the community's successes yet was unable to overcome issues that lingered for years. Maria Dolan considered the criticism of Pride as regular as the blossoming of "dogwoods and azaleas in the Spring."[49] As the buds filled out the branches, activists called for support and volunteers, who seemed to dwindle further each year.

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[44] Alonzo Wade, “AIDS Buddy System, Special Findings,” *BWMT/ Atlanta Newsletter*, October 1985. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 2.

[45] “History of African American Lesbian/Gay Alliance,” undated. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 5.

[46] Ibid.

Dolan outlined the "familiar bleatings" of those who refused to march or join the parade, as criticism that was "selectively perceptive trash." The three most common reasons for not taking part in Pride events included: 1) the idea that a march or protest had little impact 2) that someone was not political and 3) that "Marching is boring."[50] Dolan found this last criticism the easiest to dismiss. She considered that someone who had never marched telling you that it was no fun was much like a celibate person telling you that having sex was no fun.[51] Combatting the other two criticisms was harder though. Dolan's emphasis on the importance of marching came from its meaning as a protest movement. To the idea that marching or protest had no effect on politics and government she pointed out that the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-War and Vietnam marches had clearly moved public opinion. As to the idea of a non-political gay or lesbian person, she denied outright their existence, because as she pointed out, they were "breathing and walking around, and committing acts that were still not permitted in Georgia."[52]

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[47] KC Wildmoon, "Dear Editor," *The News*, August 8, 1985, 3. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[48] "Calling the Question On Gay Pride: What Will Atlanta Do?" *Etc.*, March 28-April 3, 1986, 8. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

[49] Maria Helena Dolan, "But We Must March, Darlings!," *Etc.*, May 2-8, 1986, 18. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

[50] Dolan, "But We Must March, Darlings!," 19.

[51] Ibid.

Getting people to the march, parade, or rally, was only part of the hard work related to Pride, but it was an essential part. Each year the Pride Committee's work included convincing Atlanta's gay and lesbian people to show up. Dolan argued that gay and lesbian Atlantans should march because it allowed them to experience a unique kind of freedom. She said it was "the kind of freedom which arises when virtually everywhere we look, we're surrounded by our own kind. We're no longer a despised minority. Instead, we feel the strengthening, the empowerment, the possibilities.[53] The possibilities of freedom that Maria Dolan experienced at Pride came from being in the strength of a majority. Being in the midst of thousands of people who self-identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or straight but supportive could be transformative, as Andrew Beierle found out from his experience at the Circle the Church protest earlier that year.

Pride organizer Gene Holloway said the Pride Committee had just five volunteers in 1985, which showed how little support the event had in the community. With perhaps similar numbers Holloway approached MACGLO and the ABPG for support in organizing Pride in 1986. In a detailed article titled "Calling the Question On Gay Pride: What Will Atlanta Do?" *Etc*. reported on the labyrinthine negotiations between the Pride

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[52] Dolan, "But We Must March, Darlings!," 18.

[53] Ibid., 19.

Committee, MACGLO, and the ABPG.[54] The groups met with Holloway about helping to organize and support Pride but *Etc.* reported they received him and the idea “coolly.” Each potential partner seemed unwilling to concede to the other’s stipulations about help, support, and control over Pride.

The *Etc.* report painted a complex picture of territorial politics in Atlanta’s gay community. Pride organizers and potential supporters displayed a lack of organization and seemingly no real desire to cooperate. It also showed that some parts of the community were willing to withhold support and make no compromise as a statement of protest. The Guild and MACGLO negotiated for changes that saw them “assuming more active, working positions” rather than the infusion of “substantial volunteer, in-kind, and financial support” that the Pride Committee sought. They argued that if their organizations took up funding Pride, the committee would have to concede some of their authority. The groups seemed on the verge of making a deal that would have required the Pride committee to make “concessions about leadership and decision-making for the event.”[55]

In the end it was the ABPG that declined to coordinate the event with the Pride Committee. They argued that the fourteen weeks left until Pride made it impossible to plan a production that would be worthy of a “Guild-stamped event.”[56] The Guild cited to *Etc.* another reason that influenced their decision to opt out. They alleged that Holloway missed a meeting with Ted Binkley, President of the Guild, on March 3, the same day that the Atlanta City Council passed the anti-discrimination ordinances. That Holloway missed the meeting "due to a personal problem" made the Board concerned about "too many unanswered and potentially troublesome questions." The Guild declined to help without concessions in organizing control and the Pride Committee devolved further. Holloway cancelled both the announced and publicized planning meetings with Committee members in the weeks following. *Etc.* later reported that two volunteers came to the Gay Center and found no representatives, which indicated the cancellations hadn't been adequately publicized. The Committee eventually made emergency plans "in the wake of essentially failed bail-out plans."[57]

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[54] “Calling the Question On Gay Pride.”

[55] “Pride in the New Shuffle,” *Etc.*, March 7-13, 1986, 10. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

[56] “Calling the Question On Gay Pride,” 9.

By April, the Pride Committee settled on a regular weekly planning meeting schedule which met at the Atlanta Gay Center. Regina Heimbruch, former coordinator of Atlanta Pride in 1982, said she was "dissatisfied and disappointed" in a recent meeting she attended.[58] In a guest editorial for *Etc.,* she reported that the meeting had no structure, agenda, process, or information about past Pride programs or events. She described a disinterested group who bickered, lit cigarettes to indicate that they were taking a break, and held a meeting that "dragged on without answers." She said it was a confusing meeting, compounded by the lack of clear direction and a general lack of understanding about event organizing. When the group suggested forming committees without having established how they would elect members, Heimbruch wondered "what could the Steering Committee steer?"

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[57] Ibid., 10.

[58] "Atlanta Homosexuals Announce 1982 Pride Week Celebration," Press Release, May 31, 1982. AHC, ALGHT, Box 60; Regina Heimbruch, "Pride's Past Reviews Its Present," *Etc*., April 18-24, 1986, 6. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

Around the same time that Regina Heimbruch's editorial on the state of Pride in Atlanta came out in *Etc.*, Don Weston attended the April 17th meeting of MACGLO.[59] He "introduced himself as a professional media and event planner" who was asked to join the Pride committee because of the low attendance the year before. Weston told MACGLO that at the last Pride meeting, about two dozen people formed "definite committees with definite agendas."[60] His neutral or generally positive account of the meeting contrasted widely with Heimbruch's experience. She had left the meeting early and disappointed, interpreting it in comparison to past years. She connected to Pride and its place in Atlanta's gay and lesbian community on an emotional level and her "heart sank" during discussions. A stream of questions and criticisms flooded her mind and she demanded to know "How could this happen in Atlanta? Why did Atlanta's gay community turn its pride over to one person?"[61] Who that one person was, she did not say.

The Pride Committee chose the theme of "Forward Together" in connection to a national campaign and Atlanta's celebration was announced as a "parade and festival" set for Saturday June 21st.[62] *The News* carried an update on Pride planning in May that showed some of the same organizational issues that had drawn criticism from the community in the past. The Steering Committee was made up of five sub-committee chairs, which included Don Weston as Fundraising Chair, Gene Holloway as Logistics Chair, in addition to Richard Swanson as the Pride Committee Chair. Swanson was prominently featured on the front page of *The News* in the same issue, with a quarter-page sized photograph that accompanied an article about his recent appointment by the Board of the Gay Center to the position of administrator.[63]

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[59] MACGLO Minutes of the Council Meeting, April 17, 1986, 2. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 3.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Heimbruch, "Pride's Past Reviews Its Present," 6.

[62] "Forward Together," *The News,* May 23, 1986, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

The 1986 Pride Committee did not heed the advice of its many critics to fix their lack of diversity within its leadership. The Steering Committee was chaired by a total of six, all of whom were male. That no women were involved in the public leadership positions of the Pride Committee did not go unnoticed. At some point, Maria Helena Dolan, always willing to volunteer as the token lesbian, consented to serve in some capacity. The community responded positively to the idea of her presence in the planning process. "A Friend" wrote to *Etc.* and said that Dolan would serve as a counteractive to the apolitical party vibe that had become Atlanta pride. The friend said that Dolan's presence would "no doubt give such painfully persistent sentiments as "Let's keep everything positive and not mention AIDS or lesbians" the philosophical drubbing they deserve."[64]

That year pride saw an estimated attendance of around 2000, a substantial increase over the 600 who attended in 1985.[65] A month before Pride organizers eagerly anticipated a "substantially larger crowd this year… due to the passage of the Atlanta lesbian and Gay Rights Ordinances and the long-awaited Supreme Court decision in the Hardwick case."[66] As was the case every single year, Atlanta's Pride attracted just a tiny fraction of the estimated gay and lesbian population of the city and the organizers seemed to anticipate their disappointment. The Forward Together Pride Guide issued that year included articles by local activists and organizers related to Pride and the history of Stonewall but also managed to insult the community.[67] Don Weston, member of the Steering Committee and Chair of Fundraising, began his essay with a folksy description of Atlanta's apathy problem, best exemplified by the "Southernism" that "if it ain't broke don't fix it." Weston thought Atlanta's community was desperately in need of fixing. "Folks," he said "Gay Rights in Atlanta is a bad joke."[68]

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[63] David Herring, "AGC Board Names Swanson," *The News,* May 23, 1986, 1.

[64] "To Her Credit," *Etc*., April 25-May 1, 1986, 25. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

[65] Maria Helena Dolan, "Suffering Sappho! It's Stonewall 101," *Etc*., June 20-26, 1986, 22, 24. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

[66] "Forward Together."

Don Weston, a gay man who held a leadership role in the community as an organizer of Pride, used his position to criticize the apathy of Atlanta. Many others, including Maria Dolan, voiced similar criticisms of Atlanta's gay and lesbian community over the years. Dolan also pointed out that some critics spent too much time cutting down people who were not mainstream, white, or male, and therefore represented the "wrong" type of gay and lesbian community. She argued against conservative tendencies to depoliticize Pride. When she celebrated Stonewall she reminded the community of their collective political and radical past "Now, the patrons were the types too many Queers these days wish to disassociate from—working class; Drag Queens; Diesel Dykes."[69] These people, like the rebels at Stonewall, consistently showed up for Pride and were consistently devalued by conservative mainstream activists.

Atlanta Pride suffered from internal struggles with acceptability, exclusivity, and respectability politics. Dolan dissected the complex layers of the exclusivity/inclusivity debate and examined how certain unexamined features allowed for the erasure of many gay and lesbian people in Atlanta. She said those like her demanded recognition as part of the existing community, not as apart from it. Dolan said

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[67] Don Weston, "Power in Pride," Forward Together Pride Guide, Atlanta, 1986, 2. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 3.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid., 22.

> We impede their vision of a homogenized "Gay" whole. A whole where meanings are inverted. Where "inclusive" actually signifies excluded, lost in the shuffle, unrepresented. A whole where inevitably Anglo values are unselfconsciously upheld. Where the media-poled image of Gay as white, middle class and male becomes Truth.[70]

That the Pride Committee represented a specific group within the gay community (gay men of middle to upper-middle class wealth, largely, but not entirely, white), seemed to be an issue that many of its members failed to consider seriously. As Dolan and others argued over the years, it was one of the main factors that contributed to Atlanta's low involvement as the community did not see itself reflected in Pride.

"Atlanta Responds": Activism After **Bowers v. Hardwick**

The criticisms of pride that year were complicated by the tension of division and change. The Pride Committee was roundly criticized in print but had seemingly walked away again without accepting any blame for Pride's failures. They also failed to raise a substantial enough sum to carry forward Pride organizing for the 1987 committee and they refused to pass on the organization of the event to a new group. Atlanta's potentially political and out gay and lesbian community expressed their commitment to the status quo by maintaining their share of the inertia. In this slow churning of energy and activism, the *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision jolted Atlanta.

Michael Hardwick's arrest in 1982 and the suit Kathy Wilde and other legal activists initiated in 1983 originated in a different era from when the case was decided in 1986.[71] The federal suit was filed after a wave of liberalism and decriminalization in sodomy laws nationally in the late 1970s.[72] It was an era when reform through the court system had yielded some significant victories for gay rights legal activists, yet had also resulted in some equally compelling defeats. The momentum of the suit slowed as activists waited for their appeal to move forward through the federal judiciary system. In the spring of 1983 the national organization Lambda Legal Defense Fund got involved with Hardwick's challenge and other legal groups joined later.[73]

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[70] Maria Helena Dolan, "What the Lesbian Said to the Pride Organizers," *Etc.*, June 27-July 3, 1986, 24. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

It took two years for the case to come before the Eleventh Circuit Court. Gay and lesbians activists rejoiced when a decision was finally issued in May of 1985. In a two person majority the circuit court ruled that Georgia's sodomy law was unconstitutional. Lambda Legal heralded the good news in their newsletter with the headline "Hardwick victory" and showed an illustrated map of the United States titled "Free and Unfree States."[74] The map showed in shaded boundaries which states still had sodomy laws. All Southern states but Georgia and Texas still had sodomy laws and these only because of the recent victory. However, the article on the Hardwick win also noted that Georgia filed a petition for *certiorari* to the Supreme Court appealing the decision. The court granted cert and oral arguments were heard in the spring of 1986.[75]

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[71] Sheyn, "The Shot Heard," 13-15; Eskridge, *Dishonorable Passions*, 194-228; Mary Bernstein, "Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained? Conceptualizing Social Movement 'Success' in the Lesbian and Gay Movement," *Sociological Perspectives* 46, no. 3 (September 2003): 364-65.

[72] Eskridge, *Dishonorable Passions*, 197-203; Murdoch and Price, *Courting Justice*.

[73] Lambda Legal Defense Fund, "Dear Gay/Lesbian Organization," May 9, 1983. DU, Sears Papers, Box 115; Ad Hoc Task Force to Challenge Sodomy Laws, Meeting Minutes, November 20, 1983. DU, Sears Papers, Box 115; Iron, *The Courage of Their Convictions*, 383-386; Murdoch and Price, *Courting Justice*, 277-80; Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good*, 531-35.

[74] "Hardwick Victory," and "Free and Unfree States: A Map of Sodomy Laws in the U.S.," *Lambda Update*, Fall 1985. DU, Sears Papers, Box 115.

Just a week after Pride, on June 30th, the Supreme Court's decision rocked Atlanta's gay and lesbian community and countless others across the country. The decision was immediately interpreted by many as a physical threat to the safety of gay and lesbian people who lived where sodomy laws were still in place and as a symbolic rejection of their fight for equality. In Atlanta the case was not theoretical as it hinged on the proven fact that sodomy laws were highly regulated and enforced in the state by the police, and legislative and judicial system. In Atlanta the sodomy law resulted in the very real arrest of a gay man who was out to his family, out at his job, and followed what he believed were the generally accepted rules in acting on his sexuality.

The *Bowers* decision forced people who thought sodomy laws only impacted certain people to acknowledge that their lives were regulated and criminalized. Michael Hardwick was not having sex in public when he was arrested and charged with violating the sodomy law, but acted on his sexuality in what he and many others believed to be the constitutionally protected privacy of his bedroom. Richard Swanson, the administrator at the AGC, spoke about an ironic reckoning that now had to occur in the gay and lesbian community, especially in Atlanta where it was so easy to live a semi-closeted life. Before people believed the "traditional argument that there is nothing wrong with being gay so long as you avoid being open about it." Now, he said, they would have to adjust to the reality that "there is no closet so dark that you can close so tightly that the long arm of the law can't get you and drag you off to prison."[76]

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[75] Murdoch and Price, *Courting Justice*, 280-309; Eskridge, *Dishonorable Passions*, 229-52.

Reactions to the *Bowers* decision from the gay and lesbian community were immediate.[77] In Atlanta on the day the decision was announced MACGLO members coordinated an emergency meeting to "discuss a response" to the "Hardwick case."[78] They contacted all thirty member groups to relay the call for an emergency meeting scheduled the next day. On July 1st, over two dozen people came together in a first-of-its-kind emergency session devoted to a single topic: the Supreme Court decision. Thirteen "Members of Record" (groups officially recognized as member organizations who sent representatives to monthly meetings) attended and quickly approved an agenda for an hour long meeting that was to be divided into thirds. The first twenty minutes were devoted to a presentation and "analysis" of the decision by member group GOAL (Georgians Opposed to Archaic Laws), which formed in 1983 to help fund and finance Michael Hardwick's legal suit. After that was a question and answer period followed by a general discussion of a coordinated community response.[79]

During the meeting, gay and lesbian Atlantans started to work out what the decision might mean for them as a community. Some people expressed real fears for their safety. The minutes recorded one person speaking out about the ramifications in the local community as they asked if the decision would not "encourage the homophobes" among the "police, prosecutors, and other government." One person singled out the "Georgia Legislature" as the source of their fears and chillingly reminded the group they had the power to criminalize homosexuality, which would then result in more arrests and jail. They said "It happened in Germany. It has happened in the states before. It could happen again."[80] Some members advocated a general strategy to "soft-pedal the victim angle in order to emphasize the threat to the privacy of all citizens" while another chided the gay community for not doing enough to educate people that "we are citizens and not moral freaks." Tensions at the meeting foreshadowed divisions in a cohesive and united direction for the activism of the moment.

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[76] Allan Lewis, "300 Rally Against Supreme Court Ruling," *The News,* July 18, 1986, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[77] In states where sodomy was already decriminalized reactions varied. The most radical and angry reactions were in New York City where activists filled the streets, blocked traffic, and demonstrated an appearance by President Reagan at the Statue of Liberty. In San Francisco activists demonstrated a visit by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. In Chicago activists apparently did not come out in similar protest which may have reflected the differences in community activist feeling. Gould, *Moving Politics*, 123-27; Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 162-64.

[78] MACGLO Minutes of the Emergency Council Meeting, July 1, 1986, 1. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 3.

[79] MACGLO Minutes, July 1, 1986, 2.

The local gay press reported that the *Bowers* decision "sent shock waves across the nation, touching off gay protests from Maine to San Francisco."[81] Community members who attended the emergency MACGLO meeting expressed two major needs: "(1) to build alliances in this fight and (2) to vent our anger and outrage."[82] One action that came from the meeting was the organization of a coalition style conference on privacy rights, led by MACGLO Executive Secretary Alexander Wallace. The "privacy caucus" would be held at the King Center and would pull together liberal activists in the city in a show of support for sodomy repeal and the general right to privacy of sexuality.[83] Though the organizers acknowledged they had "not done their homework," they also conceded they could not "win this fight on their own." However, the group's first impulse to call together a group of organizations they admittedly had not built any meaningful coalition with seemed to demand they come to the aid of gay and lesbian people now.

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[80] Ibid.

[81] "Warren Burger & the Supremes: Their Greatest Hits," *Etc*., July 11-17, 1986, 8. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

[82] MACGLO Minutes, July 1, 1986, 2.

[83] Bernstein, "Nothing Ventured," 366-67; Sheyn, "The Shot Heard," 16-18.

The Atlanta Gay Center, like others in San Francisco, New York City, and Washington D.C., responded to the Hardwick news with a protest.[84] They planned to hold a rally downtown at the Richard Russell federal building on July 3rd with the theme "Restore Liberty." MACGLO meeting minutes recorded a tone of displeasure at the AGC moving forward on their own as they noted the Center "had gone ahead with these plans even though they knew MACGLO would be meeting later." Some MACGLO members were clearly against the rally.[85] Though they agreed with the protest in "principle" they were concerned that not enough people would come out to show support. Minutes recorded one member's assertion that "anything less than 1,000 people would appear very bad in the media."

The desire to put on a good show for outsiders and sweep dissension under the rug (or into the closet) contributed to conflicts and criticism over Pride over the years. With the question of a political rally this insecurity about crowd size manifested again as some people desired a display of force rather than a forceful display. Those who were against the rally were backed up by Pride Committee members who un-ironically spoke out at the meeting. They "pointed out how hard it was to get to Gay Pride—and they had two months while we only have two days."[86] By the end of the meeting MACGLO agreed to support the planned protest. They would make calls to member organizations to encourage and initiate contacts through phone-tree plans.

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[84] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 123-27.

[85] Deborah Gould, "Rock the Boat, Don't Rock the Boat, Baby: Ambivalence and the Emergence of Militant AIDS Activism," in ed. Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), 135-57; *Moving Politics*, 156-60.

"On the eve of Independence day," the "Rally at the Capitol," officially sponsored by the Atlanta Gay Center, drew a crowd of about three hundred people downtown. The front page of *The News* showed a photograph of the crowd under the headline "Atlanta Responds!"[87] *Etc.* confirmed that security was aggressive and threatened protestors with arrest for trespass at the Russell building. One protestor said they "paraded around as though they themselves had written the opinion."[88] In just a few days Atlanta gay and lesbian community activists pulled together a protest demonstration that drew a sizable crowd. In part this was because they were able to call on a loyal and willing pool of people who could be counted on to pick up a microphone. Speakers included Kathy Wilde, one of Michael Hardwick's attorneys, Alexander Wallace, local journalist and Executive Secretary of MACGLO, and Ken Bartuka, chair of the Atlanta Gay Center. They joined Atlanta activist icons Maria Helena Dolan and Gil Robison in speaking out against the Supreme Court's decision. Speakers touched on the long-term negative consequences of the decision and the immediate damage inflicted upon the movement. Dr. James Harris who spoke at the rally as a representative of the group National Organization for Changing Men made an accurate assessment when he said that "It will take us at least 20 years to undo what has been done."[89]

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[86] MACGLO Minutes, July 1, 1986, 2.

[87] Lewis, "300 Rally."

[88] "Rally Round the Flag," *Etc*., July 11-17, 1986, 8. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

Maria Dolan's speeches were legendary in the local community and she could always be counted on to rouse crowds to their feet. As a local journalist, Dolan urged her readers towards the idea that marches, parades, rallies, and demonstrations were an important and critical part of the movement. She argued just months before on behalf of coming out for Pride that "putting bodies on the line still counts."[90] Dolan was reported to have "proposed a new National March for Gays and Lesbians in Washington" at the rally to which the crowd "applauded enthusiastically."[91] The recent "Supreme travesty," she said only furthered her case for the power of protest.[92] In *Etc.* she related a conversation with Kathy Wilde, the lawyer most involved in the case, on the day of the decision's announcement in which she also advocated for public protest. In a seeming break with the status quo, Wilde said "unless we stay in the streets, we will never win in the courts." Dolan yet again told her readers about the power of protest.

> This is a point I've hammered on again and again in this column. Law and public opinion *have* been altered in this country by the presence of masses of bodies in the streets, expressing dissatisfaction, solidarity, and raw power through numbers.[93]

Across the country, activists were inching towards something big. Gay and lesbian people were becoming politicized by AIDS and even in apathetic Atlanta more people seemed willing to put their bodies on the line. *The News* reported that at a Pride Committee "wrap-up" meeting "a proposal to call for a national march on Atlanta in the spring of 1987 met with enthusiastic approval."[94] The government's inaction and lack of response on AIDS was the primary force that drove the change, but the *Bowers* decision increased the energy as people interpreted the decision as a direct attack.

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[89] Lewis, "300 Rally."

[90] Dolan, "But We Must March, Darlings!," 18.

[91] Lewis, "300 Rally."

[92] Maria Helena Dolan, "The Skull Beneath the Skin," *Etc.,* July 18-24, 1986, 43. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

[93] Ibid.

Over the weekend of July 16th about twenty-five activists from across the country met in New York City at the first organizing session for what was then an unnamed and undecided upon national march for gay and lesbian civil rights. Meeting less than three weeks after the *Bowers* decision was announced activists were still reeling from the news. Atlanta activist and BWMT member Jim Harlow attended the meeting and said there was an "atmosphere of unity, seriousness of purpose, and mutual respect apparent to everyone."[95] The organizing meeting was planned before the "*Hardwick* decision," yet Harlow reflected that it "took on particular urgency given the tremendous upsurge of anger and rage seen in our communities throughout the U.S." In New York he shared with others the story of the protest rally held in Atlanta, hastily put together in the immediate wake of the Supreme Court decision. He said its success was evidence that "people are fired up with an anger not seen on such a scale in years."

Jim Harlow echoed this sentiment in a letter to the *Atlanta Constitution* dated just days after the New York meeting. He took issue with an editorial by local columnist Dick Williams, entitled "Coke Boycott Threat is Sign of Homosexual Panic," which made the argument that the *Bowers* decision "stopped the homosexual rights movement cold." Harlow said his many "jeering insults" directed at the gay and lesbian community were really just "nervous laughter generated by the panic of Williams and his ilk that this Dred Scott decision against the fundamental human rights of lesbians and gays will in fact unleash militant resistance on a national scale."[96] Harlow said Williams misunderstood and misrepresented the gay and lesbian rights movement. He emphatically stated "But we're not "stopped cold," instead "We're fired up."[97]

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[94] "National March on Atlanta?" *The News,* July 18, 1986, 3. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[95] Jim Harlow, "For Life and Love—We're Not Going Back!," July 19, 1986. AHC, ALGHT, March on Washington Materials Box 62.

The *Bowers* decision was the final tipping point in a growing restlessness for Jim Harlow and many others in gay and lesbian communities.[98] He said "people in Atlanta, like everywhere else in the country, were ready to move" and were "digging in locally for the long-haul."[99] Harlow issued a challenge to Dick Williams and "other editorial page pontificators." He wanted them to

> look up from their word processors and out the window, because we'll be in the streets, in the union halls, in community meetings, in city council chambers, in statehouses—joining with the majority of honest and right-thinking people in the country who support our struggle.[100]

Harlow's list of all the places that gay and lesbian activists would be was an indication of the kind of coalition-building movement that many of Atlanta's activists were interested in developing.[101] By participating in the march they took a step towards "strengthening a movement" that would make a "significant contribution to stopping racism, sexism, and bigotry cold forever."[102]

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[96] Jim Harlow, Letter to *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 19, 1986. AHC, ALGHT, March on Washington Materials Box 62. Material underlined in original text.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 172-75.

[99] Harlow, "For Life and Love."

[100] Harlow, Letter to *Atlanta Constitution*.

[101] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 96-97; Vaid, *Virtual Equality*.

Jim Harlow went alone to the July meeting in New York City, which itself only had a few dozen activists in attendance. He felt he represented others who could not attend and "was very proud to be there from Atlanta."[103] He was moved to "listen a lot and represent the feeling of our community as best I could in NYC." Back at home activists immediately organized a local group for the proposed national march. Maria Dolan set up a meeting at the AGC on July 29th "to draw together people here and form an Atlanta March Committee." Twenty-two people attended that meeting, roughly equivalent to the number of people who met in New York. The Atlanta group included well-known local activists as well as individuals new to political activism. In a list of attendees at the first meeting were Richard Swanson and Ken Bartuka, members of the AGC Board, BWMT members Jim Harlow and Kenneth Marshall, and long-time activists Liz Throop, Gene Holloway, and Gil Robison, in addition to new activists like Leigh VanderEls.

In August activists issued a "Call to Action" that outlined reasons for a proposed march that would "strengthen and vitalize local organizations."[104] The call reflected the interrelated concerns of leftist and liberal movement activists and protested issues they said were part of a "pattern of assaults on human rights." It addressed the fact that women were underpaid for their labor and rejected state support for the "brutal regime in South Africa." The call emphasized a new political morality and commitment to intersectional social justice. AIDS was centered in the new activism with a grave and emotional weight. Activists argued the whole country was in danger because it was guided by a homophobic "morality" that allowed AIDS to kill thousands of people. They focused their protest at the federal government because under Reagan AIDS had become a lethal crisis due to indifference or open hostility and because the state supported brutality and violence at home and abroad.

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[102] Harlow, Letter to *Atlanta Constitution*.

[103] Ibid.

[104] "Call to Action for a New March on Washington for Lesbian & Gay Rights," undated. AHC, ALGHT, March on Washington Materials, Box 62; Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent,* 86-95.

The call was a political statement written by activists to move people to action. It pinpointed a historical moment in time that served as a point of no return. They used collective memories of resistance and rebellion that compelled gay and lesbian people to engage with history and to think about the future. They said the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969 "released the pent-up yearnings that had been stilled through eons of oppression." Now they asked the gay and lesbian community, "after all the suffering and all the struggling," to "proclaim to friend and foe alike, FOR LOVE AND FOR LIFE, WE'RE NOT GOING BACK!"[105] The text occupied ¾ of the flyer page but at the bottom about sixty or so names were listed. Those who attached their names included many famous and well-known national activists in the gay and lesbian community, like Virginia Apuzzo, Steve Ault, Franklin Kameny, Gil Gerald, and Audre Lord, in addition to local activists like Jim Harlow and Maria Helena Dolan.

The call was an initial draft of the political reasons that channeled march energies, but it was also importantly a physical call to action and movement. It asked people to come to New York for a long weekend in November and was a direct appeal for personal involvement. Early organizers were committed to a consensus-based approach to decision making. No decisions about the specifics of the march were made and would not be made until people from all over the country and from all types of communities were afforded the ability to come together, speak their mind, and have their concerns represented as part of the gay and lesbian civil rights movement action. The call was an important catalyst in that it gave people a direct and action-motivated plan as they came together.[106]

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[105] "Call to Action."

Atlanta lesbian and gay activists worked to keep energies up and focused on the march. March planning occurred in stages and was intentionally crafted to include, address, and involve the concerns and voices of a diverse community. As the planning continued into the fall, issues related to representation, platform demands, speakers, and the goals of the march showed many movement perspectives and strategies. Atlanta's gay and lesbian community faced a more immediate threat at home though. Atlanta city council representatives, Richard Guthman and "Buddy" Fowlkes, who were described by Dudley Clendinen in the *New York Times* as from the "affluent white northside of Atlanta" introduced an initiative to repeal the city's gay rights or anti-discrimination law passed just six months before.[107]

The repeal effort was spearheaded by a new group called Citizens for Public Awareness (CPA). Nancy Schaeffer, a local conservative Christian political activist was the most vocal and visible member. They influenced the city council to reassess the recently passed anti-discrimination measure with a direct attack against gay and lesbian rights modelled on the successful efforts of Anita Bryant and Save Our Children. CPA lobbied council members, sent letters to religious organizations and leaders throughout the city, and placed ads in the local newspapers that campaigned for the repeal. They did not just focus their efforts on the repeal effort though. When the Atlanta police placed recruitment advertisements in *The News,* CPA bought ads in the city's major daily papers that cost thousands of dollars to protest the move. They distributed 20,000 circulars in the city in an effort to educate Atlantans about the potential threat of gay police, an idea they thought essentially showed how the city and police of Atlanta condoned criminals.[108]

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[106] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 93-95.

[107] Dudley Clendinen, "Brothers' Rift on Homosexuality Reflects a Division in Atlanta," *New York Times,* October 12, 1986.

Citizens for Public Awareness aimed to educate Christian and conservative Atlantans about local politics and to politicize them.[109] They told Atlantans the city council already passed a "Lesbian and Gay Rights Ordinance," which they claimed made sodomy a "civil right." As conservative activists reasoned, the Atlanta anti-discrimination ordinance protected criminals because sodomy was illegal and the Supreme Court agreed that Georgia had the right to regulate it. CPA President James Zauderer argued that the anti-discrimination ordinance acknowledged that gay and lesbian people were a minority, which was a real issue for him. He told Dudley Clendinen that

> Minority status is extremely important, because once you have it, you have a subtle governmental endorsement of the homosexual life style. This is something they're doing all over the country. Atlanta is their center in the Southeast.'[110]

The CPA did not underestimate the threat the ordinance presented to the city. If not repealed then the city would be lost, becoming the southern equivalent to America's most notorious gay mecca. In a flyer circulated after the repeal effort failed CPA asked "DO

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[108] Clendinen, "Brothers' Rift."

[109] Self, *All In the Family*; Stewart Foley, *Front Porch Politics*; Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*, 167-171.

[110] Clendinen, "Brothers' Rift."

YOU WANT ATLANTA TURNED INTO ANOTHER SAN FRANCISCO?"[111]

The gay community used similar tactics to fire up their side and get them engaged and active. In response to the CPA ads, the Pharr Library, a local gay club issued their own all-capitalized scare ads to the gay community. In an October issue of *Etc.* a full page ad covered the back of the magazine. The was hot pink and had REPEAL stamped across the center and urged members to contact their city council representatives. It implored the community to act, "write, telegram, or call (you know how often you're on the phone anyway.)"[112] The center of the ad read

IF YOU DO NOTHING
YOU END UP WITH NOTHING

THIS IS *YOUR* LIFE.
DO SOMETHING,
DAMN IT!

The CPA repeal campaign impacted the city. In the weeks after it was affirmed that a repeal vote would occur, many people in the community came forward to fight to keep the ordinance as law. In a poignant and dramatic turn, the Atlanta gay rights ordinance fight came to the attention of the national news with a personal interest story that seemed almost too obvious a metaphor for how divisive opinion on gay rights was at the time. CPA President, James Zauderer, seemed astonished that his organization's massive publicity campaign a few weeks before the Council meeting, which included two full page ads in the *Atlanta Journal* and *Constitution,* had the effect of drawing out a large crowd of gay and lesbian people to speak in favor of the law at the council meeting.[113] One of the men who publicly spoke in favor of the ordinance was Doug Zauderer, James Zauderer's older brother, who was estranged from his family because they rejected him when he came out.[114] The Zauderer brothers both lived in Atlanta as adults and had ended up on opposing sides of the issue in a very personal and political way. Doug spoke openly about the emotional issues in their family as he thought they influenced his brother's campaign against gay and lesbian people and the ordinance.

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[111] "What in the world are we doing to Atlanta?!?!" CPA flyer, undated ca. October 1986. AHC, ALGHT, Box 46.

[112] The Pharr Library Repeal Ad, *Etc.*, October 3-9, 1986. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

Doug Zauderer thought that hate and "evangelical fervor" motivated his brother and the CPA. He told Dudley Clendinen that he and James had not had a relationship since he came out a decade before. His brother "made it clear that I needed Jesus, that I needed to be saved."[115] At the hearing Doug's testimony conveyed a deep and emotional pain related to his family and their negative feelings about his sexuality. He personalized the fight and engaged emotionally with the general politics of the anti-gay and homophobic sentiment that motivated the repeal effort. He refused to make the argument abstract or about potential theoretical rights or discrimination. The personal element made the fight worse and Doug's testimony hinted at feelings that were growing in gay and lesbian communities—that of betrayal, resentment, disappointment, and anger. He told those in attendance "I don't understand why brother is so full of hate, but I know he is wrong to hate other people because they are gay. I want all of you to know that I am ashamed of him. I am so very ashamed.[116] James Zauderer's only comment in *The News* was that "he knew where his brother stood for the past 10 years."[117]

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[113] "Living in a House Divided," *Etc.,* October 3-9, 1986, 8.

[114] Clendinen, "Brothers' Rift."

[115] Ibid.

[116] "Living in a House Divided."

Doug Zauderer's testimony addressed uncomfortable points that some gay and lesbian activists preferred to leave out of the argument but his passionate and honest disclosures made a powerful argument for the rebirth of personal politics. That fall members of nearly twenty different social, political, and religious gay and lesbian organizations in Atlanta organized campaigns to fight the effort to repeal the anti-discrimination ordinance. In a leaflet produced and distributed throughout the community, one side showed a graphic illustration of the city skyline and riffed on Atlanta's infamous slogan. Above the cityscape read "A City Too Busy to Hate," and below seemed to imply the fine print, which stated "One Exception—Gay Citizens."[118] On the other side the flyer placed the blame squarely on City Council members who sponsored the repeal, it read "Stop Guthman and Fowlkes!" They asked citizens to write to their city representatives and let them know that they "will not let Guthman, Fowlkes, or anyone else take away this hard-won ordinance without a fight."[119]

On October 6th the repeal effort failed. In a vote of 12-4, the city council reaffirmed their commitment to the ordinance.[120] The human element with the Zauderer brothers had continued interest in Atlanta's local lesbian and gay politics and the nation was aware of Georgia's importance in the *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision.[121] The *New York Times* covered the repeal effort's failure and reported that "Atlanta thus becomes the only major city in the South to have and affirm under fire a piece of homosexual rights legislation, the kind of legislation enacted in a many cities but also overturned in such places as Houston and Chicago."[122]

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[117] Ralph Ginn and Don Weston, "City Council Votes Down Repeal Effort 12-4," *The News*, October 10, 1986, 1, 3. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[118] "Save Our Civil Rights" flyer. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 3.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ginn and Weston, "City Council Votes Down Repeal."

The threat to repeal the anti-gay discrimination policy in Atlanta kept the local community focused on political activism. They carried that energy with them into the fall as the organization and planning picked up for the national march. In November, between four and five hundred people gathered at the first organizational conference in New York. The activists decided over the weekend that the March would be held in Washington D.C., just about a year later, in October of 1987, over the Columbus Day three-day weekend. The date was also chosen to commemorate the first national lesbian and gay rights march held on October 14, 1979, symbolically linking the two marches together as part of a national gay and lesbian rights movement.[123] Maria Helena Dolan attended the meeting and was elected one of four "temporary representatives from the South" and "specifically, the People of Color designee."[124]

Maria Dolan developed a document after the November meeting that outlined how Southern activists, and especially how Southern people of color could help to shape a more inclusive and diverse movement and march. Dolan wrote “Proposals for Setting a Southern Agenda” less than two weeks after the big meeting. In it she outlined ideas that would push the mainstream community to engage in more radical and inclusive political activism.[125] She asserted the importance of a progressive Southern political vision and wanted the movement to value people of color and their perspectives. She said

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[121] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 164-65; Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*, 167; Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good*, 526-30.

[122] Clendinen, "Brothers' Rift;"

[123] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 100.

[124] Maria Helena Dolan, Dear Sisters and Brothers, December 18, 1986. AHC, ALGHT, March on Washington Materials, Box 62.

> As southerners, both native and adopted, we’ve experienced the discounting, contempt and patronization accorded by folks from other regions. (Not accidentally, such treatment mirrors that accorded to ethnic and sexual minorities and Womyn in this country.) To assert ourselves as southerners, we need to struggle mightily against these pervasive Currents-as directed against us, as internalized and as we direct outwards.

Working in a less diverse space was hard, Dolan confessed. She said “I can’t, of course, say that working with a very white group, however well-intentioned, has been entirely satisfactory.” She offered a contrast between past efforts and the current “very white group” of activists involved in planning. She had worked on the Southeastern Lesbian and Gay Conference, the 1979 March on Washington, local Take-Back-the-Night marches, and many Atlanta Lesbian and Gay Pride events. She worked with ALFA, the AGC, BWMT, and was a co-chair of the first media committee in the L/GRC. She acknowledged that her Southern roots were shallow, as she had lived in many states and Puerto Rico before she came to Atlanta. But Dolan described herself as a “Latina woman” who “adopted the South as my home over the past decade.” Pushing forward a Southern perspective was essential so as not to have a movement planned and directed from the bicoastal heavyweights of New York and California. She urged her community to put themselves “in the middle of the struggle” through “insistent and determined participation.”

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[125] Maria Helena Dolan, Proposals for Setting a Southern Agenda, November 24, 1986. AHC, ALGHT, March on Washington Materials, Box 62.

Maria Dolan reported that eighteen Atlantans attended the meeting in New York, which almost entirely made up the whole Southern contingent.[126] They were outnumbered and easily out-maneuvered at the conference. Richard Swanson reported in *The News* that "controversy met with stern resistance from the platform and the Atlanta delegation often found itself on the losing end of cloture calls."[127] Swanson echoed many of the issues that Dolan raised but offered more details about the lopsided representation that contributed to the dominance of New York and California. Swanson was especially annoyed with the fact that an S/M contingent was appointed to the steering committee but a lesbian separatist group was denied a similar seating. It seemed that despite the many calls for a more diverse and inclusive movement and march, older patterns of preference reemerged.

United Does Not Mean We Have To Be Uniform

Throughout the spring and summer of 1986, Atlanta's gay and lesbian press, *Etc.* and *The News*, reported on what many believed in the community was an increase in crime and violence directed at the gay and lesbian community. Some activists sought to capitalize on the publicity around the CPA ordinance repeal campaign that fall to highlight the increase in anti-gay feeling drummed up by the campaign led to real-life violence in the city. Carolyn Mobley with the AGC said the repeal effort and CPA contributed to "an epidemic of anti-gay violence in Atlanta."[128] She argued against repealing the ordinance because it would send a clear message that it was "open season on gays and lesbians in Atlanta." Referring to local instances of violence, she said "in Atlanta we have all learned one great lesson—we are *all* potential victims."

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[126] Maria Helena Dolan, "High Drama, Raw Nerves, Copious Bloodletting, and the Elusive Quest for Queer Unity," *Etc.*, December 12-18, 1986, 24-29. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

[127] Richard Swanson, "Sparks Fly at National March Conference," *The News*, December 5, 1986, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[128] Ginn and Weston, "City Council Votes Down Repeal."

Other activists downplayed or dismissed the idea of potential violence related to the repeal campaign and instead focused their efforts on an appeal to equal rights. At a gay and lesbian community town meeting held in October there seemed to be a growing divide. *The News* reported that at the meeting, Carolyn Mobley "spoke of the need for diversity," but defended "separate lesbian and black groups."[129] She frankly stated that "our separation is but temporary and necessary." Mobley called for diverse representation in community activism and argued that "united does not mean we have to be uniform."[130] Mobley's comments related to a perception that some of Atlanta's gay leadership desired uniformity in its activism, an issue many other communities struggled with in the era.[131]

At mid-decade Atlanta's gay press stabilized and divisions and disagreements were reported on extensively during this period of heightened activism. *Etc.* and *The News* reported on groups and actions and were often actively engaged in political and community issues as advocates in some capacity. The local gay press critiqued organizations in attempts to make them more transparent and accountable to the community. Articles that focused on personalities and control issues showed the complexity of movement activism. Reporters made the actions and statements of activists part of a public discussion which gave the community more access to the internal workings of local gay and lesbian political and community organizations. The local press sometimes wanted to correct what they saw as a misdirection in course by bringing attention to problematic politics. Often their reports shed light on the more divisive issues at the center of seemingly petty divisions or power coups.

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[129] Alan Lewis, "Town Meeting Addresses March, Gay Issues," *The News,* October 24, 1986, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good*; Vaid, *Virtual Equality,* 90-93.

Just after Thanksgiving, a string of murders became news in the community when it was made known to the public that the male victims were all street hustlers. Michael Terry, who later confessed to the crimes, paid the men for sex before he murdered them. All six of the black victims were described in the press as street people. The Atlanta Gay Center issued a press statement about the murders that called on city officials and police to address the growing problem of violence against the gay and lesbian community. They also took local gay political leaders to task for not following through on cooperative initiatives that already existed, like the L/GRC police advisory committee, and were neglected by those who had the power to neglect them.

Some people thought the AGC statement went too far. After the Center's original press statement came out, *Etc*. received over twenty calls from people who generally thought the AGC was "grandstanding." Writing about the controversy that ensued, T. Hoff noted that only two people called in support of the Center (and both were associated with the Center).[132] Some thought the statement would cause embarrassment to the community or risk relationships due to the potential negative publicity. Hoff quoted a problematic and paternalistic editorial in the *Atlanta Constitution* that seemed to confirm their worst fears. It was a "stinging opinion" piece that argued for not biting the hand that feeds you. It said asking sympathetic officials to "make some public utterance opposing random violence against gays, is gratuitous and an insult to both men." The editorial read as a soft warning that threatened a punitive future stating "gay activists are now making demands that suggest they don't know who their friends are."[133]

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[132] T. Hoff, "How Sharper Than a Faggot's Tooth," *Etc.*, December 19-25, 1986, 24-26. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

Part of the issue stemmed from a disagreement in the gay and lesbian community about the classification of the crimes as homophobic or as just routine urban violence. During the spring a number of murders and other violent crimes committed in Midtown were clearly understood in the local gay and lesbian community as instances of anti-gay violence. Activists renewed the Police Advisory Committee after years of general inactivity to combat what was seen as a rising tide of violence directed at the community.[134] Carolyn Mobley's comments that fall about diversity in opinion and the need for separation were likely made in light of the developing disagreement over who counted as victims and what crimes constituted anti-gay violence. Mainstream activists seemed to line up on the side of caution and hesitated to name the most recent murders as part of the same epidemic of anti-gay crime. The revival of the Police Advisory Committee indicated that more mainstream methods like cooperative meetings, negotiations, and liaison work were going to be the main approaches to addressing the issues. When the AGC released a statement that forcefully declared the murders anti-gay and made public demands on officials to denounce it as anti-gay violence it provoked an intense response from in some parts of the community. More mainstream activists seemed to confirm that they were indeed afraid of losing support from the straight community.

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[133] Ibid.

[134] See chapter 4, "Visibility and Victimization: Hate Crime Laws and the Geography of Punishment," Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, 155-84.

T. Hoff's report in *Etc.* showed there were a number of people in the community who disagreed with the AGC's interpretation of the crimes. Ken Bartuka, Chair of the Center's Board of Directors, defended their position and acknowledged a range of opinions on the issue of anti-gay violence in Atlanta. He said the AGC's statement "was seen as too far out of step with the middle of the road gays and straights."[135] In the days after the statement, the AGC decided to take advantage of their fifteen minutes in the spotlight and pushed the issue. Jeff Levi, the Executive Director for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), was then in Atlanta as a guest for a local fundraising event for the group. Seizing on the opportunity to continue a much-needed conversation, the AGC asked Levi to participate in a press conference on anti-gay violence.[136]

On the very same afternoon that Jeff Levi agreed to participate, he cancelled after conversations with "his board member from Atlanta as well as other people in Atlanta."[137] Levi was informed that his participation in the press conference "would be too controversial." The AGC wondered what could be controversial about the head of the NGLTF speaking out against anti-gay violence. It seemed to them rather that Levi succumbed to veiled threats issued by members of their own community. Representing the AGC's perspective of the disagreement, *The News* reported that Levi was advised that speaking at the press conference "would be detrimental to his original purpose in coming into the city, fundraising." He was also told that the Center "was on the wrong side of the issue and that these were not homophobic crimes."

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[135] Ken Bartuka, "AGC & NGLTF: What's happening here?" *The News,* December 19, 1986, 3. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[136] Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, 160-162; Vaid, *Virtual Equality*, 91-92; Murdoch and Price, *Courting Justice*, 355-57.

[137] Bartuka, "AGC & NGLTF."

The controversy had advanced rapidly. In the two weeks since the murders became public the AGC issued their statement. Then the statement became the subject of intense disagreement in the gay community press. When Jeff Levi pulled out of the press conference it showed the divide in stark terms and led to repercussions for all the players involved. Five members of the AGC picketed the NGLTF fundraiser, which was held at a private home "in a fashionable northwest Atlanta neighborhood" in the first week of December.[138] The small group carried signs that showed "their displeasure with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force" and its executive director Jeff Levi said *The News*. A photograph showed the protestors with their signs as they walked in a small tight circle at the demonstration. One sign read "Brenning Stops NGLTF From Denouncing Anti-Gay Violence!"

George Brenning was a somewhat controversial figure in Atlanta's gay community and a likely candidate for criticisms about ego-driven politics. Brenning and the AGC had a conflicted and rocky relationship that was the subject of its own share of media attention earlier in the year. At the annual board meeting for the AGC in January, Brenning was accused of acting inappropriately in the heat of an argument and eventually resigned his position. The Board meeting became well-known in the community because it led to some drastic changes in the administration and organization of the AGC.[139] Brenning's behavior was also the subject of a letter written to Maria Dolan from a representative who attended a MACGLO meeting that summer to distribute "leaflets" and to discuss the national March planning.[140] In an unsigned letter, the activist told Dolan they were "verbally attacked" by Brenning, who was "livid" and "vitriolic" seemingly because "we had the chutzpah to organize in NYC." The letter writer did not have anything good to say about Brenning in the context of movement politics. They said, "This man is an enemy, a careerist who talks a lot of shit and who works overtime to derail things he can't control."[141]

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[138] Bartuka, "AGC & NGLTF."

It seems likely that there was an element of personality politics at play in the controversy over Jeff Levi's abrupt disinvolvement with the AGC press conference. It was the same context that influenced the rift between the AGC and other mainstream organizations in the city. The AGC drew attention to how issues of race and class shaped how local gay political activists responded to the issue of anti-gay violence. They also called out their willingness to acquiesce or compromise prematurely in order to maintain their new access to mainstream political power. AGC protestors objected to what they saw as Jeff Levi's quick abandonment of the harder issues to placate local politicians. The protest was the final act in what had become a heated battle between some members of Atlanta's political leadership.[142] During the first few months of the year the AGC was embroiled in the controversy with George Brenning and other Board members over control and administration of the AGC. Around the same time there were rumblings about the planned protest at the First Baptist Church, as some people objected to the "propriety" of protesting at a church.[143]

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[139] "Tales of Honor & Dishonor," "Gay Center Board Meets: Elects Officers, Examines Wounds," *Etc.*, February 7- 14, 1986, 8, 9; T. Hoff, "Locating the Center," *Etc.*, February 20- 27, 1986, 6; "What Price *News*?" *Etc.*, February 28- March 6, 1986, 9-13. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.

[140] Letter to Maria Helena Dolan, undated ca. 1986. AHC, ALGHT, Maria Helena Dolan Papers, Box 76.

[141] Ibid.

T. Hoff offered the community his take on certain aspects of the drama but attempted to straddle the line between the two opposing sides.[144] Overall, Hoff gave the impression that *Etc.* aligned itself with the more cautious and conservative approach to interpreting the recent violence. *Etc.* reported they were one of just a few parties privy to substantial investigatory details related to the crimes and concluded, along with Buren Batson and Maury Weil of the L/GRC, that the most recent murders were likely to be caused by "insanity" rather than homophobia. Hoff noted the AGC did not have access to the same information which contributed to a knowledge gap between organizations and the press. However once this information was known the AGC still considered the violence a "homophobic crime spree" and refused to consider alternatives. He wrote

> Any disagreement with the AGC characterizations results, they say from racism. Had the victims been white working boys from Cypress Street, everyone would cry homophobia as the motive, so they say.

In Hoff's opinion, the AGC changed the terms of disagreement by pointing out race as a factor and suggested they used race as a shield from criticism.

Atlanta's gay and lesbian community was in the midst of great change in 1986.

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[142] Bartuka, "AGC & NGLTF."

[143] "Circling the Jerk."

[144] Hoff, "How Sharper Than a Faggot's Tooth."

As new groups formed to address old problems, leadership and control became unfortunate points of argument. The new political organizations still reflected divisions related to racism, sexism, and classism that were longstanding impediments to a united and unified community. In Atlanta mainstream lesbian and gay rights activists were more conservative on social, racial, gender, and economic issues and tended to generally represent middle-class and wealthy, white, and educated professionals.

Atlanta's mainstream activists pushed respectability politics and disliked the growing movement of direct action protest and confrontational tactics.[145] By the end of the year Atlanta's lesbian and gay community had witnessed a preview of the movement's major divide in the coming years.[146] Sides started to form early on between mainstream political activists and a growing vocal community of lesbian and gay people who were politicized by the trauma of AIDS and the continued conservatism of the decade. A new cohort of people were coming of age in an era of unprecedented tragedy and many more were galvanized by the significance of the defeat that *Bowers v. Hardwick* represented. These activists initiated a new era of direct action activism nationally, and in Atlanta these shifts were felt even on the streets of a fashionable northwest Atlanta neighborhood.

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[145] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 161-65.

[146] Vaid, *Virtual Equality*; Gould, *Moving Politics*, 216-21.

CHAPTER 9

"GAY RIGHTS Y'ALL": THE SECOND MARCH ON WASHINGTON AND ITS IMPACT ON ATLANTA, 1987-1988

Save Gay Pride Week

The "1987 Atlanta Pride Observance" organizers bemoaned the "lack of community involvement" on one side of a double-sided leaflet for the event that year.[1] The flyer listed two dates for planning meetings scheduled in April and advertised for volunteers. It was clear that just mere months from the event, the Pride Committee had not finalized many events. Organizers needed money but wanted engagement, they said "we'd prefer to have your help and participation." They needed people to get involved and they directly appealed for ideas saying, "Please look over the other side of this sheet. We need YOUR input and help if this year's Pride Observance is going to happen. We have only 3 months!!!" On the other side of the flyer, twelve events were listed but only four were confirmed: an outdoor concert, a gathering of Atlanta's lesbian and gay organizations, a march, and a candlelight vigil. The phrase "possibly organized by" and performance dates marked “possibly Friday” showed minimal progress in event planning.[2]

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[1] 1987 Atlanta Pride Observance leaflet, ca. 1987. AHC, ALGHT, March on Washington Materials, Box 62.

The criticisms lodged at Pride organizers in previous years failed to be addressed and deepened year after year. Late in May, just weeks from the annual celebration, local activist and *Etc.* writer Gene-Gabriel Moore begged Atlanta to get involved with Pride. In a detailed article entitled “Save Gay Pride Week: An Immodest Proposal,” he related the demise of that year’s organization and how plans fell apart due to neglect and non-involvement. Moore reminded readers that last year’s Pride was organized in just two months and by a small number of people, but it was not enough to keep it going. One organizer that year was Don Weston and Moore told the community that “this year the heavier part of the job fell on Don’s shoulders alone.”[3] He told readers that without a direct injection of new energy there would be no Pride in 1987.

Organizing Atlanta’s Pride was not a job that a single person could or should do, as Regina Heimbruch and Gene Holloway pointed out before. Don Weston told MACGLO that only eight people volunteered to help with Pride organizing. By May, he reported “the best efforts of the eight had fallen short.” He told Moore that Pride left him “disappointed” and “discouraged and exhausted.”[4] The Committee’s inability to get more people involved with Pride indicated the broader community was not willing to support them as they were currently configured. It also showed that fulfilling the commitments of Pride organizing was not a priority for those who maintained control over the Committee.

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Gene-Gabriel Moore, “Save Gay Pride: An Immodest Proposal,” *Etc.*, May 28, 1987, 36. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

[4] Ibid., 38.

The division and disappointment contrasted to what Moore considered a historic year, in light of all the March organizing. He asked “How can Atlantans even think of standing silent this summer?”

A week after Moore’s article appeared in print he reported that it made the impact he intended. Gay and lesbian Atlantans rallied to his cry and agreed that 1987 was “not the year for Atlanta to skip Gay Pride Week.”[5] He asked the community to come together immediately so they could “stage *something*, rather than nothing at all” and they answered him by saving Gay Pride Week. The weekend after his article went out around thirty volunteers met and sketched out plans for a new Pride celebration. Moore said that over seventy-five people contacted him about Gay Pride. The new Pride volunteer organizers were able to get a good deal accomplished in one weekend. They decided to hold a rally instead of a march (due to time considerations), arranged for entertainment, and asked a “nationally-known political figure” to give a keynote address.[6] They made some key changes that reflected a more realistic assessment of the community’s engagement with Pride.

Gay and lesbian activists once again lamented the lack of community involvement and support for Pride. Organizers were once again disappointed in Atlanta’s noncommittal stance towards the “Pride Observance.” None of the proposed events took place as originally planned in April. A benefit held the week before supported the celebration, which took the form of a rally held at the Capitol on Saturday June 27. The morning before the rally community members held a walkathon from the Civic Center to the Capitol that raised money for PWAs.[7] That year's Pride was the lowest attended celebration of the decade with a generous estimate of a crowd of just five hundred. It was also the first year since the mid-1970s that Atlantans did not march or hold a Pride parade.

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[5] Gene-Gabriel Moore, “Atlanta Proud After All,” *Etc.*, June 4-10, 1987, 8. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

[6] Ibid.

The march, pointedly called a parade by some, was still a controversial display of sexuality for many gay and lesbian Atlantans. In response to his pleas to the community to become involved with Pride, Gene-Gabriel Moore received a letter at *Etc.* from someone who explained why he did not support Gay Pride.[8] The subtitle of Moore's regular column, a quote from the letter, highlighted the divisive politics of gay rights activism that involved conservative, mainstream, and respectability issues related to the growing mainstream movement.[9] It read "When gays march down the Peachtree looking like a herd of irresponsible fairies, the public thinks of us as a herd of irresponsible fairies." X argued that the march (or parade) did not reflect well on the gay community.

Gene-Gabriel Moore made the letter the centerpiece in an essay about divisions in the gay and lesbian community. It was written by "a citizen who signs himself X," who worked for a gay business and withheld his name in fear of "retaliation against it or myself." He quoted it extensively so readers could get a real sense of its language. X said that years ago he went to a pride event and was embarrassed by the "drag queens waving wands" and the floats that carried men in feather boas who lisped to the crowd "Hey girls-s-s-s-s." Moore did not hold back in his criticism of citizen X. He acknowledged that the gay rights movement had come far, but unfortunately some people were still "in the dark." He said X was one of a number of "straight-appearing homosexualists" who advocated for self-censorship in the gay and lesbian community. People like X wanted to clean up Pride's image by "packing drag queens and sissy boys and diesel dykes off to a big closet somewhere."[10]

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[7] Pride Calendar, *Etc*., July 19-25, 1987, 28. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

[8] Gene-Gabriel Moore, "The Seventh Circle," *Etc.*, August 7-13, 1987, 30. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

[9] Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good*, 547- 565; Gould, *Moving Politics*, 273-291; Vaid, *Virtual Equality*.

X was not the only who objected to Pride in Atlanta. Frank Powell, "granddaddy of the gay bar scene in Atlanta," was interviewed that summer for an *Atlanta Journal* five-part series on "The Shaping of Atlanta," which included a segment on the gay and lesbian community.[11] In a conversation with Powell, *Journal* reporter Jim Auchmutey captured his distinct opinions about Pride. He touched off his remarks with the assessment that "Reputable gay people don't carry signs." He explained

> I see those people on the news and they look like creatures out of a weird movie. I would never do that. I have nephews and nieces in this town, and I don't want to embarrass them. They must know about me; I've opened 13 bars here and every one [sic] has been gay as a goose. But I don't have to flaunt it.

Powell was legendary in Atlanta's gay business world. He operated over a dozen gay bars in the city over the last two decades. The most well-known and one of the oldest gay bars in the city, The Cove, opened in the 1960s. Powell's comments indicated he preferred to exist in an unstated identity, where those around him acknowledged his sexuality but it was not specified. The closet offered some middle-class and wealthy Atlantans the ability to live comfortable lives and many chose to do so without engaging in a political movement. Powell's comments showed how a previous era of quiet accommodation persisted in some quarters of the city's gay and lesbian community.

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[10] Moore, "The Seventh Circle," August 7-13, 34.

[11] Jim Auchmutey, "The Shaping of Atlanta," *The Atlanta Journal*, August 13, 1987, clippings file. AHC, ALGHT, Box 37.

X resented the men who waved feather boas and paraded themselves down Peachtree but he also believed they harmed the movement. He warned that legislation wasn't passed "by putting on a dress in front of the state of Georgia, the state of Southern Baptists." X's social condemnation was complicated by his emotional connection to gay and lesbian politics. His attack showed that fear, grief, and anger were pervasively undercurrent during the era. He questioned the value of Pride celebrations in the face of continued repression and increasing fear. X asked the community "Will waving that feather boa bring back our dead friends?" Deep under X's petty resentment of those who openly donned dresses and waved fairy wands was a touch of gay nihilism born from the tragedy of AIDS. X said it bluntly, "My friends are dying. And I'm scared."[12]

For many in the gay and lesbian community, AIDS and *Bowers* proved their worst fears true.[13] In this new climate people responded differently to threats and defeats. It seemed that apathy and the closet were poised to make a comeback locally during a year of renewed political activism nationally. In the face of AIDS and the legal reality of a living in a state led by Michael Bowers, who was Georgia's Attorney General until 1997, it wasn't all that surprising that many gay and lesbian people did not muster the strength or energy to come out to Pride. These feelings when paired with an encumbered Pride Committee and little community involvement dragged the event down to a historic low that summer.

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[12] Moore, "The Seventh Circle," August 7-13, 30.

[13] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 136-143.

At the same time there was an explosion in activism and organizing leading up to one of the largest Marches on Washington in recent years. The March on Washington in October of 1987 took over a year to organize and mobilized communities across the country.[14] March organizers formed committees in New York and L.A. as well as in Atlanta and other smaller cities. Amin Ghaziani detailed the rich history of the national marches and how they affected local, regional, and national political activist communities as the mobilization of people for these events, he said, "stretched a fabric of organizations across the country."[15] Ghaziani said that "march planning facilitated organizational expansion and the creation of an infrastructure that stayed firmly in place, propelling growth at the local and national levels long after the weekend of any given march."[16] Atlanta's organizing around the March showed the pains of growth as cooperation and control over the movement and its leadership was publicly criticized and challenged. Atlanta activists organized at home to change their community and struggled to engage a sometimes hostile population.

When over a half a million gay and lesbian marchers gathered in Washington D.C. in October, it was proof of their organizational strength and the size of the movement.[17] When marchers came back they were ready to revolutionize their hometowns. Atlanta's newly expanded and diverse community of gay and lesbian political activists challenged the status quo in their city—before and after the March.

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[14] Ghaziani, Dividends of Dissent, 98.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent,* 123; Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, 428-431; Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good,* 557-559; Vaid, *Virtual Equality*.

Local community members and activists experienced the National March as a transformative event. The moment did not end in Washington but was manifested in the growth of community activism in Atlanta after the March. In the spring of 1988, one of Atlanta's most stable, long-running, and popular lesbian and gay community newspapers, the *Southern Voice*, was founded by an activist who got her start with March organizing. After the March, lesbian and gay Atlantans saw a major change in response to the call of political engagement too. When the Democratic National Convention was held in the city that summer, they made their presence known. Local gay and lesbian activists changed Atlanta in the process of organizing the national March and the movement entered a new era of activism.

"Gay Rights Y'all": The March on Washington

March organizing offered people new opportunities to form coalitions with a unified purpose and agenda. People involved were allowed the space to free themselves from the everyday battles of the local community and its unsteady politics. The Atlanta March Committee (AMC) organized in July of 1986 to immediately address a single mission—to plan for and organize community involvement with the national March. In November organizers met in New York City for the main conference planning session. Activists agreed to additional steering committee meetings in Los Angeles and smaller regional meetings to continue planning their actions throughout 1987. In January, the AMC held their first local fundraiser for the March at the Little Five Points Community

Pub.[18] The weekend before they called for volunteers to meet at the Gay Center at 9 p.m. and from there they headed to "local bars and establishments to promote the fundraiser and THE MARCH." Committee members encouraged people to contact either Jim Harlow or Cathy Woolard for a "supply of tickets to sell to your friends." They added that after their work promoting the March at the local bars, a "fun-raiser" will follow we're sure."[19]

Cathy Woolard was one of a number of newly politicized and engaged activists. In April she told *Etc.* that her "involvement" with the community "began in earnest a year and a half ago when she began organizing the Southeast contingent for the March on Washington." Woolard recalled that during the "summer of 86, I was back from the Peace Corps, working at my parent's motel, hanging out in bars."[20] The AMC took advantage of the fact that a good many of their community socialized in the local bars and held March events at friendly places. The Little Five Points Pub was known as a lesbian-friendly neighborhood bar and it was probably one of the bars where Woolard hung out when she came back to Atlanta. Because Woolard and other Atlanta lesbians were more involved with March planning, events started to better reflect Atlanta's lesbian community. The new infusion of activists like Woolard was reflected in the choice of the Little Five Points Community Pub as the site of the first major fundraiser for March Committee.

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[18] Atlanta March Committee Flyer, January 1987. AHC, ALGHT, March on Washington Materials, Box 62.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Stephen Keating, "Making A Difference," *Etc.*, April 1-7, 1987, 7. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

By the spring of 1987 the AMC started to publish a newsletter that carried news related to local and national organizing around the March. They reported on their local finances and showed how they raised around $2500.00 for the Committee. Almost half the money went to support the National March on Washington and the rest covered the costs associated for attendees at national organizational conferences.[21] At the organizing conference held in Los Angeles in January representatives agreed to gender parity and rules about the representation of people of color and agreed that delegations would be "50% women and 25% people of color."[22] National organizers additionally designated regional caucuses to encourage the creation of activist networks and extend the political activism of a new movement past and beyond the March.

Atlanta activists were concerned that representation in the Southeast should reflect more than just Atlanta. The AMC also recognized that a separate meeting in Atlanta would be impossible to organize because of their limited funds. March organizers instead utilized an existing organizational network and tapped into an established community of activists with the Southeastern Conference for Lesbians and Gay Men. The SECLGM met in Fort Lauderdale, Florida that year and March organizers noted "the Conference presents itself as a logical choice" as a place to hold the regional meeting.[23] At the conference, the AMC and other March activists from across the Southeast elected a diverse group to the regional Steering Committee. They met the gender parity rules and surpassed the minimum requirements for representation of people of color.

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[21] "Financial Report," *March News*, April 1987, 2. AHC, ALGHT, March on Washington Materials, Box 62.

[22] Ibid.; Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 101.

[23] "Atlanta March Committee," *March News*, April 1987, 1. AHC, ALGHT, March on Washington Materials, Box 62.

The Southeastern regional activists added another connective element of diversification by attempting to ensure a geographic representation of the Southeast. However, of the eight members elected to the regional Steering Committee, half were from Atlanta. The Atlantans on the Committee included David Almand, a PWA and member of the national March Executive Committee, Carolyn Mobley, a black lesbian and longtime Atlanta activist, and Cathy Woolard and Chris Cash, both white women who were relatively new to full-time activism. Two regional Steering Committee members were from Florida, including Ollie Lee Taylor of Tallahassee, who was a longtime activist with BWMT and the SECLGM. Committee members Dennis Mayer from Columbia, SC and Mandy Carter, a black lesbian activist from Durham, NC added important voices to the Atlanta dominated delegation.

Despite the burst of new activism and energy in the city, Atlanta's annual Pride event remained a source of major concern and a poignant failure within the community. Five years earlier, Atlanta LGT Pride organizer Regina Heimbruch said that Pride had the potential to be transformative every year. She said that in whatever form it took, as a march, parade, or rally, Pride should have recharged the community.[24] Heimbruch said

> The sense of common purpose instilled by the week of celebration helps to carry us through the remainder of the year, when very often our concerns and issues are swept aside as too controversial or too minority-oriented...LGT pride helps to raise the consciousness of our community, confronting many homosexuals with minority issues they might otherwise choose to ignore.[25]

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[24] McFarland-Bruce, *Pride Parades.*

[25] "Atlanta Homosexuals Announce 1982 Pride Week Celebration," Press Release, May 31, 1982. AHC, ALGHT, Box 60.

In the same year that Atlanta busily and successfully organized events, fundraisers, and publicity campaigns related to the national March on Washington it saw the local Pride Committee fall apart at the last minute. The year's events were saved by an ad hoc group of volunteers pulled together just weeks before the traditional June celebration. In the end that year's performance of Pride vs. Atlanta apathy reached a historic low with a rally on the steps of the capitol that drew with generous estimation, just 500 people.[26]

Atlanta lesbian and gay activists recognized that they faced a dilemma in Pride. To find out if their experience was unique, Gene-Gabriel Moore contacted other community activists in the spring of 1987 for his report on the demise of Atlanta's Pride in *Etc*.[27] He seemed dismayed but not surprised to find out that in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, and Boston, no gay and lesbian communities had cancelled their Pride events. He added "What's more, Birmingham, Jacksonville, Charlotte, Columbia, Nashville plan nine days of Gay pride festivals." Even more startling was that "Those five cities together have fewer Gays and Lesbians than Atlanta." These failures looked all the more shocking in light of the vast organizing and activism around the March.

Pride in 1987, as planned by the Committee, seemed no different than other years. At a MACGLO meeting in February, the Atlanta Pride Committee was one of a number of organizations that gave reports to the Metro Council.[28] ALFA reported on a "supportive" letter sent to Hosea Williams related to local civil rights marches in Atlanta and Forsythe County. A group called Atlanta Couples Together reported on their two year anniversary and the Atlanta March Committee related their fundraising needs. The Gay Pride report was short and showed that issues of Prides past remained present problems.

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[26] Gene-Gabriel Moore, "The Seventh Circle: It's a Terrible Sleep When You Can't Wake Up, or Waiting for Dachau While Having High Tea at the Ritz-Carlton," *Etc.*, July 24- 30, 1987, 42. 44, 46, 70. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

[27] Moore, "Save Gay Pride Week," 36.

[28] MACGLO Regular Council Meeting Minutes, February 19, 1987, 2. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 3.

As many critics noted over the years, Atlanta Pride often struggled to find a theme that resonated with the community. That year saw no change on this front as a general disinterest was reflected in the progress of the Committee's decisions on basic and important matters. MACGLO recorded the Committee told them "The theme of visibility was discussed. Appropriate buttons and posters will be made available."[29] Many people argued that a lack of publicity for Pride in the gay and lesbian community and in the city-at-large was always an issue. It seemed unlikely that there would be ample time to promote Pride if by February the Committee was still undecided on a theme. Many people in the local community saw these as perceived failures of Pride organizing that were repeated year after year.

Atlanta's Pride Committee claimed they were unable to find volunteers and lacked community support, a position hard to believe when community involvement seemed extraordinarily high in the context of March activism. However, after Gene-Gabriel Moore's call to action, gay and lesbian Atlantans proved the Pride Committee wrong by getting involved. The volunteers who responded to Moore's plea to save Gay Pride immediately set to organizing the event. They elected a new steering committee less than a month out from the recently planned events. The committee included a mix of old and new community organizers, like Gene Holloway and Don Weston who continued as members of the newly reorganized Committee. New members Marquis Walker, who was active in AALGA and a PWA, and Chris Cash, an organizer with the Atlanta March Committee joined the group.

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[29] Ibid.

Gene-Gabriel Moore was elected chair of a Pride Committee that was more diverse than years past. The new and more diverse Pride committee organized a rally that was more representative and political than recent events, but it suffered from its short incubation period. In ad space donated by *Etc.*, rally organizers used the national March slogan to generate interest. Their direct connection to the March movement politicized Pride as they proclaimed "For Love and Life We're Not Going Back."[30] The speakers highlighted in the ad for Pride showed a new commitment to political activism and diversity. The Pride Committee had lined up nationally known writer, activist, and "Black Editor" Joseph Beam as well as local activists like David Almand and "Lesbian activist" Leigh VanderEls.

Pride's speakers that year reflected the influence of new activists and organizations in the city. AALGA, the African American Lesbian/Gay Alliance, was not yet a year old but had already established themselves in the city and were producing a monthly newsletter called *Crossroads* by the summer of 1987.[31] AALGA members incorporated Pride as part of their organizational mission, stating that "We have organized as black lesbians and gay men to promote our rights and proclaim our pride." In the June issue of *Crossroads* there was a list of AALGA's main goals, which included fighting racism, fostering positive relationships between straight and gay black people, and supporting political and economic activism. An important difference between AALGA and BWMT was that they wanted to bridge gender divides and "improve the relationships between black lesbians and gay men."[32] AALGA offered Atlanta's gay and lesbian community something different as a group led by, for, and about African American lesbian and gay people.

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[30] Pride Ad, *Etc.,* June 4-10, 1987. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

[31] "Our Purpose," *Crossroads*, June 1987, 1. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 3.

It was a new era of visibility and activism for Atlanta's African American gay and lesbian community and also for lesbians in general in Atlanta. Many gay men and lesbians experienced being part of a community for the first time and pride as they navigated the new political terrain. The energy generated by defeat and reorganization carried activists towards the March that fall. There was an undeniable growth in the community and people were energized by their own visibility. The power of creating a community seeded more activism and involvement, even if it often felt like the weight of organizing fell to just a small number of active community members. Many of the same people met on different nights of the week in different groups and were dedicated activists who felt spurred to action. These organizers wanted to create a new movement and worked in multiple capacities to spread their ideas. Duncan Teague continued his membership and communion with BWMT, was active in forming AALGA, and even ventured into activism art, "performing in an openly gay and lesbian drama and doing so in a pink dress." He expressed some of his sense of place in the new movement and how exhausting activism could be. He related that

> The words community, gay family, social conscience, being political means something new and exciting now. Those terms have new meaning because of a God sent cast of twenty, a March

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[32] Ibid.

> Committee of faithful ten, twelve maybe, and a March on Washington of an estimated report of over 750,000 Sissys and Dykes.[33]

Teague's many involvements in different forms of activism was a pattern repeated by others in the period. The year leading up to the March created a heady political environment that Teague said made it impossible and unnecessary to distinguish between his "yearning to return to the stage with the desire to spread the message "Go to Our March."[34] Immediately trying to process the meaning of the March in the days after was an undertaking that many gay and lesbian activists embarked on and shared with their communities. In Atlanta, Duncan Teague and other members of BWMT documented their experiences in their newsletter and expressed for members who were unable to attend how it felt to be part of the March. Teague wrote about it in a mystical way as he tried to relay "what happened on October 11, 1987." What had happened was nothing short of transformation fueled by empowerment. That fall he said, "I grew by leaps and bounds. I donned dress, heels, hair, make-up, and said outrageous things, pranced, and teased my way to Washington where waiting on me were 750, 000 hellified gay men and lesbians for "Gay Rights Y'all."

The cover of *Etc.* magazine's published edition for the week of the March dated Friday, October 9, showed a roadmap of the Southeast.[35] The faint lines of the interstates connected six round symbols on the map that indicated the estimated number of hours it would take to drive from that point to Washington D.C. The six places marked included the major hubs of the Southeastern gay and lesbian community. Most people would live within driving distance of one of these places and would therefore be able to estimate their personal travel times. The shortest drive was from North Carolina, where it would take people a mere 5 hours to get to D.C. from the Durham-Triangle area. The longest travel time was from New Orleans at 17 hours and from Orlando in central Florida it would take 15 hours. From Nashville it would take half a day in 12 hours, from Atlanta only 11, and from the coast in Charleston, South Carolina it could take just one very long driving day of 10 hours. Organizer Cathy Woolard reported that the March Committee arranged a bus for Atlantans who had not committed to other travel plans. The cost was $55.00 and the trip was quick. The bus left from the Kroger at Ansley Park Saturday morning at 6:30 AM and returned "sometime early Monday." The single bus transportation represented just "a fraction of the number of Atlantans Woolard expects to be in Washington. Most people will fly."

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[33] Duncan T. "Duncan, on the March," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, November, 1987. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 3.

[34] Ibid.

[35] *Etc.*, October 9-15, 1987. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

Woolard thought there were about 2000 people from Georgia who attended the March and many of those were Atlantans. [36] Gene-Gabriel Moore saw members of ALFA, the Atlanta Gay Center, Bet Haverim, and college students from Georgia State and Emory representing the city. He said it was great to see college students involved as "this movement needs new, young blood." Moore noted that "Nearly everybody at *Etcetera* was there, wearing white sweatshirts with the magazine's logo on the front."[37] At least seven of the *Etc.* folk wore the sweatshirts, which gave them a united look as they posed for a group picture printed in the issue. The magazine's coverage of the March included four full pages of general photos that documented the weekend and multiple personal essays that reflected on how local activists experienced the March and other related events. Official events from that week included The Names Project, The Wedding, and Out & Outraged (the civil disobedience action) and were each given a separate page of candid shots and articles.[38] The photographs highlighted the greater Southern community and showed *Etc.* staffers, a lesbian in a wheelchair that held one half a banner that read "Southern Lesbian Witches," multiple North Carolina banners, and one from Durham that proclaimed "Coming Out as a Community." One photo showed that there was enough of a contingent from Alabama to spell out the name of their state. Each man carried a letter at least two feet large that was ingeniously harnessed in front by a neck strap that presumably stabilized the letters when they marched.

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[36] Gene-Gabriel Moore, "500,000 Gays & Lesbians March on Nation's Capital," *Etc.*, October 23-29, 1987, 12; "The Day a Half-Million Sisters and Brothers Made a Helluva Noise," 34. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

[37] Ibid., 36.

Estimates about the size of the crowd that day became controversial instantaneously. From half a million to three-quarters of a million people marched according to organizers of the event, but conservative estimates from the National Park Service eluded reality, with official estimates that claimed only 200,000. The unbelievably low estimate seemed politically motivated and many gay and lesbian commenters did not fail to point that out. Some activists said that information given to them by observers associated with the National Park service estimated "that each block of the Mall could accommodate 150,000 people" and by these estimates "organizers announced that the four block long assembly comprised 600,000."[39] The AGC was quick to remind their readers of the consequences of misrepresentation, writing in *The News*

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[38] "500,000 Strong We Marched on Washington," *Etc.*, October 23-29, 1987. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

> When reports were filed at newspapers around the country, most stories settled on the Park Service figure, noting parenthetically the organizer estimates. The implication of wishful inflation was clear, and the story quickly faded from view.[40]

It seemed like even when the success of the March was proven over and over again in the memories of hundreds of thousands of people, gay and lesbian Americans could not count on mainstream news outlets, either in television or print, to cover their community.

On Sunday October 11, at noon the March began as activists from across the country moved up Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol. Gene-Gabriel Moore said that the Southern contingent was sandwiched between New York, who was in front and Pennsylvania and Maryland together that closed the March. He reported that there were so many people there that the South finally struck out from "the Ellipse two hours and forty minutes after the first contingent. We got to the mall in front of the Capitol at 4:30."[41] Maria Dolan said "it took four hours for the sheer masses of people to pass far enough for us to get going (hell, we didn't arrive at the capitol until nearly six!)[42] Chuck C. wrote in the BWMT newsletter about recollections made in the moment. At the end of the day Chuck made his way down the over-sized D.C. escalator to catch the Metro. In a moment of rest he remembered the sights and sounds of the day. He recalled "the awe I felt upon seeing how numerous we were as we traced what seemed to be an infinite line toward the Capitol."[43]

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[39] "Media are Mum on D.C. March," *The News,* November 13, 1987, 1. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Moore, "The Day a Half-Million," 36.

[42] Maria Helena Dolan, "You've Never Seen Anything like This in Your Whole Life- They Gave a March, and *Everyone* Came," *Etc.*, October 23-29, 1987, 45. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

Maria Dolan made sure that Atlanta, Georgia was represented that weekend in the invading army of queers. She remarked that there were so many gay and lesbian people in D.C. that headlines should have read "Queers Take Over Nation's Capital."[44] At the March "practically everyone we know in Atlanta was there with the Georgia delegation." Over the weekend Dolan was typically outrageous in representing the South. When Maria and Elly (her companion at the March) were asked where they were from, she remarked "Jaw-Jah," we drawled. We wanted it known that we were from THE SOUTH, as well as the state which slapped Michael Hardwick's dick necessitating our upcoming presence at the Supreme Court."[45] Dolan wasn't the only Southerner acting up and carrying on at the March. Gene-Gabriel Moore proudly reported "We Georgians were a rowdy group."

Don Weston, exhausted and disappointed from Pride that year still had time and energy to give to the March. Moore reported that Weston provided some "unusual" chants as he was "blessed with a certain wit." The chant that proved most popular along the March route as it drew "a good deal of banter, laughter and applause" was the one that Moore and other Southern Marchers found the "most seductive." As they marched down Pennsylvania Avenue, Atlantans Don Weston and Gene-Gabriel Moore chanted with other Georgians and joined with the wider Southeastern contingent as they shouted "Gay rights, yawwwwwl."[46]

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[43] Chuck C. "Sounds from Washington," *BWMT/Atlanta Newsletter*, November, 1987, 4. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 3.

[44] Dolan, "You've Never Seen Anything," 44.

[45] Maria Helena Dolan, "Sometimes Destabilization Clears the Way For Greater Things," *Etc.*, October 30-November 5, 1987, 44. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

Weeks later and back in Atlanta, Maria Dolan was feeling more contemplative. In her regular article for *Etc.* she offered her topic in the title, "Sometimes Destabilization Clears the Way For Greater Things." She deemed the week and a half since the March a period of "reentry shock."[47] Trying to make sense of the March, she linked the transformative event and the current seasonal holiday, "The Witches New Year, Hallowmas." Hallowmas, she said, was celebrated as a time that was good for "energy conversions," an important consideration in light of the March. For Dolan, the March was a thing revisited and re-examined constantly. It had made her feel as if a "glamour has been cast over me." Dolan evoked her spirituality when she processed the meaning of the March as her "inner eye rolls across the entire scene repeatedly" and her "ethereal being is still linked to the hundreds of thousands of other selves/cells that coalesced in DC at the March."

If Maria Dolan was being over the top in her description it was only to make the point that what she was feeling was an over the top kind of reaction. She said " I'm trying to show how this overwhelming energy, this talismanic moment, can be shaped to create change."[48] Hallowmas, said Dolan, was a time for reflection and divination. It was when the dead were invited into homes and offered banquets in their honor. The pagan spirituality of the holiday was deeply connected to people's relationships with the dead and with death. Dolan meaningfully said how this idea resonated as their community had been forced to deal with death as a historic part of their political and social life because of AIDS. She pondered if the meaning of the March might come from the transformation of multiple strands of activist energies, from looking at the past reflectively and creating a future where they "honor the dead and fight like hell for the living."[49]

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[46] Moore, "The Day a Half-Million," 36.

[47] Dolan, "Sometimes Destabilization," 30.

[48] Ibid.

Despite some people's efforts to bury the story of the March quickly or to minimize its monumental importance, for those people who attended the March that weekend, it did just what they thought it would do. After the March, newly energized people went home and continued to organize in their local communities. Gay and lesbian activists in Atlanta recommitted to local organizing and community building. Some critics of the March had questioned the sustainability of a movement based around such a national event-focused plan. In *The Advocate*, one editorial writer asked if the March was "the political equivalent of a one-night stand. It may feel good while you're doing it, but what will we be left with the day after?"[50] Cathy Woolard wrote a letter to Atlanta thanking the community for their support and participation, but she scolded the negative thinkers who asked what effect the March would have. The March, she said

> Helped thousands of lesbians and gay men come out a little more in their daily lives, realize a little more the issues facing us as a community, allowed us a fine glimpse of our humanity in the face of much serious adversity and gave men and women an opportunity to work together toward a common goal.[51]

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[49] Dolan, "Sometimes Destabilization," 32.

[50] Ghaziani, Dividends of Dissent, 125.

[51] Cathy Woolard, "March Thanks! To the Atlanta Lesbian & Gay Community," *Etc.*, October 30-November 5, 1987, 56. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

She asked them to think personally about the question. “Look around you, look at yourself. What do *you* think?”

“Southern Voice”: A New Activism at Home

Local Atlanta writer Al Cotton, in a retrospective about the third National March Washington in 1993, wrote about a familiar controversy that surrounded the reporting of the real crowd size and National Park Service estimates. That year the Park Service reported an extremely low number of 300,000, just an increase of 100,000 from their low estimates in 1987. It was clear to organizers and in multiple media outlets that the number had been closer to one million. The misinformation about the 1993 National March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Rights was yet another predictable disappointment for the gay and lesbian community. However, Cotton reminded his readers in *Southern Voice*, an Atlanta newspaper started in the burst of energy after the 1987 March, that the numbers reported in the press didn’t have to matter to the movement. From the vantage point of 1993 and after his second national march, Cotton felt inclined to point out that whatever others might say, the gay, lesbian, and bi community—as people were increasingly saying—was the only one who could say what those numbers meant in any meaningful context.[52]

The meaning of the march came not from representation in the mainstream press, but from the unity and empowerment that came from other gay and lesbian and queer people. Cotton said that the feeling of community came especially from experiencing the power of what he called “the Look.” The Look came from seeing oneself in a queer crowd. Cotton had seen it at pride celebrations before and all over the faces of people that weekend in Washington D.C. It conveyed a connection to something larger than an individual's sexuality, because the Look was evidence of a broader community.

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[52] Al Cotton, “How Many Are We,” *Southern Voice,* May 6-12, 1993, 14.

> Community-wise, we have The Look when we see how beautiful, how powerful, how committed, this community of our is— it's like falling in love with an entire community. It's on our face when we first realize that we really are EVERYWHERE.

Cotton asked his readers to think about what "the Look" translated to in the years after 1987. In a long list he rattled off the products of organizational labors that included: Project Open Hand, *Southern Voice*, Queer Nation, Gay Spirit Visions Conferences, the LAMP Project, the Atlanta Lambda Center, AALGA, Friends Atlanta, and the Front Runners. These groups and new organizations changed Atlanta and the city's gay and lesbian community in the years after the March. They were a direct effect of the leadership and community created by organizing the March and by taking part in the activism of a national movement.

The size of the crowd at the March on Washington was evidence of the gay and lesbian community's potential power. The success of the March on Washington was less easily translated in numbers back home though. Atlanta activists thought that an estimated 2000 to 5000 Georgians marched in Washington. When Pride rolled around in June of 1988, the sky-high numbers seen in the nation's capital weren't reflected in their hometown turnout. Attendance at Pride that year increased substantially, it doubled its attendance, but the new organizers still only saw about 1000 people. Atlanta Pride remained well behind the heavyweights of other gay and lesbian communities in New York City, San Francisco, L.A., Chicago, and Boston.[53]

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[53] Maria Helena Dolan, "50,000 Parade Around During Annual Pride March (Not the Obligatory Summer Pride Exhortation Usually Found Here," *Etc*., July 24-30, 1988, 24, 26. AHC, ALGHT, Box 3.

In Atlanta, these newly politicized activists committed to taking on local threats and attempted to tackle the many issues of racism, sexism, and classism within their own circles. After the March and back at home, Atlanta's gay and lesbian community underwent a major period of transition that reflected national movement shifts in gay and lesbian political activism. At the March, the newly formed radical activist group ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) was a visible presence.[54] In the years after the March, their protests became symbolic of a movement of people who decided to fight back as they confronted the institutions and people who they believed sought their deaths. ACT UP held die-ins at the FDA and the CDC and made the SILENCE = DEATH message ubiquitous.[55]

The Atlanta March Committee decided not to disband after the March. Activists from the group, like Cathy Woolard, created a new dynamic in Atlanta as they joined more experienced activists like Maria Dolan, Gene Holloway, and Ray Kluka. The March Committee headed by Woolard, sponsored an overnight vigil at the capitol as part of its AIDS activism and took over organizing Pride. In the spring of 1988, March Committee member Chris Cash launched *Southern Voice*, a biweekly gay and lesbian newspaper that became a widely successful community and regional newspaper over the next decade. Lesbian and gay Atlantans also saw some mainstream political progress with representation in the state Democratic Party. By the end of 1988, Atlanta's gay and lesbian community looked vastly different from 1987.

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[54] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 81-82.

[55] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 130-132; Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good*; 548-55.

During the summer of 1988 gay and lesbian Atlantans saw a surge in political activism and engagement related to the Democratic National Convention that was held in the city that year. Gay and lesbian activists staged demonstrations and protests outside and political activists inside negotiated their way across the convention floor representing districts in Atlanta. Openly gay and lesbian Atlanta Democrats attended the convention as delegates and made their politics part of the discussions. ACT UP activists from out of state held a kiss-in protest at the DNC that inspired Atlanta activists to start their own local chapter of the national group. ACT UP/Atlanta sustained a new energy of direct action protest in the city in the years after the March, which provoked some serious discussions in the community about activism tactics, emotion, and progress.

In the years after the National March in 1987, activism and outness increased in the gay and lesbian community, as evidenced in the many new organizations that formed nationally and spread locally.[56] Between the two Marches in 1987 and 1993, national activist organizations transformed and ushered in new leadership and voices. National and historic organizations like the NGLTF and HRCF, were impacted by the great surge in interest in political activism and awareness. ACT UP protests and tactics were taken up in local chapters formed in many large and small cities. Their activism maintained a confrontational energy in the movement that compelled visibility. ACT UP inspired many more radical and confrontational activists, but mainstream gay and lesbian people also increased their power and visibility. Mainstream activists were well-represented in political organizations and especially in the gay and lesbian press.

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[56] Stein, Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement, 151; Sheyn, “The Shot Heard,” 24; Vaid, Virtual Equality.

The establishment of *Southern Voice* (*SoVo*) in 1988 changed Atlanta in immeasurable ways. It provided a consistent and more mainstream informational newspaper that was not directly associated with the city's male-dominated gay bars.[57] *SoVo* was founded as a biweekly newspaper that reported on local gay and lesbian news, the arts, activism, and national politics. Started as a non-profit venture, within the first two years it had become so successful that it went to a for-profit model and continued to grow. Over the next decade *SoVo* would see its distribution area expand throughout the Southeast. As Atlanta's out lesbian and gay community grew and new groups and voices emerged, *SoVo* reported it back to the city and was able to reach more of the community. The newspaper was widely available throughout the city and offered its readers a mainstream option, over its most direct competition, *Etc.,* which was still primarily a magazine directed at and produced for gay men.

Southern Voice was founded by Christina Cash and was the first gay newspaper or publication in Atlanta to include women's voices in a substantial and meaningful way consistently. Other news and publications had barely tried to include women with singular women's voices in columns like Maria Helena Dolan's or generally lamented the lack of women's voices but failed to address the imbalance. It was similar to how black gay and lesbian voices had been for the most part ignored, marginalized, and in some instances silenced by white gay community members resentful of being asked to change too. Like other publications they represented, for the most part, an Atlanta that was middle class and white. It was different from other publications in that it succeeded at providing in-depth coverage to issues that affected lesbians and people of color in a way that no other similar print media had done before.

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[57] Tracy Baim, ed., *Gay Press, Gay Power: The Growth of LGBT Community Newspapers in America* (Chicago, Illinois: Prairie Avenue Productions and Windy City Media Group, 2012) 329-30.

After the March, the major issues that spurred Atlantans remained unchanged. Sodomy was illegal in the state and it seemed unlikely that the state legislature would immediately or even eventually take up a repeal effort.[58] Government funding for AIDS research and support for PWAS was still mostly non-existent and subject to financial cuts or outright opposition by members of the state legislature and within Georgia departments of government like Public Health or Human Resources. The *Bowers* decision slowed and stymied the work of activists who had sought the eradication of sodomy laws through a constitutional decision.[59] Instead activists would have to devote their energies to removing sodomy laws in each state where they were still active.

After *Bowers*, it becomes harder to judge the national gay and lesbian civil rights movement as one working together in coordinated actions.[60] The national movement could not be a palliative for gay and lesbian people who were divided by a geography that defined difference. For gay and lesbian people in twenty-five states after 1986, the crime of sodomy and the threat of being arrested, charged, incarcerated, and branded a felon no longer was an impediment or encumbrance on their sexuality. AIDS, social repression, intolerance, legal discrimination, and violence all remained issues that gay and lesbian people faced everywhere, regardless of place, big city or small town. But in New York City, San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Chicago, gay and lesbian people had won their liberation as free sexual beings, which in turn freed their attention and action in different directions. In every state in the South, sodomy remained illegal, making everyday queers sex criminals. Sodomy laws were a bulwark for legal discrimination in employment and housing and continued to be an issue that Georgia activists had to fight against politically and socially.

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[58] Sheyn, "The Shot Heard," 18, 22; Bernstein, "Nothing Ventured," 367.

[59] Eskridge, *Dishonorable Passions*; Murdoch and Price, *Courting Justice;* David A. J. Richards, *The Sodomy Cases:* Bowers v. Hardwick *and* Lawrence v. Texas (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009).

[60] Stein, Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement; Faderman, The Gay Revolution.

Sodomy laws were an easy tool in policing the behavior of a population that was perceived to be criminal and socially undesirable. By the late 1980s, gay men and women had good reason to feel they were a rejected people. In the years between when Michael Hardwick was arrested in 1982 and when the case was heard in the Supreme Court in 1986, AIDS had intervened in the lives of all gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. Many gay men felt as if their own country warred against them.[61] In Georgia, not only was a gay man's sexuality criminal but because AIDS overwhelmingly affected the gay male community, continued state inaction essentially left him to fend for himself. In the South AIDS cases only increased in the years after the March. By the time of the third national March in 1993, many Atlanta activists would be gone, including among many others, John Howell, Ray Kluka, Melvin Ross, Charlie St. John, and Ken Marshall.

These losses were felt keenly in the small circles of Atlanta activism. They also gave personal evidence in a regional shift in new cases of AIDS that ushered in an unwelcome new reality. From the period 1981 to 1987, the "South," a region that according to the CDC included Oklahoma, Delaware, the District of Columbia, and Maryland, was reported to have around 26% of the population of PWAs. It was the third largest demographic region, with the Northeast at nearly 40% and the West just slightly above the South with around 27%. For the period between 1988 and 1992, the CDC reported a dramatic shift in these numbers. The number one region had become the South, which accounted for 32.5% of AIDS cases, the Northeast and West both saw drops in their percentages, to less than 31% for the Northeast and under 23% in the West.[62] These numbers meant a great deal in the communities that witnessed their husbands, partners, boyfriends, lovers, friends, brothers, and sisters, disappear from their lives. It was in this period of loss, grief, and anger that ACT UP groups directed people's emotional energy into activism.

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[61] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 166-72.

Fear was another element that guided many gay and lesbian people into political work in this period, as life or death were the stakes. After Georgia's sodomy law was deemed constitutional a new fear occupied the minds of many politically active, aware, and healthily paranoid people. In states where sodomy was legal, it gave authorities an opportunity to push for harsher, more restrictive, and sometimes unconstitutional measures related to the rights of people convicted of sodomy violations and those who could be tested for AIDS. Many gay and lesbian activists feared how entwined sodomy laws and public health measures could become, as legislators focused on "risk groups" (meaning gay men) instead of risk factors. Some gay activists during these years voiced fears of quarantine laws drawn around the sodomites in their city.[63]

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[62] "HIV and AIDS—United States, 1981-2000," *MMWR (Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report)* 50 (21) (June 01, 2001): 430-4. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5021a2.htm Accessed on November 21, 2018.

[63] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 128-29; Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, 588-689; Lierman, "The Plague Wars," 75; Andriote, *Victory Deferred*, 68.

During the summer of 1987 a new local controversy erupted when the director of AID Atlanta resigned abruptly and to the shock of many in the community.[64] Ken South led the organization since 1984 and had overseen its expansion into an organization set to administer a budget of over 1.5 million dollars. South's resignation was the source of much speculation and rumor. Some people suggested it stemmed from possible financial mismanagement or they speculated that it was an attempt by the controlling board to minimize gay visibility in the organization. The resignation or firing of Ken South was undeniably related to longstanding issues of power and control as they played out in gay and lesbian organizations.

Perennial critic Alexander Wallace sent in a long letter to *Etc.* that addressed his concerns about South's removal from AID Atlanta and the past year's state of activism in Atlanta. Wallace acknowledged that 1987 was an important year in Atlanta, but from his perspective things did not appear so drastically changed after the March. In the past year people were involved with a number of important issues. They were

> preparing for the March on Washington, worrying about anti-gay legislation, working with the Mayor's office and the Police Department on Gay/Lesbian violence, setting up the Privacy Conference with our straight allies, trying to create a true Gay Lesbian Atlanta Community Center.[65]

Wallace's letter, titled "Swimming Against the Muck or Musings on the Media," had little positive to say about Atlanta's gay and lesbian political leadership and their style of business as usual. He said "While spirits may have soared in Washington last month it was the same old crap back here at home."

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[64] Alexander Wallace, "Dear Editor: Swimming Against the Muck or Musings on the Media," *Etc.*, November 20-26, 1987, 52. AHC, ALGHT, Box 3; Bruce Garner, "Critical Response," *Etc.*, November 27-December 3, 1987, 50, 52. AHC, ALGHT, Box 3.

[65] Wallace, "Dear Editor: Swimming Against the Muck."

The March seemed to have had little impact on some local leaders. The sacking of South was yet another example of the city's gay and lesbian "dirty politics" where competition for leadership resulted in the disappearance of support from much of the community.[66] Self-styled leaders, whom he called "disgruntled egotistical amateurs," at AID Atlanta initiated a "banana-republic palace coup" takeover of the organization's top positions. Wallace's criticism was specific and pointed out familiar concerns. He described the scene from his vantage point.

> Agency and organization heads continually bleat that they can't get any support from the community while continuing to act in such a manner as to elicit nothing but revulsion. Efforts to be seen on television, in the papers and rubbing elbows with the high-and-mighty replaces any genuine concern for modesty or community.

Wallace concluded with sad resignation that local leadership continuously failed the community. He, and others, had finally "given up. It's dirty politics and many of us are tired of swimming in muck with piranha."

Most of Wallace's letter was devoted to a general discussion of the local politics of the gay and lesbian community. Part of this concerned the state of gay media in the city, or his "musings on the media." His concern stemmed from conversations in the community about what kind of papers and media the gay and lesbian community would or would not support but also related what kinds of press were supported in the past. He admitted to being part of the problem, "Most of us here in Atlanta have long moaned that there wasn't a decent "newspaper" serving the gay and lesbian community." Current and historic examples were considered "bar-rag" efforts "aimed at "twinkies." Yet he and many others worked for these publications because they supported gay media in general.

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[66] Ibid.

Etc. covered in detail an ongoing drama between members of the AGC, reporters from *Etc*., and other concerned voices in the community throughout 1987. Earlier that year, the Center took what *Etc.* reporters thought was an undue and aggressive stance towards the gay press (namely, themselves) when they ejected reporters from an open public meeting. In an editorial that some of its own board members called "character assassination," the AGC accused *Etc.* of spying.[67] Problems with the leadership at the Center spilled started to affect the perceived reliability and quality of one of their primary programs, the publication of *The News*. Wallace did not name *The News* as is his subject but it seems likely they were who he referred to as "the people currently grinding out poor fluff-and-nonsense substitutes for newspapers."

The public fights, reports, editorials, and letters to *Etc.* and *The News* from the Atlanta community voiced concerns over the nature of such publicly recorded and open dissection of the infighting of a movement.[68] Letters came in from those who supported the Center and questioned the need to report on the negative aspects of the story. Others objected to what they believed was yet another example of Atlanta's apathy, this time expressed as a desire to sweep the controversy under the rug and ignore more difficult questions as they related to organizations in the community. Some people thought the community would not support a newspaper that reported on such divisive matters but Wallace disagreed. He noted that such efforts were supported in the past and he optimistically argued they would be supported in the future. The alternative was to continue "playing ostrich," which would only result in more defeat.

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[67] Wallace, "Dear Editor: Swimming Against the Muck."

[68] Vaid, Virtual Equality; Ghaziani, Dividends of Dissent.

Alexander Wallace commended *Etc.* for “continually swimming against the muck, trying to get readers to listen.” It was clear that he thought the city needed another source of news and information. In March of 1988, Atlanta saw its first issue of *Southern Voice* (*SoVo)*. The community newspaper started as a non-profit project through the arts organization, SAME (Southeastern Arts, Media, and Entertainment) under the leadership of Chris Cash, an activist who was involved with the Atlanta March Committee. SAME began in 1985, and was generally led by playwright and activist Rebecca Ranson, who was involved with a number of artistic and activist organizations over the years. Ranson first made a name for herself in Atlanta with her play *Warren*, produced in 1984, about the death of her best friend from AIDS. SAME launched many projects including a lesbian and gay literary journal called *Amethyst*.[69]

Southern Voice reported the news of city, state, and nation in a stable and consistent biweekly schedule. It was formatted as a newspaper and looked like a regular newspaper. Cash noted in a later interview about the founding of the paper that she wanted it to be something someone could read on MARTA and not be ashamed of reading in public.[70] Chris Cash and her partner Leigh VanderEls managed the paper during this period and both were politically active and a bit more progressive than a fair number of their readers. Their involvement with the paper effected a major change in how lesbian news and stories were covered in the city’s gay and lesbian community press. VanderEls became a known activist when she took her private struggle to retain custody of her child public.[71] Her battles were much reported on in the pages of *SoVo* and represented the most substantial attention given to issues related to women and lesbians in the local gay media in years.

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[69] Baim, Gay Press, Gay Power, 330.

[70] Ibid.

Southern Voice was regarded by many in Atlanta as a newspaper that came to represent more mainstream voices. Staff editorials sometimes supported traditional political lobbying and fundraising and the work of organizations like the ACHR, which in 1988 had evolved into the Greater Atlanta Political Awareness Coalition or GAPAC and used the tagline "How it sounds is what we are," a gay political action committee.[72] *SoVo* was like other gay and lesbian publications that existed in Atlanta like *Etc., The News*, and their predecessors in that it reported community news and events but it was unlike other publications in many other ways. Atlanta's primarily gay male oriented bars financially supported the magazines with ad revenue, which meant that the content was generally geared more to gay men than it was to lesbian women. *Etc., Pulse*, and *Cruise* were published in magazine style formats and emphasized entertainment, culture, and social events. When *Cruise News* folded after less than a year of publishing in 1983, they cited the impossible financial sustainability of producing both *Cruise* the bar magazine and *Cruise News* the newspaper, as each competed for the same ad money to produce it. *SoVo* carried bar ads but aggressively went for a more mainstream market in ad revenue.

As Alexander Wallace noted the gay and lesbian community supported these publications over the years but in varying degrees. *The News*, though it acted as a newspaper for the community was used as an editorial arm of the Atlanta Gay Center and its often controversial members and positions. Though *SoVo* was a project born from SAME it was "strong and independent" said board member Al Cotton. Writing into the newspaper after the publication of a negative review of a SAME produced play, Cotton said he was glad they printed it because it showed "there was never the expectation that the paper would sycophantically endorse all other SAME projects."[73] Cotton supported making the point clear early in the newspaper's existence, he continued

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[71] Leigh VanderEls, "Journal of a Lesbian Mother," *Southern Voice*, March 29, 1988, 6; Chris Duncan, "Lesbian Mother Awaits Ruling in Custody Case," June 8, 1989, 1.

[72] Vaid, Virtual Equality; Endean, Bringing.

> If *Southern Voice* were ever to become an organizational newsletter rather than an independent organ for the voicing of our community's issues and concerns, my pride in it and involvement with it would decrease dramatically.

One of the most widely discussed criticisms of gay publications in the era was that they were not political enough. In 1988, Atlanta's gay and lesbian community could read still read *The News* or *Etc.* magazine but neither was an example of a newspaper. The Gay Center's *The News* was controversially problematic by then and many in the gay and lesbian community had started to publicly criticize the group for their stances on some issues, eventually even calling for a version of community banishment. *Etc.* by the late 1980s had added more political voices in their magazines and covered local politics with more detail, but in continuity with its history emphasized social events and pitched itself to a community of gay men still centered around bars and clubs.

When the first issue of *Southern Voice* appeared on March 1, 1988 it did not shy away from political content. The issue was only sixteen pages but carried four different articles about Georgia politics, including reports of the complicated system of delegation election in the Georgia state Democratic Party. The articles addressed recent successes in gay and lesbian participation with mainstream political parties. Writer Chris Duncan even made a fair effort to include representation of Atlanta's political spectrum when he gave a significant amount of attention to MACGLO Executive Secretary Jeffrey Laymon's work in the Republican Party.[74] The major story in the March 1st first edition was the upcoming Democratic primary for the Presidential candidates, held on "Super Tuesday," March 8, 1988. The articles outlined candidate's positions on gay and lesbian rights and AIDS as well as their responses to a national survey sent out by the NGLTF. In one article, Duncan reported that in January the local group LEGAL (Legislate Equality for Gays And Lesbians) had "successfully targeted" the 4th and 5th districts and in an "unprecedented move" voted to elect openly gay and lesbian Democrats to the slated delegations pledged to Presidential candidate Al Gore from Tennessee.

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[73] Al Cotton, "Different More Than Emotional Baggage," *Southern Voice*, March 29, 1988, 4.

The Democratic primary, as explained in *SoVo*, worked in multiple tiers. Just a month earlier Democratic caucuses for congressional districts voted on candidates for delegations that would represent their chosen Presidential candidate at the Democratic National Convention. Atlanta's gay and lesbian political activists made a huge effort to represent the city in the Democratic Convention in 1988, as it was to be held in Atlanta that summer. In the 4th district openly gay Democrats Dick Rhodes and Paul Garrard, and lesbian Melinda Daniels were elected as delegates to the Convention for Gore. In the 5th district longtime political activist, Gil Robison, one of the founding members of Atlanta's first gay and lesbian Democratic group, First Tuesday, was elected as a Gore delegate alongside Joe Williford. The next step in the process came on Super Tuesday when

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[74] Chris Duncan, "Super Tuesday Candidates," "Gay and Lesbian Politicos Take Center Stage in Recent Caucus," "How Do They Get There From Here," *Southern Voice*, March 1, 1988, 3, 6, 7. Christina Cash, "Tuesdays Tough Choices," *Southern Voice*, March 1, 1988, 4.

Democrats voted in their congressional districts for a Presidential candidate; whichever candidate won the district was awarded their slate of previously elected delegates at the Convention.

The front page of the second issue of *Southern Voice* heralded the good political news: "SCORE: LEGAL- 3, The System- 0."[75] Dated a week after the results of the Super Tuesday elections, *SoVo* reported that though Gore had not won the 5th district, he had won the 4th, which meant that three openly gay and lesbian Democrats were going to the National Convention that year as official representatives with the Democratic Party of Georgia. "The System" of local and state Democratic Party politics was complicated and required a sustained commitment. LEGAL President, Lee Harrington, thought that their success marked a turning point in local politics as it proved "the gay and lesbian vote as a political power to be reckoned with in the state of Georgia." He noted that the system had worked when the community got "involved and organized." Harrington, though, couldn't resist an ironic jab at the local naysayers when he remarked to the press on the results of Tuesday's election, "Aren't bloc voting and slates nice words in Georgia tonight?"

Lee Harrington's good-humored but sarcastic rhetoric referred to a "traditional reticence" towards bloc voting and unity in politics.[76] With continued activism he predicted more openly gay and lesbian political candidates in the coming years. Harrington's excitement with LEGAL's recent success in the party was underscored by a tone of surprise in one of the newly elected delegates, Dick Rhodes, who remarked to

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[75] "SCORE: LEGAL- 3, The System- 0," *Southern Voice*, March 15, 1988, 1, 3.

[76] Ibid.

Chris Duncan before Super Tuesday about "how fragile the system is."[77] Rhodes referred to the bloc voting procedure which made the delegate voting vulnerable "to a concentrated attempt to garner power." In this case, those who attempted to garner power, gay and lesbian Democrats in the fourth and fifth districts succeeded. Harrington and LEGAL took credit for this new kind of activism in "mainstream politics," which he told Duncan was a "relatively new concept for gays and lesbians in Georgia."[78]

Georgia gay and lesbian political activists were involved in mainstream politics before Lee Harrington's entrance into the scene. Harrington's statement showed a lack of awareness about the city's history or was a rude denial of the importance of activists who came before him. Gil Robison, an elected delegate that year, was a founding member of First Tuesday in 1977, the city's first gay and lesbian Democratic club. He and Diane Stephenson, the first Director of the AGC, were the first two openly elected gay and lesbian Democratic party members in 1979 when they won seats on the county committee. To be fair to Harrington, partisan political activism had fallen away in the 1980s, in part because gay and lesbian activists had little success at progressing their agenda in the Democratic Party. Around 1980 First Tuesday voted to sever their group from the Democratic Party and became a non-affiliated political group. They were primarily involved with rating candidates and providing education about voter issues to the entire gay and lesbian community (Democrats and Republicans), rather than attempting to gain entrance or positions of leadership within a specific party. The ACHR and GAPAC were by design nonpartisan to appeal to a wider range of Atlanta's gay and lesbian community for fundraising but also to better reflect the more conservative and Republican members of the community.

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[77] Duncan, "Gay and Lesbian Politicos," 6.

[78] "SCORE: LEGAL- 3," 1.

LEGAL and Lee Harrington did a tremendous amount of work in a very short time and so deserved a pat on the back. In March of 1988, LEGAL declared victory with the first-ever openly gay and lesbian delegates elected and seated for representation at the National Convention from Georgia. Formed in the spring of 1987, the group had not yet celebrated their official one year anniversary. To grow from non-existence to representation at the national level in Democratic politics was an especially impressive list of achievements in their first year. During the first week of April in 1987, *Etc.* reported that gay Democrats were organizing a group around planning for a coordinated action at the National Convention the next year.[79] Lee Harrington, George Brenning, John Howell, and Alexander Wallace were noted as members of a planning committee, of which Harrington said the "first order of business is organization." *Etc.* listed that work as "structural matters" like organizing "committees on membership, precinct work and registration, media, and "hospitality" for the '88 Democratic convention."

These structural matters did not sit well with one planning committee member, Alexander Wallace. In a letter to *Etc.* published on April 17, Wallace said that he was "terminating" his involvement with the group despite the fact that over fifty people signed up to support the action.[80] Alexander Wallace's commentary often seemed like a Southern version of controversial and cantankerous New Yorker, Larry Kramer. His description of local party politics was a prime example of his ability to mix analysis, criticism, and rudeness into a cutting remark. He charged that Gay Democrats wasted their time on Georgia politics because it "revolves around those fools in the Legislature, the peanut farmer, the teetotaler and the embittered ex-Ambassador. What a national embarrassment! What a poverty of power!" He called out the planning committee for getting "bogged down in minutiae and trivia, totally unrelated to the need at hand—typical of gay and lesbian Atlanta."[81]

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[79] "Atlanta Gay Demos Organize for '88," *Etc.*, April 3-9, 1987, 8. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

[80] Alexander Wallace, "To the Community," *Etc.*, April 17-23, 1987, 37. AHC, ALGHT, Box 2.

Wallace's negative criticisms had made their way into print before. He had criticized the community's non-response to AIDS early in 1983 and more recently expressed his outrage at the firing of Ken South at AID Atlanta. Wallace seemed to see more of the old issues resurfaced in this new Democratic group. He questioned the impact of activism on the Presidential nomination process, which seemed to be one of the goals. He made it very clear that he thought this kind of insider political process was not just wasted effort but an ill-advised compromise on tactics. The new group was a familiar disappointment. It was not a group oriented towards action but instead a "typical Atlanta Chatting Society" focused on "goals, discussion of goals, regurgitation of goals and re-evaluation of goals, ad nauseum, post-convention time."[82]

A year later, Wallace was proven at least partially mistaken in his final assessment of the group's impact on state and local politics. The success of LEGAL in electing openly gay and lesbian delegates to the Convention had changed conventional mainstream politics. LEGAL was buoyed by their success, but struggled to be an organization that represented Atlanta. They faced some public criticism about its diversity and attention to issues of sexism and racism within their own ranks too. Dick Rhodes, LEGAL member, delegate to the Convention, and candidate for the Georgia House of Representatives attracted a sharp and angry response from ALFA member and lesbian activist, M. P. Schildmeyer, when he made comments to *Etc.* about the apparent lack of organization in the lesbian community.[83] Rhodes alienated many women who were potential allies with his comments and ignored the long history of lesbian activism in the city. Schildmeyer did not mince words and called out the explicit problem, which was "a man reeking of misogyny seeking the lesbian vote because he is gay."[84]

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., 38.

During the convention gay and lesbian delegates met daily to discuss and argue about endorsements and pledges, how the votes went, and their defeats and successes. Atlanta gay and lesbian Democratic delegates, Melinda Daniels and Dick Rhodes, described a packed floor of political conventioneers and Daniels said she worked to win allies. The delegates had to do the heavy political work of spreading their lesbian and gay civil rights message in what was, for the most part, an unfriendly and non-supportive group. Daniels and Rhodes were charged with the intimidating job of outreach and persuasive discussion as they tried to get their delegation to pass a gay and lesbian resolution developed by the lesbian and gay caucus. It took a lot of networking at the convention but Daniels said, "this (the convention) was a major learning experience for me…I went in as a novice and now I know how important it is to work in the party, and for people to know who you are. Most people in the Georgia delegation just saw Dick and I as the queers from the 4th district."[85]

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[83] M. P. Schildmeyer, "Rhodes' Attitude Questioned," *Southern Voice*, April 14, 1988, 5.

[84] Ibid.

Melinda Daniels thought there was some reason to hope for a better future, though, "What is important here is that there were people within the delegation who were sympathetic." Rhodes added to the sentiment with a folksy anecdote about finding friends in the unlikeliest of places. He told *Southern Voice* that "several delegates, including a woman from south Georgia, came up to him on the floor of the convention and said she wanted him to know that there are some in the delegation in support of lesbian/gay civil rights." The two out delegates met with some open hostility and but were more pervasively "ignored" by their fellow Georgia Democrats "until the last day when they needed our vote" said Rhodes.

Despite her best efforts, 4th District Atlanta delegate Melinda Daniels, was unable to present the resolution to the entire Georgia delegation and therefore could not get it passed. Throughout the Convention she persisted in demanding attention from Georgia delegates and after much negotiating she was awarded time with the state's delegation pledged to candidate Al Gore. While not the entire Georgia delegation, the Gore group was still an unknown and potentially unreceptive contingent. At least since the mid-1960s, Democratic politics in the South was undergoing a transformation and realignment that lasted until the end of the century. During the decades of political realignment many white, socially conservative Democrats abandoned the Party and became former

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[85] Terry Francis and Christina Cash, "88 Lesbian/Gay Caucus Disappoints, but Georgia's Melinda Daniels Shows "Guts," *Southern Voice*, August 4, 1988, 3.

Democrats.[86] In state politics the transformation happened at different rates and to various degrees, but in Georgia conservative Democrats still held power over the party. They controlled state politics in a system that remained solidly dominated by one party, and Georgia Democrats by and large were far more moderate and conservative than the national Democratic Party.

This proved to be especially true when Daniels made her presentation to the Gore delegation, which contained among its members the well-known political strongman and local legend, Tom Murphy, state assemblyman and Speaker of the House of Representatives since 1973. She recounted that when she finished her presentation, Murphy made no attempts to hide his contempt. Murphy "emphatically responded with "My vote's no!" and stormed out of the room with a trail of followers at his heels."[87] His reaction was no surprise to Daniels. At the last lesbian and gay caucus meeting delegates reported that the resolution was passed by all delegations except in two states: Florida and Georgia. A Florida delegate said Daniels should be given a "guts award" for her courage and attitude as she faced off against would-be friends who were actual foes. Hearing of her story, the lesbian and gay caucus gave her a standing ovation for her efforts.

Establishment gay and lesbian political groups continued to grow in strength and status as lobbyists in the late 1980s.[88] National lesbian and gay Democrats had shown their power and their ability to work within the conventional closed-room politics that netted them support in high places. After the Convention, Lynn Shepodd, a California Democrat, and future Human Rights Campaign board member commended Atlanta's gay and lesbian political community. In a letter to *Southern Voice* she expressed her positive experiences with lesbian and gay Democrats in Georgia and was proud of and thankful for a community of mainstream activists. Shepodd remarked that Atlanta raised "three times what experts expected" for the HRCF and paid a special compliment to the city's local lesbian and gay newspaper, noting that "*Southern Voice* puts out the news without ads for puttin' out."

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[86] Charles S. Bullock and Ronald Keith Gaddie, *Georgia Politics in a State of Change* (Boston: Pearson, 2013).

[87] Francis and Cash, "88 Lesbian/Gay Caucus."

[88] Vaid, *Virtual Equality*; Endean, *Bringing;* Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good*; Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*; Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*.

Lynn Shepodd's commentary about *Southern Voice* showed a resurgence in respectability politics that increased in the coming years. Mainstream political activism and moderation became even more popular as a response to the radicalism of groups like ACT UP, which grew bolder and bigger in their activism, and Queer Nation which formed in 1990. Mainstream activists sought to control and reshape the representational image of lesbian and gay politics and wanted to move away from radicalism and direct action protests. While *SoVo* was not mainstream entirely they eased the process and represented a powerful shift in tone and culture because the publication did downplay sex in the community. In not relying on ad money from gay male clubs, bookstores, video shops, or sex phone lines, they defied the status quo by offering the community something different. Lynn Shepodd said *Southern Voice* made a political statement with their ad policies, stating “You dare to portray our community’s focus as broader than just our shorts.”[89]

“ACTION!” Nay, revolution—NOW!”

When Alexander Wallace resigned his participation in the newly formed LEGAL group in the spring of 1987, it was because he disagreed with their politics. Wallace joined in organizing around the Democratic National Convention, but did not agree with the finalized orientation of the group as a partisan political organization. He originally “envisioned” an “Ad Hoc “ACTION” Committee,” something that seemed very much like ACT UP that would “publicize” and “demand” gay and lesbian issues at the Convention.[90] When he sent in his open letter to the community about leaving the new group, he asked for their support. He thought there were others who felt like him and wanted a different movement, one with “no bylaws, no constitution, no sucking up to local party “bosses,” and no endless talking!” Wallace closed his letter with a call to arms in the community, “ACTION!” Nay, revolution—NOW!”

Alexander Wallace’s calls to action were very much in the mode of the AIDS activist and direct action protest group, ACT UP. ACT UP formed in 1987 when gay and lesbian activists in New York started taking more aggressive and protest oriented action to compel interest and awareness around AIDS.[91] Their founding and explosion onto the scene showed the growing anger and intensity in many parts of the gay and lesbian community about the continued inaction of the government. By 1987 they were a very visible presence at the National March on Washington and by 1988 many cities had started their own ACT UP chapters and were working to bring the same kind of attention to AIDS in their communities.[92]

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[89] Lynn Shepodd, “Atlanta’s Lesbian/gay Community Commended for Commitment to Progress,” *Southern Voice*, August 4, 1988, 5.

[90] Wallace, “To the Community.”

[91] Gould, *Moving Politics*; Andriote, *Victory Deferred*; Julian Gill-Peterson, “Haunting the Queer Spaces of AIDS: Remembering Act Up/New York and an Ethics for an Endemic,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 19, no. 33 (2013): 279-300; Tamar W. Carroll, *Mobilizing New York: AIDS, Antipoverty, and Feminist Activism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

Alexander Wallace's plans to storm the Convention in highly publicized and coordinated efforts were realized by other activists that summer. The most radical and determined were the protests organized by ACT UP activists who came from out of state to make a statement at the DNC. Following the Convention, Atlantans started their own chapter of ACT UP which impacted the city's rising tide of mainstream activism. ACT UP/Atlanta challenged the dominance of one kind of activism in Atlanta that stressed appropriate and accepted forms of political negotiation and lobbying. After ACT UP/Atlanta was founded the city saw an increase in direct action protests and a growth in engagement with community politics. ACT UP/Atlanta did not usher in Wallace's desired revolution, but it did affect the city's gay and lesbian community as their tactics provided the subject for continued discussion about movement politics and community activism.

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[92] Benita Roth, *The Life and Death of ACT UP/LA: Anti-AIDS Activism in Los Angeles from the 1980s to the 2000s* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Collin Johnson, "Feeling Our Way Toward a History of ACT UP," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17, no. 2-3 (2011): 432-34.

CHAPTER 10

"OUTRAGEOUS AND RESPECTABLE": DIRECT ACTION AND MAINSTREAM ACTIVISM, 1988-1990

Chicago 68, Atlanta 88

When the Democratic National Convention met in Atlanta local gay and lesbian activists made use of the Convention to demonstrate their political power and to protest their lack of power. The Convention began on Monday July 18th, but the weekend before saw an explosion of activism and protest as the city's local community was augmented by the addition of national activists. From grassroots protest groups like ACT UP, Gay Freedom Ride, and GUTS (Gay Urban Truth Squad) to national lobbying and policy organizations like the NGLTF and the HRCF, the groups represented the gamut of activism in the political world. LEGAL, the gay and lesbian Democratic club, welcomed what was reported as between seventy and ninety or so openly gay and lesbian delegates or alternates at the Convention with a dessert reception that followed a "theatrical gala."[1] On Sunday, July 17th, the day before the Convention opened LEGAL organized and sponsored a free speech rally that drew 1000 people. The protest's message was "Stop AIDS. Stop Violence. Stop Discrimination... This is America!"[2]

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[1] Rex Wockner, "Election 88 Gay/Lesbian Convention Schedule," *Etc*., July 15, 1988, 28-29. AHC, ALGHT, Box 3.

[2] "Lesbians, Gays and the KKK Converge on Atlanta During Convention Week," *Southern Voice*, July 7, 1988, 1.

LEGAL's protest was well-attended. Lee Harrington made assurances to the business and professional community in the weeks before "that the rally was fully permitted and would be peaceful." The group worked hard with local organizations and community members to represent the city in a positive light to the national Democratic Party as well as the national gay and lesbian organizations who were going to be in the city for the week. Local and national groups planned over twenty-five different events over the course of the week, including protests, caucus meetings, discussions, and fundraisers. There were so many things going on at the DNC for gay and lesbian people that year that Chicago journalist and syndicated columnist Rex Wockner, who was also a correspondent for *Etc.,* commented "it's going to be difficult to tell whether we're at the Democratic National Convention or a convention of our own."[3] GAPAC, LEGAL, and *Etc.* hosted events that weekend for gay and lesbian Democrats in town for the Convention.

That weekend Atlanta got its first direct experience with the kind of activism that energized ACT UP members in other cities. The group, alongside its frequent sponsor the GRF (Gay Freedom Ride), made its presence known throughout the city. Its members engaged in a "Queer Visibility Action" at Lennox Square mall, passing out "palm cards" that told strangers about their sexuality and how it affected their civil rights.[4] Maria Helena Dolan was one Atlantan who was happy ACT UP was in town "to stir up some shit."[5] A number of activists used the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, notorious for its violence and examples of excessive police force, as a touchstone in reference to their own activism. Maria Dolan pinpointed a very specific way in which Atlanta was not going to be another Chicago though, when she said in exasperation that "southern civility threatens to create a non-presence."[6] Atlanta city officials had won a "free speech site" that allowed for a managed and scheduled week of demonstrations and protests. They distributed in an equalized and efficient manner times and slots for different activists and organizations. The physical space allowed demonstrators their constitutional rights to free assembly and protest but seemingly dampened their energy by effectively being put in a corner, which could obviously be ignored if necessary.[7] This system worked out for some who were more conservatively bent in their approaches to political activism.[8] At a discussion about AIDS activism and protest in the city, others in the community noted ACT UP contrasted to "Atlanta and the visiting Democrats," who they thought were "at pains to appear "squeaky clean."[9]

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[3] Wockner, "Election 88;" Baim, *Gay Press, Gay Power*, 249-251.

[4] Rex Wockner, "Gay/Lesbian Pre-Convention: Protests and Peacemaking," *Etc*., July 22, 1988, 6-7. AHC, ALGHT, Box 3.

[5] Maria Helena Dolan, "Conventional Dilemmas," *Etc*., July 22, 1988, 28-29.

ACT UP national chapters organized actions all across the Convention and gay and lesbian activists from the city and delegates to the Convention were a visible presence. On Monday July 18th, the opening day of the Convention, ACT UP staged a "kiss-in" protest outside the Omni Hotel on the sidewalk. They believed they were protected in their right to protest, yet with certain acknowledged limitations. Activists were aware of regulations and designed the demonstration to remain legal. This kiss-in saw activists continuously walking on the sidewalk and only briefly coming together to kiss. City officials disagreed and the police moved protestors down the street and into the containment area of protestors, the "Free Speech" area. Once dispersed into the crowd, ACT UP members reformed and returned to the hotel sidewalk where they were met with more force from the police and some were arrested. It is very possible the police responded as they did because at an anti-racist demonstration the previous day events had become violent.[10] Many people thought the police responded to ACT UP's kiss-in in an overly aggressive manner. Mayor Andrew Young even said as much later that week in an apology to ACT UP, where he acknowledged the problematic homophobic response of his police force who decided to use riot gear when faced with peaceful protestors.[11]

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Vaid, *Virtual Equality*, 118.

[8] Ibid., 116-122; Jean O'Leary, "From Agitator to Insider: Fighting for Inclusion in the Democratic Party," in D'Emilio, Turner, and Vaid, *Creating Change*, 98-102.

[9] Dave Hayward, "Atlanta ACT UP Forms," *Etc*., July 29- August 4, 24. AHC, ALGHT, Box 3.

From the sidewalk ACT UP chanted "Chicago in 68; Atlanta in 88; We still live in a police state."[12] Demonstrators said the police pushed, shoved, and even attempted to knock photographers' cameras out of their hands and the notebooks out of the hands of reporters. That night ACT UP activists met with local gay and lesbian organizers at a planned "Roundtable Discussion." In a flyer that listed the ACT UP-sponsored actions and other gay and lesbian events at the Convention, the roundtable was described as a "Discussion of the role of oppression, coming out, civil disobedience, media work, lobbying and confrontation in AIDS activism."[13] Dave Hayward reported in *Etc.* that much of the conversation centered around the afternoon's events, the police, and the kiss-in. Demonstrators were angered at their treatment and wanted to have a vocal and provocative response with press conferences, formal protests, observers, and protestors who “make signs/make noise!”[14]

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[10] "Lesbians, Gays and the KKK."

[11] Chris Duncan, "ACT UP Adds to City Formula" *Southern Voice*, August 4, 1988, 4.

[12] Rex Wockner, "ACT UP, Cops Clash- Andy Young Apologizes," *Etc.*, July 29- August 4, 13, 15-17.

[13] ACT UP/ ACT NOW Activities at Democratic National Convention Flyer, July 10, 1988. AHC, ALGHT, Box 46.

The day after ACT UP met with riot gear they decided to push the issue. Activists confronted the city about “what they saw as a violation of their civil rights.”[15] After a planned sodomy protest at the capitol at noon, members made an unscheduled march to city hall. They camped out in an unoccupied council chamber until Shirley Franklin, chief administrative officer, spoke with them. Activists and their legal representatives claimed that the protest violated no laws and even noted that they had planned the kiss in around the laws, “We purposefully kept moving so as to not block the sidewalk.” ACT UP member Neil Broome alluded to the bureaucratic tape that had seemingly ensnared the group. He said that they were “denied the right to free assembly…They’ve been changing the rules over and over again down here to prohibit as much free speech as possible.” Franklin gave activists an important win and sympathetic hearing. She offered a supportive statement and agreed with their “right to the public right of way.” She sensitively told them that she was “sorry I wasn’t there to help you.”[16]

The tale of the kiss-in was not yet finished though. On Wednesday Mayor Young issued the group an apology of sorts. He acknowledged to the national press that the police were “homophobic” but then with a more subtle version of gay panic defense he countered that the kiss-in was “making an issue of lifestyles.”[17] ACT UP and other gay and lesbian activists and supporters gathered at the Omni that afternoon to attempt the kiss-in once more. Police stopped the potential demonstrators a block further from the hotel than the first time, which prompted NGLTF activist, Urvashi Vaid to shout “Fascists!” at the police. Activists were targeted by police, as they were before, by the ACT UP shirts they wore. Other people on the sidewalk who were not obviously with the group were allowed free passage on the sidewalk. Thursday saw a second apology from Mayor Young, which referred to his former apologetic bungling. ACT UP activists that afternoon were able to hold their kiss-in outside the Omni, with the personal escort of Shirley Franklin holding at bay the police who were said to have “beat up activists” earlier that week but were quiet then “but for occasional snickers.”[18]

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[14] Hayward, “Atlanta ACT UP Forms.”

[15] Wockner, “ACT UP, Cops Clash,” 15.

[16] Ibid.

The ACT UP kiss-in protest at the DNC and its drawn-out controversial engagement continued to make headlines in the gay and straight press. As ACT UP extended their protest beyond the original planned event they reacted on the ground to events and showed a rapid and coherent collective response. The group’s tactics worked in getting Mayor Young’s attention, as well as the attention of local gay and lesbian activists. The protests were seen as an opportunity to capture the energy of ACT UP but to filter it through the established channels of gay and lesbian political leadership. Some of whom disagreed with ACT UP’s style and criticized the confrontation with the Mayor as not being in line with how they do things in Atlanta. ACT UP’s antics in City Hall got them an apology or two, but it was in part due to the help of local mainstream activists, like Cathy Woolard, who used her influence from years of activism with the L/GRC to get the Mayor and his aides to work with ACT UP. The group forced the city and the Mayor to acknowledge their rights, but without insider access to the administration they were not likely to have gotten as much as they did.

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[17] Ibid., 17.

[18] Wockner, “ACT UP, Cops Clash,” 17.

In the years following the March on Washington in 1987, two main streams of political and gay activism emerged: mainstreaming and direct action protest.[19] These two tactics had long been part of the community and major responses to political activism over the years. Gay Pride events and “zaps” had become popular expressions of gay activism in an earlier period but had fallen out of fashion by the 1980s. Throughout the 1970s gay and lesbian activism had encompassed social and community organizing efforts like the establishment of collective houses, newspapers, and community centers. By the 1980s, political lobbying groups like the national Human Rights Campaign Fund and the local Atlanta Campaign for Human Rights, political action committee GAPAC, and the democratic club LEGAL had proven to be occasional effective lobbyists.[20] These groups had some important successes like the 1986 anti-discrimination ordinances and were capable fundraisers.

Atlanta had a powerful, active, and committed group of mainstream activists who were vocal about their role in the community. Before the establishment of ACT UP the city’s social and medical AIDS work was generally centralized through AID Atlanta and the political work done was through a few overlapping lobbying groups like the Georgia AIDS Action Council (GAAC) and the Georgia AIDS Legislative Coalition, led by longtime activist Gil Robison.[21] In 1988 another long time Atlanta activist, John Howell, died from complications of AIDS but left a significant amount of money to two mainstream groups he had been involved with over the years. Howell left about $15,000 to the LG/ACLU and $10,000 to GAAC, which helped support and sustain the organizations. Howell's money went to GAAC despite the fact that as member Maury Weil readily stated, the group had been "relatively inactive" and was at present time of the bequest without a "president or a formal executive committee."[22]

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[19] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 81-92, 128-56, 287-88; Vaid, *Virtual Equality*.

[20] Vaid, *Virtual Equality*, 117-20.

Atlanta responded to the more radical politics of ACT UP and the new era of visibility in the mainstream world. Chris Duncan, a writer and activist, considered the need for change in the local movement.[23] The formation of ACT UP/Atlanta was bound to shift things because their tactics could not be ignored by the "city too bureaucratic to notice" gay and lesbian issues. The relative ease of living in the city, and for many it was not just easy but good, made political activism sometimes a hard sell for Lennox Square mall crawlers. He surmised that

> The Southern qualities that make Atlanta unique have also spread a veneer of apathy over the wellspring of anger that groups like ACT UP have tapped so successfully in other major American cities, and have hampered local lesbian/gay leaders in their dealings with city officials.

"Converting Anger Into Action": ACT UP/Atlanta

In Atlanta mainstream activists lent their support to ACT UP activists. They used the political goodwill developed over the years with the city to initiate conversations and negotiate compromises. Though Cathy Woolard helped win ACT UP a meeting with the

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[21] Gary Kaupman, "GAC Garners Good Grades in 1990 Legislature," *Southern Voice*, March 15, 1990, 5.

[22] Matt Moline, "$25,000 Bequest Left to 2 Local Organizations," *Southern Voice*, January 5, 1989, 6.

[23] Chris Duncan, "ACT UP Adds to City Formula," *Southern Voice*, August 4, 1988, 4.

Mayor, she was quoted in *Southern Voice* questioning their methods. She said that ACT UP had gone too far in their confrontation with the Mayor. She said they "belabored the point. There is a factor of diminishing returns after a confrontation (has been resolved)."[24] On the other side, supporters of ACT UP criticized Atlanta's gay and lesbian political activist community with being all too ready to concede, compromise, and give-up when the city's establishment wasn't supportive.

The more confrontational style of political activism proved popular with many in Atlanta's gay and lesbian community. At the roundtable discussion on AIDS politics and activism that occurred on the first night of the Convention, after the first altercation with Atlanta's police, some members of the community voiced the opinion that local politics was too safe and mainstream. The sentiment that lesbian and gay Democrats were "at pains to appear "squeaky clean" added to Alexander Wallace's earlier criticism that the community was too much talk and not enough action.[25] In early August it was reported that Atlanta activists were in the process of starting a local chapter of ACT UP. Longtime local activist Gene Holloway, a member of a number of community organizations over the last decade, past Pride Committee organizer, and then current board member of LEGAL, was the local representative for the Atlanta chapter of ACT UP. Holloway was quoted in the *Southern Voice* on the potential importance of such a group in Atlanta. He said "I believe in one-on-one negotiations, but I also believe in direct action—from a historical point of view."[26] The "squeaky-clean" political style of Atlanta had competition in the city and it seemed an early indication that some activists felt comfortable with both mainstream and direct action work and would refuse to choose one or the other.

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Hayward, "Atlanta ACT UP Forms," 24; Wallace, "Swimming in the Muck."

[26] Duncan, "ACT UP Adds to City."

The lesbian and gay community was not of one unified voice on the protest style of ACT UP and Atlanta's activism was changing. As in many other cities, ACT UP chapters formed to take on their local communities after the New York City group first organized in the spring of 1987.[27] After the DNC in Atlanta in the summer of 1988, inspired by the activism and success of the kiss-in and the confrontation with the Mayor, the Atlanta chapter of ACT UP formed and started to protest around the city. The group made headlines in the city's gay and straight press, an early success in achieving more publicity and directly affected their impact in the city. But by the end of the summer, despite the heat outside, activists' emotions had cooled to gently separated oppositional stances regarding ACT UP in Atlanta.

Just a few weeks after the Convention, Atlantans started to assess the impact of the event. Delbert Stone, from Tucker, Georgia, wrote to *Etc.* about his reaction to ACT UP's protests in Atlanta. His letter suggested that ACT UP's kind of activism wasn't appropriate for the setting in Atlanta and in the South. He expressed his disdain and embarrassment about the kiss-in with a reprimanding tone, stating their tactics were "foolish gimmicks." The kiss-in was nothing more than the "blatant flaunting of our sexuality," which he objected to as "distasteful PR."[28] Delbert Stone from Tucker seemed to live by the old adage that if you can't say something nice, you shouldn't say anything at all. He argued that if "we can't deploy a little bit better political tact and coothness than that, then we should just stay home and save ourselves some shame!" He made the serious point that "our legislative political concerns deal with discrimination and the AIDS issue."[29]

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[27] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 49-53, 131-32, 155-57; Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good*, 547-50, 568.

[28] Delbert Stone, "Dear Etc.: Kiss My…" *Etc.*, August 12-18, 1988, 11.

Six months later, Atlantans were still having intense responses to ACT UP and the group was the focus of an article in *Southern Voice*, entitled "ACT UP: Converting Anger Into Action."[30] Wendy Morse's article skillfully covered both national and local AIDS politics with interviews with New York City ACT UP members, Atlanta members, and numerous examples of more mainstream AIDS and gay and lesbian political activists. Maria Maggenti of ACT UP/New York talked to Morse about the importance and power of direct action protest, which she thought was the "most effective way of getting change." Morse in her article countered that observation with a good example of local color, when she reported that Atlantan James F. Bernecker in a letter to *Etc.*, had called ACT UP/Atlanta "a rabid group of rabble rousers and people that look like part of a lunatic fringe group."

Some gay and lesbian activists objected to ACT UP because they thought there was the real potential that aggressive confrontational protests would alienate allies and damage the relationships that had been built up over the years. Although they seemed to ignore the bare fact that if these relationships could be damaged by a group like ACT UP it supported the idea that they were precarious and conditional, another concern that ACT UP activists sought to address. Gil Robison by then was a lobbyist for another AIDS activist group that predated ACT UP and explained to *Southern Voice* that "Here in

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Wendy Morse, "ACT UP: Converting Anger Into Action," *Southern Voice,* February 2, 1989, 11.

Georgia, the state has quite a bit of authority and power compared to other states' anti-discrimination legislation. The only way to have an effect on the state is lobbying."[31] Dave Hayward, another longtime activist in Atlanta described ACT UP as a provocative on purpose. He said "The whole idea is to create controversy, cut through the red tape and stir things up." He told Wendy Morse he was not surprised that ACT UP was criticized by some quarters of the gay and lesbian community.

ACT UP's mission was education and awareness about AIDS and the politics of AIDS. Founding member, Maria Maggenti, said they formed to engage the public "to such a degree as to end the AIDS crisis—not to end AIDS, but to end the crisis." ACT UP activists surely wanted to see an end to AIDS, but the point of the group was to force people to deal with the issue and not to continue to ignore it or accept small favors from mainstream systems. Dave Hayward said "The whole point is for us to make a splash, a strong statement—something that forces the issues in a non-violent way."[32] ACT UP's activism was not guaranteed support from the gay and lesbian community. In Atlanta there were a number of vocal gay conservatives who neither supported ACT UP or the progressive coalition style politics that emerged in the city's lesbian and gay political community in the late 1980s. The additions of AALGA and *Southern Voice* had diversified the leadership and activism in the city. Coalitions between anti-racist groups and women's groups were sources of political controversy in the period as some readers questioned the value of the coalition.

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[31] Morse, "ACT UP: Converting Anger Into Action."

[32] Ibid.

Critics questioned the good that ACT UP claimed to be doing. They argued the protests and the negative press from some straight media outlets harmed the community.[33] Some, like Delbert Stone and James Benecker, were against the group for reasons of social propriety, tinged by more than a little bit of Southern respect for hierarchies of place, order, and proper decorum. There was an element of internalized homophobia in their criticism that reflected more conservative and regionally specific emotional and political baggage related to open displays of same-sex sexuality. The silence that surrounded discussion of topics related to sexuality still ruled many gay men and women in the South. In Atlanta, the public but closeted, semi-out community adhered to ideas about the appropriate context for discussions of sex and sexuality, especially as related to AIDS. In addition, AIDS activists in Atlanta were reticent to alter the status quo because of past experiences. Battles over educational materials that depicted frank sexual images or text were favorite targets of conservative lawmakers over the years who sought to pull funding for AIDS programs from the budgets.

Milder forms of disapproval came from well-respected and committed activists, who objected to what they saw as a misguided emotional response to AIDS. In a widely reprinted piece, originally published in the *Gay Community News*, gay historian and activist John D'Emilio reflected on his experience at the "War Conference" held in February of 1988. The conference was a continuation of activism from the organizing around the National March in 1987 and devised as a movement strategy meeting. D'Emilio outlined why he was against the new anger he saw unleashed in his fellow activists at the conference. The essay, entitled "You Can't Build a Movement on Anger:

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[33] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 280-84, 289-91.

Feeling Our Way Toward Failure; Thinking Our Way Toward Success," was republished in gay and lesbian papers in many communities and made its appearance in Atlanta's *Southern Voice* in August of 1988, just after the DNC.[34]

John D'Emilio critiqued what he saw as the spread of a bad strategy. At the War Conference he heard too many people focused on "finding" their anger and rage, when he cautioned they should have been thinking of political strategy. Activists were relying on an emotional response to guide political action. He concluded that "a movement that mobilizes a constituency on the basis of pain will end up feeling its way to despair, disillusionment and, ultimately, failure."[35] Atlanta writer and activist Gary Kaupman reported that there were a lot of Atlantans who agreed with the more mainstream and moderate approach. At a recent meeting of the group Fund for Southern Communities, a progressive grant giving institution, he noted that many people

> expressed feelings similar to mine and D'Emilio's: Anger, indulgent self-pity and charity are out; empowerment and change wrought within the confines of the system are in. That doesn't mean no demonstrations. That doesn't mean accepting the status-quo. It means recognizing political reality and then busting gut to be sure that no one abuses our rights; it means making the system work for us too.[36]

Whether or not one was for or against ACT UP activism, the group's establishment cracked Atlanta's veneer of apathy. ACT UP/Atlanta and the actions they staged in the fall of 1988 in their first few months of existence changed the city's gay and lesbian rights movement for years. They joined a national ACT UP coordinated response to the gas station Circle K when the company changed its health policy to exclude coverage for medical issues related to “lifestyle” choices. ACT UP saw this as a direct attempt to throw PWAs off their health insurance and to discriminate against gay and lesbian people in the future.[37] The local group advocated a boycott of Circle K even after national ACT UP activists had negotiated with the company and scaled back their protests. Activists in Atlanta staged buy-ins where they bought just a few cents worth of gasoline to tie up the pumps, which ticked off a number of locals.

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[34] John D'Emilio, "You Can't Build a Movement on Anger: Feeling Our Way Toward Failure; Thinking Our Way Toward Success," *Southern Voice*, August 4, 1988, 5.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Gary Kaupman, "Emerging from the Coma: Directions for the Lesbian/Gay Rights Agenda in the Post-Reagan Era," *Southern Voice*, August 4, 1988, 16.

ACT UP became known for its controversial, attention-getting direct action protests. In the fall of 1988, ACT UP/Atlanta staged a mock funeral and die-in at the Governor’s mansion. The group drove down West Paces Ferry Road at funereal pace during rush hour traffic. *Southern Voice* reported that about forty members exited their cars and walked to the mansion carrying a casket. When they got to the gate they fell to the ground symbolically dead. The protest was over the decision of Democratic Governor Joe Frank Harris to not expand the state’s share of the cost for AIDS funding of the high-cost drug AZT for low-income PWAs, which congress had let expire. In a last-minute victory an extension was granted. The protest had effectively brought attention to the issue at an important moment, which even the national lobbying group and more moderate Human Rights Campaign Fund thought was worth recognizing. Reportedly ACT UP/Atlanta got a call from someone at HRCF who said “You could not have timed this better.”[38]

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[37] “ACT UP/ATL Joins Nationwide Protests; “ZAPS” Circle K,” *Southern Voice*, September 1, 1988, 1, 3; “ACT UP: “Circle K Sells Death!”: Boycott pressures increase,” *Southern Voice*, September 15, 1988, 3.

[38] F. G., “ACT-UP Visits the Governor as Congress Okays AZT Funding,” *Southern Voice*, October 13, 1988, 1, 3.

ACT UP/ Atlanta's protests included widely reported on demonstrations focused on national issues as well as local ones. Protests and boycotts of the convenience store, Circle K, in many different cities were part of a national action that used locally organized protests to connect groups to a broader movement community. Other more regionally focused and local actions organized by the Atlanta group, like the demonstration at the Governor's Mansion, aimed at getting people's attention in the city and state where they lived. Later actions, like a "teach-in," were less controversial than a die-in or a staged occupation, but each in its way worked to get people to pay attention to AIDS policies and related legislation.

Just one year after they first organized, in August of 1989, ACT UP aimed their controversial tactics at a local event that drew press attention and community opinions from Atlantans in exactly the kind of way that the group had become known for. ACT UP staged an action at the Hotlanta River Raft Expo, a gay male party event that drew thousands to the city from across the nation. The weekend included a number of big parties held at clubs in Atlanta but culminated in the takeover of the Chattahoochee River by hundreds of gay men cruising down the river in rafts. The event started in 1979 and was a success for a number of years and was always well-attended. Around four to five thousand mostly gay men, locals and visitors, came to Atlanta for the parties and the raft expedition. Cleve Seay, reviewed the events of the weekend for *Southern Voice* and his takeaway was heavily critical. He called the weekend's biggest party, the Mr. Hotlanta contest, "a predictable evening of drag, speeches, endless awards, mediocre sets, and bad sound, projected against nervous, unrehearsed and nearly neglected contestants." Though some attendees were unimpressed with the weekend's entertainment, more people attended that year's parties than came to Atlanta's Pride which saw about 2000 people march in June. That year Walt Greer, the head of Hotlanta River Expo, when asked about why they didn't make donations to AIDS organizations told a reporter for *Southern Voice* that even though the events always drew a crowd, the money never materialized. Greer said "We're a profit- making venture but we never make a profit. We just cover our expenses."[39]

It was reported that the Silver Ball, a Hotlanta sponsored party, held on the Saturday night before the raft trip at the Georgia Freight Depot saw a crowd of more than 3000. It was a captive audience for ACT UP members who crashed the ball, armed with condoms and leaflets to distribute to party-goers. ACT UP sought to disseminate 1000 condoms and information about safe sex to a group they deemed in need of an education because of the dangerous statistics that showed risky sexual behavior among gay men to be on the increase. Cleve Seay reported that "the Silver Ball came dangerously close to political suicide" when they tossed ACT UP from the venue. Organizers "sympathized" with ACT UP but cited state policy that forbade the distribution of literature at the Depot.[40]

What happened at the Silver Ball became an instantaneous scandal in the gay community. In addition to the Hotlanta River Expo review of weekend events written by Seay, the *Southern Voice* included a more detailed account of the night's activity written by Chris Duncan. Duncan reported that ACT UP members were not just ejected from the ball, but that they had been threatened with arrest by Expo managers. His report showed a complicated relationship between members of the gay community and leaders with different constituencies. ACT UP member Jimmy Allen was personally offended by the Expo's position and their subsequent explanation about Georgia littering laws. He put it in an emotional and outraged context, the drives that fueled ACT UP's activism. He said, "When I think of all my friends who have floated down that river... and are now dead," Allen said, "it is a sacrilege not to welcome AIDS activist groups to participate."[41] Allen felt obligated to be at the party doing this kind of activist work because the community was "under attack (from AIDS)."

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[39] Cleve Seay, "Mr. Hotlanta" Contest Highlights Expo Weekend," *Southern Voice*, August 17, 1989, 20.

[40] Ibid.

The story got more complicated as Duncan reported the Expo's version of events, which included ACT UP members who one manager said "showed up unexpectedly and then got in my face when I told them they were breaking the law." Walt Greer told Duncan that he would have handled the situation differently but that Georgia was "real particular." Greer was also a board member of GAPAC who represented Midtown and had presumably honed his skill at compromise and placating Georgia officials while lobbying on behalf of the community. He hinted at the real thin ice gay activists and the community skated on. Referring to the Expo and their event, Greer said "We have to walk on pins and needles ourselves."[42]

The next issue of *Southern Voice* carried letters, opinions, and rebuttals to arguments by members of ACT UP, the River Expo, and the community. In an open letter from ACT UP/Atlanta, signed by Joseph A. Hartley III and addressed to the "River Expo Committee," the group called out a number of issues and concerns they had with how the incident was reported. Some important "facts" that Chris Duncan left out related to discrepancies regarding "litter and legalities." ACT UP confirmed with the Georgia Building Authority that if the Expo had approved it they would have been permitted to distribute their information and condoms. ACT UP further argued that the River Expo had some personal responsibility in preventing the spread of AIDS in their community. "Shouldn't a business such as yours that encourages gay men to play (often times under the uninhibiting influence of alcohol and/or recreational drugs) make more than just a token obligatory effort to encourage us to play safe?," ACT UP demanded.

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[41] Chris Duncan, "ACT UP Members Threatened with Arrest at River Expo Dance," August 17, 1989, 3.

[42] Ibid.

The Hotlanta River Expo responded to *Southern Voice's* coverage of the Expo weekend. Burl Compton, whose drag performance as Cher Cleve Seay had called "unnecessary filler" wrote in to say that the point of the Expo was to have fun. Compton's letter was mostly about redeeming his fellow performers who he said worked hard to put on an entertaining show created by his friends and not "some snobby theatre group with only profit and a long run in mind."[43] It seems likely that Compton's upset at Cleve Seay's critical review caused him to cast doubt on *Southern Voice's* impartiality as an objective news source. He may have been referring to the newspaper's relationship as a project of SAME, which was heavily involved in the local arts scene, under the leadership of Rebecca Ranson, the well-known playwright and director.

Walt Greer, president of the Hotlanta River Expo, also commented on *Southern Voice's* "fine job of investigative reporting" in their "concise and factual article." Greer also disagreed with details in the article and wanted to clarify a few points for the whole community. He specified that ACT UP did not contact the Expo to be included at their host hotel and their decision to remove ACT UP was not anything specific or personal to the group. They explained that it was simply a policy decision in that they didn't allow any organization to distribute from their events. Mr. Greer also asserted that the management company who held the license for the Depot was within their rights to have ACT UP removed and were "most gracious to have not caused the arrest of ACT UP members."

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[43] Burl Compton, "River Expo's Purpose is Fun," *Southern Voice*, August 31, 1989, 6.

Walt Greer's response added to the controversy. In September Ivy Sinclair, who was not a member of ACT UP still felt compelled to write in to express his astonishment and disagreement with Greer and the Expo. Sinclair wondered how any gay organization, social or recreational, could claim to be apolitical, as Greer had when he said "Let me state for the record, HRE is not politically motivated."[44] The number of deaths from AIDS and related illness had reached over 75, 000 and the Expo's actions said Sinclair "represents a disturbing philosophy of denial and elitism that is still all too prevalent among many gay men."[45] Keith Floyd thought ACT UP was deemed to have "dampened the party mood by reminding everyone that AIDS is an ever present threat to our community" and was thus removed.[46] David Brey couldn't figure out why the Expo reacted with such an aggressive response, but he knew they only offered "excuses" rooted in "AIDS phobia or personal gain, I'm not sure which."[47]

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[44] Walt Greer, "River Expo is "Not Politically Motivated," *Southern Voice*, August 31, 1989, 6.

[45] Ivy Sinclair, "They Say Get Back," *Southern Voice*, September 14, 1989, 6.

[46] Keith Floyd, "16,000 Condoms Are Not Enough," *Southern Voice*, August 31, 1989, 7.

[47] David Brey, "Fear of Litter," *Southern Voice*, August 31, 1989, 7.

Walt Greer not only defended his organization but expressed his opinion that ACT UP and their protests were divisive. He said "It is unfortunate that radical groups such as ACT UP tend to disrupt and separate our own community." Greer called for more communication between groups and patronizingly mused that there "was a lesson here to be learned" if "ACT UP has been listening." Despite hollering about the importance of "COMMUNICATION," Greer blamed ACT UP entirely for the controversy. In his follow-up response to Silver Ball reports and community letters he said, "I am truly sorry for any problem which ACT UP may think that we caused them, when in reality, they caused their own problem."[48] Ivy Sinclair likened Greer and the Expo's attitude to that of a few infamous first-class passengers on the doomed ship Titanic "who refused to board lifeboats that held anything but first class passengers."[49]

Just a year after they had officially formed ACT UP had emerged as a major force in Atlanta gay and lesbian political activism. ACT UP and its new brand of activism, as it grew, started to create a real rift in the Atlanta gay and lesbian community. The divisions were felt nationally along the same lines as people responded to direct action protest and mainstream political lobbying as the two most prominent forms of activism for the gay and lesbian rights movement. In Atlanta during the intense period of organizing around the National March, new groups formed and challenged the political and movement agendas of older and more established groups. Some local leaders and groups had worked hard to lobby their way into access to more politically powerful allies at Georgia's capitol, the Gold Dome, and in Atlanta's city hall. ACT UP was a different political option, they offered a direct action protest alternative to the back door lobbying and fundraising of groups like GAPAC, LEGAL, or the HRCF.[50]

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[48] Walt Greer, "To Our Community," *Southern Voice*, September 14, 1989, 6.

[49] Sinclair, "They Say Get Back."

In January of 1990, on the first day of Georgia's legislative session, ACT UP/Atlanta and ACT UP/New York, with help from members in cities across the country staged a sodomy law protest in Atlanta. The next day the groups targeted the CDC, an event documented in video footage in the documentary about ACT UP activism, *United in Anger*.[51] The two protests aimed to draw attention to issues that were seen by some as separate or distinct, that of AIDS and sodomy laws. To ACT UP activists they were related and interconnected issues that needed to be addressed together. Both protests attracted local and national press attention, in the straight and gay media. Local ACT UP activists and those who supported the protests succeeded in provoking discussions in the gay and lesbian community and press.

ACT UP's planned sodomy protest became controversial and a much talked about topic in gay activist circles. In December, Chip Rowan, a lawyer, activist, and the legal coordinator for ACT UP Atlanta, talked to *Southern Voice* for a profile piece in "Outlines," which was a feature dedicated to highlighting and spotlighting activists in the community. He was generally optimistic about the gay community's growing awareness about AIDS.[52] By the end of the month, however, Rowan felt the need to defend ACT UP's position on the sodomy law protest against a growing number of complaints from members of the gay and lesbian community. Some of the criticism of ACT UP's sodomy protest was a continuation of the disagreement and disapproval at their tactics and style. Rowan cited these attitudes in the community, where "Some people think that those who participate in demonstrations are rude radicals or publicity hounds."[53]

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[50] "Activism For Mainstreamers: Options For Those Caught Between ACT UP and Act-Not," *Southern Voice,* March 15, 1990, 20.

[51] Jim Hubbard and Sarah Schulman, *United in Anger: A History of ACT UP* (ACT UP Oral History Project & Film Collaborative, 2014).

[52] Charlene Ball, "Outlines: Chip Rowan Acting up about AIDS," *Southern Voice,* December 7, 1989, 20.

Some criticism came from longtime gay political activists in the city. Lobbyist Chris Hagin, who co-wrote the 1986 anti-discrimination employment ordinance, was a vocal opponent of the protest. He and other mainstream political activists argued that the protest would jeopardize their work with the legislature. Chip Rowan believed that direct action and lobbying could "complement" one another, that it didn't have to be an either/or choice. He addressed another typically Atlantan perspective that viewed the value of direct action as of limited value in the public sector. Rowan drew a comparison between Georgians' struggle to repeal the sodomy law and world events to emphasize the political philosophy of direct activism. He said "Some say it can't be done, the Sodomy Laws are here to stay. They said the same thing about the Berlin Wall. Atlanta's Gay Men and Lesbians have "people power" too."[54]

The ACT UP sodomy protest at the Georgia Capitol made the cover of the first issue of *Southern Voice* in 1990. The front page showed two photographs of two couples. On the left two men embraced in a kiss and on the right two women did the same. The photographs were broken up by text printed in black ink that read the slogan of the protest, "Sodomy: The Law is the Perversion." In the middle of the page printed in red was a familiar phrase in the era, uttered famously by President George Bush, "Read My

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[53] Chip Rowan, "Direct Action + Lobbying = Success" *Southern Voice*, December 21, 1989, 7.

[54] Ibid.

Lips." ACT UP New York had a number of art activists who shaped and contributed to the movement.[55] Video activists, like DIVA (Damned Interfering Video Activists) documented the group's meetings, actions, and planning process. An arts collective called Gran Fury acted as the de facto "art arm."[56] They created posters and images that were impactful, provocative, and demanded attention. In the documentary *United in Anger* archival footage from the period showed two posters with the slogan "Read My Lips," one of which was used on the cover of *SoVo*. The poster showed two men, one in service uniform, kissing and holding each other. ACT UP protest images were purposefully graphic and often sexual, as they were designed to spark a reaction. The other "Read My Lips" poster that was not featured on *SoVo's* cover showed a close-up photo that appeared unfocused or abstracted, having the effect of resembling a softer inkblot Rorschach image. The text on top "Read My Lips" and in the middle, where the image centered, it revealed clearly the two lips of a woman's vulva and ominously warned "Before They're Sealed."

Inside the issue reports, features, interviews, and letters explored different voices and opinions from the community. The issue showed a range of opinions regarding the protest. Some people supported it and planned on going, others supported it but were not committed enough to attend. Others mildly disapproved or vehemently opposed it. In a photo feature that spotlighted six local community members who were asked if they intended on participating in the protest, of the three white men included, two were not planning on going, and the other supported it but was not going, though he was protesting at the CDC the next day. Later criticism of the group ACT UP was that it was too white, and too male, but in Atlanta it seemed that early support for the group was more diverse. Two lesbians, black and white, supported the protest and would participate, and the white straight couple who was included in the feature was going to be there too.

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[55] Gould, *Moving Politics,* 129; Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 158.

[56] Hubbard and Schulman, *United in Anger.*

The sodomy protest issue featured a dueling viewpoints segment with two gay activists in the community. Against the protest was registered lobbyist Chris Hagin and for it was Chip Rowan, the local ACT UP legal coordinator and action facilitator for the sodomy protest.[57] Writer Gareth Finley introduced the piece and framed the two activists as fighting for the same cause but with very different battlegrounds. Finley said "Although these two gay men are both working to repeal the state's sodomy law, one sees it as a professional insider's job, while the other believes in stirring up public outrage." Chris Hagin was one of the lobbyists who was instrumental in getting the 1986 anti-discrimination language passed that protected some city employees from discrimination. Hagin was opposed to the protest for a number of reasons. He argued that "Real political decisions are made by a small number of people." He was also annoyed that ACT UP had not consulted with others in the community, "It upsets me that newly activated activists in the Atlanta gay community have good intentions, but they do everything without talking to us old hacks and finding out where we're at now."[58]

Chip Rowan's response to Hagin was more optimistic about finding a common ground. Rowan offered support to established gay and lesbian activism, but defended the work of ACT UP, which was organized to disrupt the status quo. He said, "We choose direct action because nothing else has worked. There have been efforts to work through the system, and we do believe in that work."[59] ACT UP's goal was to educate and bring awareness to the issue of sodomy and the importance of its repeal. They maintained that more than one tool could be used to solve the problem and that "A politically sophisticated community has several strategies going at once. We encourage other groups to do what they do." ACT UP seemed to say they would do what they did and others could do their thing too.

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[57] Gareth Finley, "Sodomy: Same Cause, Different Fight," *Southern Voice,* January 4, 1990, 10.

[58] Ibid.

ACT UP worked on a different level in a way that lobbying could not. Activists involved found that the group satisfied the emotional and connective needs of community.[60] *Southern Voice* related hearing a lot of negative commentary about the planned protest but defended it in a staff editorial that was supportive and encouraging.[61] The editorial also touched on Hagin's arguments about politics and power and his description of how favorable legislation got passed. In arguments against the sodomy protest because a repeal was in the works, he explained that his coalition included "Four people who were involved with the passage of the AIDS bill are also working with me on the sodomy bill." Two were paid and registered lobbyists and two were Legislators.[62] *SoVo* acknowledged that "Working inside the system may get us favorable legislation, but invariably it is others, not we ourselves, who make that happen. Laws passed this way too often leave us with a vaguely hollow feeling." In contrast they noted that being involved in a direct action protest "allows us to feel like we are part of the answer rather than victims mired in the problem."

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[59] Ibid, 10.

[60] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 213-65.

[61] Staff Editorial, "Much Ado About Marching..." *Southern Voice*, January 4, 1990, 6.

[62] Finley, "Sodomy: Same Cause."

Gay and lesbian participation in the sodomy protest was exactly what some in the political arena were afraid of. In another feature that landed on the anti-protest side and agreed with Hagin's sentiment, "Peter Politics" argued against the protest because it would threaten the work done by lobbyists and legislators. He said the bill to repeal part (or all) of the sodomy statute would have passed had it been done quietly "without the vocal and/or visible support of the gay and lesbian community," as planned by the political strategists. However, according to Peter Politics, "by making the repeal of the sodomy laws a gay and lesbian issue, these activists will generate a visible rise in "homohatred" and public outcry against any attempt to legislate "the actions of those homosexual perverts."[63] *SoVo* ended the editorial with a common-sense appeal to the community to keep a level head when it came to discussions of the protest. "Don't believe the doom mongers on either side…This isn't the end of the world or the rift that killed the movement." Though it may not have ended the movement, ACT UP and the sodomy protest became a divisive topic and a source of tension in the community with many activists aligned to one side or the other.

"Outrageous and Respectable": Direct Action Activism vs. Mainstreaming

ACT UP New York sent over a hundred people to Georgia for the twin protests at the Capitol and the CDC. Their movement was national by that time and they lent support to local groups and regional actions.[64] New York activists had just come off a highly controversial but successful demonstration on their own turf that highlighted the sensational, loud, and confrontational tactics of the group. In December of 1989, ACT UP and partners in the action, WHAM! (Women's Health Action Mobilization), staged a die-in and interrupted services at St. Patrick's Cathedral in protest of the New York church authority and politically influential John Cardinal O'Connor, who openly condemned gay and lesbian people and opposed women's reproductive health rights.[65] At the "Stop the Church" demonstration about 100 members of ACT UP were inside and over forty were arrested that day. In video footage, controversial and outspoken member Michael Petrelis stole the show and drowned out other activist calls when he screamed loudest of all, "Stop killing us!" over and over.[66]

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[63] Peter Politics, "Getting in Bed with the Democrats," *Southern Voice*, January 4, 1990, 12.

Outside the crowd was estimated at around 5000 people, an astonishing show of strength and support. Protestors chanted "O'Connor says get back, we say fight back."[67] New York member Maxine Wolfe thought it was one of the best demonstrations ACT UP staged, though she noted that its success stirred much controversy in the community about its appropriateness. She said "there are loads of people who think it was terrible, okay, and they blame it for a hundred things." Instead she argued that it affected the strength of the Catholic Church's ability to influence politics in the city.[68]

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[64] Gould, *Moving Politics,* 263; Benita Roth, *The Life and Death of ACT UP/LA: Anti-AIDS Activism in Los Angeles from the 1980s to the 2000s* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 13-14.

[65] Jason DeParle "111 Held in St. Patrick's AIDS Protest," *New York Times*, December 11, 1989. Accessed December 20, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/1989/12/11/nyregion/111-held-in-st-patrick-s-aids-protest.html

[66] Gould, *Moving Politics,* 285-286; Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good*, 542-46.

[67] DeParle "111 Held."

In the documentary *United in Anger*, which used primary footage taken by video activists in ACT UP, members can be seen boarding a plane and flying South for the sodomy and CDC protests. At the Atlanta airport, what was most likely a group from ACT UP/Atlanta held a banner to greet their collective brothers and sisters. The cloth banner wasn't small—it looked like it reached at least three feet across—and proclaimed in all large capital print, painted in colorful blue and purple, "WELCOME TO GEORGIA, SODOMITES." In the upper right corner, pinned to the banner was the Read My Lips cover of the *Southern Voice*.[69] It was an attention-getting sign, meant to welcome ACT UP in a rowdy way. The presence of out-of-town activists caused friction in the local community and stirred up resentment among local activists. A *SoVo* editorial about the protest highlighted some local color, as activists on staff took a defensive tone in their review of the demonstration and their interactions with the coalition of ACT UP activists from out of state. They wrote that

> Activists from New York, Boston, San Francisco and L.A. got to come south, puff themselves up with pride and pretend that they were showing us corn pone types just how such actions ought be orchestrated. Local activists were able to see that, while their out-of-town guests might have more experience, us Coke guzzlin' yokels can act up pretty damn well on our own, thank you very much.[70]

In stark contrast to the massive, thousands-strong crowds that supported ACT UP demonstrations in New York City, the Atlanta Capitol sodomy protest was much smaller. Cliff O'Neill noted that "save for the members of Atlanta's ACT UP, proportionately few locals attended the event." He reported that 120 ACT UP NY members made up a crowd of an estimated 300, which also included ACT UP members from L.A., Chicago, Boston, and D.C. *SoVo* was disappointed with lack of support from the community but they aimed their criticism in the wrong direction and other community activists were quick to defend the outsider ACT UP activists. One " unidentified reader" said that after attending an ACT UP/NYC meeting it was obvious they "have their act very much together. If they want to puff up, they have every right."[71] Reader Barbara Snell didn't like the editorial's take on "puffed up" outsiders either and scolded them as she opened her letter with "Poorly done, *Southern Voice*." She defended her position with a traditional, middle class interpretation of manners and respect as they related to gender and region. Snell said "First of all, as a woman born and raised in the South, I feel that your remarks regarding our guests to be rather impolite and derogatory. Especially when one considers the personal time, effort, and expense put forth by these visitors."[72] Some Atlantans clearly thought that *SoVo* was unnecessarily defensive and unwilling to learn from valuable and experienced allies within their own movement.

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[68] Maxine Wolfe in Hubbard and Schulman, *United in Anger.*

[69] Hubbard and Schulman, *United in Anger.*

[70] Staff Editorial, "Well Done, ACT UP," *Southern Voice*, February 1, 1990, 6.

The coordinated back-to-back demonstrations showed a directed, planned, and united attack on multiple issues. The sodomy protest at the Capitol focused on Atlanta and Georgia's sodomy law because it was a notorious example of discrimination upheld by the Supreme Court with the *Bowers* decision. ACT UP and other activists who joined in the demonstration, like Sue Hyde and other prominent NGLTF members, hoped that the nation's attention would be drawn to them so that they could raise awareness on the issue of sodomy and how the criminalization of sexuality between adults contributed to homophobia.[73] Homophobia, sexism, and racism became interconnected and related battlegrounds that ACT UP activists fought in various actions.[74] They hoped their dramatic protests would direct press attention towards their educational goals as they sought to show people how these issues were connected to the government's inadequate and negligent response to AIDS. New York member Ann Norton reflected that "We said for years in ACT UP that our job was not to be liked. That we were not doing what we were doing to get the public to like us. We were doing what we were doing to accomplish something about particular issues…And we weren't liked…But we forced people to pay attention."[75]

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[71] "An Unidentified Reader," "She Likes What Our Editorial Said," *Southern Voice*, February 15, 1990, 6.

[72] Barbara Snell, "And She Doesn't," *Southern Voice*, February 15, 1990, 6.

Atlantans paid attention to ACT UP's twin protests, but the sodomy demonstration held on the opening day of legislative session for the Georgia General Assembly on Monday January 8, 1990, was more controversial. At a rally in the morning activists heard from different speakers, including Sue Hyde of the NGLTF, local State House Representatives Jim Martin who was co-sponsoring a bill with Cynthia McKinney that would reform the law by removing references to sodomy. They were also entertained by ubiquitous and beloved, unabashed and in-your-face lesbian comedian and entertainer, Lea DeLaria, who welcomed the crowd and gave a hearty, "Hello all you sodomites."[76] *Southern Voice* reporter Cliff O'Neill described the most controversial element of the sodomy demonstration, when "the crowd chanted as it made its way down Peachtree

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[73] Sheyn, "The Shot Heard," 22.

[74] Gould, *Moving Politics*; Roth, *The Life and Death*.

[75] Anne Norton in *United in Anger*.

[76] Cliff O'Neill, "300 Protest Sodomy Law, 63 Arrested: Repeal, Restriction Measures Introduced" *Southern Voice*, January 18, 1990, 3, 10.

Street, pushing a bed on wheels on which lay two naked, life-size, inflatable rubber dolls. Arranged to simulate simultaneous oral sex, the dolls represented one of several sex acts made illegal by the Georgia sex statute."[77]

The action was meant to be provocative, as many of ACT UP's protests were designed to provoke in confrontational and radical ways. Activists meant to push the boundaries of proper politics because they believed it was a complicit part of the silence that eventually equaled their deaths. In Atlanta, much of the criticism of the demonstration and protest hinged on ideas about respectability, compromise, accommodation, and what constituted progress. For some more traditional political activists, it seemed like ACT UP's protest came at a critical point in their timeline that threatened to derail their lobbying work. Some believed that their efforts had brought them to the brink of a major breakthrough and they were poised to pass the sodomy law reform. However, this optimism was disputed in letters and editorials published throughout Georgia's forty day legislative session.

The ACT UP sodomy protest received mixed reviews in the community. Some were dismayed by the sensational tactics. *Southern Voice* reported that "demonstrators did routinely break into chants unprintable in mainstream newspapers, much to the dismay of many of those entering the State House building."[78] One critic of ACT UP, but supporter of the sodomy reform effort, Thomas Thompson said that he went to the rally because he was against the sodomy law which he termed, "silly." The demonstration "proved everything that I expected it to be. Less than three hundred people turned out.

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[77] Ibid., 10.

[78] O'Neill, "300 Protest," 10.

The majority proved themselves obviously angry. I heard speakers use language befitting the late Abbie Hoffman. But, so what?"[79]

Opinion on ACT UP in Atlanta's gay and lesbian community was not by any means settled in one direction. Some lobbyists were against the protest as a matter of timing while others distrusted the anger and emotions of the group. Thompson's story recast the familiar roles of the city's gay and lesbian politicians as egotistical leaders on a power trip. His instinct guided him, he said

> I personally distrust ACT UP. They seem motivated more by outrage than mature citizenship and dissent. They look more like chronic malcontents seeking warmth in a video camera's kleig lights. I went to the rally. I saw ACT UP. I left unmoved.[80]

Another critic, J. L. Stein, pleaded with the community to not support future ACT UP demonstrations and "to refrain from indulging in such sophomoric spectacles as those exhibited by the members of ACT UP." He emphasized that the demonstrations had a real effect on things that mattered. He continued, "Gay Georgians in favor of passage of H.B. 1380 need to get serious and leave the circus clown buffoonery to the members of ACT UP—preferably in another city, another state and another zone of reality."[81]

It was not just conservative or closeted gays and lesbians who opposed the sodomy protest, but also openly gay and activist members of the community. That people within the community were vocally opposed to the action and attempted to influence others to oppose it similarly became another major point of controversy. Jim Allen with ACT UP, most likely the Jimmy Allen reported on in the Hotlanta River Raft ACT UP protest from the summer before, wrote a powerful letter to *Southern Voice* that explained his emotional and personal reasons for supporting ACT UP and the demonstrations. His letter titled, "Tender Truth," was also a response to those opposed to ACT UP and he named names as he called out his community. He said "Our great ally—truth—is slain by the egos of self-appointed leaders like Jeffrey Laymon. Read his lies in *Creative Loafing's* January 6th issue. Truth is lost on behind-the-scenes lobbyist Chris Hagin who can't comprehend the relationship between sexually oppressive laws and AIDS."[82]

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[79] Thomas R. Thompson, "Distrusts ACT UP," *Southern Voice*, February 15, 1990, 7.

[80] Ibid.

[81] J. L. Stein, "Get Serious," *Southern Voice*, March 1, 1990, 7.

Sabrina Sojourner, outgoing chair of AALGA, told *Southern Voice* that those who were against the protest had their priorities wrong. In a pointed and specific reference to the politics of local gay and lesbian activism, Sojourner disagreed with the fundamentally assumed argument that a conditional or qualified alliance of support was a good measure of progress. She said

> They believe that the publicity will cause those who would otherwise be our friends and supporters to abandon us. Well, let me tell them something as a Black person, still fighting racial injustice: With friends like that you don't have to worry about enemies 'cause they're right in your own front yard. Human rights-doing what is right and just-should not be based on which way the wind blows.[83]

For activists like Jim Allen and Sabrina Sojourner, the political fights were personal and the connections were integral—not tangential—to the cause.

Many ACT UP activists had personal stories about loss that motivated their activism, and Jim Allen recounted a transformative moment from his recent past to Atlanta. He told the city scenes from a memory about how AIDS impacted him. He remembered a day in a "small room" on the 26th floor of a tourist hotel New York City and the call from the hospital. Someone close to him, a man named Doug, died. Doug's family decided to act quickly and Allen was unable to say a final goodbye to the physical body. In his anguish he felt raw, “Powerless. Shamed.” He remembered other moments like this and other bodies that belonged to his friends and lovers. AIDS had rendered him into a new man, “There is nothing left to me but anger. Death and waste abound. Seeds of activism root deeper in my being with every body [sic] I bathe and every grown man's diaper I change.”[84]

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[82] Jim Allen, "Tender Truth," *Southern Voice*, February 15, 1990, 6-7.

[83] Ibid.

Jim Allen and others who experienced the trauma of survival were witnesses to the deaths in their communities. ACT UP activists created a new era that permanently disrupted the status quo by making emotional and personal stories a central part of their political activism. ACT UP had an uphill battle and worked hard to change popular sentiment in a conservative and traditional town like Atlanta, but were eager to show they were willing to engage in something different. Allen conveyed the idea that ACT UP/Atlanta fought many foes. Their primary struggle was with straight society and the system of institutions that regulated, criminalized, and condemned him as a PWA, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer. ACT UP/Atlanta also battled a historic tradition of apathy in the community that was complicated by the half-closet and hushed-tone levels of outness. These barriers reinforced the silence that surrounded issues related to sexuality, which was supported and perpetuated by homophobia. Allen addressed some very Atlanta problems that also reflected national issues with the mainstream political movement and lobbyists. Their closet, their indifference, and their strategies had led to deadly ramifications for thousands of gay men. He said PWAs “will continue to die until the tuxedo and liquor crowd is willing to dirty their hands, until we realize that home ownership is not a gay right, that parties and raft races and decorating will not stop AIDS, until we are prepared to commit every ounce of fight we have to wage this war."[85]

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[84] Ibid.

Gay and lesbian activists had felt at war with their own society before. It was a familiar and consistent sentiment expressed in gay and lesbian politics since the radical 1960s, but in the years of AIDS the feeling of being at war was realized when the gay community started to gather the numbers and saw the staggering cost of the war as evidenced in a growing list of casualties. The cold political war became a hot medical zone that politicized people in a way that was impossible to conceive of before it occurred. The clashes between gay and lesbian civil rights movement activists and new activists in ACT UP, and later in Queer Nation, were likely related to an inability or unwillingness to adjust to the great changes that AIDS wrought in gay and lesbian politics.

Others still held to mainstream and traditional institutions, where they thought they saw the beginnings of positive change. Gay and lesbian Democrats with LEGAL had some early successes in Atlanta. They sent delegates to the DNC in 1988 and political leaders in the city lent their efforts to the competitive Mayoral primary race in 1989. Every February the Democratic Party of Georgia held an annual fundraiser called the Jefferson Jackson Day Dinner and in 1990 ACT UP members protested it. Activists were photographed outside with signs that read "Tom Murphy: Homophobia Kills."[86]

Inside, two members of LEGAL, Jeff Corrigan and Marty Worsham, had contributed to their party and tried to enjoy their dinner. Tom Murphy, Speaker of the

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[85] Allen, "Tender Truth."

[86] "Murphy Meets Real Live Homos," *Southern Voice*, March 15, 1990, 2.

Georgia House, remarked to the dinner crowd that he must have made “the big time—the gays are picketing me outside.” ACT UP deemed him important enough to protest but the feeling was not reciprocated. He told the donors, “I’m delighted to say I know nothing at all about their way of life.”[87] After dinner the LEGAL members in attendance confronted Murphy. They “marched upon the Speaker, shook his hand and announced that they were gay. And that they were not amused by his demeaning comments.” In a childish and insulting reaction, Tom Murphy physically moved back from the two after he shook their hands. *Southern Voice* reported his reaction, “Get away from me,” yelped the Speaker as he snatched his hand back.” Worsham and Corrigan “were surrounded by a crowd who herded them away from Mr. Murphy and lectured the two on the obscene nature of ACT UP’s demonstration and the need for proper behavior at official functions.”[88]

The encounter left LEGAL members confused. Worsham told *Southern Voice* that “he describes himself as “middle class,” a “believer” in the system and “not a very demonstrative person.”[89] However, that did not stop him from reacting emotionally and aggressively when he confronted Murphy. Worsham said he shouted “across the crowd” to Murphy, “You’re adding to homophobia.” This moment, he added in a slight tone of surprise, might have made an impact on Murphy, he said “I think I really frightened him.” It also seemed a bit like Worsham also frightened himself. He considered his actions and reflected that “I’m still a Democrat, but I’m pretty disillusioned by all this. It makes me feel less and less like playing the game...(I'm getting) angry enough to want to take it to the streets."

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[87] Ibid.

[88] “Murphy Meets Real Live Homos.”

[89] Ibid.

ACT UP impacted Atlanta through the persistence of the local group's actions. The change that ACT UP effected was substantial. In March, an article in *Southern Voice* entitled "Doctor ACT UP: Or how we learned to stop worrying and grew to love zaps" reported on the unprecedented recent meeting between Speaker Tom Murphy and members of ACT UP.[90] The man from Bremen who had confidently boasted that "he knows nothing about sodomy and/or those who do" had invited activists to a meeting. They mused that "It was mighty funny when Dr. Strangelove's disembodied hand/arm flew out of control, grabbed his throat and tried to strangle the old fool. A look at our mail suggests that's how many gay men and lesbians feel about the more aggressive actions taken by ACT UP—the seemingly unruly arm of our community." *SoVo* pointed out that though some people disliked their style, that it was "not the Executive Secretary of MACGLO, or the Administrator of the Atlanta Gay Center, or the Board of GAPAC, or the Editor of *Southern Voice*" who Murphy met with, but instead it was the loudest screamers at the church.

A vocal contingent of gay activists criticized the tactics of ACT UP in Atlanta. In New York, some ACT UP members expressed frustration and disappointment about the actions of Michael Petrelis at St. Patrick's in December of 1989. Others pointed out that the demonstration effectively shook up the city's status quo and showed that the church was vulnerable to protest and shifting public opinions. Tom Murphy's surprise meeting with ACT UP activists also showed a deviation from the status quo. ACT UP succeeded in getting the attention of a key influential organization in the city and state, the Democratic Party of Georgia. The lesson learned from ACT UP's protests and demonstrations was that this kind of activism, with persistence, could make a difference in the system. *SoVo* theorized that "History suggests—even in stodgy old Atlanta—that when we show up in force and make a lot of noise, we get noticed."[91]

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[90] "Doctor ACT UP," *Southern Voice*, March 15, 1990, 6.

Getting noticed was not always the point though, although sometimes it was. *Southern Voice* thought that getting noticed was a step in the process. They said "when we get noticed, people talk to us. And… when we start a person-to-person dialogue with someone, we tend to get what we want. Bits and pieces at a time, perhaps. But it comes." It was an attitude that expressed hope in direct action "people power" but was committed to working within the system. It presumed that there was a unity in cause that could be simply expressed with the aim to "get what we want." *SoVo* seemed to think that ACT UP could help gay and lesbian activists win the prizes of mainstream political participation. Many well-intentioned mainstream activists still failed to realize that, as Jim Allen had put it, "home ownership is not a gay right." Yet they had started to see the value in acting up.

The ACT UP sodomy protest at the Capitol building had proved contentious in the community. Some spoke out against it and condemned the action as detrimental to what others characterized as a flimsy support system in the first place. Sabrina Sojourner made it a point to convey that political messages were not the same as action. However, even the message being sent was vacillating and she argued that conditional support for sodomy repeal was misguided. In Atlanta, some gay and lesbian activists decided the best approach for getting pro-gay legislation into circulation with favorable support was through discreet political lobbying and quiet passage. The 1986 anti-discrimination ordinance was passed just this way, with the gay press noting it quietly went through a city commission vote that was unpublicized and the product of just a few people who negotiated for it. It was also very limited in scope and because of the way it was passed, alienated a good many people in the gay and lesbian community by not only shutting them out of the democratic process but also by advocating for behind-the-scenes, insider, closed-door type of politics.

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[91] Ibid.

Writing for *Southern Voice* Al Cotton considered the politics of the movement in a general discussion that outlined many of the major arguments at the time.[92] Cotton's article "The Great Catch-22 in Gay Activism" included a review of a recent book by gay political activists Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen who advocated for the mainstream, assimilationist strategy. Their book, *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90's*, Cotton said "presents the "respectable" response to discrimination, one that supporters propose should take the place of ACT UP's radical, polarizing and in-your- face aggression toward the system."[93] Cotton called the political divide the debate between "separatism vs. assimilation," which spoke more to an emerging debate rather than the immediate past, an effect of ACT UP activism and their growth in the last few years. This new approach advocated by Madsen and Kirk was in line with the "more respectable" leaders in Atlanta. Cotton argued that two of the most vocal opponents of the sodomy demonstration showed a local example of mainstreaming. He said

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[92] Al Cotton, "The Catch-22 in Gay Activism," *Southern Voice*, March 1, 1990, 1, 15.

[93] Cotton, "The Catch-22 in Gay Activism."

> MACGLO Former Executive Secretary Jeffrey Laymon and lobbyist Chris Hagin… who denounced the ACT UP demonstration and refused to participate in it. Kirk and Madsen would look at the image the demonstration projected—radical, aggressive, actively pushing sodomy in the faces of Georgia legislators—and say that it did nothing but alienate and embarrass potential allies.

Chris Hagin and Jeffrey Laymon found themselves at the center of another recent complicated controversy in the community. In 1989 the Atlanta Gay Center attempted to move into a historically black neighborhood in Atlanta, which involved rezoning a residential home.[94] and the public neighborhood meetings revealed a significant amount of homophobic prejudice and resentment at the idea of gay people moving into the neighborhood. Hagin and Laymon publicly sided with neighborhood activists against the Gay Center. Residents were likely opposed to the gentrification of their neighborhood, but Hagin and Laymon overlooked the anti-gay sentiment that motivated many of those opposed to the move. Both men wanted to maintain their relationships with people in positions of power in city government and sometimes valued compromise over solidarity with other gay leaders.

Al Cotton was not sold on the effectiveness of the mainstreamed campaign for acceptability that Kirk and Madsen advocated, but nether was he sold on ACT UP's particular brand of righteous anger turned into empowerment. Cotton noted that in 1983, Edmund White rewrote his introduction for *States of Desire* because he thought that the movement was in the process of mainstreaming. This was, however, before the onslaught of AIDS, which at that point had only taken 1300 lives. Since then many more thousands of deaths and years of government silence. Cotton said the AIDS epidemic "changed the rules of the game." He summed up the divisive internal debates with a mediation on the modern gay and lesbian rights movement, where he eloquently defined the frustrations of gay and lesbian politics. Cotton said

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[94] "Not In My Neighborhood," *The News*, September 28, 1988, 1, 6, 7. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

> The great Catch-22 of the lesbian and gay rights movement is the paradox that to earn our rights, we must be both outrageous and respectable, ostentatious and invisible; that we must find some way to work within the system and to criticize it from the outside.[95]

After the Ball made the case that to achieve mainstream success and equality gays and lesbians needed to make themselves palatable to Americans. They wanted to replace the outrage in the streets with a slick media campaign in the pages and on the TV screens. The authors ultimate goal was to transform the movement by "moving activism into the realm of the gay middle-class."[96]

Activism for Mainstreamers

That spring articles appeared in the *Southern Voice* that reminded the city that there was room in the movement for more than just ACT UP. Chuck Cummings, past editor of AALGA's newsletter, *Crossroads*, wrote an article titled "Gay Conservatives: No Room at the Table?"[97] Cummings, though, made it abundantly clear that he was only writing the piece for journalism, at the end of the article it was noted that he was "neither Republican, nor conservative." The article outlined a debate between two conservatives that aired on C-SPAN about the national Hate Crimes Act. The debate featured Representatives William Dannemeyer, an anti-gay conservative from California who voted against the bill and Robert Bauman, who had subtitled his memoir "the conscience of a gay conservative." Cummings interviewed an unnamed local gay conservative who was starting to organize in the Republican Party. In what proved to be a very bad assessment and prognostication about the future of Republican politics, especially in Georgia for the 1990s, the local said that "Eight years of Ronald Reagan are over, and the party is learning that America is swinging toward moderation."[98]

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[95] Cotton, "The Catch-22 in Gay Activism."

[96] Ibid.

[97] Chuck Cummings, "Gay Conservatives: No Room at the Table?" *Southern Voice*, March 15, 1990, 8.

Gay and lesbian conservatives, the local gay Republican said, would have to carve out their place in a moderate wing of the Republican Party. This position left them limited in outreach to a large part of the gay and lesbian community who rejected the kinds of compromise that limited their full equality. Cummings cited Robert Bauman's politics as an example of such compromises. Bauman had not advocated for the betterment of gay and lesbian people in the past and had once killed a fair housing bill in his home state of Maryland because it included a component that would have banned discrimination against gays and lesbians. As Cummings put it "the price of entry into the inner circles of conservative power was not only denial of one's homosexuality, but also a certain amount of BYOP (Bash Your Own People)."[99]

In the same issue that featured gay conservatives, another article, "Activism for Mainstreamers" highlighted local organizations that people could join to "work within or on the edges of the system."[100] Framed in opposition to ACT UP, the article heralded a choice for those in the community who were "caught between ACT UP and act-not." Gareth Finley opened the piece with a statement about the invisibility of such groups in

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[98] Ibid.

[99] Cummings, "Gay Conservatives."

[100] Gareth Finley, "Activism For Mainstreamers: Options For Those Caught Between ACT UP and Act-not," *Southern Voice,* March 15, 1990.

Atlanta's most recent and publicized political battles. Finley argued that the "lack of visibility—especially in mainstream media—leaves the false impression of a yawning void between ACT UP (of demonstration fame) and a tiny collection of independent lobbyists who work behind the scenes."

Atlanta's political gay and lesbian activism was more than just the divide between radical and conservative, it supported a number of moderate and progressive groups who worked inside the system. Among the organizations listed for those who might not want to participate in the radical politics of ACT UP were the American Civil Liberties Union-L/GRC, GAPAC, HRCF/Atlanta, and LEGAL. These groups all maintained the mainstream approach to political lobbying and traditional gay and lesbian civil rights activism. The piece included short descriptions and information about the groups, their officers, mission, and the scope of their political activism. The lists of officers revealed a lack of lesbian participation, or at least lesbian leadership in these organizations. It seemed that none of the organizations had implemented gender parity policies in their own executive leadership boards. Of the sixteen Atlanta activists cited in the paper only four were women and only one, Cathy Woolard was listed as an officer, the President of the L/GRC and was also a paid organizer for the HRCF. While not as easily identifiable, the racial composition of these groups was most likely to be majority white, and at least one had all white officers. Two years earlier when *Southern Voice* reported on the "startling" win of ten lesbian and gay Democrats to the DeKalb County Democratic

Committee, all ten were white, two were women, and one was more startling because of his later conservative turn—Jeffrey Laymon.[101]

The conversations around mainstream activism, radicalism, and direct action protest reflected the changes that ACT UP effected on the movement. ACT UP offered a kind of political activism that allowed for emotive expressions—it encapsulated the grief and rage of a community that was left to die when they faced a public health crisis without government assistance.[102] ACT UP challenged gay and lesbian people who were not political as they forced the issue of visibility in a non-conformist, non-insider way. It was not a tactic that was universally approved of in the gay and lesbian political community. For mainstreamers, if legal remedies were to be effectively sought, so said the argument, they would only be won by masses of people who came out and demanded their equal rights. To get attention and remain worthy of respect became a concern of the movement.

For many people ACT UP left a sour taste in their mouths as their radical protests had the potential to alienate moderate allies, as was seen in the sodomy protest in Atlanta in January. Kirk and Madsen wanted to move the movement into moderation and assimilation, "into the realm of the gay middle-class." Mainstreaming eventually caught on and took over the movement but not before the gay and lesbian community experienced another major wave of radical direct action protest activism.[103] Mainstream and conservative activism for gay and lesbian people in Atlanta came to the forefront of discussions in 1990. In the spring, in New York City, a new kind of radicalism was coming into formation with the organization of the group Queer Nation. Queer Nation exploded just as ACT UP had done three years before.

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[101] Wendy Morse, "10 Gays and Lesbians Take Seats in the DeKalb Democratic Party," *Southern Voice,* September 29, 1988, 3.

[102] Gould, *Moving Politics*.

[103] Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good*, 555-59; Vaid, *Virtual Equality*, 213-19.

Queer Nation/Atlanta was still many months from forming. It would not be until the fall that local Atlantans created their own chapter. When they did come together, the group combined aspects of traditional civil rights activism, mainstream visibility, and direct action protest. Queer Nation/Atlanta pushed the politics of gay and lesbian rights but did so in a respectable way and targeted local institutions. The group was less radical and in-your-face aggressive than in other cities like New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles and that seemed to work to politicize the gay and lesbian community in the city finally.

CHAPTER 11

“GAY AMERICA LOVES YOU”:

THE GAY, LESBIAN, AND QUEER MOVEMENT, 1988- 1990

Opening the Lavender Suitcase

Inside the perimeter, gay and lesbian life was cultured as white and middle-class. It centered around gayborhoods like Midtown, Little Five Points, Virginia Highland, and for the wealthier, Buckhead. Outside the perimeter was thought to be, by many, not a literal wasteland but a dangerous and hostile zone. A video from the late 1990s showed a group of gay men on their way to “Pearl Day,” an event where gay and lesbian people wore pearls to Six Flags amusement park located outside of Atlanta in Cobb county. The group stopped their rented limousine at a McDonald’s for breakfast. As they ordered their meals, one of the men jokingly commented that it was hard to understand the employee because “we’re outside the perimeter, they don’t understand English here.”[1] Sometimes Atlantans used the acronym “OTP” to indicate outside the perimeter, which referred to the highway system that encircled Atlanta. An address ITP, inside the perimeter, for Atlantans indicated your city resident bona fides. The comment reflected a commonly held antipathy about the rest of Georgia and those parts outside Atlanta.

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[1] “Jody Films Pearl Day! This is for the KIDS!” Joey’s Midtown Madness Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MO_I0fGEOHA. Accessed on August 19, 2018.

In the summer of 1990 *Southern Voice* profiled suburban life from an unusually self-aware position with a number of articles about how queer life was different in the suburbs.[2] Debbie Fraker's piece "Coming Out in Cobb" examined modern queer life in Cobb county, but was subtitled "Our self-admitted queer intown snob Debbie Fraker goes in search of gay and lesbian life beyond the perimeter."[3] Fraker's research included talking to nearly twenty gay and lesbian Cobb county residents, who reported that life was definitely not easier in the suburbs but that it had its benefits. The suburbs were less expensive, less crowded, and safer than the city. They also had far less out gay and lesbian people so opportunities for communal activities and socializing were severely limited.

Debbie Fraker interviewed Cobb resident, Samantha Claar, a lesbian and feminist activist who worked for NOW about why she wanted to move to the city.[4] Claar wanted to move away after two decades of life in Cobb for a number of reasons but ultimately she noted that she was tired of altering her behavior. She was not closeted but said she "unconsciously moderated herself." In another report about queer suburban like K.D. Childers provided gay and lesbian readers with some insights from local Cobb County officials, the Mayors of Smyrna and Marietta.[5] Both told Chiders they personally knew no gay or lesbian people who lived in Cobb county but they knew there were gays and lesbians living in Cobb. Childers reported that local media paid little to no attention to gay and lesbian news. It was maybe not an overtly hostile place for gays and lesbians to live, but invisibility remained the biggest issue in Cobb. Cobb would undergo rapid change in regards to its friendliness and visibility of the gay community over the next three years. It became the center of a national controversy after the county passed an anti-gay resolution in 1993. Local Atlanta activists instigated a campaign against the county that capitalized on the city's Olympics plans and organized in a group called "Keep Olympics Out of Cobb."[6]

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[2] Debbie Fraker, "Coming Out in Cobb," "Back From the Burbs;" K.D. Childers, "Close But No Midtown," *Southern Voice*, August 30, 1990, 1, 5.

[3] Fraker, "Coming Out in Cobb."

[4] Fraker, "Back From the Burbs."

[5] Childers, "Close But No Midtown."

A month later *Southern Voice* published an indignant letter from Greg Henry of Chamblee, Georgia who took issue with Debbie Fraker's articles.[7] Henry was mad at the incredulous tone Fraker used when she asked "why anyone would be gay and choose to live in the suburbs?" Henry revealed much about his personal dislike of what he perceived as the "gay community" in Atlanta. He objected to the idea that if he lived in the city his Midtown neighbors would call him "girlfriend" and that their closets probably held only "pink tanktops and spandex." What angered him most, though, was Fraker's usage of the word queer to describe gay and lesbian people. Greg Henry found the term deeply offensive and added that none of his friends used the word queer to describe themselves.

Atlantans expanded the gay and lesbian community to include the suburbs and redefined how the city's geography influenced their idea of community. That summer, one newcomer to the city, Don who called himself a "rural North Carolinian fag" wrote to *Southern Voice* about adjusting to "Atlanta and its abundance of lesbian liberty and faggot freedom." In Atlanta he was able to socialize with more gay people than had been in his entire community back home. He could kiss a romantic partner freely in the city but he still felt the paranoia of rural homophobia. Back home he was conditioned to watch out for "large men toting shotguns notched with pink triangles lurking nearby every time my lips pucker in the presence of a man." Caufield had only been in town for two weeks but already he saw a potential downside to living in the city of gay abundance. Because of Atlanta's large community and opportunities for socializing, he lamented that he and his lover were already having difficulties. Despite his recent arrival he was immediately aware of deeper differences. He compared his former and smaller gay community's limited awareness of AIDS to how it felt in Atlanta where "the tragedy bleeds profusely." He cast the city's gay and lesbian community in parallels, saying "Atlanta is a city to dread and a city to cherish—an odd symbiosis of concern and nonchalance, kindness and selfishness, opportunity and disadvantage."[8]

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[6] Chenault and Braukman, *Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History,* 107-8; Fleischmann and Hardman, "Hitting Below," 11, 15.

[7] Greg Henry, "Gay, Suburban, and Proud," *Southern Voice,* September 13, 1990, 7.

Don Caufield's letter to *Southern Voice* was printed under the title, "Opening the Lavender Suitcase." It was a cute name that riffed on ideas of migration, queer geographies, and gay and lesbian communities. Caufield moved from the rural South to the big city in the South, Atlanta, and found what he knew would be there—a large gay and lesbian community. Living in Atlanta meant he had to learn how to "acclimatize and adapt." Part of the adaptation would be learning to live openly as an out gay man. His letter related his place in the journey as he admitted that he wasn't yet ready to fly a rainbow flag. He hoped that living in the city and in the community would help him become the kind of gay man who would fly a rainbow flag. The lavender suitcase indicated the travel and change element that was often a connective aspect of coming out stories for many gay and lesbian people. Though native gay and lesbian Atlantans must have made up an unknowable size of the community, Atlanta was a major queer center for the Southeast and grew its community with people who moved to the city because of its reputation as a safe(r) place for queer people in the Southeast.

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[8] Don Caufield, "Opening the Lavender Suitcase," *Southern Voice,* August 16, 1990, 7.

Activists promoted a new image of respectability and mainstream visibility through organizing and projects that sought to capitalize on a new era of activism in Atlanta. In the summer of 1990, a local activist designed a massive billboard that was displayed on the city's busy highways. The billboard project became a flashpoint in the community as radical and mainstream activists voiced their opinions of its message, "Gay America Loves You," printed over a billowing American flag. Pride that year set off another round of critical evaluation of the event and its less than stellar crowd size. The conversations were different that year though because of the growing activism of the direct action group, Queer Nation.

As the mainstream national political agenda focused on creating a community of gay and lesbian people who were non-threatening to straight people, another wave of radical activism developed. Atlanta's lesbian and gay community reacted to the rise of the word queer as an identity and they dealt with growing divisions in the community regarding mainstreaming vs. radical activism. These issues became more complicated as the community expanded outside the generally more liberal and progressive confines of the city. Racial and class dynamics challenged the status quo and shaped change as divides were addressed in the community during the era.[9]

"*Celebrating Our History, Creating Our Future": Black, Gay, and Lesbian in Atlanta*

Within Atlanta's black gay and lesbian community, the politics of middle-class respectability was challenged by a new wave of activists influenced by direct action and protest activism. Some activists challenged older alliances made between business elites and the city's Democratic political machine and women became involved and visible in the African American gay and lesbian community for the first time. Atlanta's black gay and lesbian activists had a dual agenda as they fought for inclusion within the broader lesbian and gay community in Atlanta and engaged in vital work within their own racial community to overcome, educate, and combat homophobia.

In 1988, activists met across the country to coordinate and organize in regional and national gay and lesbian movement meetings. The year of conferences included meetings for people of color, lesbians, and a new national annual conference organized by the NGLTF called Creating Change.[10] The conferences kicked off in February with the first National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Conference held in Los Angeles, followed in the same month by what was called the "War Conference" that met in Warrenton, Virginia. The War Conference followed up on National March activism and was intended to be a movement strategy meeting.[11]

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[9] Vaid, *Virtually Equality*, 274-306; Eric Brandt ed., *Dangerous Liaisons: Blacks, Gays, and the Struggle for Equality* (New York: New Press, 1999).

[10] Cliff O'Neill, "Lesbian/Gay Activists Meet for 'Creating Change' Conference," *Southern Voice*, November 23, 1989, Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 228-29.

[11] Vaid, *Virtually Equality*, 222.

The timing of the meetings caused some division in the movement community. The Leadership Conference and the War Conference were both held in February and on opposite sides of the country just a few weeks apart. For many gay and lesbian people of color, it represented a failure of the national movement to consider the needs of other communities in the planning and logistics of a national movement. The short turnaround between the Leadership Conference for gay and lesbian people of color and the War Conference for all movement activists forced many to make a choice between the two. For many working-class people, people of color, single women, and single parents, economic realities intruded upon their activism in practical ways: meetings, marches, and conferences cost money and time. For some in the community this forced choice (which could have been averted well in advance by a change in date to accommodate for other activism) symbolized the veneer of a unified national movement.

After the War Conference, longtime black gay activist Charles Stewart, took a dim view of the current movement as represented in the community of activists who gathered in Virginia.[12] In a reflective piece, he dissented from the "Lesbians and Gays of Color Caucus" who had adopted a resolution during the conference that sought to remedy and address racial representation and inclusion. The group presented their position and expressed disappointment that not even a dozen people were represented in their caucus; it was stark and clear evidence that people of color were visibly absent. Stewart noted that some minority members boycotted the conference "as a protest against a nationwide pattern of indifference to minority concerns."[13] Stewart's essay about the War Conference expressed his deep resignation, disappointment, and solidifying disconnection with the white gay and lesbian mainstream movement.

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[12] Charles Stewart, "The War Conference: A Dissent from the Lesbians and Gays of Color Caucus Report," National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Conference Program, February 17-20, 1989. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 4.

It was an opinion that probably reflected a common sentiment in gay and lesbian communities of color—that the national movement's agenda did not necessarily reflect their concerns and made little attempt to include them. Charles Stewart's criticism of the organizational logistics of conference planning showed how the white gay and lesbian community failed to reckon with the unconscious but common racism that manifested in institutional and professional preference. This could be seen in the advancement of agendas that reflected, for the most part, the concerns and issues of white, middle-class gay men. Movement leaders had seemingly showed to Stewart that they were unwilling to cede power and control and let the movement become diverse and representational. He said

> I have learned at this "war conference": That we are indeed in a war, but we do not fight together as brethren or as compatriots…We fight on different battle fronts, in different arenas, with different weapons and resources. We do not share consensus on who the enemy is or who our friends are. We are, in fact, two different armies, without a common strategy.[14]

Stewart's experience at the War Conference in 1988 led him to the conclusion that the "inclusion of lesbians and gays of color is not a priority for the Anglo movement." His reaction to the realization was decisive and sundering. He said he once "felt torn between allegiance to the people of my heritage and the people of my heart. I am no longer torn."

The Leadership Conference was an example of the kind of community organizing that emerged in the late 1980s as gay and lesbian politics diversified as more people came out and organized within their own communities of affinity and kin.[15] The Leadership Conference in L.A. in 1988 was cosponsored by two national organizations for people of color in the period, BWMT and the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays. National organizations for gay and lesbian people of color were limited throughout the 1980s but local communities were supported by numerous regional organizations and political activists, like AALGA in Atlanta.[16]

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Stewart, "The War Conference."

In 1986, a visit to Atlanta by Gil Gerald, a National Coalition leader, was one of the catalysts cited by AALGA for its first organizational emergence.[17] AALGA initially had conversations about officially affiliating with the national group but eventually chose to remain an independent organization. Atlanta's BWMT chapter was still active but the national organization suffered in the 1980s as internal politics and administrations were plagued with issues and organizational fights.[18] Throughout the decade the group struggled to develop a national movement because members were unsettled on the terms of the relationships between chapter groups and the national leadership structure. BWMT/Atlanta had, in fact, determined after the controversial conference in 1985 to limit their dues payment to the national organization. They decided to limit their contributions to the bare minimum that maintained the chapter's membership nationally. It seemed like an attempt to register a complaint against their perceived mistreatment but it was also a statement that conveyed their objections to certain leadership decisions made by the national board.[19]

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[15] Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 295.

[16] Keith Boykin, *One More River to Cross: Black and Gay in America* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998).

[17] "History of African American Lesbian/Gay Alliance."

[18] Regis D'Angiolini, *Smashing Racism: The History of Black and White Men Together/Men of All Colors Together Philadelphia*, 17-19; Jim Marks, "Ten Years Together in Black and White," *Outweek*, July 25, 1990, 22-25, 30.

In the early 1990s, the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays was still technically operative, but the group really dissolved sometime in this period but had no official death certificate. It was for some time, formally an organization rather than a working organization.[20] BWMT and the National Coalition were still important organizations for accessing a national community of gay and lesbian people of color. The groups pulled together people from across the country to organize around their needs in a way that the national movement failed them. The leadership conference allowed gay and lesbian people of color the opportunity to address overlooked and under-acknowledged aspects of intersectionality in national gay and lesbian rights politics. These activists considered how communities connected in struggles against homophobia, racism, sexism, and economic opportunity.

Charles Stewart's grim essay about the War Conference was reprinted as part of the program for the second Leadership Conference held again in February in L.A. It was the most severe rebuke included in the program and stood out from the generally positive tone. The organizational essay, "Why a National Conference?" asserted that black gay and lesbian leadership was needed to combat homophobia and racism.[21] The Leadership

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[19] Mike Smith, To Members of the Board of Directors, National Association of Black and White Men Together, September 27, 1987; James Credle, Dear Mike, September 23, 1987. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 3; D'Angiolini, *Smashing Racism*, 17-19.

[20] Vaid, *Virtual Equality*, 268; Johnny L. Bailey, "'As Proud of Our Gayness, as We Are of Our Blackness': The Political and Social Development of the African-American LGBTQ Community in Baltimore and Washington, D.C., 1975-1991" (PhD diss., Morgan State University, 2017), 195-97.

[21] "Why a National Conference," National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Conference Program, February 17-20, 1989. AHC, BWMT Records, Box 4.

Conference filled an important need because "no one has ever successfully addressed the needs of Black Gays and Lesbians." Organizers said this led to the unfortunate reality that black gay and lesbian people were "far less conscious, productive, and loyal to either the Gay or Black movement as a whole." This dynamic "assured that Black Gays and Lesbians would be at best indifferent to a Black, non-gay agenda and at worst hostile to the goals and objectives of the non-Black, Gay movement."[22]

Excluded from leadership opportunities in straight black organizations and the white gay and lesbian movement, many black gays and lesbians became alienated from both. The NBGLC aimed to remedy this. The Leadership Conference would "nurture" and "support" members of the community as they did the important work of challenging straight black communities and white gay and lesbian communities to acknowledge and address the people who were part of both communities. Ricky Wilson, an AALGA member, attended the first conference, which was inaugurated with the theme "Leadership! What Have We Learned? What Can We Share?"[23] The second conference in 1989, "Loving Ourselves, Healing Ourselves, Preparing for the 21st Century" explored topics in panels related to a variety of issues, with AIDS and health related sessions well-represented. Other panels covered economic stability and opportunity, like "How to Buy Your First Home," and the program included a range of topics with panels on political organizing, lobbying, and lesbian sexuality.[24]

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Ricky Wilson, "NBGCL," *Southern Voice,* March 1, 1988, 10.

[24] National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Conference Program.

The third annual Leadership Conference met in February of 1990 and for the first time, outside L.A., in Atlanta. Having the conference meet in Atlanta showed the product of black gay and lesbian activists' intense and busy activism over the last few years. Hosted by members of AALGA and other groups like BWMT, having the conference in Atlanta spoke to the importance of place in the national and regional black community. It was a city called affectionately by many the "Black Mecca of the South."[25] Atlanta's black gay and lesbian community proved to national leadership that they could organize the event and it was an important validation of the work the community did in the city.

The Leadership Conference's theme that year highlighted Atlanta's historical connection to the African American Civil Rights Movement, "Celebrating Our History, Creating Our Future." Black gay and lesbian activists in AALGA were instrumental in bringing the conference to the Southeast. Pat Lewis, a member of AALGA, wrote about the opportunity that the conference represented for the community in the *Southern Voice*.[26] She said the "Leadership Forum," the organizational body behind the conference, chose Atlanta because "Atlanta's progressive; there's lots happening here."[27] *SoVo* covered the conference with articles before the event and with two covers in February, the month of the conference. Their coverage made AALGA and the Leadership Conference more visible to a wider and whiter gay and lesbian community. The cover of the February 1st issue asked the question "Where and how do Black lesbians and gay men fit into their community of origin and into the white-defined lesbian and gay community?"[28] This was an important question that many black gay and lesbian activists asked over the years. It was a key factor in first organizing the Leadership Conference.

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[25] Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 5-7.

[26] Pat Lewis, "Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Conference: Opportunity for Atlanta's Gay People of Color," *Southern Voice*, January 18, 1990, 6.

[27] Gary Kaupman, "National Black Gay and Lesbian Conference Comes to Atlanta," *Southern Voice,* February 1, 1990, 5.

AALGA had come some ways in defining their place in the movements. They directly and consistently addressed problematic areas of gay and lesbian political activism, which engaged and evolved members attitudes. AALGA tackled divisions between men and women and how sexism divided and degraded the movement. Charles Nelson said that Atlanta's progress was in part due to the fact that they confronted the thorny issue of the gender divide. He said "In particular, we wanted to close the separation between lesbians and gay men. We did not want that (the separation) to happen. What is unique about us is that we try to bridge that gap."[29] As evidence of their ability to back up words with actions they organized a "health institute" as part of the conference that included a focus on women's health concerns, in addition to the issues of chemical dependence and HIV in the community. AALGA co-chair Joan Garner agreed with Nelson in that they were a different organization because "as a co-sexual organization, we're bridging the gap between gay men and lesbians."[30] The group made improving relationships and cooperation between gay men and lesbian women a clear priority and open goal of their work.

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[28] *Southern Voice,* February 1, 1990, 1.

[29] Charlene Ball, "Outlines: Charles Nelson: Bringing His Community Together," *Southern Voice*, February 1, 1990, 15.

[30] Charlene Ball, "Outlines: Joan Garner: True to Herself," *Southern Voice*, March 29, 1990, 12.

The organization seemed less successful in their bridge efforts as they interacted with the straight black community.[31] Pat Lewis acknowledged the lag to Gary Kaupman and noted Atlanta "doesn't have as many connections" as the black gay and lesbian community in L.A. She admitted those connections were "almost non-existent."[32] "Louisa," a pseudonym for a local woman closeted enough to not use her real name, said this was a major source of frustration in organizing the event. She told *Southern Voice* that finding volunteers was difficult because closeted women were reluctant to out themselves and straight women were afraid of being sexually approached. Louisa bluntly broke the situation down for readers, "The lesbians tell me they're afraid to participate because they don't want people to know they're lesbians. And the straight women are scared that they're gonna' get hit on by the lesbians." It was an instance of blatant homophobia that was surely disappointing to hear could still manifest in such a way. Activist Byllye Avery, an out lesbian who worked in the feminist health movement addressed the same issues in her professional life. She highlighted the difference between gay and lesbian communities and straight black communities. After she came out she said "I was accepted among the white women more so than black women. Black women didn't talk about it, but — some kind of shunned me. A few were accepting, but it was kind of hurtful because most were not accepting."[33]

After the conference AALGA members reflected on their next moves. Joan Garner told *Southern Voice* that one of the major priorities for the group in the future was to address the divide between straight and gay and lesbian black people. She told Charlene Ball that "We're looking at ways to reach more of our community. Also, we're looking at ways of educating the straight Black community about lesbians and gays." When Ball queried her about conservatism in the black community, Garner responded that "Black people have been discreet about being gay. But we're in an era now in which gayness is one of the major political issues. So Blacks are having to face that challenge. We want straights to be aware of us and of our issues."[34] In a moment of high profile illumination of this very issue, in March, Martin Luther King, Jr. III made national and especially local gay press headlines when he made homophobic statements to a group of students at a community event in upstate New York where he was speaking about civil rights.[35] King's remarks were reprinted in *SoVo* without much context. They reported he explained that "Our population is really all kind of mixed up right now. I mean we've got a straight community and a community we call the gay community.... We laugh, but that's real." His continued commentary defended his homophobic position and proved controversial as he related that "Any man who has a desire to be with another man has a problem in my opinion."[36]

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[31] Brandt, *Dangerous Liaisons*.

[32] Kaupman, "National Black Gay."

[33] Byllye Avery interviewed by Loretta Ross, July 21-22, 2005, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, 69. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

As a Fulton County Commissioner, Martin Luther King, Jr. III was an elected representative well known to Atlanta and a nationally known figure. His comments about the gay and lesbian community were bound to draw criticism. *Southern Voice* connected

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[34] Ball, "Outlines: Joan Garner."

[35] "King Apologizes for 'Uninformed' Homophobia," *Southern Voice*, March 15, 1990, 2.

[36] Ibid.

King's viewpoints to another prominent Atlantan, former Mayor Andrew Young, who "according to a longtime family friend" had taught him everything he knew about the gay and lesbian community. King's subsequent apology attempted to make amends with the community. He was filled with "deep regret" over the incident and was aware that his comments caused "a great deal of concern and pain." His casual homophobia and anti-gay sentiment was broadcast to the entire gay and lesbian community though it was not surprising. Another Fulton County Commissioner, Lee Roach, was quoted in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* in agreement with King. Roach told the paper "All he said was that gays have a problem.... I think everybody who is not gay would say, 'Hey, Marty, I think you're right.'"

Martin Luther King, Jr. III qualified his statements with the phrase "in my opinion," which became a key point, especially to those who defended him. AALGA co-chair Charles Nelson told *Southern Voice* that King needed to be more careful when he was speaking as a public figure. He needed to make sure his private feelings did not influence his public work. But ultimately Nelson said "I have a hard time faulting him for his opinions." *SoVo* seemed to disagree about the perceived line between private anti-gay feelings and allied public persona. The paper's reporter thought his comments looked like more of Andrew Young's politics whose "religiously based difficulty with lesbians and gay men was a thorn in the side of activists throughout his term as Mayor."[37]

Southern Voice's coverage of King's controversial comments included two pieces that ran together on the same page framed in opposition. The layout represented the two main political and activist frameworks of the gay and lesbian movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The two pieces—one a letter to the editor and the other a regular column—argued the main differences in the debates on separatism and assimilation and radical direct action and mainstream political activism. In his letter to *SoVo* Jeffrey McIntyre offered a simple explanation for King's prejudice.[38] He considered that it was possible that King did not actually know any out gay or lesbian people. But he also distributed some advice that was directly from the mainstream movement's playbook. He suggested that more people around King needed to come out of the closet, which would help him become more tolerant about gay/lesbian sexuality based on personal relationships. McIntyre explained

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[37] "King Apologizes for 'Uninformed' Homophobia."

> The more you learn about the lives of gay and lesbian people, the more you will realize that there are really very few differences. You will learn that we are lawyers, secretaries, construction workers, pastors, city employees, and that we represent every economic, educational and racial segment of society. You will learn that the largest problem faced by gay and lesbian people is the perception of people who really know very little about us.

K.C. Wildmoon used her regular column "Heterodoxy," to address the controversy too. Wildmoon raged at the hypocrisy inherent in King's words and pointed out that his comments to students were made during a presentation where he was "ironically speaking about intolerance."[39] She bluntly summarized his words, "Martin Luther King III thinks we Queers have a problem." Wildmoon wasn't so sure about McIntyre's faith in the idea that personal contact could overcome prejudice. What most troubled her was that King's words would have a damaging effect on some of his student audience. She implied the damage was already done in her rhetorical question, "How many of those 750 kids are going to be Queer?"

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[38] Jeffrey McIntyre, "Dear Mr. King," *Southern Voice*, March 1, 1990, 7.

[39] K.C. Wildmoon, "Heterodoxy," *Southern Voice*, March 1, 1990, 7.

Jeffrey McIntyre spoke about the potential redemption of people like King, who harbored prejudice in their hearts.[40] He shared a personal and heartfelt story about a lifetime spent trying to undo the damage of learned prejudice. He was in the process of overcoming his own racism that was taught to him by his racist father. He thought his father's racism stemmed from the fact that he ultimately did not know any black people. It seemed to McIntyre that King's homophobia might also be rooted in such a learned system. However, he wasn't ready to forgive unconditionally. With a more forceful nod to the politics of the city, he closed his letter with a warning. He told King "it would be prudent of you to consider the degree to which other prominent politicians in this city are recognizing the gay and lesbian population as a significant voting constituency."

Making gay and lesbian politics a priority for straight politicians was a hard sell in conservative places. In Atlanta, moderate and progressive Democratic politics could still lean towards religious and social conservativism.[41] Atlanta's city politics was generally more conservative, which made it harder for gay and lesbian activists to work in than in other big cities like New York, San Francisco.[42] Part of the problem in Atlanta and the South generally was the perception that gay and lesbian people who lived in more conservative places were more closeted. Jeffrey McIntyre's letter to *Southern Voice* emphasized a mainstream movement goal of getting people to come out of the closet wherever they were and in all communities. The idea was to get people to come out in mass numbers—to such an extent that straight people would be unable to render them invisible anymore.

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[40] McIntyre, "Dear Mr. King."

[41] Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*, 140-68.

[42] Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good,* 526-30; Armstrong, *Forging,* 113-33.

"Gay America Loves You": Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Politics in Atlanta, 1990

The mainstream movement campaign to get people to come out in the post National March era conceptualized a social revolution that would affect political action. After the second National March was overwhelmingly ignored by the mass media in 1987 gay and lesbian activists made visibility a new priority in the movement. Immediately after the March activists redirected their energies into new projects in local communities and in regional and national associations. At the War Conference a new strategy within mainstream activism took shape that made great strides in normalizing gay and lesbian people. Mainstream activists developed a new politics of coming out that drew on a variety of tactics, implementations, and sought to cut across divisions within the lesbian and gay community.[43]

Atlanta was a revelation and life changing for many gay and lesbian people who came from other smaller and more hostile places in the region. During the spring of 1990 SAME, the local gay and lesbian arts organization that launched *Southern Voice,* supported the work of a local artist and activist Jay McDonald, a gay man who lived in Atlanta. McDonald conceived of a publicity campaign that would promote the city's gay community in a larger than life way. McDonald designed a billboard to be displayed over Atlanta and seen from the highways that dominated the city. At the beginning of June and the Pride season commuters on what Gary Kaupman called the "city's busiest section of interstate highway" were introduced to a bold display of mainstreaming.[44]

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[43] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 128-34; Vaid, *Virtual Equality*.

The highways pumped cars in and out of the city in a constant grind of daily commuter traffic. The beltway 285 forms a circle of highway around the city, interstate highways I-85 and I-75 take travelers north and south, and I-20 directs vehicles east and west. The major highways were used by local commuters to get around town and during the daily rush hour(s) of suburban commuters. Regionally the city was a central point and crossing of two major interstate highways. On I-85 you came to Atlanta from North Carolina then passed on to Alabama and on I-75 travelers came from Tennessee into Atlanta and then could travel south into Florida. Atlanta was not only a hub for air traffic with the Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport but it was also a hub and crossroads for multiple interstate and state highway systems. These transportation networks carried gays and lesbians, in addition to straight people, into the city, many of whom made it a one-way trip.

Jay McDonald's billboard campaign used the captive commuter community and the city's busy highways to wage a war of compassion. The 28 x 84 foot billboard was the largest in the city and loomed over the cars with a message of goodwill. The background of the billboard was a huge stylized billowing American flag and underneath it huge letters proclaimed "Gay America Loves You." It faced north for travelers on I-75/85 across from Grady Hospital and could be seen from many parts of the city. The billboard generated a lot of discussion and press in the community as a bold statement. In a report for *Southern Voice*, Duncan Teague noted that the billboard was possibly the "largest Gay Pride banner ever in America, certainly in Atlanta."[45]

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[44] Gary Kaupman, "Atlanta: Diversity! Opportunity! Intolerance?!" *Genre*, Summer 1991, 26. AHC, ALGHT, Dick Rhodes Papers, Box 81.

The billboard sparked enormous debate in the community. It unquestionably relied on the image of the flag to convey the mainstream notion that gay and lesbian people were just as "American," i.e. normal, traditional, and patriotic as straight people. Some gay and lesbian people were angered by its message of forgiveness, an essentially Christian and very Southern sentiment to convey in the face of AIDS and homophobia. The message of kindness and charity was in direct opposition to the rage and grief expressed in the activism of ACT UP. Jay McDonald told *Southern Voice* the idea for the billboard sprang from his own personal emotions and reactions to homophobia. He said he struggled with negativity and pessimism related to his identity as a gay man who lived in America. His project had four main goals: to "make a positive statement; project the image of a cohesive "Gay America;" combat negative stereotypes of gays and lesbians; and promote the inclusion of gay and lesbian people in mainstream America."[46] *SoVo* thought the billboard "Sounds like an idea directly from Kirk and Madsen's controversial *After the Ball*." However, McDonald, when asked about this directly, denied its influence and distanced himself from the book and the authors. He told *SoVo* "Nope. Never heard of them, or their book."[47]

The billboard was a flashpoint in the battle for unity in the gay and lesbian community. Some thought it was a "broad brushstroke" that simplified the community and their message.[48] Others were critical of the fact that "gay" subsumed them under a label that did not represent them. The billboard also risked alienating people who struggled to see themselves reflected in the pride of patriotism that its design so successfully targeted, captured, and emphasized. Surprisingly though when KC Wildmoon canvassed a small group of gay and lesbian people about the billboard she found their overall impression favorable. They expressed points of criticism but they weren't totally against it. Atlanta's positive reception of the billboard and the generally unified stance on the sentiment behind it was an idea so new to Atlanta's recently divided gay and lesbian community that it made it in as the article's sardonic subtitle. *Southern Voice* incredulously asked "Has Atlanta finally seen an expression of gay pride that no one really hates?"[49]

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[45] Duncan Teague, "The Man Behind the Billboard," *Southern Voice*, June 21, 1990, 5.

[46] "Billboard to Proclaim "Gay America Loves You," *Southern Voice*, April 26, 1990, 2.

[47] Ibid.

Joey Hartley was one Atlantan who disagreed with the sentiment behind the billboard and spoke out for the radicals who weren't interested in turning the other cheek.[50] He wrote to *Southern Voice* to let them know there were some dissenters out there after all. He "hated" the billboard because it appeared to "beg." He thought the message portrayed gay and lesbian people as victims who sought sympathy instead of equality. Hartley was angry the country rejected him. He felt no love for people who let him and other PWAs die from neglect or accepted anti-gay and homophobic violence. He extended no hand across the aisle to welcome people who rejected their loved ones despite the bonds of family kinship. Furthermore he objected to the politics of patriotic pride on display in the billboard. Hartley rejected the assumed connection that he, as an American, would have with the flag. The American flag he argued represented a problematic history that celebrated a country that conquered and took over land that was already occupied and supported its economic growth with slavery.

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[48] KC Wildmoon, "The Billboard Project: In Search of Dissenting Voices," *Southern Voice*, June 21, 1990, 1.

[49] Wildmoon, "The Billboard Project."

[50] Joey Hartley, "Billboard Perpetuates a Stereotype," *Southern Voice*, July 5, 1990, 7.

The letter then turned to a comparison of Atlanta's gay and lesbian politics vs. New York City's, where a new kind of radical activism was taking over the city. Hartley made an important case for the importance of place and region as influential to a local community's activism. He said that he was thinking of all the reasons he was against the billboard and its message on a recent trip to New York. While there he read

> a wonderful essay written by a friend entitled "I Hate Straight People." It spoke of the suppression of the anger of the Queer Nation not only by heteros but by ourselves. Nowhere is that more evident than in the South which is why I like to hop a flight to some filthy dirty city with loud, rude, obnoxious queers who have more rights than we'll ever know here.[51]

Queer Nation (QN) embarked on their first major public action that summer at Gay Pride in New York City where they handed out fliers with their controversial statements and tracts.[52]

It's likely that Joey Hartley from Atlanta encountered Queer Nation on their inaugural protest action. He was clearly impressed with their ideas. QN was a direct action radical group recently organized in New York City. They were a local group but represented a national community of queer Americans, like Joey Hartley, who felt alienated from mainstream society and subject to campaigns of hatred and violence. This

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 184; Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Nationality," in Michael Warner, ed. *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 198-202; Erin J. Rand, *Reclaiming Queer: Activist & Academic Rhetorics of Resistance* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014), 17-19.

"Queer Nation" opposed Jay McDonald's "Gay America." If the billboard represented the mainstream than Hartley aligned with radicals who rejected acceptance because it was tainted with an official indifference to AIDS that many believed bordered on genocidal.[53] Joey Hartley did not love America nor was he able to extend forgiveness to those who harmed him. He was not alone in voicing his anger, which still seethed in him even after years of ACT UP activism. He ended his letter with what seemed like a mantra that enabled him to gear up for yet another major campaign. He said, "I hate what the government of this country has done to the Queer Nation. I hate how the citizens of this country have verbally and physically abused us. And I hate that billboard."[54]

In the spring of 1990 New York activists conceived of Queer Nation, which took the radical direct action protest tactics of ACT UP but applied them to gay and lesbian activism.[55] Hartley's friend was likely an early member of the group, which focused on fighting homophobia and directly confronted the issue of anti-gay and lesbian violence in the New York streets.[56] Local ACT UP chapters spread the group's ideas and philosophies into local communities and from this base a loose national collective movement emerged.[57] Queer Nation groups formed in many cities and their proliferation renewed radical politics and activism as it reengaged people who were starting to feel burned out. QN's in-your-face aggressive and anti-mainstream politics also attracted many younger people to political activism in a new era.

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[53] Berlant and Freeman, "Queer Nationality," 193-229.

[54] Hartley, "Billboard Perpetuates."

[55] Signorile, *Queer in America*, 88; Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement,* 183-86.

[56] Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, 177, 182-84.

[57] Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 192-94; Roth, *The Life and Death*, 55-57; Vaid, *Virtual Equality*, 295-97.

Originally a New York group that fought local issues, Queer Nation, like ACT UP was adapted for use elsewhere. The organization spread quickly because it drew on the same kind of enthusiastic and defiant energy that ACT UP made so effective. In the national gay and lesbian magazine *Out/Look*, writer Alexander Chee recounted how Queer Nation's formation was a direct result of the turn in ACT UP towards treatment, medicine, and drug policy.[58] Chee said many who attended the early meetings were also interested in an ACT UP teach-in on "Lesbian and Gay Activist History." He pointed out that young activists were interested in exploring their radical past as well as their future. Chee reported that many ACT UP members said they originally joined because they were drawn to its intersectional politics of the group. When the shift towards medicalization and emphasis on patient centered issues occurred younger activists who were HIV-negative felt "baffled and disengaged."[59]

Early Queer Nation meetings in New York centered on visibility and anti-gay violence. But by the summer of 1990, just a few months along in their organization, the group evolved their political philosophy and advocated for a radical movement manifested in a new era of liberation politics. At New York Pride, a group of self-proclaimed but anonymous "Queers" handed out pamphlets that espoused the basics of their movement under the headlines: "Queers Read This" and "I Hate Straights."[60] In the text, “I Hate…” the group vented their anger and named those people and systems they hated. The first line of the essay began “I hate Jesse Helms. I hate Jesse Helms so much I’d rejoice if he dropped down dead. If someone killed him I’d consider it his own fault.”[61]

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[58] Alexander Chee, "A Queer Nationalism," *Outlook,* Winter 1991, 94.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 184; Rand, *Reclaiming Queer,* 1-2, 17-19.

The statement was an example of extreme political rhetoric from a new kind of queer activist. The language meant to shock but it also mirrored statements made by anti-gay Christian and conservative leaders about people with AIDS and gay, lesbian, and queer people in general. Queer Nation hated Ronald Reagan, the Pope, and “John fucking Cardinal fucking O’Connor.”[62] They hated straight people who universalized heterosexual lifestyles and othered queer people. QN hated “straights” who refused to listen to queer anger and change. Part of the text read, “Year after year I continue to realize that the facts of my life are irrelevant to them and that I am only half listened to, that I am an appendage to the doings of a greater world, a world of power and privilege, of the laws of installation, a world of exclusion.”[63] Joey Hartley expressed similar sentiments in his letter to *Southern Voice* about the Gay America Loves You billboard. He ultimately rejected the idea at the heart of that campaign in favor of the anger expressed in Queer Nation’s manifestoes, which clearly resonated with him.

The billboard in Atlanta was popular with many as evidenced by the jump in attendance at Pride that year. Pride saw modest increases in turnout in 1989 and 1990, but attendance in those years never reached more than the highest estimates of around 5000.

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[61] Queer Nation Pamphlet, “Queers Read This,” c. 1990. http://www.qrd.org/qrd/misc/text/queers.read.this. Accessed on November 20, 2018.

[62] Ibid.

[63] “I Hate Straights” in Queers Read This.

Southern Voice reported that summer's Pride crowd at over 3000, the largest showing since the 1978 combined Pride and Anita Bryant protest.[64] Atlantans wondered about the increase. Longtime activist Dave Hayward and occasional contributor to the *SoVo* thought it was "The billboard!" On the other hand he said "you can't dismiss the 'fed up factor.'"

Gary Kaupman's review of Pride that year included some first-hand observations of a crowd that seemed to him not much changed. Women claimed a performer made sexist comments, he overheard men complain about "lesbian music," and he observed some tension between "leather types" and "sissies." Overall, Kaupman believed the feeling of unity prevailed at Pride. This was for him symbolized when Jay McDonald took the stage, "his body obviously weakened by AIDS." McDonald told the crowd about the profound love he and his partner shared.[65] KC Wildmoon hedged her enthusiasm saying that the crowd and the event, though better than year's past, marked no real change in the status quo of the city's politics. She acknowledged that it was a great improvement in numbers but pointed out that it wasn't an exceptional turn out for a gay and lesbian community the size of Atlanta.

The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* ran an article that summer which focused on the middle-class gay and lesbian community in the city.[66] The article discussed what they faced when they tried to attain the prizes of middle-class life. *Southern Voice* editor and publisher Christina Cash told *AJC* journalist Holly Norris that living in Atlanta and having a nice home, a good job, and social life was easy if you remained closeted. Things changed when you came out though as you faced more obstacles and impediments to higher levels of success.[67] For these reasons, many Atlantans stayed closeted or at least partially so, which made it impossible to determine the size of the city's actual gay and lesbian population.[68] Some estimated it around 300, 000 which they said would have made it in the top ten for largest gay and lesbian communities in the country at the time.

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[64] Gary Kaupman, "Pictures of Pride," *Southern Voice*, July 5, 1990, 20.

[65] Ibid., 21.

[66] Holly Norris, "On parade day gays still fear 'coming out,' *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, June 24, 1990, D1, D10. AHC, ALGHT, Dick Rhodes Papers, Box 81.

Atlanta's Pride marches and celebration events never attracted a very large crowd. In part this was due to the size of the gay and lesbian population that remained closeted but it was significantly impacted by a lack of enthusiasm for the event related to leadership and organizational problems over the years. Many gay and lesbian people in Atlanta felt pushed out of Pride or not truly represented, which contributed to the low turnouts. However, Pride in 1990 seemed on its way to something great, yet some were still hesitant to proclaim victory. Wildmoon contrasted Atlanta's Pride with her experience in South Carolina's first gay and lesbian Pride event held the day before Atlanta's. She thought the efforts of the South Carolinians a far more impressive feat with "1/3 the number of people with 10 times the enthusiasm."[69] Back in Atlanta "we partied in the park and listened to the same tired speeches and the same tired promises." Wildmoon said she was tired of explaining to organizers "that it's important to have Lesbians and Queers of Color involved in organization, speaking onstage, and marching somewhere other than the rear of the pack." Atlanta's Pride did not reflect its gay and lesbian community and it needed to change for it to become successful. Wildmoon defined success as when its crowds reached "ten thousand, twenty-five thousand, with the numbers growing every year." She hoped that the rumblings of more "Queers" getting involved with Pride would change things.

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[67] Kaupman, "Pictures of Pride."

[68] Norris, "On parade day."

[69] KC Wildmoon, "Heterodoxy," *Southern Voice*, July 5, 1990, 7.

Over the summer Queer Nation chapters formed around the country. In *Southern Voice* two articles in August reported on the newly established Queer Nation/San Francisco (QN/SF).[70] Rachel Pepper, an activist and reporter from San Francisco was excited about the potential of the new group. She said though they started as "an ad hoc activist coalition bringing ACT UP style energy to promoting gay and lesbian visibility, Queer Nation could quickly become a national entity on a par with the radical group." Pepper also reported rumors about future Queer Nation chapters being organized in cities like Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles. QN ideology confronted discrimination, homophobia, harassment and other instances of inequality where they occurred.[71] Chapters could be extremely localized in their protest but were committed to drawing attention to the cause and demanded to be seen by the media. QN groups saw visibility and awareness in their actions as a core mission despite their differences on tactics. Each chapter reflected the politics of a particular community and the activists who guided the work of the movement. Queer Nation in New York and San Francisco looked and sounded different from other chapters in other places, and especially in Atlanta.[72]

Public discussions on assimilation and radicalism were a consistent and historical aspect of creating gay and lesbian political movements.[73] As Queer Nation evolved they engaged the broader community in a discussion about the usage of the identity signifier "queer." Some people struggled to find themselves in the label and outright rejected it as a derogatory and damaging insult. Those opposed thought it a slur that should be abandoned. In an interview with four of the founding members of the New York group, Jay Botcher said that Queer Nation over the last few years queer "has been developing as a term for all gay people" and it had "positive meaning." Alan Klein said the group deliberately used the word as a statement. QN embodied and embraced "the idea of reappropriating the words of our oppressors and actually decontextualizing the term "queer" and using it in a positive way to empower ourselves."[74]

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[70] Rachel Pepper, "Queer Nation Chapter Forms in San Francisco," *Southern Voice*, August 2, 1990, 2.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Michael Cunningham, "Queer/Straight," *Mother Jones*, May/June, 1992.

Queer Nation's stance on the word queer was not necessarily new but it was refashioned in light of ACT UP.[75] It was a radical and positive political affirmation of identity and a rejection of the assimilationist, mainstreamed, and acceptance based gay and lesbian activism expressed most recently and locally in Atlanta with the Gay America Loves You billboard. Gary Kaupman's review of Pride touched off a debate that highlighted the many conversations that gay and lesbian activists had surrounding the establishment of Queer Nation as a movement group and the broader spread of the term Queer as a popular and accepted identity.

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[73] Rimmerman, Wald, and Wilcox, *The Politics of Gay Rights*; Rimmerman, *The Lesbian and Gay Movements: Assimilation or Liberation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2008); Vaid, *Virtual Equality*.

[74] Rich Flowers, "Queer Nation: Questions and Answers," *Southern Voice,* September 13, 1990, 32.

[75] Rand, *Reclaiming Queer,* 1-6; Lisa Duggan, "Making It Perfectly Queer," in Duggan and Hunter, *Sex Wars*, 149-63; Berlant and Freeman, "Queer Nationality," 198-99; Gould, *Moving Politics*, 256-65.

Gary Kaupman, the editor of *Southern Voice*, had a theory about gay and lesbian community newspapers and how they functioned in dialogue to host community discussions. As smoke indicated fire, when the paper received feedback from the gay and lesbian community, he knew it was on a subject that mattered to people. He said "if three or more people (again un-orchestrated) take the time to write or call and share like feelings, that probably means there are a lot of readers who see the matter similarly."[76] In his words, a set of critical responses to his article about Pride showed a "hypersensitivity of the readers."[77]

In two letters to the editor, one from a lesbian and one from a gay man, the readers raised issues with how Kaupman reported on Pride and the usage of the word queer by *SoVo* writers. Julie Powers, from Marietta, thought she and Kaupman attended two different prides as she saw no evidence of the critical evaluations of performance or tense relations between men and women that year.[78] She argued the "divisiveness that so often seems to be the cornerstone of our community" was caused by those who were overly politically correct. She saw Gary Kaupman's apparent criticism of sexism within the gay and lesbian community to be part of the problem. The other letter came from Chuck Ross who adamantly rejected the use of queer as a label and the paper's use of it to refer to the gay and lesbian community. Ross was "appalled" that *SoVo* used the "derogatory" word so casually and claimed they were "setting a poor example with their language."

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Gary Kaupman, "Words and Meaning," *Southern Voice*, August 2, 1990, 6.

[78] Julie Powers, "Two Different Prides" *Southern Voice*, August 2, 1990, 6.

Chuck Ross questioned the quality of the paper and their knowledge of the gay and lesbian community's fights for inclusion. He asked if they did not know the history of "how homosexual men struggled with the *New York Times* to convince that newspaper to use the word "gay?"[79] Ross implied that *Southern Voice*, a gay and lesbian community newspaper that grew and prospered over the last two years in Atlanta did not represent true community feelings. For Ross it was hard to distinguish nuance in the word queer. He thought there was little difference between *SoVo's* use of the word and when a "truckload of teenagers" or Jesse Helms called them queers. He compared it to calling black people "colored" or women "chicks" and declared "Believe me, there are not many men who wish to be called "queers." Gary Kaupman was shocked to hear Ross's opinions and his letter made him feel "like a (slightly jaded) innocent who runs into an angry grizzly bear while strolling down a primrose path."[80] Kaupman couldn't believe this kind of sentiment was still prevalent. He said that "Almost every gay or lesbian person with whom I have regular contact uses words like "queer," "dyke," and "fag" to describe themselves and their friends in ways which connote personal and political power."

Atlanta's gay and lesbian community argued over terminology before but it was buried in their collective history. In 1980 Atlanta Lesbian and Gay Pride became Lesbian/Gay/Transperson Pride. The name stuck only for a few years but it was an important challenge and expansion of the week's festivities to include more diverse voices in the movement. The new name and the ideas that it supported provoked criticism from some parts of the community who objected to the addition. They thought adding identities like lesbian and transperson diluted the message of unity and confused the issue of gay rights, with little acknowledgment that when everyone was called gay some people suffered from erasure. The 1980 L/G/T Pride Committee wanted to show a commitment to inclusive change by making transpeople a visible part of that community.

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[79] Chuck Ross, "Derogatory" *Southern Voice*, August 2, 1990, 6.

[80] Kaupman, "Words and Meaning."

The expansion provoked some controversy in the community as more conservative and mainstream people spoke against it. Maria Helena Dolan, Atlanta's most visible radical for many years, wrote about the controversy for the local gay magazine *Gaybriel*. She favored the new inclusion and used her characteristic humor to deflect some of the internalized heterosexism she sensed behind the criticism. Dolan pointed out to certain parts of the gay male community that accepting the addition of transperson was an easier pill to swallow than what she ideally wanted, which was to use the word Queer to describe all the gay and lesbian and transpeople who rejected traditional gender inequalities and roles.[81] Queer, Dolan said, was a "wonderfully descriptive word. It's a taken-back term; taken out of the mouths of the oppressor, and put to use in our own. It's fun, educational, unserious, and menacing all at once."[82]

A decade later and in the post-ACT UP world of gay, lesbian, and queer activism, terminology was again at the center of debates about the meaning of the movement. The rise of a new radical wave of politics left many more conservative gay and lesbian people feeling alienated from and angry except not with straight people but with the new queer movement. In September *Southern Voice* devoted a whole issue to the debate over the word queer and the activism around it. Called "Sticks & Stones: Or, what we call ourselves and why it's such a big deal," the issue explored the arguments in greater depth with features and community perspectives. In the introduction, *SoVo* contextualized the debate and acknowledged the discussion was not just happening in Atlanta but in communities across the country. They engaged the community discussion in a sincere way and were not necessarily convinced one way or the other. *SoVo* thought Chuck Ross's letter was not an isolated opinion. They said

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[81] Maria Dolan, "When Queers Collide—A Short Account of Differing Perceptions in the Body Erotic," *Gaybriel*, (1980) 54-55, undated photocopy. AHC, ALGHT, Box 60.

[82] Ibid.

> Mr. Ross is not the only person who has taken us to task for using "queer" in a flip, clever or even neutral context, and *SoVo* isn't the only community paper to print such a letter within the last month. Obviously "queer" is a word that still pushes some buttons and carries more overtones than we realized.[83]

The *Southern Voice* "Sticks and Stones" issue showed two sets of illustrated cartoon figures on the cover.[84] Two gay men and two lesbians in argument with each other represented the oppositional stances of political activism. A mainstream gay man, conservatively attired in a suit, faced off against a radical queer man with a Mohawk and a safety pin in his ear. The mainstream woman was also dressed in a suit and wore her hair conservatively styled and had makeup on. The radical queer "womon" sported a mullet and wore a double woman symbol earing.

Speech bubbles made clear their positions in relation to their appearances. Each accused the other of misunderstanding language and willfully ignoring or holding back the progress and agency of the other. The mainstream man wanted to be called gay but the radical man called his "oversensitivity" to queer "irrational." The mainstream lesbian charged that to use “womon” was “alienating,” to which the womon responded with an objection to the other’s “total acquiescence to hetero-patriarchal lifestyles.” The speech bubbles were drawn down the page and each was connected to the other to show the tit-for-tat of the debate. Like a speech bubble maze, whatever side and statement was represented followed a path to the same place in the center, where the cartoonist had drawn the essential conclusion that each side’s arguers agreed that their positions resulted from “internalized homophobia.”

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[83] "Sticks & Stones," *Southern Voice*, September 13, 1990, 8.

[84] Ibid, 1.

Southern Voice Editor Gary Kaupman introduced the concept and reasons for the special feature issue with an editorial titled “Words ‘R’ Us.”[85] He included some news about a similar controversy in San Francisco where one gay man in an open letter to Queer Nation proposed replacing the offensive word with gay. Kaupman thought that such a proposal to replace queer with gay as a blanket term was to commit a new offence against the community. He asked about the “millions of lesbians who feel that “gay” excludes them entirely.” His personal stance on the usage of queer was positive, gleaned from “study and consideration” of radical queers before him like Harry Hay, Judy Grahn, and James Broughton. He also acknowledged that others in the community disagreed with his stance.

Gary Kaupman was willing to compromise because of the obvious controversial nature of the debate and the discussions that had dominated conversations with other gay, lesbian, and queer people. Before these discussions “I said we would only use words like queer, fag, dyke and the like when we sure that the author’s intent was positive.” Now he said, after “many hours reading and discussing the subject,” *SoVo* was willing to modify that policy. He continued, “We will not use queer, etc. in news stories unless they are part of a quote or the name of a group.”[86]

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[85] Gary Kaupman, “Words ‘R’ Us,” *Southern Voice*, September 13, 1990, 6.

The decision to amend the policy showed that *Southern Voice* was willing to respect the opinions and wishes of its readers. However, they reserved the right to allow editorial exceptions for writers who used queer in a way that passed their original “positive intent test.” *SoVo* wanted to establish that they would not censor their language to eliminate queer from its pages, but they would make sure that it was the precise word meant for conveying a specific meaning and fit for the context. Kaupman quoted writer Gustave Flaubert at the beginning of his editorial in support of the writerly sentiment that words have specific meanings. Whether or not it was difficult or dangerous, a writer had to use the one word that best fit their meaning. Flaubert said “Whatever you want to say, there is only one word that will express it; one verb to make it move; one adjective to qualify it.” In this context, Gary Kaupman seemed to say that queer, might on occasion be the one right word for usage.[87]

The center spread in the Sticks & Stones issue featured a point and counterpoint layout with editorials that represented the two sides to the argument. The side of the mainstream gay and lesbian community was represented by Matt Montgomery who argued against the destructive power of divisive words.[88] Montgomery thought that by using words like queer, dyke, or faggot the community undermined its own political and social goal of equality. He argued that the words demeaned, devalued, and disrespected the community. Montgomery was against their adoption into the language of the movement because ultimately these words had too much baggage. He thought it possible that if these words were widely adopted by the gay and lesbian community it would embolden the straight majority to continue using them against them negatively.

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[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Matt Montgomery, “Don’t Borrow Destructive Words,” *Southern Voice*, September 13, 1990, 8.

Southern Voice contributor Al Cotton gave the queer view.[89] Cotton shared his personal history with some of the words, which as it was for many, included painful memories of childhood bullying and familial traumas. He abandoned these hurtful words too for a long time. To change his relationship to these words he created a new meaning for queer and faggot, based on positive aspects of his identity. He told readers that a lot of other people were doing the same thing. He recounted an increase in the usage of these words as they had appeared in the pages of two popular gay and lesbian publications, *OutWeek* from New York City and *Gay Community News* from Boston. As the gay and lesbian press adopted the word and put it into circulation, the protest group Queer Nation started to get national attention and spread its influence. Al Cotton reported that seven chapters in different cities around the country had formed by that point, which to him indicated that "there is lots of work going on in our community to aggressively reclaim these words."[90]

The two sides of the argument represented generally a white middle-class debate about identity. In a special report that highlighted black gay and lesbian community feelings about the words issue, Vee Burns reported that much like the white community there was no unanimous winner to the gay/queer debate. She reported that overall, gay and lesbian were the preferred terms of use. In an impressive show of research skills and a commitment to delving deep, Burns surveyed around seventy people for her article.[91] She found that the majority of the people she talked to preferred to be called by their name, most of all, rather than a label. She related the casual use of words like sissy and dyke in the community and admitted she had used them to refer to her friends too. Burns was shocked and saddened to find out that of the people she talked to for her survey "90 percent felt a sense of degradation when they were addressed by a label they did not prefer even with friends or acquaintances."

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[89] Al Cotton, "Reclaiming My Oppressors' Words," *Southern Voice*, September 13, 1990, 8.

[90] Ibid.

Vee Burns used that as a jumping off point to discuss some of the finer points of labels and names in what she called the black "lesbigay" community. Some of the issues and problems surrounding controversial words related to respectability politics and the power of the closet. These were familiar arguments made about the mainstream vs. radicalism debate in the white community. Burns related a subject that was much discussed in AALGA meetings when some members objected to "flamboyant" effeminate men and their the use of the word "she" to describe other gay men or their lovers.[92] It was a problem that men and women were working through in dialogues devoted to addressing concerns out in the open.

In 1988, AALGA member John S. reported in their newsletter, *Crossroads*, about a recent meeting between the women's and men's caucuses to address what was perceived as low participation in AALGA events from lesbians. John said that at the meeting men and women both “stated that they had difficulty dealing with flamboyant men. Some felt that this behavior is a mockery of females and often leads to insulting behavior.”[93] AALGA members then resolved that “persons in the life and in the struggle need to stop and simply consider each other’s humanness.” Two years later, Vee Burns closed out her report with similar advice for the whole community that pulled politics into the realm of “common courtesy.” She asked that “Before a mouth is open to call someone other than their name, stop and ask, “what do you wish to be called” or “do you prefer I call you...,” or “do you mind if...” Amusingly, though, this common courtesy only needed to really be extended to other lesbigay people because, she said, “as far as the heterosexual community is concerned—WHAT’S IT TO YOU!!!”[94]

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[91] Vee Burns, "In LesbiGacious Color: A Minority Report," *Southern Voice*, September 13, 1990, 9.

[92] John S., "We Came Together," *Crossroads*, November 1988, 9. AHC, ALGHT, Box 68; Burns, "In LesbiGacious Color," 11.

Like a Nation Scorned

Between 1988 and 1990 continued divisions between mainstream and direct action activism kept the energy of the community engaged, locally and nationally. In Atlanta, the mainstream and assimilationist vs. radical direct action activism divide was complicated by race and class dynamics unique to the city. In February, African American gay and lesbian activists in Atlanta hosted a national leadership conference that showed how important their organizational work was in the city. The conference marked the city’s importance in the national black gay and lesbian community and reflected its status as a “Black Mecca.” *Southern Voice* in 1990 included more diverse voices from the city’s gay and lesbian community than ever before. They covered the conference with multiple articles and two covers. *SoVo's* newfound attention highlighted how under-reported was AALGA's activism in the city's gay and lesbian community news before the conference. While *SoVo* did report on African American gay and lesbian activism in the city their coverage still maintained a supplementary bias that subtly framed that activism as additional. The continued reality of racism in the gay and lesbian community and homophobia in the straight African American community still made interracial organizing and representation of gay and lesbian people of color an uphill struggle in the city.[95]

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[93] John S., “We Came Together.”

[94] Burns, “In LesbiGacious Color.”

When local activist Jay McDonald created a billboard that proclaimed "Gay America Loves You," the community was poised on the brink of transformation. The billboard represented a pause in the movement as gay and lesbian people reckoned with the growing radicalism of Queer Nation and their rhetoric against assimilation and mainstreaming, which the billboard supported in sentiment. Atlanta explored these issues in more depth as the community engaged in a public debate about the new queer politics. Discussions about the growing radicalism in the national gay and lesbian movement community were made less theoretical when Atlanta activists organized a chapter of the group. Queer Nation/Atlanta further politicized Atlanta's gay and lesbian community in a way that no other group had ever done before.

In the fall of 1990, before Queer Nation officially organized, gay, lesbian, and queer people in Atlanta were already starting to experience another wave of political protest energy. Just a few weeks after the Sticks & Stones issue, *Southern Voice* reported that Senator Jesse Helms, an arch-conservative and ardent foe of gay and lesbian equality was invited to speak in town. Helms was invited for the "Family Concerns Conference," organized by local Christian conservative and anti-gay activist, Nancy Schaeffer.[96] Schaeffer spearheaded the 1986 Citizens for Public Awareness campaign that attempted to repeal the passage of Atlanta's limited anti-gay discrimination policy.[97]

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[95] Mumford, *Not Straight, Not White*, 181-89; Bailey, "As Proud of our Gayness"; Brandt, *Dangerous Liaisons*.

Atlanta activists only found out three weeks before Helms' scheduled visit but a coalition of activists hastily put together what was one of the largest demonstrations in the city in years related to gay and lesbian rights. Protestors from ACT UP/Atlanta and a new group formed for the protest, the Stop Helms Coalition, pulled together a plan to demonstrate at the First Baptist Church of Atlanta where the conference was meeting on the day of Helms scheduled appearance, Friday October 12th. The protest was called "A Day of Outrage," a theme chosen to coordinate with ACT UP activists national actions around the country called the Week of Outrage.[98] Over 700 outraged activists heard speakers, protested with pickets, and held a die-in at the protest. Many were disappointed to find out that Senator Helms cancelled his appearance at the Family Concerns Conference, citing a need to stay in Washington D.C. to work. Undeterred by his absence, in a moment that looked much like another church protest from four years before, they circled the church and chanted "Keep the hate inside."[99]

The week after *Southern Voice* devoted its cover to the "Day of Outrage" protest.

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[96] Gary Kaupman, "Helms Stays Home," *Southern Voice,* October 25, 1990, 6.

[97] "Helms Coming to Atlanta" *Southern Voice,* October 11, 1990, 2.

[98] Roth, *The Life and Death*, 49-51.

[99] Kaupman, "Helms Stays Home."

Photographs showed activists holding a *SoVo*-designed poster for the protest they distributed to the community in an earlier issue. Two pages of the paper created a small poster sized image, a ready-made protest sign for those who were feeling too lazy or didn't have the time to devise their own witty sign. The poster showed a picture of Jesse Helms posed in a mugshot and alerted the community to a real threat, "Jesse Helms America's Most Unwanted." The *SoVo* cover declared of the protest that "Helms Hath No Fury . . .Like a Nation Scorned."[100] Though it's unclear if Queer Nation/Atlanta had already formed by the time of the protest, the paper's cover phrasing implied that the "Nation" was already there.

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[100] "Helms Hath No Fury . . .Like a Nation Scorned," *Southern Voice,* October 25, 1990, 1.

CHAPTER 12

"QUEERS TAKE PEACHTREE": QUEER NATION'S IMPACT ON ATLANTA, 1991-1992

They're Here. They're Queer. Get Used to Them.

Atlantan Maria Helena Dolan identified as Queer (and more) ten years before Queer Nation activists embraced the name. In 1980 she declared, "I'm an oddball, a freako, a destroyer of the basis for patriarchal power and order, a Queer."[1] Dolan's humorous rhetoric was an honest reflection of her radical politics, which she knew many in the gay and lesbian community disagreed with. That year during a controversy over the addition of transperson to the lesbian and gay Pride march she used her radicalism as a foil of comparative alternatives. Some people objected to the new LGT celebration, but she asked them how'd they feel about using her preferred term, "Queer Pride." She wondered if they considered the alternative "doesn't LGT make good sense then?" Dolan challenged the community to consider adopting Queer, but also understood that it was unlikely due to its radical positioning. She wrote "Until we're ready to assume the complete mantle of Queer, LGT says it gracefully for us: "We're here, and we're Queer, and we ain't going away. Get used to it, America."[2]

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[1] Maria Dolan, "When Queers Collide—A Short Account of Differing Perceptions in the Body Erotic," *Gaybriel*, undated clipping, ca. June, 1980, 54-55. AHC, ALGHT, Box 60.

[2] Ibid.

A full decade before Queer Nation formed in Atlanta, Maria Dolan's pitch for radical queer politics recalled that an earlier generation rejected it. In the next edition of *Southern Voice* after the Helms protest at the First Baptist Church on October 12th the news section included a brief report about the formation of a Queer Nation chapter in Atlanta under the title "We're Here, We're Queer, Get Used To It!" Queer Nation was "an organization dedicated to combating homophobia at the grass-roots level by promoting visibility of the lesbian and gay community."[3] Their first meeting would be held at the Little Five Points Community Center the first week of November. Just five days after they engaged in their first action, a "Queer Night Out," at a local straight sports bar called Jock's and Jill's in Midtown.

A defensive editorial *Southern Voice* made a case for the new group and attempted to dispel some of the "rumbling discontent" they recognized coming from the community.[4] It was "the same kind of belly-aching that ACT UP has had to contend with" they said. Queer Nation's message to straights applied equally to the lesbian and gay community. The editorial's title "They're Here. They're Queer. Get Used to Them." underscored this sentiment. Much of the editorial focused on setting the record straight about what happened on the night of the first action and what led to the arrests of activists at the bar. Rumors that QN members were rowdy, rude, and sexually inappropriate were inaccurate and only undermined the value of direct action. The *SoVo* editorial was decisively in favor of Queer Nation. They recognized that some people objected to the language of the new queer movement and their confrontational tactics but said "We do not and an increasingly large number of lesbians and gay men appear to be of a similar mindset."[5]

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[3] "We're Here, We're Queer, Get Used To It!" *Southern Voice,* October 25, 1990, 3.

[4] Gary Kaupman, "They're Here. They're Queer. Get Used to Them," *Southern Voice*, November 22, 1990, 9.

Queer Nation was a new movement that generally argued for an aggressive coming out of gay and lesbian people everywhere. As the groups formed in different cities they created a wider national queer community of activists who were mostly focused on urban issues of local homophobia in straight bars and in neighborhoods that were harassed and subject to anti-gay violence. QN activists aggressively asserted a right to space in the urban world. The September "Sticks and Stones" issue of *Southern Voice* reported on actions that recently formed chapters in other cities already staged. During "Queer Nights Out" activists went to straight bars as a group and engaged in public displays of affection. The "Queer Shopping Network" sent members into suburban malls handing out leaflets about QN. Some groups staged sit-ins and publicly confronted officials in "zaps." Sometimes the confrontations ended with members shouting down people with a powerful chant of "SHAME," a tactic directly borrowed from ACT UP activists, of which many QN members were drawn from.[6]

Queer Nation/Atlanta engaged in actions much like these in their first few months of existence but in the spring of 1991 they embarked on a campaign against the restaurant chain Cracker Barrel over employment discrimination. QN's activism against the restaurant chain proved transformative for them and Atlanta's larger gay, lesbian, and queer community. QN/ATL's fight with Cracker Barrel moved the focus of their activism to the suburbs and pushed the group into mainstream political activism as they disengaged from other more radical QN actions. QN/ATL's very public battle against homophobia and workplace discrimination initiated a new era of political awareness and activism in the city.

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Kaupman, "They're Here. They're Queer."

Queer Nation burst onto the New York scene in the spring of 1990. By the fall of 1991 when Atlanta activists organized they became the eighth official Queer Nation chapter. Michael Cunningham documented the quick rise and fall of QN groups across the country for *Mother Jones* magazine in May of 1992. The article only documented two years of the group's activism but it showed that despite their short life they'd made a deep impact. Cunningham's account showed how common problems, when coupled with activist burn-out, led to a decline that was almost as immediate as the group's rapid rise. In some chapters activists came together very briefly, like QN/San Francisco, which was basically defunct by the summer of 1991.[7] The first Queer Nation in New York City called it quits in 1993 and many other groups by then had also dissolved.[8] QN/ATL disbanded in the spring of 1994, which made them one of the longest lasting groups.[9]

Atlanta's Queer Nation was different from other chapters and its history has largely been ignored as the narrative focused on the group's more radical activism in other places.[10] Because each group was unique to its local community, Atlanta's QN grew and developed in the context of the city's gay and lesbian history. QN/ATL's protest campaign against Cracker Barrel lasted for over a year and at its heart was the traditional political and civil rights issue of discrimination. QN groups in New York and San Francisco led actions against homophobic violence and staged varied events that drew hundreds and thousands, but never focused on solely one issue. The Cracker Barrel protests dominated the activism of QN/ATL for most of 1991 and 1992. This had a profound effect on Atlanta's increasingly queer community as it drew national and local attention to the group and their activism. Members of QN were arrested at multiple protests, which drew 100 to 150 protestors week after week in the spring and summer of 1991. The media attention allowed QN to keep the politics visible in their actions and drive home the fact that gay and lesbian people were unprotected by employment anti-discrimination laws.

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[7] Ibid., 63.

[8] David Gerstner, *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Queer Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006) 475-76.

[9] The last group to officially disband was QN/Seattle in 1995. Rand, *Reclaiming Queer*, 172.

[10] Entries in three different queer encyclopedias limited their discussion of Queer Nation to the New York or San Francisco chapters and focused on the radicalism of the groups in these communities. Jay Blotcher said QN's "greatest accomplishment" came in 1990 when the NY group reacted to anti-gay violence and forced the police to investigate a murder in the community, which resulted in convictions. Susan Stryker's

Queer Nation's activism and success in politicizing Atlanta was made evident at the Pride March in the summer of 1991. That year the city's annual Pride celebration saw its attendance skyrocket to an estimated 30,000 people, up by at least 20,000 over 1990's estimated crowd of 5,000 to 7,000. It was the highest community turnout ever. This major victory, twenty years long in the making, reflected the phenomenal growth of gay and lesbian activism in the period and especially highlighted the major role that QN/ATL played in politicizing the community.

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entry for the now defunct website GLBTQ.com described QN's activism as "attention-grabbing direct action" and said "Rather than launching long-term campaigns to create social change, Queer Nation favored short-term, highly visible, media-oriented actions, such as same-sex kiss-ins at shopping malls." Jonathan Katz concluded the consensus style of activism "proved increasingly unwieldy" and most groups "disbanded by 1992." Blotcher in Gerstner, *Routledge International*, 476; Susan Stryker, "Queer Nation," GLBTQ.com, http://www.glbtqarchive.com/ssh/queer_nation_S.pdf; Jonathan Katz in George E. Haggerty, John Beynon, and Douglas Eisner, ed., *Gay Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2012) 725-26.

Queer Nation/Atlanta is Distinctly Atlantan: Queer Direct Action Activism

Queer Nation/Atlanta used the city's civil rights legacy as a model for their activism.[11] Early on they adopted a philosophy of non-violence in direct relation to the city's civil rights history but it was not a given that they would. Their commitment to non-violence was likely due to the fact that one of the founding members, Lynn Cothren, was committed to this kind of activism and had worked for the Martin Luther King Center for Non-Violent Social Change since 1982.[12] QN/ATL was different from other chapters in many regards but especially because the group did not subscribe to the non-hierarchical, collective, consensus style politics that other QN groups and ACT UP made a core part of their activism. Instead the group opted to have leaders like Lynn Cothren and later Cheryl Summerville who served as co-chairs.

Ladelle McWhorter discussed the connections between Queer Nation/Atlanta and their commitment to non-violent protest. In a 1997 interview, Lynn Cothren related that QN/ATL's most important action, the Cracker Barrel protests that erupted in 1991, were modelled on the civil rights movement tradition of civil disobedience and peaceful protest. Cothren said "the campaign was organized to follow Dr. King's teachings on non-violent social change." QN/ATL made their connection to local civil rights history and tradition part of their political philosophy. McWhorter noted those connections were readily apparent as “the parallels were conscious, deliberate, and philosophically and historically informed.”[13]

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[11] Ladelle McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) 19-23.

[12] Ibid., 22.

Before Queer Nation/Atlanta committed itself to non-violent direct action protest the group burst onto the city landscape much as it did in other cities. Like ACT UP Queer Nation had its origins in New York City and was a direct action, protest oriented activist group. Members formed, in part, to relieve ACT UP activists from the burden of having to address issues of homophobia and anti-gay politics in addition to their primary focus of AIDS. Groups like Queer Nation, ACT UP, and twenty years before that the Gay Liberation Front, spread out across the country. When people came together in communities and started a chapter they acted as an autonomous and independent group connected in a wider social movement but highly focused on local activism.

Queer Nation/Atlanta voted to disband in 1994, years after many other larger groups had gone defunct. Early organizer and co-chair Lynn Cothren reminisced about their beginnings that saw around 35 people attend the first meeting, a far cry from the hundreds who came out in New York City and San Francisco.[14] The small crowd listened to a New York activist tell them how to start their own chapter. The organizing also offered younger activists an opportunity to meet local people who were politically active and in the movement. Lynn Cothren met “longtime community activist” Gary Kaupman for the first time as QN/ATL organized and he helped “shape the direction of QN/Atlanta.”

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Lynn Cothren, “Not an End, But Closure,” *Southern Voice*, March 31, 1994, 17.

At the second meeting they decided their first official action would be a Queer Nights Out at the local straight sports bar Jock's and Jill's.[15] Twenty-two members of QN/ATL arrived at the bar around 10:30 on a Saturday night. Some ordered drinks, others held hands, some stood by the bar in groups or in couples and kissed. In less than an hour their presence, which was tolerated initially finally made the bar manager angry enough to call the police. *Southern Voice* reported the manager was nonplussed when two women kissed close to the bar. But when two men did the same he lost his cool and screamed at them threatening to have them arrested. After the cops showed up things really went downhill. The police arrested one activist when he asked an officer for his name as they were attempting to escort all QN members out of the bar.[16] The arrest made an impact on the group and Gary Kaupman said it "changed the tone of QN's first Night Out from playful to frightening."[17]

The early actions of Queer Nation in Atlanta looked more like those in New York or San Francisco. The protests focused on visibility and the politics of confronting straight people in their own spaces, like at the bar or the shopping mall. In another action that holiday season, a planned Queer Nights Out added elements from the Queer Shopping Network protests aimed at suburban shopping malls. On December 1 about seventy-five Queer Nationals stormed the Atlanta Underground, "Atlanta's premiere tourist attraction."[18] The group's numbers swelled as they were supported by activists from across the country who were in the city for an ACT UP protest at the Centers for Disease Control.[19] The group greeted shoppers telling them that they were gay and lesbian. Some activists kissed and one couple drew the angry attention of a security guard who finally stopped screaming at the couple when his supervisor told him to back off.[20] They ended the night on friendly terms with no arrests and minimal hostile confrontations.

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[15] "Queer Nation Atlanta Visits Jock's and Jill's," *Southern Voice*, November 22, 1990, 8.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Kaupman, "They're Here. They're Queer."

[18] Carrie Wofford, "Queer Nation Goes Underground," *Southern Voice,* December 6, 1990, 2.

At the beginning of December, QN member Padraig McManus-McLoughlin sent in a letter to *Southern Voice* that explained the purposes of the group to the community. They had taken some time to pull the document together because as he said each group "individually controls its own agenda. So, Queer Nation/Atlanta is distinctly Atlantan."[21] Their purpose statement looked much like the actions of other groups. They wanted to promote visibility, confront homophobia, correct misinformation, and to "publicize and counter assaults" committed against queer people. The last principle was distinctly Atlantan as they wanted to "Succeed in securing the aforementioned goals through the use of the principles of non-violent social change as expounded upon by Mahatma Gandhi, Leo Tolstoy, Henry David Thoreau, and Martin Luther King, Jr."[22]

Over the winter Queer Nation/Atlanta decided to take a harder look at local city politics. Lynn Cothren said the group's next major action was focused on the Mayor and the city's progress on support of the gay and lesbian community. This action turned out to be fairly controversial because it was during “a time when holding elected officials to their campaign promises was not the ticket.”[23] QN/ATL took a decidedly mainstream turn with their involvement in local politics. They researched Mayor Maynard Jackson’s campaign promises and compared them to the actions he’d taken since being in office. The group then issued a “report card” for the Mayor, who received the grade of F. On the front page of the Valentine’s Day issue of *Southern Voice* the headline read “Queer Nation Flunks the Mayor.” An editorial cartoon showed a rotund Jackson sitting in front of a chalkboard where the lines “I must try harder!” were written.[24]

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[19] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 263; Sheyn, "The Shot Heard," 22.

[20] Sandra Sparks, "Going Underground with Queer Nation," *The News*, 12/19/90-1/2/91, 13.

[21] Padraig McManus-McLoughlin, "Queer Purposes" *Southern Voice*, December 6, 1990, 8.

[22] Ibid.

Patrick Garvey suggested in *Southern Voice* that Queer Nation was grading the Mayor harshly but not without reason. He said that technically “Jackson has fulfilled some of his promises—issuing three relatively toothless executive orders and appointing one openly lesbian woman to a city board.” However, he also pointed out that Jackson had warmed relations between city hall and the gay and lesbian community recently. Things were “more cordial” with three gay and lesbian community “advisors” and a vast improvement in community relations than during Mayor Young’s terms. Nonetheless, *SoVo* seemed to side with QN in the opinion that Jackson moved too slowly on substantive issues like hate crimes legislation and worse than that he had made no moves at all on domestic partnership benefits.

Queer Nation/Atlanta organized itself differently from other chapters and early on committed to a structure that other Queer Nationals rejected. Most Queer Nation groups preferred the consensus, non-hierarchical model of political activism. Michael

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[23] Cothren, “Not an End, But Closure.”

[24] Patrick Garvey, “Queer Nation Flunks the Mayor,” *Southern Voice,* February 14, 1991, 1.

Cunningham commented on their non-traditional organizational ethos, regarding them as "ferociously democratic and decentralized."[25] Some groups operated as a forum for activists and most chapters accepted anyone who showed up as a member as they aimed to "exclude no one."[26] This seemed not to be the case in Atlanta, because by July of 1991, an offshoot organization formed with about ten members called Queer Action Caucus (Q.A.C.—pronounced Quack).[27] Q.A.C. announced their presence in Atlanta with some well-placed activist art graffiti around town. The group spray-painted neon triangles on the street with the message "Hate Crime Occurred Here."

One of Q.A.C.'s founders, Padraig McManus-McLoughlin, told *Southern Voice* that the splinter group was "dissatisfied with QN's focus on Cracker Barrel." Since the spring QN had been involved in a months-long campaign of direct action protests against the restaurant, which apparently eclipsed all other actions. Q.A.C. wanted to focus on combatting homophobic violence as their first organized action highlighted. Joe DeRose, another member of Q.A.C., said the group was going to be more like other Queer Nation groups and would bring back actions like the Queer Nights Out. In addition to expanding the scope of direct action and increasing visibility they also voiced concerns about the structure of QN/Atlanta which had two co-chairs and only five media contacts. Q.A.C. would be unstructured and as McManus-McLoughlin said had "no leaders or spokespersons. Any of us can say anything."[28]

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[25] Cunningham, "Queer/Straight," 63.

[26] Ibid.

[27] KC Wildmoon, "New Queer Group Hits the Streets," *Southern Voice*, July 4, 1991, 2.

[28] Wildmoon, "New Queer Group."

Queer Nation/Atlanta looked different from other groups in their organizational structure but it was how they evolved that made the group stand out in comparison with other chapters. Over the course of 1991, QN/ATL almost exclusively focused their efforts on battling the southern restaurant chain Cracker Barrel and the issue of employment discrimination. In the spring of 1992 Michael Cunningham confessed in his detailed report about the demise of Queer Nation that its decline confused him. Chapters exploded with energy and potential all across the country just a year earlier. At the time of publication he wondered why the only group that still seemed to hold on was Atlanta's. He thought it important to note that QN/ATL was the "only one with an old-fashioned leader" and the only one "embroiled in a battle with a clear-cut villain," Cracker Barrel.[29]

The battle with Cracker Barrel focused QN/ATL's political activism. It was concentrated on one issue, employment discrimination, and one offending institution, Cracker Barrel. With all the local attention it received the protests easily transitioned the politics into general advocacy and awareness. The fight with Cracker Barrel drew attention to political issues that were less articulated in other actions like Queer Nights Out or the Queer Shopping Networks. Michael Cunningham admitted that QN worked hard at a seemingly impossible to accomplish agenda. Their mission to fight "homophobia, racism, and sexism" was like "battling crabgrass" which was "so intricately stitched into the lawn that you can't quite tell where to begin."[30]

The Cracker Barrel protests began after gay and lesbian employees of the chain were fired because of their sexual orientation, a result of a new policy that emphasized heterosexuality in its employees. The Valentine's Day issue of *Southern Voice,* in addition to QN's failing report card for the Mayor on the cover, carried a brief report about an alarming incident close by that, if true, was something the gay and lesbian community needed to keep an eye on. The report alerted *SoVo* readers to a very real example of the discrimination they could face if they came out at work, or as the case turned out to be, were even presumed to be gay or lesbian. At the beginning of February three gay male employees at the Norcross Cracker Barrel were asked to attend a meeting. Only two were able to meet with their manager as the third was unable to attend because of a work-place injury. The Norcross store rounded up its most openly gay employees and in the meeting the manager explained they would no longer be employed with the company. There was a new company policy that according to the manager barred the employment of "homosexuals or men who had feminine traits."[31]

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[29] Cunningham, "Queer/Straight," 68.

[30] Ibid.

The policy was interpreted broadly and accounted for the fact that gay and homosexual applied equally to men and women, though it was initially designed to target openly gay or gender-non-conforming men. *Southern Voice* was quick to point out that because Georgia was a "right to work" state, employees lacked basic protections from homophobic companies and policy directives like Cracker Barrel's. They bluntly told readers "the firing of the men because they are gay is legal."[32] In the weeks and months following fired employees came forward to talk about their experiences. They became powerful examples of how gay and lesbian people were unprotected from discrimination. The QN/ATL Cracker Barrel protests had a mainstream political issue at its core, anti-discrimination protections, but the group, like ACT UP showed they were willing to engage in some unruly tactics to force an issue they believed should be an agenda item of the highest priority for the gay, lesbian, and queer rights movement.

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[31] "Restaurant Accused of Firing Gays," *Southern Voice*, February 14, 1991, 2.

[32] Ibid.

As the story broke in Atlanta that February it also went national. The story about the policy attracted enough negative press to make Cracker Barrel aware they were in the midst of a public relations situation. By the end of the month Cracker Barrel told the national press that it had reconsidered the policy and rescinded it.[33] When the policy was active it resulted in the firings of between fifteen and eighteen employees. The controversy attracted national and mainstream media attention, but Cracker Barrel's statement to rescind the policy was likely to have ended the story. Local Atlanta activists, however, thought the company was being disingenuous in its public about-face.

That spring QN/ATL launched a local campaign that went national with the help of *Southern Voice*. The paper continued to report on the story and the activism of the group—they covered meetings, interviewed fired employees, investigated firings in other states, and importantly shared their findings with the community. Lynn Cothren remembered how important *SoVo* was in the moment because their reporting broke the story and they kept on it. They used their trusted position as a community newspaper to draw attention to the issue and get people involved. Cothren said the paper

> immediately broke the story and as a result encouraged the mainstream press to cover this human rights issue. Gary Kaupman again played a pivotal role in QN/Atlanta's history by providing the necessary guidance and information on the restaurant chain's actions. In addition, Gary encouraged Cheryl Summerville, a fired employee and eventually the co-chair of the organization, to attend a meeting to explain her situation.[34]

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[33] Ronald Smothers, "Company Ousts Gay Workers, Then Reconsiders" *New York Times*, February 28, 1991.

[34] Cothren, "Not an End, but Closure."

Cheryl Summerville, a cook at the Cracker Barrel in Douglassville, Georgia said she'd heard a rumor about the firings and the company's new anti-gay employment policy. In an documentary made with the ACLU about her firing and fight with Cracker Barrel, Summerville said that her sister called and broke the news of the policy to her, having read about it in *SoVo* presumably.[35] The next day Summerville went to work and found out the rumors were true when she too was fired. Summerville's case was different from the other employees because she forced the issue at her local store. Gary Kaupman related that Summerville confronted her managers. She said "I told them I'd heard there was a new policy [about gays]" but her supervisors tried to explain it away.[36] She said "At first they said that it didn't apply to me because I worked in the kitchen and because I was a woman." Then they clarified their position saying their "understanding was that the policy was targeting gay men who worked as waiters."[37] Her supervisors finally settled on the policy covering her too and fired her for being gay as her sexuality violated the new company policy.

As Gary Kaupman reported the policy seemed to be a direct attack on specific employees at the Tifton, Georgia store, a location just off Interstate 75 in south Georgia. The original report identified two men who were fired from that store and Kaupman had more details to add to the mystery of the policy's original intent. He reported that one employee said "she was told the anti-gay policy was instituted when an irate customer wrote to the company complaining that two male employees in the Tifton store were kissing each other in view of the customers."[38] One of the men fired from the Tifton store, Wylie Petty, told *Southern Voice* that he and his lover did work for the same store but denied they ever kissed each other at work. He added that management advised them to not be affectionate towards one another. The company seemed to admit the policy stemmed from a specific complaint when on February 22 they faxed a statement to the NGLTF, which became involved and exerted more pressure on the company than locals could. The statement explained the policy away with the explanation that "Our recent position on the employment of homosexuals in a limited number of stores may have been a well- intentioned over reaction to the perceived values of our customers and their comfort levels with these individuals."[39]

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[35] Modi Frank, *Created Equal: The Cheryl Summerville Story*, ACLU and Zimmerman & Markman, 1998. https://vimeo.com/42595572. Accessed November 1, 2018.

[36] Gary Kaupman, "Cracker Barrel Waffles on Anti-Gay Policy," *Southern Voice,* February 28, 1991, 1.

[37] Ibid.

The policy argued from a business plan rooted in what Cracker Barrel called the "concept of traditional American values."[40] The official memorandum sent out to the company stores explained that it was "inconsistent with those in our customer base, to continue to employ individuals in our operating units whose sexual preferences fail to demonstrate normal heterosexual values which have been the foundation of families in our society."[41] A *Southern Voice* editorial cartoon that week emphasized the layers of bigotry, racism, and sexism that the Cracker Barrel stores pedaled to their "customer base" under the guise of nostalgia. In four panels a hooded Klansmen shared the secret of

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[38] Kaupman, "Cracker Barrel Waffles."

[39] Ibid.

[40] Smothers, "Company Ousts."

[41] Ibid.; Kaupman, "Cracker Barrel Waffles."

Cracker Barrel's success, which was to give the customers an experience of a "simpler time" that indulged their "longing for yesteryear." It was a time

> When a woman knew her place was in the home…When you could be sure the person sittin' next to you would be white! When you could take it for granted that ever'one was Christian an' het'rosexual—An anybody that wasn't kep' it to themselves or got run out of town![42]

Chas, the editorial cartoonist, spared Cracker Barrel no criticism. They directly connected how bigotry in one instance begat other prejudices. The charges of racism and sexism that Queer Nation and other activists leveled at Cracker Barrel were confirmed later when the NAACP sued the company for racist employment practices and discrimination. In assessing the effects of the Cracker Barrel protests a decade later, John Howard noted the campaign against Cracker Barrel had little direct impact on legislative results for gay and lesbian rights but it did suggest "that corporate bias against one cultural group may prove a useful predictor of bias against others."[43] In the editorial cartoon the Cracker Barrel Klansmen ended his speech smugly secure in at least the consolation that though they could not control women and black people anymore they "could still fire a queer for bein' queer—an' it's still perfectly legal."[44]

Cheryl Summerville told *New York Times* reporter Ronald Smothers that she had worked at Cracker Barrel for three years and her coworkers tried to spare her from the effects of the policy. Her supervisors "didn't really want to fire me because the policy was really aimed at effeminate men and women who have masculine traits who might be working as waiters or waitresses." As a cook she didn't directly make contact with customers, but Summerville regarded the issue differently. She said "I couldn't let them fire other people and keep me because it would just be a matter of time before the policy caught up with me, too."[45] She added "We're all the same. I can't figure out the difference and it's not right."[46]

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[42] Chas, Editorial Cartoon, *Southern Voice,* February 28, 1991, 7.

[43] John Howard, "The Cracker Barrel Restaurants" in Cañas, Kathryn A. and Harris Sondak, *Opportunities and Challenges of Workplace Diversity: Theory, Cases, and Exercises* (Boston: Pearson, 2014) 302.

[44] Chas, Editorial Cartoon.

The local and national media liked Cheryl Summerville's story and her firing was reported in different ways, though with similar slants. The *New York Times* reported that "sympathetic managers had advised her to be quiet about her sexual preferences, stay in the kitchen and wait for things to blow over." Michael Cunningham thought she "may have been the best-behaved lesbian in the world."[47] Cunningham portrayed her in relatable middle-class terms. She lived in the country outside Atlanta in a home she helped build herself. She had a family that included her partner, Sandra Riley, and their son, Summerville's child from a former relationship. He noted that both women were "ample" and they dressed "along suburban lines." Summerville's partner was especially relatable and he noted "Sandra Riley favors ruffles. She carries a pocketbook."[48] Summerville never considered herself closeted at work and Sandra Riley had come by the store numerous times. Summerville told Cunningham that her supervisor asked her directly if she was a lesbian and she answered yes.

In the ACLU documentary Cheryl Summerville gave a fuller account of her firing. She said her local supervisors refused to fire her because of "conscience or whatever" and they called in the district manager.[49] Jody Waller, the district manager, agreed that the policy included her—as an admitted lesbian—and fired her.[50] Summerville asked that her pink slip verify the reason for the termination of employment and Waller obliged. He wrote down "This employee is being terminated due to violation of company policy. The employee is gay."[51] It took some time for her firing to sink in as she focused on some of the more practical and immediate concerns of the loss of employment. Summerville had been the "breadwinner" in the family and supported a partner and teenage son. She also initially thought her firing was illegal. She remembered that her and Riley were both depressed, taking the firing personally, but they rebounded quickly. "First thing on Monday morning," Sandra Riley said she called the ACLU who listened to their story but ultimately told her "they were sorry but there was nothing they could do because it wasn't against the law." After speaking to other groups in Georgia, they were referred to Queer Nation.[52]

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[45] Smothers, "Company Ousts."

[46] Frank, "Created Equal."

[47] Cunningham, "Queer/Straight," 63.

[48] Ibid., 64.

Cheryl Summerville and Sandra Riley were reluctant about joining Queer Nation. The name made them unsure of their activism and politics. Summerville told Michael Cunningham that it took her an entire week to determine whether or not she could face going and even drove by the Little Five Points Community Center before the meeting to see where and what it was like. On a weeknight meeting after she had been fired QN was scheduled to talk about “possible actions against Cracker Barrel.”[53] Riley and Summerville were nervous and arrived twenty minutes early, which gave them a good vantage point to see how many “normal” people were part of Queer Nation. She said “They were wearing just jeans and T-shirts. One of ‘em came in a suit, and I sure as hell didn’t expect that.”[54]

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[49] Frank, "Created Equal."

[50] Cunningham, "Queer/Straight," 63-64.

[51] Frank, "Created Equal."

[52] Cunningham, "Queer/Straight," 64.

They had not expected Queer Nation to be what they were. Summerville said “I guess I just expected more radical people, which some were of course. I guess I expected ranting, but it was a nice experience. Everyone there was very pleasant.”[55] They stayed for the meeting and when the time came to discuss Cracker Barrel, Cheryl Summerville spoke up. She came to the meeting despite not being a “political person” joking that “the most political thing I had ever done at all was go to a voting booth.”[56] She continued “I had never been active in anything. I had never pounded the streets with picket signs or anything.”[57] She was brought to politics because she personally was affected by an anti-discrimination policy directed at gay and lesbian people. Her illusion of protection was shattered, as Michael Cunningham emphasized, when he cast her as a “model of conventional good behavior.”

A month after the first reports of Cracker Barrel’s anti-gay policy, an editorial in *Southern Voice* titled “Corporate Hate Crime” argued that the firings represented the potential for anyone who was gay, lesbian, or queer to be fired at any time.[58] The Cracker Barrel firings showed how civil rights protections were not merely theoretical, but bread-and-butter issues directly related to income security and the right to pursue your own life unfettered by someone else's moral judgments. The firings brought into stark relief that no amount of good behavior could save a queer's job if an employer wanted to fire them—it was simply not protected. *SoVo* wasted no space in driving the point home. They said "Every one of the fired employees with whom we've spoken said "I thought it was illegal to fire someone because they are gay." They were on a mission to educate people and to challenge them to think about tougher realities. *SoVo* said "We invite readers to imagine themselves in the shoes of the Cracker Barrel employees who were fired. See how it feels."

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[53] Kaupman, “Cracker Barrel Waffles.”

[54] Cunningham, “Queer/Straight,” 63-64.

[55] Patrick Saunders, “Catching up … with Cheryl Summerville, fired from Cracker Barrel for being gay” *The Georgia Voice*, June 6, 2014.

[56] Cunningham, “Queer/Straight,” 64.

[57] Frank, “Created Equal.”

The campaign against Cracker Barrel was not only a campaign to end the discriminatory policies of one specific company but also to raise the visibility of the queer community in Atlanta. It was a campaign to educate local queer people about their rights, or their lack of rights. The Cracker Barrel firings and the discriminatory policy against lesbian and gay employees were not based on witnessing an act of same-sex sexuality, but the perceived, alleged, assumed, or affirmed identity of employees as gay or lesbian. That Summerville and the other gay employees had done nothing wrong or illegal, was not a minor point. It was not illegal to be gay or lesbian but it was also not something that protected you in employment rights. Cracker Barrel was well within their legal rights to fire employees for being gay or lesbian.

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[58] "Corporate Hate Crime," *Southern Voice,* February 28, 1991, 6.

Due to all the negative press they received, at the end of February the restaurant chain announced they had rescinded the policy directive. Many gay and lesbian activists questioned not only their sincerity but also their veracity. By the time of *SoVo's* "Corporate Hate Crime" editorial, no one had been offered their jobs back. A few weeks later, Lynn Cothren pointed out that although the company-wide policy was rescinded, it had not been entirely abandoned. Instead of a broad national corporate policy, it would be implemented at the local level.[59]

At the first Queer Nation meeting that Cheryl Summerville and Sandra Riley attended it was decided that a protest would be held in two weeks at a Cracker Barrel in Norcross. They asked Cheryl if she would be there and she said "It would be the first protest of my entire life and I told them that I would be there. But I had no idea when I showed up that day what to expect because I had never been to one before." The March 3rd demonstration at the Norcross store was the first of many QN/ATL protests held at suburban Atlanta Cracker Barrel stores. This demonstration seemed very much like other rowdier QN actions. During the busy Sunday afternoon rush, fifteen QN activists came into the store and attempted to apply for work. They said, "We want to work for the Cracker Barrel" and asked managers "Do you hire gays and lesbians?"[60] Lynn Cothren politely regarded what they did in a different light. He said they educated customers inside about the discrimination faced by gays and lesbians. Outside around thirty-five people picketed the store, including Cheryl Summerville, Sandra Riley, and Cheryl's sister and her family. Her sister said she supported Cheryl and that's why she got involved. In the documentary she related that this was where "straight but not narrow came in. It's so people would know that there were straight people out there with their children on those lines"[61]

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[59] Patrick Garvey and Gary Kaupman, "Cracker Barrel Mum Amid Increasing Protests and Pressure," *Southern Voice,* March 14, 1991, 2.

[60] Ibid.

Activists decided their next protest would be held at the Douglasville Cracker Barrel on March 17th, the store where Cheryl Summerville was employed until just a few months before. Early QN Cracker Barrel demonstrations attracted small crowds with between thirty and fifty people, but as momentum grew so did the protests. The local media attention drew national press and more people became aware of the demonstrations. QN sought to capture media attention too, as part of its campaign was to make gay, lesbian, and queer issues more visible. QN/ATL protestors developed an action strategy that they deployed at the Douglasville store that Sunday. Activists entered the restaurant and sat at tables for up to two hours where they ordered nothing but a beverage. QN/ATL activists held enough tables to cause a minor delay for regular customers who were told there would be a forty-five minute wait due to the protest.[62]

The protest at Douglasville was more restrained, less aggressive, and even polite when compared to the earlier protest at Norcross. The group allied their interests with the working class wait staff and made an extra effort to compensate them. QN/ATL activists gave their servers a $5 tip and a note that addressed why they were there, explaining "We realize that you are not the source of the discriminatory employment policy."[63] The activists also acknowledged how the protest could potentially affect them. They said "We in no way want to penalize you or make your life more difficult. On the contrary, we want to assure that YOU are not the next victim of renegade bigotry at Cracker Barrel."[64] In the note they used the term "victim" to describe their own positioning. QN/ATL wanted to frame the argument as one between those who had the power to discriminate and those who could only be discriminated against.

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[61] Frank, "Created Equal."

[62] Patrick Garvey and Gary Kaupman, "Activist's Siege of Cracker Barrel Continues," *Southern Voice,* March 28, 1991, 2.

[63] Garvey and Kaupman, "Activist's Siege;" Cunningham, "Queer/Straight," 64.

A month later Queer Nation showed that it had already made an impact on the city. The group worked to build a coalition of support with other progressive organizations and on April 21 they saw the results of their labor in the largest to-date direct action at a Cracker Barrel protest. By that point QN had official support from the state and Atlanta chapters of the National Organization for Women, the ACLU, and Jobs for Justice.[65] At a rally before the demonstration at the Morrow store Lynn Cothren told the crowd of about a hundred people "We have enough people to take this restaurant. Let's go."[66] Queer National Larry Pellegrini reported when they took the restaurant activists planted a "gay flag" on each table as they "occupied" them. When the group filled the dining area and "the last table was claimed deafening applause and cheers broke out."[67] In QN/ATL notes from the Cracker Barrel campaigns they recorded that at the

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[64] Cunningham, "Queer/Straight," 64.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Larry Pellegrini, "Queer Nation Shuts Down Morrow Cracker Barrel," *Southern Voice,* May 9 and 22, 1991, 2.

[67] Ibid.

Morrow protest the store was forced to issue over fifty "free meal coupons to customers inconvenienced by the action."[68]

"Queers Take Peachtree": Lesbian, Gay, Queer Advances

At the end of April, Atlanta got a short break from the Queer Nation Cracker Barrel protests when the National Lesbian Conference (NLC) came to town. The conference, held over the course of four days from April 24th through the 28th, brought together between 2500 to 3000 women from across the country. Unfortunately, the original estimation that five thousand lesbians would come to Atlanta fell far below that number. The conference was billed as a "woman-to-womon gathering," a name that seemed slightly outdated for a city in the midst of a Queer uprising.[69]

The NLC's slogan, "Diversity, Empowerment, Solidarity," championed all the right ideals but some women regarded the conference as a good idea overrun by an excess of "political correctness." Two months before the conference Debbie Fraker interviewed one of the original organizers of the NLC, Michelle Crone, a long-time activist who helped train and develop the civil rights disobedience action at the Supreme Court during the March on Washington in 1987. The *Southern Voice* article was part interview, preview of the conference, and examination of the ups and downs of organizing such a "herstoric" event. Fraker said doing research on the NLC for the article was "frustrating" because their office seemed unworkably disorganized. She argued that organizers had not reached out to locals and had not seen to the details. They ignored "planning the conference schedule or doing outreach to the Atlanta community for participation, housing, and other types of conference support."[70]

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[68] Queer Nation/Atlanta, "Highlights: Cracker Barrel Actions," undated ca. 1991. AHC, ALGHT, Box 37. Hereafter cited as QN/ATL.

[69] National Lesbian Conference Flyer, undated. AHC, ALGHT, National Lesbian Conference Materials, Box 71.

People in the community were talking about the conference but not in a good way. She said

> Many lesbians voice concern that the NLC will be paralyzed by "purist" attitudes. The possibility that the Conference will be controlled and even stagnated by lesbians who feel that "political correctness" is nothing more than taking whatever position opposes "the patriarchy" has not been ruled out.[71]

NLC activists planned the conference for two and a half years. The first official organizational meeting was held in Durham, North Carolina in 1989. At two more national meetings organizers developed a commitment to racial parity, diversity goals, and consensus style organization. These rules made the planning process slow-going, which was a point often criticized by other lesbians. By the time the conference finally met many women expressed feeling burnt-out from all of the "processing."[72]

The NLC's program heralded that it was a conference "For, By, and About Us" and among organizers were a number of local Atlanta lesbian activists.[73] The local organizing group for the conference, the Atlanta Lesbian Agenda Conference Committee (ALACC) was established in 1989. They raised funds for the conference, helped address logistical concerns in Atlanta, and attempted to organize a statewide network of lesbians.

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[70] Debbie Fraker, "Dreams, Questions, and Answers," *Southern Voice*, February 28, 1991, 14.

[71] Ibid., 1, 14.

[72] KC Wildmoon, "The Process of Processing," *Southern Voice*, March 28, 1991, 7.

[73] National Lesbian Conference: For, By, and About Lesbians, April 24-28, 1991, Atlanta, Georgia, Program. AHC, ALGHT, National Lesbian Conference Materials, Box 71.

ALFA members featured heavily in local planning but other women from the community lent their support by attending the conference. Some Atlantans contributed more directly to the content with workshops listed in the program from Sabrina Sojourner, Rebecca Ransom, Kathy [sic] Woolard, and the Georgia Lesbian Ecofeminists. Joan Garner was the contact for the Lesbians of Color caucus and M.P. (likely M.P. Schildmeyer, a long-time member of ALFA) was the contact for a Lesbians in Recovery caucus.[74]

Despite Debbie Fraker's reservations she was registered to attend the conference. A month before the conference a large ad in *Southern Voice* asked some of Atlanta's most well-known lesbian activists "Why Are You Going to the NLC?"[75] The women came from all different kinds of lesbian communities in the city. Joan Garner of AALGA was going, Eleanor Smith a disabilities activist in Atlanta said she was attending with her organization, in addition so were Cathy Woolard, Christina Cash, Samantha Claar, Debbie Fraker, and KC Wildmoon. They were all going for various reasons. Eleanor Smith wanted to get the message out about disability activism and Judy Siff articulated a rather leftist and radical political message. Siff said she was going "Because it's a time for getting OUT—getting ourselves OUT of the closets, our sisters OUT of the prisons—and our government OUT of Central America and the Mideast!" KC Wildmoon gave just one simple reason, "To raise hell."

By the time the National Lesbian Conference convened KC Wildmoon had decided not to go at all.[76] She told readers in her "Heterodoxy" column that "eyewitness reports" confirmed what she said everyone already knew and what she'd said for years. The NLC had been over-processed at the expense of logistical planning and creative effort. She said energies should have been put towards designing a "conference that was appealing to the vast majority of lesbians." Wildmoon's harsh assessment of a conference that she did not attend reflected that some divisions in the community were proving deep. She said "anti-thisism and anti-thatism, and all the emphasis on a non-hierarchical structure" overshadowed the conference and completely ignored the fact they were all lesbians. She didn't go because "I don't have enough oppressions listed after my name to matter."

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[74] Ibid.

[75] "Why Are You Going to the NLC?," *Southern Voice*, March 28, 1991, 5.

[76] KC Wildmoon, "Begin Again," *Southern Voice*, May 23 1991, 13.

It wasn't just KC Wildmoon who objected to the level of processing done in advance and during the conference. One of the goals of the NLC was to develop the idea or sound out what a national lesbian agenda might look like. L. Lavonne Casey wrote into *Southern Voice* about her disappointment with the NLC too.[77] Casey's disappointment stemmed from similar and familiar criticisms. She agreed that "issues were processed to the nth degree, with little or no resolve" and because of this the conference failed to ask what united them. Casey outlined what would have made for a progressive agenda that touched on the commonalities that lesbian women at the conference shared. She said

> How about domestic partnerships, and sodomy laws? What do we do to ensure that lesbian mothers are given a fair shake in divorce and custody cases? How do we deal with the Cracker Barrels, the bureaucracy, the patriarchy? What about establishing political clout so that legislators will know that we are a force to reckon with? Aren't these things that affect all of us, regardless of whether we eat meat, wear make-up, are of color, or chose to be military dykes?[78]

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[77] L. Lavonne Casey, "Lessons of the NLC," *Southern Voice*, May 23, 1991, 12.

[78] Ibid.

The National Lesbian Conference drew around 2500 lesbians to Atlanta for four days of networking that spring. Sandra Sparks gave the NLC a mixed review in *The News* saying it suffered from a "split personality."[79] Conference sessions included workshops that were political, historical, social, religious, sexual, spiritual, which gave it no sense of coherence. The lack of coherent politics disappointed her, the arguments about language left her cold, but the ability to socialize with so many lesbians in town for the conference made it "easy to connect all over the city."[80] Sparks thought the NLC was probably most useful and beneficial for women who came for the cultural and social community aspect. She noted that if you attended the conference to delve deep into the politics of the lesbian movement it was divisive and divided. Sparks quoted political activist and NGLTF Executive Director, Urvashi Vaid's speech from the last night of the conference that summed up how many of the women who attended felt. Vaid said "We are not one lesbian community but a series of very splintered communities who have, in fact, not been working together at home or at this conference."[81]

After the out-of-town lesbians left Atlanta, Queer Nationals settled back into a rhythm of protest at Cracker Barrel locations across the suburbs. On May 5th over 100 protestors were in Norcross. A special Mother's Day protest on May 12 at Douglasville was attended by over 100 people, including Cheryl Summerville's mother who said protestors were not treated with respect. Comments to *Southern Voice* had pointed out multiple times when protestors were supported by other customers, but Summerville's mom said they were treated "like we had leprosy or that we had something contagious and that that they weren't supposed to get that close to us."[82] QN/ATL started their protests in March and by the middle of May Cracker Barrel started to react. Their treatment at the Mother's Day protest indicated a shift in the tone of interactions between protestors and management that only worsened as the demonstrations continued.

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[79] Sandra Sparks, "The Split Personality of the National Lesbian Conference: Disasters and Delights," *The News*, Summer/Pride Issue, 1991, 10-11. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[80] Sparks, "The Split Personality," 11.

[81] Ibid., 10; Vaid's description of the event later was much harsher as she claimed the conference "unraveled at the eleventh hour" and the organizational issues made it a disaster. In the mid-1990s, she said "To this day, no lesbian leaders have taken responsibility for the waste that conference represented." Vaid, *Virtual Equality*, 348.

At the Mother's Day protest Cracker Barrel unveiled a new strategy and approach to handling the protests. When Queer Nation members arrived at the store the police were already there. The store's managers delayed seating people in an attempt to discern who was with the protest and who was not. Larry Pellegrini pointed out that this was made more difficult by the presence of straight allies like Summerville's mother and other family members. Once they were all seated management told them that ordering a beverage was no longer considered "ordering from the menu," which counteracted QN/ATL's original strategy. This development gave the store manager a way to involve the police as they claimed activists were no longer customers and could be arrested for "criminal trespass."

These strategies and maneuvers were not behind-the-scenes conversations but declarations in a campaign. Cracker Barrel had legal representation at the protest and so did Queer Nation. After a brief consultation between an ACLU lawyer and the Douglas County District Attorney, who supported Cracker Barrel's rights to determine what constituted an order, demonstrators quickly reacted by adding toast or a biscuit to their orders. Again management threatened to have the protestors arrested, this time because they were "taking too long."[83] Lynn Cothren agreed they had stayed long enough. As QN/ATL activists left the store Jody Waller, the District Manager who fired Cheryl Summerville, told Cothren that "you and your group are not welcome here. We don't want your kind. You have been costing us business and you will be arrested if you come back."[84]

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[82] Frank, "Created Equal."

Queer Nation/Atlanta continued the protests. On May 25th over a hundred activists filled the Lithonia store and held a teach-in. Outside they picketed and distributed flyers to passing car traffic.[85] As QN added to their tactics so too did Cracker Barrel. In June the protests took a serious turn when eighteen protestors at the Union City store were arrested. *Southern Voice* reported that the June 9th protest "was heavily covered by mainstream news media. Local TV channels 2, 5, 11 and 46 were on hand, as well as reporters from WSB and WGST radio, the *Atlanta Journal/Constitution*, and *Mother Jones* magazine." Journalist Michael Cunningham at *Mother Jones* was at that protest and his experience there tallied, in the end, as more evidence of QN/ATL's difference as compared to other groups. Cunningham called Lynn Cothren "an anomaly. In an organization that eschews the very idea of leaders, he boldly proclaimed himself chair of the Atlanta chapter."[86]

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[83] Larry Pellegrini, "Cracker Barrel Threatens Queer Nation With Arrest," *Southern Voice,* May 23, 1991, 1.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Larry Pellegrini, "Queer Nation Changes Tactics," *Southern Voice,* June 6, 1991, 2.

[86] KC Wildmoon, "18 Queer Nationals Arrested for Criminal Trespass," *Southern Voice,* June 20, 1991, 2.

Michael Cunningham credited to Lynn Cothren the success and impetus for the Cracker Barrel protests. At the June 9th protest in Union City he remembered a mixed crowd of about 120 people who altogether proved that "aside from some fundamental appetites, human beings have very little in common." QN/ATL activists included women in plaid, women in makeup, bodybuilders, and "middle-aged men in sweat suits." The protests had proved to be a great unifier in his estimation as he witnessed these people gathered outside the Union City Cracker Barrel. Some of them prepared themselves for the probable event of their arrests for what they believed to be acts of civil disobedience in pursuit of political and civil equality. Two of the women who were arrested that day checked in with each other before the protest. Cheryl Summerville asked Sandra Riley if they should change their plans, suggesting that her partner need not be arrested. Michael Cunningham noted that Riley was wearing "heels and a blue flowered dress" that day, she answered back "What am I going to do while you're in jail? Sit outside worrying about you? No thanks."[87] Summerville and Riley were both arrested in what Sandra termed Cracker Barrel's attempt to "get tough with us."[88]

Michael Cunningham asked Queer Nation/Atlanta leader Lynn Cothren about the meaning of the campaign against Cracker Barrel. He wanted to know what he thought they accomplished through the protests. Cunningham portrayed Cothren as incredulous at being asked about the value of the protests and "impatient" with the reporter who he imagined "didn't understand the righteousness of Queer Nation's cause or the immensity of his will."[89] Cunningham's focus on Cothren and his leadership obscured the fact that of the eighteen people arrested that day thirteen were women. There were a large number of women who participated in the Cracker Barrel protests and it was a statistical first for women to have such direct and visible roles in a united gay and lesbian effort. Cheryl Summerville later became co-chair of QN/ATL in a move that signaled a willingness to share power.

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[87] Ibid.

[88] Frank, "Created Equal."

As Atlanta's gay and lesbian community geared up for the annual Pride season and its attendant criticisms, an editorial in *Southern Voice* highlighted some uncharacteristic optimism in the hope that "times may be changing."[90] The paper connected the recent surge in political activism associated with the Queer Nation Cracker Barrel protests in light of Atlanta's long history of apathetic response. They outlined a brief but fairly accurate accounting of the city's queer political history.

> Face it, Atlanta's lesbian and gay community does not have a particularly stellar reputation when it comes to the quality or quantity of its public demonstrations. ACT UP has managed a half dozen or so effective and visible zaps. The anti-Helms demo at First Baptist (and it precursor several years earlier against Rev. Stanley's AIDS-phobic rantings) were inspiring as was the turn out, back in the mid '80s, at hearings on repeal of the City's meager gay/lesbian employment rights ordinance. And we sure did raise hell about Anita Bryant. In 1979.[91]

Aside from getting the date wrong on the Anita Bryant protest—it was 1978, not 1979—the editorial laid out Atlanta's bare embrace of gay and lesbian political activism. *SoVo's* editorialist made familiar arguments about the community. It stereotyped materialistic men who thought not going to a Macy's sale counted as a protest and conservatives who objected to language that made the politics of the "Q" movement too radical.[92]

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[89] Cunningham, "Queer/Straight," 65.

[90] "Thanks to QN, Cracker Barrel Feeling the Pinch," *Southern Voice,* May 23, 1991, 12.

[91] Ibid.

The contrast between gay and lesbian rights and the new queer movement was profound at the beginning of the gay nineties. Queer Nation pushed the city into the national spotlight with their unrelenting schedule of protests and demonstrations at suburban Cracker Barrel restaurants. The group provoked controversy and helped to break Atlanta's continued indifference to political activism. Atlanta's Pride celebrations had stagnant participation numbers for many years, but QN/ATL's impact was felt in 1991. It proved to be meteoric and transformed the community. In 1990 attendance at Atlanta's Pride was estimated at between five and seven thousand people but in 1991 the crowds jumped to a staggering 30,000. It appeared that Atlantans had become less closeted and more political in a very short period of time, which also made them more willing to come out to Pride. The theme that year "Be There, Be Aware, Be Counted," was taken literally by thousands of Atlantans.

Queer Nation/Atlanta's regular protests with Cracker Barrel garnered local and national attention and contributed to the explosion in participation in Pride. Reflective of their presence in the community, Cheryl Summerville was honored as the Co-Grand Marshall of Pride that year. According to *Southern Voice* writer Al Cotton the most popular shirt at Pride that year was Queer Nation's.[93] The group's simple and graphic bold capital Q t-shirts were ubiquitous in photos from the parade and events. *SoVo* claimed a victory in Atlanta for Queer, the term, and for Queer Nation the group. Their

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[92] Vaid, *Virtual Equality*, 204-205, 349-350.

[93] Al Cotton, "Fabulous Pride," *Southern Voice,* July 4, 1991, 1.

Pride issue declared on the front page "Pride '91: Queers Take Peachtree."[94] The headline implied a turning point in a battle and the article heralded a transition into something new. Debbie Fraker reported that "Sunday's Pride Parade was the largest in the 20 year history of Pride in Atlanta." Lesbian comic and entertainer Lea DeLaria emceed and the two-day event saw eighty-three couples participate in a mass public commitment ceremony during a rainstorm the day before the parade.[95] Samantha Claar, an organizer said "the influx of a diverse group of people made this Pride special."[96]

The diversity found in the crowd was not yet reflected in the leadership of Pride's organization. Pat Hussain, an activist who was building her reputation in the community as an important political voice for social change, wrote an open letter to the newly elected members of the Atlanta Lesbian and Gay Pride Committee that August. Hussain broke down the numbers in her letter and why they mattered. The new committee was more diverse than it had been in the past but it was in no way representative of Atlanta's gay and lesbian population. She related that "the Pride board for '91 was composed of 8 men and 3 women" and all were white. The Pride Committee for 1992 was again "composed of 3 women and 8 men," but now there were "10 white members and 1 person of color."[97] Despite an actually diverse slate of candidates she protested that the newly elected board looked too much like the committees that came before. Al Cotton thought there was a lesson to be learned as he cautioned that "even though Sunday was a smashing victory for local activism and awareness in Atlanta, it will only be important if it also becomes a foundation upon which to build something even better, stronger, fiercer."[98]

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[94] Debbie Fraker, "Pride 91: Queers Take Peachtree," *Southern Voice,* July 4, 1991, 1.

[95] Ibid., 4.

[96] Ibid., 5.

[97] Pat Hussain, "Dear Pride Board Members," *Southern Voice,* August 29, 1991, 9.

Queer Nation/Atlanta resumed their protests at Cracker Barrel locally but started to spread out from Georgia. The week after Pride QN members were arrested at the Lithonia store.[99] In July QN/ATL members were barred from Cracker Barrel despite their newly acquired status as shareholders in the company.[100] Activists launched a broader campaign that fall called "Buy One" that encouraged members to purchase stock in the company and therefore force their voice to be heard at a shareholder's meeting in New York City.[101] In August Queer Nationals from across the Southeast took their campaign against Cracker Barrel on the offensive and staged a demonstration in Lebanon, Tennessee, the hometown headquarters of the national restaurant chain. Between 200 and 250 people rallied in Nashville before activists drove out to the Lebanon location about 30 miles away. QN/ATL members protested outside the store because they were barred from all Cracker Barrel locations, but they lent their support to the activists inside who managed to occupy nearly the entire store, taking 32 of the 36 tables.[102]

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[98] Cotton, "Fabulous Pride."

[99] KC Wildmoon, "Cracker Barrel Adopts Hardline Response to Queer Nation," *Southern Voice,* July 4, 1991, 2.

[100] KC Wildmoon, "Queer Nation Barred From Cracker Barrel Property," *Southern Voice*, July 18, 1991, 2.

[101] Carl Owen, "Buy Cracker Barrel," *Southern Voice,* December 19, 1991, 8; QN/ATL, "Highlights: Cracker Barrel Actions."

[102] KC Wildmoon, "Protesters from across Southeast converge on Lebanon, Tennessee," *Southern Voice*, August 15, 1991) 2; QN/ATL, "Highlights: Cracker Barrel Actions."

Less than a month later Queer Nation/Atlanta supported the first action in South Carolina where they joined the newly established QN/Columbia in protest at a local store. Atlantan Larry Pelligrini reported that an officer taking photographs of them as they left the store "must have snapped over a hundred pictures but he never reloaded the camera."[103] Photographing and video recording the activists had become a tactic that Cracker Barrel started to use in Atlanta in June. It served to intimidate activists but also helped managers learn to recognize and identify Queer Nationals in the future. On September 15th a demonstration at the Lithonia store was tense as Cracker Barrel managers tried to identify activists who were "dressed in regular street clothes." They even attempted to read the lips of their customers in conversation to determine if they were members of the activist group.[104] After this heated protest, QN/ATL activists initiated a new strategy they called a "Zap" visit. These protests were smaller in scale than an action, which usually had around 100 activists. In a ZAP, about fifteen or so activists met unannounced and staged a secretive and performative political demonstration. QN/ATL said in a ZAP "the group arrives unannounced, dressed in normal street clothes, and occupies separate tables in the store. Members do not acknowledge the presence of other members until the time comes to show our Queer Nation/Atlanta t-shirts and begin our process of disseminating information to educate the public." That fall QN/ATL zapped stores in Morrow, Norcross, Lithonia, and Union City.[105]

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[103] KC Wildmoon, "Cracker Barrel Protest Moves to S.C.," *Southern Voice,* September 12, 1991, 2.

[104] QN/ATL, "Highlights: Cracker Barrel Actions."

[105] Ibid.

Early in October another employment discrimination case broke that kept the politics at the heart of Queer Nation's battles with Cracker Barrel in focus. *Southern Voice's* front page headline read "Shahar vs. Bowers" and the story reported on the federal lawsuit Robin Shahar filed against Georgia's Attorney General, Michael Bowers.[106] The suit made the claim that Bowers violated Shahar's constitutional rights when he rescinded a job offer after learning she was engaged to a woman. Shahar's lawyers argued that she broke no law and Bowers denied her employment based on her religious practice. She said "the ceremony was an extremely moving expression of our commitment to each other and to Judaism." *The Atlanta Journal/Constitution* ran multiple editorials on the lawsuit and covered the controversy in detail with reports about other legal opinions in the field.[107]

Straight opinions were mixed. Some argued that Bowers had the right and the legal authority to take this particular stand while others agreed with it entirely. DeKalb County's Chief Executive Officer Manuel Maloof said that if Bowers made his decision to deny her the job based on her sexual preference "then he's by-God wrong." McKay Jenkins included an opinion from longtime Fulton County District Attorney, Lewis Slayton, who declined to bring charges against Michael Hardwick in 1982. In a smooth comparison it was noted that Bowers challenged that case all the way to the Supreme Court. The point was clearly drawn between how the two men approached issues of sexuality at the workplace. Slayton indicated that he probably employed gay people in his office already. He didn't know of any but he said that wouldn't matter to him anyway. He said "if their work is OK, I don't go around telling everybody, and I don't fire them."[108]

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[106] KC Wildmoon, "Shahar vs. Bowers," *Southern Voice,* October 10, 1991, 4.

[107] *AJ/C* clippings file: "Gay rights battle focuses on state, Bowers' office," October 6, 1991; Jane Hansen, "She trusted in fairness only to lose her job," October 19, 1991; "Views on Michael Bowers, Robin Shahar Case;" Durwood McAlister, "Bowers had no choice in homosexual marriage case," October 6, 1991; Mark Silk, "What exactly is Bowers opposing?" AHC, ALGHT, Dick Rhodes Papers, Box 81.

That fall Atlanta's lesbian and gay community was mired once again in a controversy with the Atlanta Gay Center. Community relations with the Center were rocky off and on throughout the 1980s as controversial changes in administration, fights over board control, and the internal politics of the Center made headlines. In 1988 fights with gay activists Jeffrey Laymon and Chris Hagin over the Center's planned move into the Bedford-Pine neighborhood deepened divisions. The Center often sparred with mainstream organizations as they criticized aspects of corporate and institutionalized culture they saw as problematic. Their valid criticisms were lost, though, when they published articles and reports that included ad hominem attacks on other members of the political and activist community in their newspaper *The News*.

The News published a number of investigatory articles on AID Atlanta that focused on alleged mismanagement and implied other possible misdeeds in 1991. These reports led to an increased estrangement between people, organizations, and businesses that supported AID Atlanta who objected to what they saw as the AGC's increasingly hostile smear campaign against the organization.[109] But it was not just AID Atlanta they criticized. The Center criticized the Police Advisory Board in the past and their approach to the city's anti-gay violence issue. More recently activist Cathy Woolard's approach to leadership of that board became the focus of their criticism. That summer *The News* published a two-part interview with Bill Gripp, Chairman of the AGC, which only added to the growing division.[110] Gripp served as the Chair five times in the decade he worked there and was touted "as the most public gay person in Atlanta." His tenure and activism was controversial and so were the interviews. They were detailed and lengthy with the first running over ten pages and the second at seven.

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[108] McKay Jenkins, "Metro officials' views mixed on Bower's action," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, October 5, 1991. AHC, ALGHT, Dick Rhodes Papers, Box 81.

[109] David Kanis "Carbon Copies: Dear Mr. Wilson;" John Burger, "Dear Sirs," *Southern Voice,* May 23, 1991, 13.

Bill Gripp's unfiltered and harsh words renewed old controversies and created new ones. In a guest editorial about the breakdown in relations between the city's gay and lesbian community and the police, *Southern Voice* former Editor Gary Kaupman called out Chief Eldrin Bell for his homophobia and Mayor Maynard Jackson's seeming acceptance of the status quo.[111] But he also cleared the air on another longstanding issue—Bill Gripp's presence and influence in the community and on the police. This was especially of concern as he noted that Gripp was in charge of the sensitivity training program at the Police Academy. Kaupman said Gripp had "shown no compunction about launching vitriolic and personal attacks on members of the PAB," which added to the antagonistic tensions on the board. In *The News* interview Gripp called the L/GRC Police Advisory Board "one of the most useless organizations in the City."[112] He said "Cathy Woolard and her crew of lap-sitters" botched their handling of anti-gay violence by "cozying up to former Police Commissioner George Napper." He called their current concerns a "frantic attempt to be seen as relevant." With opinions like these coming from inside the community, it was not hard for Gary Kaupman to make the case that Gripp's influence was poisoning any good relations that existed between members of the Police Advisory Board. Kaupman said that Chief Bell had shown "open disdain for members of the board, especially its Chair, Cathy Woolard" and so had Bill Gripp.[113]

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[110] "A Conversation with Bill Gripp," *The News*, August, 1991, 6, 7, 16-18, 30-35; "A Conversation with Bill Gripp: Part II," *The News*, September, 1991, 7-9, 12-13, 16-17. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[111] Gary Kaupman, "Enough Already," *Southern Voice,* October 10, 1991, 10.

[112] "A Conversation with Bill Gripp," 18.

Bill Gripp's commentary seemed to be a breaking point in the community. *Southern Voice* and other members of the community had a very public and messy fight with the AGC. Many essentially stated they would no longer support the Center or keep quiet about the harm they did to the lesbian and gay community in Atlanta. Christina Cash, the publisher and current Editor of *Southern Voice*, took a direct approach to what she saw as the real issue at hand. Her editorial, "It's Time to Name Names," subtitled "Bill Gripp of the Atlanta Gay Center has hurt us all" was a response to the interview and an emotional outburst.[114] Cash was as critical and combative as Bill Gripp. She cut deep with a detailed history of Gripp's controversial stances in a personal and public confrontation. She concluded from his friends' stories and testimony that Gripp was "a good thing gone all wrong." *The News* printed a brief response titled "Southern Shriek" that called Cash's editorial "nothing more than an hysterical 1,224 word personal attack." They thought "Considering the rage in which the editorial must have been written, we can only hope the catharsis was worth it."[115]

The editorial opened a floodgate of criticism that poured out from long-disgruntled and angry community members. The next two editions of *Southern Voice* carried letters about the AGC and Bill Gripp that were supportive of the public denunciation.[116] Jeff Cornett, a former volunteer with the AGC had "long waited" to tell his story but never did because "going against Bill and his toadies was like wrestling with a pig—you both get dirty and the pig likes it."[117] Dr. Stosh Ostrow agreed with the editorial and congratulated the paper on calling out Gripp, who he said "has been a malevolent and destructive presence in our midst for too many years."[118] Lynn Cothren focused, like the others, on the personal and combative leadership of Bill Gripp at the AGC, but he also pointed to a new direction.[119] He said Gripp had dominated the Center for too long and "When one person dominates an organization for numerous years the organization is usually stifled." Cothren concluded with a public call for "new leadership." He said "It is time for Mr. Gripp to provide the ultimate unselfish leadership for the Center and make room for new blood at the top."

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[113] Kaupman, "Enough Already."

[114] Christina Cash, "It's Time to Name Names," *Southern Voice,* October 24, 1991, 6.

[115] "Southern Shriek," *The News*, November, 1991, 4. AHC, ALGHT Box 1.203.

The critical letters about Bill Gripp acknowledged that the AGC had a place in the community and provided some important programs, but at a cost they were no longer willing to pay. Lynn Cothren argued for the AGC's potential to be comparable to similar community centers in New York and Los Angeles. Part of his concerns stemmed from his understanding of what the Center can and should be to the community vs. the reality of what it currently was. He emphasized a vision of the Center as "an umbrella, not a pitch fork" and as a "common meeting ground of all Atlanta organizations." Calls for new leadership at the AGC were seconded by many but Dr. Ostrow reminded the community that it would be a fight. He said "As long as Mr. Gripp and his cronies control the Atlanta Gay Center as a personal fiefdom, there is no room for more community minded people to create something of real value for Atlanta's gays and lesbians."[120]

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[116] "Gripping Responses," *Southern Voice* November 7, 1991, 8; "More Gripping Responses," *Southern Voice,* November 21, 1991, 8.

[117] "Gripping Responses."

[118] "More Gripping Responses."

[119] "Gripping Responses."

Early the next year activists initiated a new project that attempted to solve the problem of the Atlanta Gay Center. At the end of January in 1992, gay and lesbian activists undertook the first steps in organizing for the creation of a community center they thought would be of real value to Atlanta. The Atlanta Lambda Community Center (ALCC) Board of Trustees met in a "Town Hall Meeting" where they displayed an impressive amount of work accomplished in just a short period of time.[121] The ALCC had only recently come together, formed from two groups that met separately, and apparently unbeknownst to the other, in discussions about starting a new community center. The discussions were clearly related to the blow-up with the AGC in the fall and likely the result of facing what many others thought to be true—that Bill Gripp and the AGC were not likely to change their positions and therefore the only other option was to start from scratch.

At the first town hall meeting the Lambda Center's trustees gave community member attendees an introduction to the project and the realities they faced in getting it off the ground. Jeff Corrigan of LEGAL explained how the group first came together after being made aware of another group's efforts around developing a center. They decided to combine their collective resources. Marcia Okula, the first openly lesbian appointed as a Special Assistant to the Mayor, was part of the other group that was "meeting to discuss problems with political unity."[122] The activists who launched the Lambda Center showed a commitment to diversity and inclusivity. The roster of names included at the town hall meeting also showed that the impetus for the project came from numerous organizations in the city. Members of AALGA, BWMT, LEGAL, GAPAC, and Fourth Tuesday, the lesbian professional and social organization guided the first meeting. Joan Garner, member of AALGA and a Senior Advisor to Mayor Jackson, told *Southern Voice* they had "appropriate representation from almost all the community" and were prioritizing diversity by "doing our best to not exclude anyone."[123]

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[120] "More Gripping Responses."

[121] Atlanta Lambda Community Center, Meeting Minutes for Town Hall Meeting, January 29, 1992. AHC, ALGHT, Dick Rhodes Papers, Box 81.

The Lambda Center's plans were ambitious but realistic as they envisioned a timeline that took them through Pride season that year when they would launch a major fundraising campaign. One of their foremost priorities was to create a physical center for other community groups to have available to them. Marcia Okula said the idea evolved to include a plan for the creation of a "center, a physical focus for our community."[124] Jeff Corrigan echoed this sentiment saying they wanted a space "for all lesbians and gays." Joan Garner wanted it to "be a hub for the community, a place where we can all participate as equals." The AGC responded to the news of the Lambda Center with an article in *The News* that proved they had no qualms about publishing remarks that were openly hostile to the efforts.[125] They included a condescending reception from the current

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[122] KC Wildmoon, "New Atlanta Lambda Community Center Closer to Reality," *Southern Voice*, February 13, 1992, 2.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid.

[125] "Group plans gay/lesbian meeting room space; says it competes with Atlanta Gay Center," *The News*,

AGC Board Chairperson, Dr. Donald Smith, who welcomed the Lambda Center "as the sixty-ninth gay/lesbian group in Atlanta."

The unidentified author of the article in *The News* said the Lambda Community Center positioned itself to compete with the AGC. They reported the organizing "committee includes a number of individuals who are on record as disliking various AGC members or opposing various programs." One of the people they singled out to contradict in an effort to prove this idea was Jeff Corrigan who they said "began" the current effort, which deliberately obscured the group nature of the organization and its widespread community support. They said he claimed not feeling welcome at the Center and implied a personal motivation that wasn't based in reality. *The News* said "when challenged about that claim, [Corrigan] admitted he'd never set foot in the Center throughout its fifteen year history." It turned out that Jeff Corrigan was never "challenged" by a representative of *The News* or the AGC. He wrote to the paper to request a correction to their report, claiming he never talked to anyone who asked him about feeling welcome at the Center.[126] If asked he would have honestly answered about his past visits, but he also confirmed that he did not feel welcome there "because of unwarranted and vicious attacks on my friends and others."

The News turned Jeff Corrigan's phrasing against him. In their response they claimed his letter was an example of "those unfortunate few who, in defending bad ideas, choose to lower the level of debate to personal attack."[127] However, there was too much

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March 1992, 12. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[126] Jeff Corrigan, "Editor," *The News*, April 1992, 14. AHC, ALGHT, Box 1.203.

[127] Ibid.

evidence of the Center's open hostility to community members and past controversies to claim the moral high ground. Before the AGC responded to Corrigan a letter to *Southern Voice* from a relative newcomer to Atlanta, Chris H., described what many others had expressed in the past. She confirmed that it was a hostile place especially for women. Chris said she went to the Center's Coming Out group a few times "but didn't feel comfortable" in the "almost all male" meeting. What was more disconcerting was something happening elsewhere.

> A group of men were sitting around making nasty remarks about people in another room. I heard someone refer to this paper as the "Southern Vulva," and that did it. I wasn't about to come back to a place where they feel free to make such sexist, anti-lesbian remarks.[128]

The desire to have a physical place that was open to all lesbian and gay people in the community clearly reflected many people's opinion that the AGC was not a welcoming space. When the AGC first responded to news of the Lambda Center their report heavily focused on the differences between what the AGC believed it represented in the community and what the Lambda Center proposed. They were "surprised" at the assumption that the Lambda Center could replace the AGC because, as they put it, "we are not in the meeting room business or recreation center business, but in the social services business."[129] Joe Lillich, the AGC Administrator, pinpointed the problem to a misunderstanding about the roles and functions of a community center, arguing that their model was based on providing services and programming not the "recreation center model." Chairperson Don Smith agreed that providing meeting space for other community groups was not an "essential part of our mission."

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[128] Chris H. "Southern What?" *Southern Voice*, March 19, 1992, 9.

[129] "Group plans gay/lesbian meeting room space."

The Lambda Center trustees outlined their plans at the first town hall meeting. They reported to the community members in attendance on the basic structure of the group and the committees that would guide the process. The four committees included groups working on development, a business plan, research and design, and outreach. After the basics were covered they opened the discussion to a question and answer session. Community volunteers were concerned with the physical and the philosophical. They asked questions about the size and cost of the facility and if it would be rented or owned. They also asked pointed questions about how the Lambda Center would be run, framed in light of their perceived issues with the AGC.

Meeting notes showed that audience members asked questions that were more accurately statements about what they wanted from the new community center. One person stated "The actual people running the center will be critical to the success of the effort," which didn't really leave room open for the trustees to comment further. Another made a point to say that "It is important that no one person speak for the center." The trustees were able to add some clarification to their view of how the organization would be run in a question related to the development of by-laws. It was important to have by-laws and "other mechanisms" in place that would ensure that "trustees and volunteers keep their own personal agenda out of the establishment of the center."[130] One person related a specific need in the community saying they needed "a quality archive and library" and the Lambda Center "should work on developing these services." Lambda Center trustees acknowledged the dire need to address the issue of community history and its perceived loss. They said "We are losing our history and we need to have a repository." But they also opened up the discussion to include others who might be working on it. They stated that if another group was working in the area, "we don't want to take over the work unless we are asked to do so as part of the center's work."

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[130] Atlanta Lambda Community Center, Meeting Minutes, January 29.

That summer *Southern Voice* writer Candace Chellew reported on the progress of a new group in town dedicated to just such a project. The new organization was called the Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History Thing (ALGHT). Chellew consistently referred to the group by the wrong name calling it the "Gay and Lesbian History Thing."[131] The misidentification of the group hinted at a negligence to detail that bordered on ignorance and showed the continued fight for lesbian visibility in the movement. The ALGHT story even included a photograph of one member holding a banner that read "Help preserve Atlanta's queer history," underneath the slogan the group's name was written out— The Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History Thing. A year later at a Board of Directors meeting ALGHT officers discussed their name and considered alternative options. Meeting minutes recorded that "Some people feel the name is charming, humorous, "Southren," distinctive, and memorable; others feel it is inane, confusing, and flippant."[132] In the end, the group decided to keep their name as is "and to try to train others to use the words in our name in the correct sequence ('Lesbian and Gay')."

The simple sentence on the banner conveyed the group's core mission to preserve Atlanta's queer history and their desire to make community involvement a part of their work. The group came together after the death of long-time "dedicated and often arrested gay rights veteran," Charlie St. John. What spurred the activists to action was when his papers were sent to a gay and lesbian archive in New York. They felt Atlantans lost an important historical source for documenting their own story.[133] The group came together to preserve Atlanta's history but also to preserve it *in* Atlanta. That fall ALGHT member Liz Throop spoke to a student group at Georgia Tech about the organization. She related how they were compelled to act because of the many deaths of local activists due to AIDS. "We felt it would be best to keep the materials somewhere in the Atlanta area where they'd be available to the local people who would care most about them instead of being sent off to one of the national archives."[134]

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[131] Candace Chellew with Yvette Loury, "Gay and Lesbian History Thing," *Southern Voice*, July 16, 1992, 18.

[132] The Atlanta Lesbian & Gay History Thing, Draft Minutes, Board of Directors Meeting, March 31, 1993. AHC, ALGHT, Joy Wasson Papers, Box 86.

The ALGHT collection started with about eight boxes donated by Maria Helena Dolan that she inherited from gay activist veteran Ray Kluka when he died in 1989 from illness related to AIDS. By the summer of 1993 the collection had grown to occupy a "room full of files and boxes" housed at the Atlanta History Center.[135] Kluka's records included documentation of his long career and activism in the city's gay and lesbian community. He was a local organizer for the first and second national marches, former Director of the Atlanta Gay Center, and an Editor for a number of years at the popular local gay magazine, *Etc.* Dolan said that "instead of letting them stay in my house and have the cats sleep in and piss on them, I and a small group formed The Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History Thing, specifically to preserve evidence of our lives and our heritage."[136] Dolan was not the only activist to have records in her personal care. In a later chronology of the organization and their work, ALGHT member Joy Wasson, Liz Throop's partner, recalled that both her and Gil Robison "had lots of gay materials to preserve including all of Ray Kluka's stuff."[137] Wasson remembered Dolan's desire to have the materials preserved elsewhere. She said "Maria wanted to get it out of her basement."

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[133] Holly Morris, "55-foot-long Gay Pride timeline notes 50-year history in Atlanta;" "The life and times of Atlanta's gays," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, June 24, 1993. AHC, ALGHT, Joy Wasson Papers, Box 86.

[134] "Outline of Liz's talk to the Georgia Tech Student Group," October 21, 1992. AHC, ALGHT, Joy Wasson Papers, Box 86.

[135] Morris, "55-foot-long Gay Pride timeline."

In December of 1991 Joy Wasson and Liz Throop approached the Atlanta History Center (AHC) about starting a gay and lesbian collection that would be preserved, housed, and eventually exhibited there. The AHC was supportive of ALGHT's plans and said they would accept the collection. ALGHT was responsible for building the collections and soliciting donations. The collection is still housed at the AHC and contains over sixty feet of materials collected by activists that date back to the pre-World War II era. The choice of housing the local queer archives at the History Center was not an uncontroversial move. Activists voiced concerns about having their materials and the record of their work hidden away in the archives unable to be viewed and researched by the community that it represented. Lynn Cothren challenged the choice and told *Southern Voice* "the appropriate place would be the Lambda Center." He made the impassioned argument that "We don't want to give up our history when we're planning a place for ourselves."[138]

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[136] Maria Helena Dolan, "You Can't Be a People Unless You Have a History," *AIDS Survival Project* (September/October 2004) http://www.thebody.com/content/art32194.html.

[137] Joy (Wasson), "History Thing Chronology," June 24, 1997, 2. AHC, ALGHT, Joy Wasson Papers, Box 86.

[138] Chellew, "Gay and Lesbian History Thing."

ALGHT was concerned that a local community center might not be able to fund the long-term and permanent storage and preservation of the collections. The desire of some activists to control their own histories and ensure that they would be given proper attention were not idle concerns or ego-driven power politics. Liz Throop told Candace Chellew that "Our history has been more than neglected, it has been aggressively destroyed." She added that sometimes "People die and their blood relatives immediately go for the personal letters, papers and anything else that is a testimony to this person's life as a gay person."[139] Throop told students at Georgia Tech that the AHC was the right choice for their collection because "as professional archivists, dedicated to the safekeeping of historical papers and objects, they'll be much better equipped than the gay community is to deal with these things."[140]

Activists involved with the project elaborated on their concerns about the ability of the community to care for the physical records of their history. Before they settled on the name of ALGHT, in the spring of 1992, the group was known as the "Ad Hoc Committee for the Preservation of Atlanta's Lesbian and Gay History." In April they sent out letters to organizations in the city asking them to become involved with their group and the project. They noted then that recent deaths in the community made the establishment of a "Gay archives," something they were thinking about for years, "imperative" now. In the letter they touched on what must have been an unfolding and evolving conversation about the right space for the archives. They gave a detailed and thoughtful response to challengers who wanted to keep the records in the community.

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[139] Ibid.

[140] "Outline of Liz's talk to the Georgia Tech Student Group."

They said “Creating an Atlanta Lesbian and Gay archives from scratch has been discussed, but some have deep reservations about the feasibility of long-term funding for the kind of accessible, secure, climate-controlled environment necessary for historically significant documents.” In addition having the collections housed at the AHC marked their inclusion as an important community in the city with a history worth preserving in a mainstream institution. They said “many of us feel strongly that it is important for us to take our rightful place as part of our city’s history and not be segregated from it.”[141]

The activists who penned that letter were lesbian and gay Atlantans who had long cared about their unique history and were involved in organizations and events of historical importance. The Ad Hoc Committee included Cal Gough, Dave Hayward, Gil Robison, Liz Throop, Joy Wasson, and Maria Helena Dolan. ALGHT took advantage of the growth in Pride and showcased their work and what they considered an important element of activism—that of historical awareness. As the group advanced in their mission they made outreach efforts to different communities, especially the city’s gay, lesbian, and queer university students. They hoped to get students and a younger generation involved and invested in their mission to preserve and promote queer history. ALGHT grew during an extraordinary time in Atlanta’s gay and lesbian community history, when regional activism and interest in gay and lesbian history generally was increasing. Liz Throop said at the time there was “an explosion of interest and research in our history.”[142]

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[141] “Dear Atlantan,” letter from the Ad Hoc Committee for the Preservation of Atlanta’s Lesbian and Gay History, April 1992. AHC, ALGHT, Joy Wasson Papers, Box 86.

[142] “Outline of Liz’s talk to the Georgia Tech Student Group.”

Activists with ALGHT were right to be concerned about the community's ability to care for the physical documents of their history. The needs of the collection required, at minimum, a location better than Maria Dolan's basement where they were tended to by her cats. The Lambda Center was still in the process of planning and years from being funded. Over the spring and summer they assessed survey responses that asked community organizations about the needs of the proposed center. Debbie Fraker, who served on the research and design committee for the Lambda Center, told *Southern Voice* they settled on a plan for the physical needs and requirements of the space, which would be around 10,000 square feet.[143] The research and design committee reported that many people wanted to build a "library/archives," but acknowledged their limitations and so instead proposed a "reading room environment." They said "The archives would be an operation that we will continue to strive for, but will probably be "further down the road" for the center, if it is still needed."

Nice Southern Queers

Queer Nation/Atlanta's protests at Cracker Barrel continued into 1992 and spread nationally. At another Lithonia protest Lynn Cothren and five others were arrested during the launch of a new national campaign called "Roll Out the Barrel Week."[144] That week activists in Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Virginia demonstrated at Cracker Barrels and one person was arrested in Virginia after management took issue with his filming inside the restaurant. It was Cothren's fourth arrest since June of 1991 when

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[143] KC Wildmoon, "Atlanta Lambda Community Center Plans Well Underway," *Southern Voice*, October 8, 1992, 3.

[144] KC Wildmoon, "Six Arrested at Latest Cracker Barrel Demo," *Southern Voice*, April 2, 1992, 3.

Cracker Barrel managers started to take a hard line stance with the activists. The energy of his activism had not decreased though he was clearly starting to feel the effects of his multiple arrests. He told *Southern Voice* "I get butterflies every time I go to a Cracker Barrel demo."

Lynn Cothren and other QN/ATL activists were vindicated in their efforts the next week when ten activists were found not guilty of criminal trespass related to arrests at a Cracker Barrel protest in the summer of 1991.[145] In a trial that lasted two days, a six person jury heard from Cracker Barrel managers, including Jody Waller, who *Southern Voice* pointed out may have committed perjury when he testified under oath about the company's anti-gay policy by denying its existence. When confronted with physical evidence that contradicted this he changed his story. The evidence was QN defendant Cheryl Summerville's termination notice, which he personally conducted and contained his written statement that she was fired for violating the company policy by being gay. Cothren lamented the waste of money spent on arresting QN/ATL activists and pursuing the charges against them, whose "only purpose was to promote the bigoted and discriminatory employment practices of the Cracker Barrel company."

That spring the annual Pride season criticism reflected a changing landscape in queer politics and mainstream activism. In a Pride Committee meeting in late May organizers and community activists sparred over a recent decision by the Committee to exclude overtly political speakers. They did so, they said, because of complaints about too many political speeches at past events. The argument started when two gay and lesbian political activists, Jeff Corrigan and Samantha Claar, requested to speak at Pride.

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[145] KC Wildmoon, "Not Guilty," *Southern Voice*, April 9, 1992. 1, 3.

Committee organizers held firm in their decision but offered them the position of Grand Marshal, which was viewed as a compromise. This option was voted down by the Committee because of how they were treated by the political activists at the meeting. Duncan Teague facilitated the meeting and said "There was no concern for the kind of hostility brought into that meeting. I felt like they wanted to define our agenda, tell us what we ought to do" and added that the disagreement needed to be worked in a more mature way.[146]

Part of the disagreement rested on a new variation of older divisions. The Pride Committee's arguments to keep the event non-political were interpreted in the context of mainstream and radical divide in gay, lesbian, and queer activism. In support of Pride, Gene-Gabriel Moored penned a guest editorial that gave a recent retrospective of Pride in Atlanta. He outlined how much progress the community made since 1987 when he and other activists rallied to "Save Gay Pride." The change in the city was undeniable and he felt it came from the new leadership in the local movement. However, he noted that too had changed. Moore related that at recent meeting of QN/ATL activists "weren't talking overthrow of the capitalist system" but instead discussed their initiative to adopt a highway.[147] It wasn't what he expected and underlined the fact that QN/ATL moved in the mainstream.

Pride's theme was "Celebrate Your Individuality" and activists hoped to celebrate another year of record attendance. [148] Events that year included a commitment ceremony, a viewing of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, an art market and musical entertainment. On Sunday June 28th Atlantans marched from the Civic Center down Peachtree Street to Piedmont Park where they listened to speakers at the rally. Local activists who spoke included Larry Pellegrini, President of the L/GRC, coordinator for QN/ATL, and member on the boards of GAPAC, LEGAL, and the Lambda Community Center, Joan Garner who spoke about AALGA's activism, and of course, Maria Helena Dolan. Candace Chellew noted Dolan's official biography described her as "a shameless, wide-eyed Aquarian Latina dyke who has lived, loved and agitated openly in the Atlanta area since 1976." National speakers included activists from Out Youth and the National Latino/Latina Lesbian and Gay Organization and added to the diversity to stage. Chellew said that Lea Delaria served as "the host of choice," which showed how far the city had come from the days of Prides past "when there was an open mike on the stage so anyone and everyone could have their say."

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[146] KC Wildmoon, "Gay candidates angry over decision to not allow political speeches during Pride," *Southern Voice,* June 4, 19921, 4.

[147] Gene Gabriel-Moore, "New Grit," *Southern Voice,* June 4, 1992, 4.

[148] Candace Chellew, "Pride '92," *Southern Voice,* June 25, 1992, 17-19.

Former Pride Committee organizer Gene Holloway celebrated his fifteenth Pride that year. He told *Southern Voice* "I always knew we could do it" when he looked at over the 60,000 person crowd. KC Wildmoon reported the rally was not without its own controversies as ACT UP activists protested in an unplanned action at the start of the day. They chanted loudest when Lynn Cothren took the stage. A photograph printed in *SoVo* showed one activist in a Queer Nation shirt who carried a sign that read "Who died and made Lynn Cothren God? Let Samantha speak!"[149] Since the May meeting Jeff Corrigan had dropped out of the race but activists found a way to get Samantha Claar who was still in the running for a Georgia House seat on stage. Claar was invited by Out Youth activist Kelly Patillo to share her stage time at the rally.[150]

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[149] Jim Knoll, "Cothren is not the enemy, oppression is," *Southern Voice*, July 9, 1992, 9.

The photograph accompanied two letters to the paper that showed divergent viewpoints on the controversy that unfolded over the Samantha Claar issue but morphed into something else. In the Saturday *Atlanta Journal Constitution* that came out the weekend of Pride, Lynn Cothren made comments in an interview that many local activists felt disrespected their collective cause and were "AIDS-phobic." Cothren was quoted as stating he wanted "to give up the ownership of AIDS as a gay white male to blacks, straight people, Congress and the president whose responsibility it is to deal with it."[151] The image was captioned "A Cothren protestor/Claar supporter at Pride '92" and indicated the issues were related. The next few weeks of the *Southern Voice* carried multiple opinion pieces, editorials, and letters from the community about the two issues and showed a shift in community feelings about radicalism, anger, and the limits of acting up.[152] Introducing the controversy to readers who may not have been aware of it, *SoVo* included a quote from Claar's speech where she told the crowd to "stop stabbing each other in the fucking back," though the paper noted that "some accused her of being the chief knife-wielder."

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[150] KC Wildmoon, "60,000," *Southern Voice,* July 2, 1992, 1, 12-13.

[151] Wildmoon "60,000."

[152] "Let Samantha Speak?;" Padraig McLoughlin, "Why I Will Vote for Claar;" Terry McDurmon, "Why I Won't Vote for Claar;" Jim Knoll, "Cothren is not the enemy, oppression is;" Jimmy Allen, "No One is Bigger Than Aids;" ACT UP/Atlanta, "ACT UP can't remain silent;" Joan Garner, "Our struggle is mighty let's stick together;" Goldy Criscuolo, "Political rally was horrible show of sexism," *Southern Voice,* July 9, 1992, 1, 9, 11. Christina Cash, "Diversity ≠ Adversity;" Tom Blount, "Carbon Copy," *Southern Voice,* July 16, 1992, 9, 13; Hubert Alexander, "Pride & Such," *Southern Voice,* July 23, 1992, 9.

The controversy kicked up a lot of dust. ACT UP and Queer Nation activists offered divergent opinions. Activists in both groups were by no means decided on one side or the other. At a protest rally held at the Capital in support of Samantha Claar the day before Sunday's parade activists displayed some questionable tactics and fueled the growing controversy. KC Wildmoon reported at the rally they "knocked around" an effigy of Cothren, a dummy in a Queer Nation t-shirt, and Cheryl Summerville was portrayed as a puppet worked by the hands of Cothren.[153] QN/ATL activist and former chair of Atlanta NOW, Goldy Criscuolo, who was arrested at a Cracker Barrel protest that spring and described herself as "the little gray-haired old woman who shows up at almost all actions in the activist community" said she was "appalled to read and hear about the degrading and disgusting portrayal of Cheryl Summerville."[154] Activists who supported Claar seemed to unleash a barrage of long-held criticism of QN/ATL and especially Cothren's leadership. Critic Jimmy Allen remembered one QN meeting where a "secret file" was passed around for only a few who were privileged enough to see it. He was shocked when he forced his way to it and discovered that it was an apology to a radio station written on behalf of an activist who used profanity on air.[155]

The decision to keep political speeches away from the Pride stage grew out of concerns about Lynn Cothren's statements about AIDS. ACT UP activists were outraged at the idea that Cothren was clearly advocating for—to reduce the visibility of AIDS activism in the gay, lesbian, and queer community. For many it was an unbelievable betrayal, but also a predictable chain of events judging from their past interactions with QN/ATL's atypical leader. Christina Cash in an editorial about the state of affairs in Atlanta said the last few months were "marked by disagreement, dissension and divisiveness" and had "pitted friend against friend, family against family and organization against organization."[156] Since it was an election year and Claar was running for office much of the criticism focused around her qualifications as a candidate and the community's responsibility or feelings about supporting candidates on a single issue. In the cases of Claar and Cothren, Cash inveighed against the single-issue concept found in each controversy. For Claar her candidacy seemed based on her queer identity and for ACT UP activists it seemed rooted in the supremacy of AIDS as the uniting cause in queer politics.

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[153] Wildmoon "60,000."

[154] Criscuolo, "Political rally was horrible show of sexism."

[155] Allen, "No One is Bigger Than Aids."

Queer Nation and ACT UP changed Atlanta's gay, lesbian, and queer community. By 1992 the politics of the movement had changed everywhere, not just in Atlanta. ACT UP chapters were in decline in many cities and many QN chapters had already folded.[157] People were deeply impacted by the massive coming out process that direct action activism effected but radicalism seemed to have run its course. In 1990 Al Cotton was an early proponent of queer as a reclaimed identifier in part because he thought it would empower him and decrease its harmful psychological effect. Two years later he admitted this was not the case and acknowledged that a lot of people in the community still objected to its use.[158] He thought its divisive meaning wasn't really about the word itself and considered it a symptom of a bigger issue in the community. He said

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[156] Cash, "Diversity ≠ Adversity."

[157] Vaid, *Virtual Equality*; Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*.

> The debate over whether or not to use Queer is just another version of the never-ending argument about the best type of political action. Is it better to assimilate and wait for fair-minded people to recognize our harmlessness and give us our rights, or is it better to yell until they get tired of the noise and give us our rights to shut us up?

Six months later Cotton was still unsure of his queer politics, what he called the "Queer/Gay stuff."[159] He deemed himself not radical enough to really claim Queer, yet Gay seemed to him more closeted and not reflective of his life and his "level of outness." Since neither term fit him Cotton coined a new term. He said "Nice Southern Queers (NSQs for short) are Atlanta's contribution to Queer activism." "Being Nice," he said had dominated activism in the 1980s, especially when contrasted to the alternative, being "Ugly" and yelling. A prime example of an NSQ vs. a non-Southern Queer was seen in the difference between the 1990 sodomy protest which featured blow-up dolls on a bed positioned to sixty-nine and QN/ATL's Cracker Barrel protests where activists sat quietly and tipped big. He said NSQ's were openly queer and wanted to be identified as such with t-shirts, bumper stickers, and pride paraphernalia everywhere yet seemed to be addicted to politeness and unfortunately still partially closeted only outing themselves at work with queer topics of small-talk infrequently.

Al Cotton remarked that "NSQ's *love* Bill Clinton." They were instinctually attracted to his "Southern Niceness" as they had been with friends, family, and co-workers. However, he also argued that it was delusional to continue being "Nice to Aunt Jennie" in the hopes that she would be nice right back. Cotton understood that niceness was a mask in Southern politics and queer people depended on it for survival in a hostile world. He also seemed preternaturally tuned into the future as he foreshadowed that "Aunt Jennie" and Bill Clinton would not be nice in return. In 1993, Clinton's acceptance of the controversial Don't Ask, Don't Tell military policy hit Georgians especially hard because it was Georgia's longtime Senator, Democrat Sam Nunn, who pushed hard for it. His refusal to support lifting the ban on gay and lesbian members of the armed services who wanted to serve openly was accepted by Clinton and showed that Niceness had not won them "an existence unencumbered by bigotry and oppression."[160]

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[158] Al Cotton, "That Darn Q Word," *Southern Voice,* April 30, 1992, 9.

[159] Al Cotton, "Nice Southern Queers," *Southern Voice,* November 26, 1992, 11.

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[160] Ibid.

EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION

The Very Beginning of a Long War, 1993

By the time of the third national, officially titled the 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation, the gay and lesbian rights movement was in the process of transformation. Amin Ghaziani argued that by the time of the March, the movement was fundamentally different.[1] National themes of diversity, economic justice, and intersectionality forced back to the center long-standing and unsettled issues over single-issue politics and the soul of the gay and lesbian civil rights movement.[2] These issues contributed to transformations in Atlanta's gay and lesbian political and activist communities too. Gay and lesbian activists had divergent ideas about mainstreamed liberal gay and lesbian politics, direct protest activism, and the rise of queer politics. Activists and community members engaged in discussions regarding power, progress, and the meaning of the gay and lesbian rights movement.

The summer before the march the development of the platform drew the attention of more conservative and mainstream members of the community.[3] Columnist Leonard Green said it reflected the politics of the "ultra-left" and warned that "If Gays are having problems with the platform, you can be assured straights will, too." Green's criticism of the radical and leftist politics of the March reflected the continuing wear of the division between the mainstreaming and assimilationist communities of the movement. He feared the platform was too radical for moderates and would complicate future efforts to raise money for political lobbying efforts, two aspects of the mainstream movement that dominated lesbian and gay politics for the rest of the decade.[4]

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[1] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent,* 128.

[2] Vaid, *Virtual Equality*.

[3] Leonard Green, "Marching to the Left," *Southern Voice*, June 25, 1992; Carolyn White, "MOW Platform is No Grab Bag," *Southern Voice,* July 16, 1992, 11; James Sears, "The South, New Battleground for Gay Rights," *Southern Voice*, August 27, 1992, 9.

Leonard Green's syndicated opinion piece appeared in *Southern Voice* and quickly elicited a local response that challenged the mainstream views he advocated. Carolyn White, who was a co-chair of the Georgia organizing committee, a regional committee member, and a platform committee member, argued the platform represented true diversity. She said Green's was "in name only." White argued that those who were alienated by the platform and "reluctant to publicly support us" would not be appeased by more moderate politics. The March's coalition style politics represented a moment of hopeful optimism in the lesbian and gay movement's political strength and commitment to what many believed was the coming liberal Democratic era. White wanted those who weren't out in support held accountable for their politics. Buoyed by the progress and support received from Bill Clinton, many lesbian and gay political activists threw their full support behind Clinton and other Democratic politicians. They intended to show their political strength in the elections that fall. Instead of accepting the moderated compromises of their current political representatives, she wanted to vote them out. There was an opportunity for the community to “come out of the closet and elect officials who will vote for right, not hide in fright.”[5]

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[4] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent,* 157-95.

Lesbian and gay issues became a substantial part of the 1992 Presidential campaign of Bill Clinton. One of his specific campaign promises to the lesbian and gay community was to repeal the ban on gays in the military.[6] Clinton’s election was felt by many lesbian, gay, bi, and queer activists as an uplifting and potentially victorious moment. In her history of ACT UP, *Moving Politics*, Deborah Gould considered how widespread relief was in the queer community at Clinton’s election.[7] Many activists approached the election with a “sense of urgency” as Clinton represented a real hope to change the status quo of inaction related to AIDS.[8] ACT UP activists and other gay and lesbian activists had reason to believe this as Clinton campaign’s addressed their concerns with promises to enact much-needed and delayed AIDS funding and to end the military ban. Many welcomed the relief that hope offered because they were tired and burned out from years of anger and rage. The community of mainstream, liberal, and radical activists united around the possibilities of the Clinton administration. In January of 1993, for the first time, lesbian and gay activists held an inaugural ball in celebration of Bill Clinton. At the Triangle Ball, cosponsored by the Human Rights Campaign Fund, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, musician Melissa Etheridge came out publicly, symbolically cementing a new era of visibility.[9]

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[5] White, “MOW Platform is No Grab Bag.”

[6] Eaklor, *Queer America,* 198.

[7] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 415-19.

[8] Ibid., 415.

The victory felt less sure soon after President Clinton announced his plans to keep his campaign promise and lift the military ban. In February the lesbian and gay community in Atlanta reacted with special interest because the most significant and detrimental opposition to lifting the ban came from Georgia's senior Senator, Sam Nunn. *Southern Voice* editor Christina Cash argued the military ban was symbolic of a deeper national moral referendum on gay rights. She placed part of the blame on Nunn in her editorial. She said "Our conservative Democrat has pushed the issue of gays in the military to the issue of whether or not gay men and lesbians will be treated, in all segments of our society, as equal citizens."[10] That spring the military ban became a national issue of interest and cause for many people in America, straight and queer. It superseded anti-AIDS activism in the gay and lesbian movement, which was partly due to the decline of ACT UP and radical activism in general.[11] The issue motivated people to come to the national March and show their strength. A month out from the March organizers reported they expected close to a million people to come to Washington D.C., not just for the March but also to take part in associated events held over the course of the week.[12]

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[9] KC Wildmoon, "Gay Times in D.C.," *Southern Voice*, January 28, 1993, 1, 9.

[10] Christina Cash, "An Unexpected War," *Southern Voice*, February 4, 1993, 9.

[11] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 305-313; Signorile, *Queer in America*, 391-394.

[12] C. Mitchell, "One Month and Counting," *Southern Voice*, March 25, 1993, 9, 10, 26.

The National Park Service grossly underestimated the crowd at 300,000, which other official sources claimed to be between half a million and one million.[13] Reports of the lower numbers circulated within the gay community and were interpreted by many in a direct comparison to the media blackout that occurred after the 1987 March. One woman at the March joked that the low numbers were due to lesbian invisibility, theorizing that there were over half a million lesbians but the press just didn't see them. Al Cotton contrasted the emotional environment in which each March took place, with the former. He said in 1987 "we had an urgent reason to march that came direct from Georgia—*Bowers v. Hardwick*. We had just discovered that our government had the right, if it chose to exercise it, to outlaw our profoundest expression of love for one another. We HAD to march."[14]

The third March was held without such a clear cut enemy. People from around the country came to Washington in a political climate that was not so obviously hostile to the gay and lesbian rights movement. The recent election of gay-friendly Democrat Bill Clinton offered a new era of hopeful progress. Al Cotton wasn't sure the March had reached a million and considered if the generally optimistic mood was the cause of the smaller crowd. Things were less dire than they were in 1987. He said maybe the crowd would have been bigger "if George Bush were about to appoint Byron White's replacement on the Supreme Court, or if Dan Quayle were still handing out Family Values-laced grape Kool-aid."[15] The March energized individuals and communities as it had in 1987. In the spring of 1993 Marchers thought it a moment of possible forward momentum and the dawning of a new era but it actually reflected the twilight of the direct action movement.

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[13] KC Wildmoon, "But Who's Counting," *Southern Voice*, April 29, 1993, 1, 14.

[14] Al Cotton, "How Many Are We," *Southern Voice*, May 6-12, 1993, 14.

[15] Ibid.

For the third year in a row Atlanta's Pride surpassed its record with an estimated crowd of over 100,000 who showed up for the city's march and festivities under the slogan "It's Time to Tell, America."[16] Less than a month after Pride, lesbian and gay people felt the sting of disappointment, betrayal, and setback when President Clinton compromised with conservative senators and accepted a partial negotiation of the military ban, Don't Ask, Don't Tell. Before DADT changed the movement Atlantans basked in the afterglow of a successful national March and embraced the new liberation movement's call to come out. Coming out once again became a political expression of a movement, but in the 1990s that political activism was dominated by mainstream and moderate leaders. Lesbian and gay visibility increased throughout the decade in mainstream media, entertainment, and popular culture generally as more people came out but the era of radical gay, lesbian, and queer activism faded.

In Atlanta, the shift towards mainstream activism started in the 1980s and was the major source of political activism in the city for most of the decade. Despite an early charge to energize the community in protests in 1986, Atlantans organized more discreetly until 1988 when the direct action activism of ACT UP emerged in the city. Queer Nation's protests at Cracker Barrel proved an important event in the city's lesbian and gay community history. This activism was born out in the change in Pride in 1991, which saw its first crowd size in the tens of thousands. In an era of momentous change lesbian, gay, and queer activists in Atlanta organized to make sure their history was preserved and acknowledged as a historic community. By the summer of 1993, the Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History Thing had incorporated as a non-profit, advanced in their collecting goals, and grown to about a dozen active members that included local activists, students, and community members.

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[16] KC Wildmoon, "A Weekend Full of Pride," *Southern Voice*, July 1, 1993, 3, 15.

Like the lesbian and gay community in general, ALGHT's work was rewarded with positive mainstream local media coverage. *Atlanta Journal* and the *Constitution* staff writer Holly Morris highlighted ALGHT's mission, their origins, and a massive fifty-five foot long timeline the group displayed at the Pride celebration.[17] ALGHT recorded the coverage as part of their institutional history in 1997 with a direct notation that "We got press coverage from the *Atlanta Journal/Constitution*."[18] It was a succinct statement of fact about a write-up in the local newspapers but it belied a twenty-year history of fighting conservative and hostile opinions or entire media blackouts. The press coverage included details about ALGHT's large tent size, exhibited physical memorabilia, and the timeline of "gay people/places/events in Atlanta."[19] In a photograph that ran with the articles, Liz Throop, Joy Wasson, and John Howard, identified as a Ph.D. candidate at Emory University, stood before sections of the timeline. The photo showed older generation activists engaged with a new generation in consultation over their work.[20]

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[17] Morris, "55 foot;" "The Time of Their Lives."

[18] Joy, "History Thing Chronology."

[19] Ibid.

The ALGHT collection was donated to the Atlanta History Center despite some early community protest that its rightful home should be in the Lambda Community Center, which was still in the process of being funded. The collection was a product of the activists and community members who were most involved with its creation. The history in the records related mostly to mainstream gay and lesbian political organizations. ALGHT activists made some early attempts to reach out to gay and lesbian people of color, but the collection overall offers only fragments of their history incorporated into a broader archive that shows the dominance of middle-class, professional, and white activists and their interests and issues in the city. It contains the organizational records of the First Tuesday Association, the Lesbian/Gay Rights Chapter of the GA ACLU, the Atlanta Gay Center, and the personal papers of local activists like Ray Kluka, Maria Helena Dolan, John Howell, Frank Scheuren, and many others. The ALGHT collection reflects the founders political activism within the city. Other Atlanta gay and lesbian collections at Georgia State University, Emory University, and Kennesaw State highlight Atlanta's queer history in differing degrees and focuses. BWMT/Atlanta's records are also housed at the Atlanta History Center, while other black gay and lesbian materials have been collected and preserved at the Auburn Avenue Research Center.

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[20] The photo caption and the article identified "Joy Wasser"; Joy *Wasson*, in fact, was very active in ALGHT and donated her papers about the organization to the archival collection at the Atlanta History Center. Morris, "The Time of Their Lives."

Atlanta's lesbian and gay community eventually dispersed it records throughout the city, mirroring how they lived and engaged in smaller social and activist communities. Duncan Teague donated his collection of materials to the Auburn Avenue Research Center, but it remains unprocessed. This issue affects many institutions who may struggle with funding archivists to process backlogs or may be a result of lacking an ally within to advocate for the prioritization of the collection. The Research Center houses collections that highlight Atlanta's black community and history and it makes sense that black gay and lesbian activists in Atlanta would want to locate their specific history in the context of what they saw as their primary community.

ALFA was one of the longest continuously functioning lesbian organizations in the country when they disbanded in 1994.[21] Part of ALFA's library collection, the periodicals, were sold to Duke University in North Carolina before the group officially disbanded.[22] The rest of the group's materials became a core part of the extensive holdings at the Rubenstein Library related to gay, lesbian, queer, and transgender history in the Southeast.[23] In that context, ALFA's importance as a regional institution overruled their somewhat complicated relationship to their city of origin. The decision to preserve outside of Atlanta acknowledged that the group's community had grown from its physical center in the Little Five Points neighborhood and evolved into a networked community that supported women from many places and was an especially important organization for lesbian women in the Southeast.

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[21] Bonnie Zimmerman, *Lesbian Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia,* Volume 1 (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000) 193.

[22] KC Wildmoon, "ALFA: What did the group mean and why did it die?," *Southern Voice*, April 28, 1994, 14-15.

[23] There are over two dozen unique LGBT collections at the Rubenstein Library. They span multiple subjects and areas and include the records of writers, activists, organizations, and periodicals. https://guides.library.duke.edu/lgbtstudies/archives.

In the early 1990s, lesbian, gay, and queer communities all over the country experienced transformations. Some national organizations born in an earlier era survived intact and grew bigger in the next decade, like the NGLTF and the HRCF. In Atlanta, older-generation groups remained active but were in a state of decline as the movement shifted away from direct action activism and at the same time reacted to another major defeat in DADT. Atlanta's major local lobbying group was absorbed into the national HRCF organization, and even some of its activists too, like Cathy Woolard who moved to Washington D.C. in the early 1990s to work for HRCF. Late in 1993, Daniel Gandy, President of LEGAL wrote to members of the gay and lesbian Democratic association to inform them that the organization voted to disband. It was a sad outcome directly influenced by DADT. He explained

> This decision was a difficult and painful one for us all. It has not been done hastily or in anger, but after many months of struggling to revitalize the organization. The deep disappointment with President Clinton's betrayal of our Community over the issue of the military led to an ever diminishing enthusiasm which we could not overcome.[24]

In 1994, Queer Nation finally called it quits after a significant decline in membership and enthusiasm. ACT UP/Atlanta was one of the few organizations founded in an earlier generation that survived the decade but like other ACT UP chapters around the country suffered from a sometimes lethal decline in members.[25]

The third national March in 1993 shifted lesbian, gay, and bi communities attention away from the local and towards the national collective. The March and the national battle over lifting the ban on gays in the military reoriented the movement towards the nation's capital and national issues. The LGB community worked to see a physical manifestation of their power and were able to celebrate when somewhere between half a million to one million people came to the March in April of 1993. The victory was short-lived though as the DADT compromise passed that summer marked, yet again, another major defeat to the national gay rights movement that would prove transformative.[26]

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[24] Daniel Gandy, Dear Friend, December 21, 1993. AHC, ALGHT, Joy Wasson Papers, Box 87.

[25] Many ACT UP chapters were in decline by 1992 and all but defunct by mid-decade. Gould, *Moving Politics,* 267-327.

For many on the political left, women, and people of color, the years between the second March in 1987 and third in 1993 were an exciting period filled with new political radicalism, protest, and activism. It was a period of great strides forward in organization and impact but at the same time some communities continued to struggle against sexism, racism, and classism within the gay and lesbian community. The tensions between Atlanta's mainstream and direct action community activists increased engagement and identification with lesbian and gay politics and activism. In Atlanta and across the nation, as more people came out and became involved with aspects of local queer community, they transformed American society.

In 1993 a controversial and well-known gay activist and journalist named Michael Signorile published *Queer in America: Sex, the Media, and the Closets of Power*. The book was a powerful and analytical look at the politics of sexuality in modern America that proved just as controversial as its author's most infamous and criticized advocation of "outing." Outing was the process of disclosing a closeted person's sexuality in a public way. It was pioneered by radical activists within ACT UP and Signorile and other proponents of outing used their new visibility to expose and overturn what they saw as the hypocritical and destructive power of the closet. In a 1994 afterword to *Queer in America* Signorile wrote that the previous year had proved critical for the movement. He said the "entire lesbian and gay community underwent a traumatic and difficult experience in which the highs were high and the lows were low."[27] The March and DADT were highs and lows but both brought more mainstream visibility to gay and lesbian issues. Signorile counted this new visibility as a major victory.

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[26] Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 147-49.

Michael Signorile also thought the acceptance of DADT by Democratic politicians and gay and lesbian lobbyists and activists foretold something more ominous for the future. He said "Nineteen ninety-three marked the very beginning of a long war." Signorile proved an accurate seer in his prediction of "a ten-year battle at least."[28] The damage to the movement was added to three years later when Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act. Signorile thought there were signs of a growing conservative backlash in the early 1990s, evidenced by the passage of an anti-gay initiative in Colorado in 1992. DADT was a national defeat that reflected a resurgence of social conservatism that was powerfully consolidated in the midterm elections of 1994. In the years after a Republican dominated congress was aided in pushing an anti-gay agenda by moderate and conservative Democrats.[29] As bleak as the lows were, Signorile pointed out other tools the community had to fight back. In addition to coming out and breaking the power of the closet, queers in America had been working on “advanced techniques to take on the system.”[30]

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[27] Signorile, *Queer in America,* 395.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, 471-512; Self, *All in the Family*, 401-13.

In the chapter, “The Silicon Solution,” Signorile opened his study of how gay and lesbian communities used technology with a view of the not too distant future. The first lines read, “Your video display terminal is a battleground. Your weapon is a modem.”[31] Throughout the 1990s technologies of the internet and the personal computer changed how queer people found and met their political, informational, educational, sexual, health, and social needs, just as Signorile and others predicted it would. While it may not have encompassed life the way that it does for people in the twenty-first century, it was apparent and transformative as it evolved.

At the 1993 NGLTF annual Creating Change conference, held that year in Durham, North Carolina, a group called Digital Queers was interviewed by the video magazine Network Q, which covered lesbian, gay, and queer social, cultural, and political news.[32] Digital Queers, founded in 1992, “adopted” the NGLTF soon after they organized in a community-minded campaign to update the organization’s ancient technology.[33] Cofounders and co-chairs Karen Wickre and Tom Rielly answered questions about the group and their mission, which included engaging individuals and bringing queer people into the digital age.[34] They also wanted to create an online space for the queer community that Reilly envisioned as an "electronic town square." At the Creating Change conference the group's class on email communications and chat rooms drew a full crowd. Reilly said "We scheduled to do one class a day on email and we were forced to add two classes, which quickly sold out. And we added another class and we still literally had to kick people out at 11 o'clock at night just to go to bed." In the background of the interview, a full class of queers sat in front of monitors learning about and how to use the internet for queer purposes.

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[30] Signorile, *Queer in America,* 343.

[31] Ibid, 342.

[32] Larry P. Gross, *Up from Invisibility: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Media in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 251.

[33] Signorile, *Queer in America,* 352-53.

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[34] Network Q Out Across America, Episode 27, January 1994. Network Q Project, Q27: NGLTF Creating Change, Part 3, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgUtD5yyJY4. Accessed on November 1, 2018.

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