

**Out and Proud:  
Gay and Lesbian Organizing at Alabama Universities, 1983-1997**

by

Max Zinner

A thesis submitted to the Graduate faculty of  
Auburn University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

Auburn, Alabama  
May 5, 2019

Keywords: AIDS, Alabama, gay,  
lesbian, queer, student organizations

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Approved by

David Carter, Chair, Hollifield Associate Professor of Southern History  
W. Matt Malczykcki, Joseph A. Kicklighter Associate Professor of History  
Melissa Blair, Assistant Professor of History

## Abstract

This is an attempt to fill a void in the historical literature on gay rights, student activism, and the South by examining the recognition of and responses to gay and lesbian focused student organizations at Alabama state universities, specifically the University of Alabama and Auburn University. By examining contemporary sources, particularly student newspapers, gay and lesbian focused campus organizations are traced from their first formal appearance at the University of Alabama in 1983 to the recognition of their legal right to exist and receive equal treatment throughout the state by the eleventh circuit court of appeals in 1997. Despite the fact that gay and lesbian student organizations had been recognized on campuses in other states since the 1960s, such organizations were still quite controversial in Alabama throughout the 1980s and 1990s. This history places Alabama gay and lesbian focused student organizations into the broader history of queer student organizing and the struggles for gaining and maintaining university recognition of queer organizations with an emphasis on the role of outness and queer visibility. It also discusses why the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association, despite being formed later than the University of Alabama Gay Student Union and at a less political campus, received so much attention and had a greater legal impact on the state as a whole. This story demonstrates the important distinction between legal rights and social realities as they relate to marginalized populations such as the queer community. Finally, by centering universities in the deep South as opposed to metropolitan centers, this complicates prevailing narratives about AIDS and the timeline of the gay movement.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank David Carter who over the years has served as a primary advisor and mentor as I have gone through the process of higher education. Matt Malczykcki, who taught me to truly appreciate the practice of writing as well as giving and receiving proper criticism. Melissa Blair, whose expertise in American history and grassroots politics has expanded my horizons greatly and exposed me to numerous new ideas.

I would also like to thank the staff of the Hoole Special Collections Library at the University of Alabama who have taken the long hours to record and catalogue the records of LGBT organizations in West Alabama and beyond. Joshua Burford, who ensured that many early records of Alabama's gay community are preserved and whose work with the Invisible Histories Project will undoubtedly further our knowledge of queer history throughout the Deep South. Auburn University Libraries for preserving, digitizing, and cataloging the records of the *Auburn Plainsman*, one of the most important resources for this project. John Wayland Bales who has preserved so many early records of the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association on his own website which have also proven to be invaluable to this research.

Also significant to getting this done are the officers, members, and supporters of Auburn University Spectrum, a successor to AGLA and an organization that I have worked with first as a member, then an officer, and finally an advisor. Over the years it has been incredibly supportive of my research and granted me numerous opportunities to share it. The Auburn University Student Senate of 2017-2018, for commending the achievements of AGLA and beginning to

reckon with their own institution's role in the history of gay and lesbian organizing in Alabama. My parents also deserve a mention for always being there to support my education and teaching me the importance of critical thinking, an appreciation of history, and in countless other ways making me the person I am today.

Finally, I would like to thank all the founders and members of the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association, The University of Alabama Gay Student Union, and everyone that stood with them through their struggles for recognition. Without their courage and willingness to stand up for their rights there would be no story to tell. I hope that I have done their story justice.

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## List of Abbreviations

AAUP	American Association of University Professors
ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
AGLA	Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association
ALO	Alpha Lambda Omega
ASP	Alabama Student Party
AU	Auburn University
CAEB	Campus Activities Executive Board
GLBA	Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance
GLSS	Gay/Lesbian Support Services
GSU	Gay Student Union
KA	Kappa Alpha Order
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
SGA	Student Government Association
UA	University of Alabama
UAB	University of Alabama at Birmingham
USA	University of South Alabama
YAF	Young Americans for Freedom

## Introduction

In 1978 Harvey Milk, one of the nation's first openly gay elected leaders, gave the following proclamation:

Gay brothers and sisters, you must come out. Come out to your parents. I know that it is hard and will hurt them, but think about how they will hurt you in the voting booth! Come out to your relatives. Come out to your friends, if indeed they are your friends. Come out to your neighbors, to your fellow workers, to the people who work where you eat and shop. Come out only to the people you know, and who know you, not to anyone else. But once and for all, break down the myths. Destroy the lies and distortions. For your sake. For their sake.<sup>1</sup>

While the words of Harvey Milk were addressed to all gays and lesbians, they are particularly relevant to student activists. To date, very few have examined the intersections between queer history and the history of higher education. However, a number of articles have been written examining a number of different campuses including Columbia, Cornell, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, Appalachian State University, and The University of Florida.<sup>2</sup> From the little that has been written about university gay rights activism there would appear to be a number of common trends, with perhaps the most important being an increase in the visibility of queer students. These trends appear with the first gay student activists of the 1960s and 1970s, the years which most of the historical literature currently focuses, but, as the story of Alabama organizations demonstrates, would continue for decades to come. While often forgotten, students

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey Milk, "That's What America Is." Speech, Gay Freedom Day, San Francisco, CA, June 25, 1978.

<sup>2</sup> Brett Beemyn, "The Silence Is Broken: A History of the First Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual College Student Groups," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no. 2 (April 2003). ; Jessica Clawson, "Coming Out of the Campus Closet: The Emerging Visibility of Queer Students at the University of Florida, 1970–1982," *Educational Studies* 50, no. 3 (June 5, 2014); T. Evan Faulkenbury and Aaron Hayworth, "The Carolina Gay Association, Oral History, and Coming Out at the University of North Carolina," *Oral History Review* 43, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2016); Kathryn Staley, "Gay Liberation Comes to Appalachian State University (1969-1979)," *Appalachian Journal* 39, no. 1/2 (Fall/Winter 2011).

were on the ground from the very beginning of the modern gay rights movement coming out in hopes that through sharing their experiences, others would become more sympathetic and therefore less likely to support discriminatory policies.

Gaining university recognition for their organizations was often one of the first steps taken as queer students came out of their closets. Simply carving out spaces for themselves on their campuses and in their communities was an incredibly important step for queer students. Though in later decades this process of recognition would often, but not always, be less challenging, during the 1960s and 1970s many groups faced at least some difficulty in obtaining university recognition for their organizations. However, the publicity gained from forming an organization and the ensuing controversy was often exactly what was desired by the activists and fit directly into the idea of increasing visibility. In addition to increasing the visibility of the queer community, campus organizations would also serve as a sort of base of operations for future activism, as well as support students that had yet to come out and create a community that would allow them to do so. The visibility that a university recognized organization provided was perhaps one of the most effective forms of gaining recognition for the community and making their presence known.

The first university recognized queer organization was the Student Homophile League, formed at Columbia University in April of 1967 more than two years prior to the Stonewall riot, a story which has been well documented by Brett Beemyn. At Columbia there were numerous complaints made about the group from both outside and inside of the university community. Beemyn describes a dean at Columbia claiming that the Student Homophile League was “quite unnecessary,” and even the director of counseling services was concerned that the organization



might promote “deviant behavior” on campus.<sup>3</sup> While this negative publicity did cause the organization’s status to be questioned, the group’s charter prevailed and it was ultimately beneficial to the organization’s cause as it did help with recruitment.

Carving out spaces for queer students was not limited to forming campus organizations. Some students went beyond this; one example of forming communities beyond campus described by Beemyn involves gay students at Cornell effectively turning a new bar into a de facto gay bar by simply showing up en masse when the place opened to the point that the majority of the bar’s patrons at that time were gay, creating a precedent where gay people made up the majority of the clientele for the newly opened bar well beyond that one night.<sup>4</sup>

The experiences and difficulties faced by the Student Homophile Leagues in New York were quite similar to what would be faced by other student groups as they began to form in later years. Similar cases can be seen even on southern campuses such as at the University of Florida which was documented in some detail by Jessica Clawson.<sup>5</sup> Though Gainesville, Florida was significantly more conservative than New York City, the University of Florida did have a fairly strong history of student activism in the 1960s, paving the way for gay students in the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> Though it is certainly possible that students at Florida knew about Stonewall, Clawson’s research suggests that that was not a major issue there. Instead, what increased queer visibility in Florida, including at the University of Florida, was the more local issue of the Johns Committee. This was a committee of the Florida legislature in the 1950s and 1960s that was a part of the national

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<sup>3</sup> Beemyn, *The Silence is Broken*, 207.

<sup>4</sup> Beemyn, *The Silence is Broken*, 215.

<sup>5</sup> Clawson, *Coming Out*.

<sup>6</sup> Clawson, *Coming Out*, 214.

anti-communist movement. This particular committee would become known primarily for hunting down and harassing queer teachers and students, resulting in over twenty professor firings and fifty student expulsions at the University of Florida.<sup>7</sup>

Florida also was home to *The Independent Florida Alligator*, one of the most notable student newspapers in the nation. This paper had a long history of challenging university administration as well as the government. During the 1950s and 1960s, its writers and editors strongly opposed the Johns Committee as well as numerous university administrators. Clawson argues that this strong precedent of questioning authority “probably helped guide the *Alligator* to a place of queer advocacy.”<sup>8</sup> This paper was a place where queer students could get a fair hearing and granted them the necessary visibility for their activism. A major part of having visibility was having a figure that was willing to be publicly out. This was incredibly important to the queer community; Clawson went as far as to state that simply having someone that is willing to be openly queer was an essential first step to forming any sort of queer organization.

Even southern universities that did not have such a strong history of student activism saw some form of queer visibility during the 1970s. Appalachian State University, which was examined in some detail by Kathryn Staley, had not experienced the climate of a place like Florida or Columbia though within a few years it as well would see the rise of a queer student organization.<sup>9</sup> During the 1970s Appalachian State was generally seen as conservative and was not significantly influenced by the civil rights movement. Its abandonment of *in loco parentis* policies generally coincided with national trends though the campus did embrace feminism to

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<sup>7</sup> Clawson, *Coming Out*, 213.

<sup>8</sup> Clawson, *Coming Out*, 214.

<sup>9</sup> Staley, *Gay Liberation*, 73.

some extent. Staley connects the rise of gay rights activism on the campus of Appalachian State with national trends and that it was not until 1979 that Appalachian students and employees would publicly participate in the campus gay liberation movement.<sup>10</sup> Despite being underground for most of the 1970s, queer students were still active within their community and still created communities for themselves. Staley speaks about how in 1970 “gay men co-opted the Wesley Foundation, a United Methodist Church student center, as a safe space in which to socialize.”<sup>11</sup> This co-opting of the center would appear to be quite similar to the co-opting of the bar at Cornell described by Beemyn. Unlike at Florida, Appalachian State’s student newspaper *The Appalachian*, was somewhat mixed in its treatment queer students. For example, a number of articles related to the queer community were published referring to individuals as “fag” and “fruit.”<sup>12</sup> However, when the university counseling center created a gay support group in 1975, *The Appalachian* announced it in a fairly objective manner. Student newspapers would be an important voice for queer students in Alabama as well and were generally sympathetic to their cause.

Despite the existence of gay and lesbian student organizing in the South since at least the 1970s, it would not be until the 1980s that the state of Alabama would receive its first university recognized student organization dedicated to gays and lesbians, when students at the University of Alabama formed the Gay Student Union in 1983. It would then be several more years until other universities in the state would recognize similar groups. This is not to say that Alabama had no queer student organizing prior to this; James Sears has documented at least one Gay

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<sup>10</sup> Staley, *Gay Liberation*, 77.

<sup>11</sup> Staley, *Gay Liberation*, 77.

<sup>12</sup> Staley, *Gay Liberation*, 78.

Liberation Front group organized in Auburn, Alabama by students in the state as early as 1971.<sup>13</sup> However, this early group was not focused on campus recognition and only loosely organized.

Despite this relatively late start and the fact that the legal precedents set by cases such as *Gay Lib v. University of Missouri* were in their favor, queer Alabama student organizations still faced great difficulties and took significant precautions when forming. Even with these precedents in place, a later founding date did not guarantee a smooth process. The Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association, the case in Alabama that received the strongest response and went through the longest fight for recognition, did not receive its university charter until 1992.

Many of the students involved in creating queer organizations were not solely concerned about the plight of the gay community and were also involved with other contemporary movements. This was not only the case on campus, but off campus as well. Simon Hall has pointed out how a number of slogans used during the Stonewall riots were directly taken from Black freedom struggles as well as the fact that a number of major gay rights activists of the 1970s already had experience as activists for other causes including the new left, the anti-war movement, and the civil rights movement.<sup>14</sup> Gay communities were also an important part of political coalitions that elected many of the nation's first black mayors during and after the civil rights movement as was documented by Timothy Stewart Winter.<sup>15</sup> On campus, many of the gay activists at Columbia and Cornell also did not isolate themselves, rather they found allies within

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<sup>13</sup> James T. Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 64-66.

<sup>14</sup> Simon Hall, "Protest Movements in the 1970s: The Long 1960s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 4 (2008): 655-72.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

other social movements, most notably the anti-war movement. It was through these connections that gay liberation became a concern to those that were not gay themselves.

Several of the tactics used by queer student organizers were also taken from other movements. Beemyn argues it was only when the Student Homophile Leagues took on more confrontational tactics from anti-war and black power activists that they began to make significant traction.<sup>16</sup> Clawson argued that queer visibility on university campuses could not have happened were it not due to the climate of activism that already existed on campuses related to civil rights and new left politics. The 1970s saw a culture of protest throughout the United States across numerous identity groups, not just queer people. For these reasons, the gay rights movement of the 1970s could be seen in many ways as a continuation of other protest movements of the 1960s; Hall refers to this period of protest as “the long 1960s.”<sup>17</sup> For students in Alabama during the 1980s and 1990s, collaboration with others was also key. Queer student organizations in Alabama, even when they were under significant scrutiny themselves, worked side by side with other movements to oppose what they saw as hateful actions such as the Old South Parade at Auburn University.

Despite these similar problems faced and regular alliances between queer students and others, there were splits within queer activist student communities. Some in the community were primarily concerned about discussing civil liberties, while others were more interested in creating a gay culture within their towns and universities. Over time, some gay students at Cornell grew tired with appeasing the closeted members of their organization. Inspired by the Stonewall Riots as well as a recent militant uprising by the Afro-American society and Students

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<sup>16</sup> Beemyn, *The Silence is Broken*, 205.

<sup>17</sup> Hall, *Protest Movements in the 1970s*.

for a Democratic Society a student named Kelly, who was elected president of the Student Homophiles League at Cornell in the summer of 1969 was quoted as saying “We [decided] to ditch the conservatives.”<sup>18</sup> Going along with sentiment, Kelly and a number of others attempted to formally ally the Cornell Student Homophile League with Students for a Democratic Society. Ultimately, the radical side would appear to have won out, as the Student Homophile League, inspired by the Black Liberation Front, changed its name to the Gay Liberation Front and began holding a number of sit-ins and boycotts together with other organizations. Gay students at Cornell were hardly the only ones to ally themselves with radical organizations. Similar trends can be seen at the University of Florida, where Julius Johnson, a student and president of the Gainesville Gay Liberation Front, happily worked with organizations such as the Young Socialist Alliance.<sup>19</sup> At the University of Georgia, gay students also worked with that campus’ chapter of the Young Socialist Alliance.<sup>20</sup> In the early 1970s Georgia had a dedicated community of out gay and lesbian activists, including both students and faculty and a number of gay men even managed to get elected to the student government.<sup>21</sup>

In part because of this importance of collaboration, most queer student organizations did not limit their membership to non-heterosexuals. In fact, some of these organizations focused heavily on recruiting heterosexual students. One reason for such an emphasis was to dilute the threat of the organization in the eyes of the administration and make the groups harder to dismiss entirely. This was particularly concerning for students at Cornell, a school which according to

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<sup>18</sup> Beemyn, *The Silence is Broken*, 217.

<sup>19</sup> Clawson, *Coming Out*, 215.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Huff, “Conservative Student Activism at the University of Georgia,” in *Rebellion in Black and White: Southern Student Activism in the 1960s*, eds. Robert Cohen and David Snyder (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013 ), 178.

<sup>21</sup> Huff, *Conservative Student Activism*, 182.

Beemyn had traditionally taken a heavy handed approach to student movements causing one member of the Student Homophile League to admit “we didn’t know if we were going to be thrown out of school.<sup>22</sup>” In addition to this security measure, making it clear that these organizations were a place that included heterosexual students as well as the queer community provided a sort of cover for closeted students to join the organizations. This inclusion of heterosexual students provided important protection for organizations that would emerge in Alabama, as the fear of being outed by being publicly associated with a queer organization was a significant barrier to creating both the Gay Student Union at the University of Alabama and the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association.

The question of outness and the nature of the closet are a major issue that appears within the history of queer student organizing. The concept of outness is questioned by Clawson, in his discussion of gay students at the University of Florida. Using queer theory, Clawson explains that these concepts are often incorrectly seen as a binary. He uses this term primarily to describe visibility, which would appear to be his primary interest in his article on the University of Florida. Faulkenbury and Hayworth complicate the concept of what it means to be out as a gay person in the 1970s through examining the story of the Carolina Gay Association, the first gay rights group on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Staley also briefly addresses the issue of outness at Appalachian State, stating that in the late 1970s “no campus members [of the LGBT community] were publicly out, yet some were broadly known as gay.”<sup>23</sup> This example from Staley is quite similar to how John Howard discussed much of the gay male community of Mississippi.<sup>24</sup> It is also an excellent example of outness as a spectrum, a concept

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<sup>22</sup> Beemyn, *The Silence is Broken*, 212.

<sup>23</sup> Staley, *Gay Liberation*, 79.

<sup>24</sup> John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

discussed at some length by Faulkenbury and Hayworth.<sup>25</sup> The ability to control one's level of outness was something that many members of queer student organizations were concerned about, as being outed to the wrong person potentially resulted in being disowned by family, fired from a job, or even violently attacked. Outness would also be significant in Alabama, and many student leaders existed at different places on the spectrum of outness. At times even some of the most vocal campus activists in Alabama were forced out of the closet more than initially expected as was the case for Steven Migalski, who was outed to his family when they saw footage of him speaking up in support of the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association on national television.<sup>26</sup>

Queer student activists faced many of the same obstacles as other student activists. Legal institutions were at times used as a way to oppose student activists of all stripes. Much like the Johns Committee in Florida, other state legislatures formed committees as well that looked into not only queer "infiltrators" on campus, but also as a part of a larger anticommunist movement during the second red scare. One of the most known activist groups that was pursued by such committees was Students for a Democratic Society, which was infiltrated by the FBI on a number of occasions. Students for a Democratic Society took on numerous causes in the late 1960s and early 1970s, ranging from anti-war activism to free speech to opposition to *in loco parentis* university policies. While *in loco parentis* policies were a potential concern to queer students as well as other students interested in sexual liberation as they placed significant limits on sexual freedom, their official demise in the courts predated the founding of most queer student organizations. However, there were still other laws that were used against campus queer

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<sup>25</sup> Faulkenbury and Hayworth, *The Carolina Gay Association*.

<sup>26</sup> Steven Migalski, "My Life as an Activist." Lecture, Adler University, Chicago, January 27, 2018.



student activists. During the 1960s and 1970s, the vast majority of states had anti-sodomy laws, many of which would remain on the books until they were struck down as unconstitutional in 2003 in the case of *Lawrence v. Texas*. The mere existence of these laws was often used by institutions of higher learning, legislators, and the general public in attempts to silence queer student activists. Faulkenbury and Hayworth describe advertisement for the Carolina Gay Association in 1978 defaced with messages such as “Sodomy is a Felony in North Carolina... Arrest Faggots.”<sup>27</sup> Institutions also used anti-sodomy laws as a way to justify not providing recognition for queer student organizations. At Columbia, though the Student Homophile League was permitted to form and obtain a charter, “it was forbidden to serve a social function for fear that this would lead to violations of New York State’s sodomy laws.”<sup>28</sup> As the story of student organizations in Alabama demonstrates, sodomy laws would continue to be a major barrier for queer students well into the 1990s.

An additional difficulty that was faced by queer students was the pathologization of homosexuality. Universities sometimes attempted to use the concept of homosexuality as a mental illness as a way to justify denying queer students a platform. Though the DSM was officially changed in 1973, removing homosexuality from the list of deviant behaviors, there were still a number of psychology professors that still referred to the older version in which homosexuality was defined as a disorder as late as 1979.<sup>29</sup> By the 1980s this particular form of pathologization was not as much of an issue from university faculty and staff though the idea of

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<sup>27</sup> Faulkenbury and Hayworth, *The Carolina Gay Association*, 115.

<sup>28</sup> Beemyn, *The Silence is Broken*, 207.

<sup>29</sup> Staley, *Gay Liberation*, 78.

homosexuality itself as a form of illness could certainly be seen among some students in Alabama.

As the 1980s went on another form of pathologization of the gay community emerged due to the rise of AIDS. Many in Alabama and around the nation saw AIDS as the consequence of homosexual behavior, leading them to associate the gay community with the disease. The public response to AIDS caused widespread homophobia around the nation. Michael Bronski has stated that during the late 1980s when AIDS was making headlines “Inflammatory rhetoric ran so high that the moralism and bias of the past paled in comparison.”<sup>30</sup> To date, much of what has been documented about the response to AIDS has focused around major cities such as New York and San Francisco. In these cities, the primary emphasis of AIDS activists such as ACT UP as documented by Deborah Gould was radical activism as a form of mourning the dead.<sup>31</sup>

The story of radical AIDS activists has dominated the literature on this topic, yet the militant response was not the only one in the country. Unlike the cities where powerful anger due to AIDS led to radical demonstrations such as shutting down the FDA and Stop the Church, in the college towns of Alabama AIDS led many deeper into the closet. As activists did emerge to oppose this rise in homophobia, many of the tactics used by Alabama student organizations in their pursuit of acceptance turned towards the politics of respectability. This is best demonstrated by the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association’s participation in the Adopt-A-Mile Program. By participating in such a program, the organization attempted to show the local community that it was not something to be feared as a bringer of disease and sexual deviancy, but instead made up of good citizens interested in maintaining a clean society. Even the more shocking forms of

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 230.

<sup>31</sup> Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight against AIDS*, 1st edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

organizing that Alabama student groups engaged in were typically well within the law, with the notable exception of the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association's protest of the Old South Parade though that demonstration was part of a broader coalition and not primarily focused around the queer community. None of this is to say that Alabama students never engaged in radical action. Rather, those that may have done so likely went to the cities to participate in such action and used more conservative tactics when organizing at home in events that up to this point have been mostly ignored by historians.

Throughout the literature there is debate over the use of language, something which in this area has changed significantly since the start of the gay movement. Some scholars have made an effort to use terms as they were used by those that used them in the period they discuss. Beemyn would appear to be one of these, in one of their footnotes it is pointed out that "Unless otherwise indicated, I will use the word 'gay' throughout this article in the way that it was often used then: to refer to lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals."<sup>32</sup> This is not the only position. Clawson, for example, liked the term queer as a more inclusive way to discuss sexual minorities. The term queer does present some problems however. As Clawson points out, it often contains a particular political stance with that stance being "a focus on liberation, rather than privileging assimilation as an end-goal."<sup>33</sup> Queer is also complicated because, in addition to political connotations, for much of this time period it was seen as a homophobic slur which was used by people that committed violence against gay student leaders. For these reasons, I shall only use queer when discussing groups or movements in general, and for the most part avoid this language when referring to individuals in favor of the terms they used to describe themselves.

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<sup>32</sup> Beemyn, *The Silence is Broken*, 206.

<sup>33</sup> Clawson, *Coming Out*, 210.

The acronym LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) has been used in the modern day but I for the most part stay away from it here. This is due to the fact that, in the context of universities during the 1980s and 1990s, queer student organizations were publicly focused on gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, particularly the former two. This is not to say that there was never discussion of transgender issues on southern university campuses, they certainly were discussed at least occasionally as demonstrated by Staley.<sup>34</sup> However, most available sources from Alabama did not discuss them significantly, if at all. To use a term such as LGBT that includes the transgender community while not properly examining its role in the movement could be seen as participation in transgender erasure which is quite far from the goals of this work and therefore shall be avoided whenever possible.

This lack of inclusion of transgender voices in the public story brings attention to the issue of sources. Finding sources in any queer history can be difficult, particularly when one is dealing with communities that have been highly closeted. Like with Clawson's examination of queer student organizing at the University of Florida, much of the information referenced here comes from student newspapers, particularly *The Crimson White* at the University of Alabama and *The Auburn Plainsman* at Auburn University. In addition to these student newspapers, several events on Alabama campuses received coverage from other newspapers as well such as *The Montgomery Advertiser*, *The Birmingham News*, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, and even *The New York Times*. Beyond newspapers other documents related to queer organizations also exist, ranging from letters sent to the American Civil Liberties Union to posters advertising events. It is important to note that the vast majority of these sources are related to public or political life. For this reason this work does not and cannot provide a comprehensive discussion

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<sup>34</sup> Staley, *Gay Liberation*, 78.

of the personal experiences and places that were known to queer students in Alabama during the 1980s and 1990s. Instead, in the following pages I shall demonstrate how student organizations at Auburn University and the University of Alabama, the two largest public institutions of higher learning in that state, fit into the broader narrative of the gay movement in their struggles for gaining and maintaining university recognition. When included in the broader narrative, this story points to the difference between southern campuses and major liberal cities, and how queer activism varied greatly based on where and when it was taking place. I also attempt to answer the question of why it was the case at Auburn, despite being later and at a generally apolitical campus, that received so much attention both within the state and beyond. Finally, I shall discuss the impact that formal organization had on these campuses and the recognition of their rights by the eleventh circuit in 1997.

## Chapter I.

### Roll Pride

When one references student activism at the University of Alabama (UA), one is most likely to consider its role during the civil rights movement as the location of George Wallace's infamous stand in the schoolhouse door. Less than twenty years after this, the university would become embroiled in a controversy over the recognition of a gay student organization, the first time this issue reached the state of Alabama.

In many ways, racial tensions defined the culture of UA well beyond the 1960s. By the 1980s race was still a controversial topic frequently discussed by both campus reporters, administrators, and students. Among the most notable events were the booing of a black homecoming queen to the burning of a cross in protest of the desegregation of sorority row. Based on reporting from *The Crimson White*, the major student newspaper at the University of Alabama, it would seem that there were near constant tensions between traditionally white fraternities, such as the Kappa Alpha order, (KA) and the African American Association though they did occasionally come to compromises. In addition to racial tension, Alabama student politics of the 1980s were heavily influenced by the presence of the Machine, which dominated the Student Government Association (SGA) for most of the decade. Student Government elections were often controversial, and on more than one occasion students would file lawsuits over them. The issues of SGA and The Machine would ultimately culminate in 1992, with the university suspending the SGA. Perhaps more than any other Alabama institution, state politicians attended the University of Alabama and graduated from its law school. Many of them,

such as John Merrill who was elected UA SGA President in 1986, began their political careers in student politics at UA.

It was in this context of that the Gay Student Union (GSU) was formed at the University of Alabama. The group was first publicly announced in the February 2 issue of *The Crimson White*, with the story taking up much of the front page.<sup>1</sup> The primary barrier for university recognition of the GSU at the time was the possibility of releasing the names of at least ten members of the group, which was a requirement of the Campus Activities Executive Board (CAEB), the student board charged with granting university approval to organizations. For advice on how to handle this, GSU had contacted the National Gay Task Force, which *The Crimson White* described as “a New York based organization that exists to promote gay rights and help groups such as this one get started.” In an attempt to circumvent this requirement, the GSU initially sought status through the University Counseling Service.<sup>2</sup> This attempt to obtain recognition through the counseling services was not permitted, though multiple university officials were quoted as saying that the GSU was welcome to participate on campus and seek a charter through the normal route. This issue led the group to wait until they had more money and members in order to strengthen their case for institutional recognition, something they were clearly concerned about. One representative of the organization, quoted only as “Jack” in order to protect anonymity, stated that the goal of the group was primarily academic, telling *The Crimson White* that “we want to educate the public.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Andress, “Gay Student Union Seeking University Charter,” *The Crimson White*, February 2, 1983.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Andress, “Gay Student Union Seeking University Charter,” *The Crimson White*, February 2, 1983.

<sup>3</sup> Ann Andress, “Gay Student Union Seeking University Charter,” *The Crimson White*, February 2, 1983.

The announcement of the GSU's existence and interest in receiving university recognition was met with a great deal of debate by the campus community, which would play out on the opinion page of the student paper over the subsequent months. One of the first responses came in the February 9 issue from Marty Kessler, a Freshman at the University of Alabama.<sup>4</sup> Kessler criticized the group as singling out gays as if they are special, claiming that they are not and that "Homosexuality is a sickness and a very unnatural act," and went on to state that "I do not wish to mingle with a sick homosexual person."<sup>5</sup>

While Kessler's position was very much opposed to the formation of the GSU, that was hardly the only view. A number of people including Mary Elizabeth Kirchner, a Sophomore in Communications, wrote a letter of support for the GSU.<sup>6</sup> In this letter, Kirchner said that it is not the place of anyone to judge another as sick, unless they are a doctor or judge, going on to say that if the GSU is granted a charter it demonstrated that the University was advancing beyond its legacy of denying civil rights. In the letter Kirchner also emphasized the fact that she was heterosexual herself, which was a common theme among many students that spoke up in favor of the rights of the GSU.<sup>7</sup> The idea of homosexuality as some form of sickness as disputed by Kessler and Kirchner was a common theme and would be repeated throughout the conflict over chartering the GSU and other organizations in the state of Alabama. This theme is hardly unique to university campuses and has been well documented in other areas as well.

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<sup>4</sup> Marty Kessler, "Gay Charter," *The Crimson White*, February 9, 1983.

<sup>5</sup> Marty Kessler, "Gay Charter," *The Crimson White*, February 9, 1983.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Elizabeth Kircher, "Horror," *The Crimson White*, February 11, 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Elizabeth Kircher, "Horror," *The Crimson White*, February 11, 1983.



Another argument that came about frequently was that of religion. In a letter to the editor of *The Crimson White* Connie Lackey, a Senior in Education, stated “My Bible says that God created Adam, a man. Then God created Eve – not Steve!” later going on to define homosexuality as a sin like stealing, killing, and adultery, and claiming that the university did not charter groups for murders or thieves.<sup>8</sup> Lackey made another argument that would commonly be used against Gay and Lesbian Groups: that they were asking for special rights in remaining anonymous and that “homosexuals should have guts enough to reveal who they are and what they believe in.”<sup>9</sup> Anonymity was a major concern as many students did not want to be associated with the group due to fears of being seen as gay. This fear contributed to some difficulties in finding faculty support, which was something the organization believed would assist them in their quest for recognition.

The organization had support from David Miller, an associate professor of English that served as the group’s first official faculty advisor, but in order to demonstrate support and ensure that the group would receive recognition, Miller asked for additional faculty members to join him as co-sponsors. Anticipating that such a group would be controversial, he sent out a memo to all permanent faculty stating that “Nobody is asking for a commitment of time. It’s your good name we want to drag through the mud.”<sup>10</sup> This letter was successful in gaining the support of over twenty different faculty members. During this search for faculty co-sponsors, the GSU also familiarized itself with the legal precedent around the nation and had communicated with the local chapter of the ACLU which was willing to bring forward a lawsuit against the university

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<sup>8</sup> Connie Lackey, “Gays,” *The Crimson White*, February 21, 1983.

<sup>9</sup> Connie Lackey, “Gays,” *The Crimson White*, February 21, 1983.

<sup>10</sup> Memo from Miller to UA Faculty, “Standing Up To Be Counted,” 1983, Miller-Stephens GLBTQ UA Student Organization Collection, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, AL.

should the group be denied recognition. By the time the GSU took the time to do the necessary research and obtain faculty support the Spring term was coming to an end so they had to wait until the start of the fall semester to apply for university recognition.

On September 6 of 1983, the CAEB heard the case from the GSU which was immediately followed by objections from the UA chapter of Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), a national conservative student organization that was first founded in the 1960s and had president Reagan as honorary chair of its advisory board. Prior to the CAEB hearing, YAF had circulated a petition against the GSU. Based on the concerns of YAF, the CAEB decided to deny the petition of the GSU, a decision which was promptly overruled by Melford Espey, the UA director of campus activities.<sup>11</sup> Referring to this decision Kenneth Goodwin, the assistant university attorney, said that he believed that if the university refused to recognize the GSU it would be unconstitutional based on legal precedents from around the nation and asserted that “the law is clear on this matter.”<sup>12</sup> Goodwin went on to say that the Ku Klux Klan, if it applied, would be eligible for recognition as well so long as the group complied with the law. John Bolus, the UA SGA President, also spoke on this issue claiming that “if a group wants recognition... then we’re obligated to give it to them if they meet the objective requirements set down by the University and because of their First Amendments Rights.”<sup>13</sup> He went on to clarify that there existed a distinction between university recognition and a charter. According to Bolus, university recognition simply allowed them to use university facilities. A charter would allow the group to

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<sup>11</sup> Staff Reports, “University Recognizes Gay Student Union,” *The Crimson White*, September 9, 1983.

<sup>12</sup> Staff Reports, “University Recognizes Gay Student Union,” *The Crimson White*, September 9, 1983.

<sup>13</sup> Staff Reports, “University Recognizes Gay Student Union,” *The Crimson White*, September 9, 1983.

receive SGA funds and the decision of granting that could be up to the students based on whether or not they condoned the group.<sup>14</sup>

Natalie Maiden, president of the newly recognized GSU, was “pleased” with the decision to recognize the group and stated that “We are proud to be a part of the University and are looking forward to a good working relationship with the Campus Activities office.”<sup>15</sup> YAF was less happy about this decision. Rusty Johnston, president of YAF and a third year law student at UA, said that the university overruling CAEB was “improper and invalid” and that “We (YAF’s members) are actively considering a lawsuit against the University.”<sup>16</sup> Forrest McDonald, the faculty advisor for YAF, agreed with Johnston. *The Crimson White* quoted him as saying the university decision was “absolutely outlandish” and “nothing less than criminal.”<sup>17</sup> McDonald said that the YAF’s reason for opposing the GSY was that “Private sexual behavior is not anybody’s business... However, when it becomes public, it’s an attack on the very building block of our society: the family.”<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, McDonald also claimed that “individual rights must come second to society’s,” and that “society has a right to defend its morals.”<sup>19</sup> This rhetoric is quite similar to that used by advocates of segregation and anti-miscegenation laws in previous decades.

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<sup>14</sup> Staff Reports, “University Recognizes Gay Student Union,” *The Crimson White*, September 9, 1983.

<sup>15</sup> Staff Reports, “University’s Decision Pleases GSU, but YAF Attacks ‘Outlandish’ Verdict,” *The Crimson White*, September 9, 1983.

<sup>16</sup> Staff Reports, “University Recognizes Gay Student Union,” *The Crimson White*, September 9, 1983.

<sup>17</sup> Staff Reports, “University’s Decision Pleases GSU, but YAF Attacks ‘Outlandish’ Verdict,” *The Crimson White*, September 9, 1983.

<sup>18</sup> Staff Reports, “University’s Decision Pleases GSU, but YAF Attacks ‘Outlandish’ Verdict,” *The Crimson White*, September 9, 1983.

<sup>19</sup> Staff Reports, “University’s Decision Pleases GSU, but YAF Attacks ‘Outlandish’ Verdict,” *The Crimson White*, September 9, 1983.

True to their word, YAF held a press conference explaining their plans for a lawsuit against the university.<sup>20</sup> At the press conference Rusty Johnston said that his group would ask the Tuscaloosa County Circuit Court for the following: “1. A declaratory judgement that the actions by Mr. Espey (director of Campus Activities) and any other officials to recognize the GSU are improper and invalid, and, 2. A permanent injunction restraining and enjoining the University of Alabama from granting public facilities to be used by the GSU.”<sup>21</sup> Johnston believed it would take several years to resolve this issue in court, so he was hoping that legislators would also take action, citing the fact that his group had already been in contact with several members of the legislature. Johnston believed that legislation blocking the GSU would be preferable to a lengthy court case. According to *The Crimson White*, his primary goal was to “block official recognition of the GSU.”<sup>22</sup>

*The Crimson White* also spoke to Espey, who had originally overturned the CAEB decision. He claimed that his reason for doing so was because they voted based on the group’s philosophy, not procedure and that any organization that petitions for status must be recognized so long as it met the necessary requirements. Prior to making this decision Espey spoke with University attorneys who advised him that legal precedents were set and to deny status to the GSU could potentially risk a lawsuit.<sup>23</sup> Some students questioned these precedents. *The Crimson White* quoted Bob White, a student in Commerce and Business Administration, as saying “They (the Campus Activities office) said they did it because other universities have set the precedent...

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<sup>20</sup> Sally Buckley, “YAF Plans Lawsuit Against University,” *The Crimson White*, September 12, 1983.

<sup>21</sup> Sally Buckley, “YAF Plans Lawsuit Against University,” *The Crimson White*, September 12, 1983.

<sup>22</sup> Sally Buckley, “YAF Plans Lawsuit Against University,” *The Crimson White*, September 12, 1983.

<sup>23</sup> Sally Buckley, “YAF Plans Lawsuit Against University,” *The Crimson White*, September 12, 1983.

I don't think Vanderbilt or Tennessee has anything like it, [the GSU] and I've got friends at both universities."<sup>24</sup> The editorial board of *The Crimson White* shared their own views on topic, stating that "We believe the GSU has every legal right to exist. Further, given the area of superstition and ignorance which surrounds the subject of homosexuality in the Deep South, the GSU's presence is doubtless needed."<sup>25</sup> Later in September, the student paper ran a cartoon critical of YAF, representing the conservative organization as "Yahoos Attacking Fobias" alongside a Klansman and a picture of Adolf Hitler.<sup>26</sup> Notably, this cartoon also mentioned the argument that GSU would bring AIDS to campus, suggesting that there was at least some public awareness of the issue of AIDS among students at the University as early as 1983.

Just days after announcing the lawsuit over the GSU, YAF announced that it would delay filing the lawsuit until after the November meeting of the UA board of trustees.<sup>27</sup> The purpose of this delay was to give time to the UA trustees to fully consider the issue. YAF hoped that if given the time the board would listen to them and affirm their views. Johnston claimed that his organization was confident that the university president or the Board of Trustees would overrule Espey's decision and deny the GSU the right to use school facilities.<sup>28</sup> Johnston believed that the GSU was breaking the law by "talking about homosexuality" claiming that it was "'only logical' that the group members would talk about 'going some place (socially following a meeting of the

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<sup>24</sup> Mike Brantley, "University's Move to Recognize GSU Draws Mixed Reactions from Students," *The Crimson White*, September 12, 1983.

<sup>25</sup> Editorial Board, "GSU," *The Crimson White*, September 9, 1983.

<sup>26</sup> Ken Adams, "Cartoon," *The Crimson White*, September 21, 1983

<sup>27</sup> Susan Cullen, "YAF to Stay Lawsuit Against UA Until November Meeting of Trustees," *The Crimson White*, September 14, 1983.

<sup>28</sup> Susan Cullen, "YAF to Stay Lawsuit Against UA Until November Meeting of Trustees," *The Crimson White*, September 14, 1983.

group)''<sup>29</sup> Johnston believed that YAF could prove that “words spoken in a GSU meeting would lead eventually to specific homosexual acts.”<sup>30</sup> In an additional statement, Johnston also said that YAF “requests and demands” that an upcoming blood drive sponsored by SGA post a sign asking “active male homosexuals, Haitian refugees, and intravenous drug users” to not give blood claiming that this is much kinder and less invasive of privacy than the existing questionnaire that was given to all potential blood donors.

Joab Thomas, the President of UA, had a different view from Johnston, claiming that the university had no choice but to recognize the GSU because of the strength of the legal precedents.<sup>31</sup> He went on to specifically mention the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) as the primary organization fighting for gay and lesbian groups on campus and that he did not want a lengthy battle with them that would cost UA valuable time and money. He believed a long legal battle would not be good for the university, particularly from a financial perspective as the university had already been required to make budget cuts.

In the following days *The Crimson White* described student’s reactions to university recognition of the GSU as “mixed.”<sup>32</sup> The university recognition of the GSU rekindled the debate in the opinion section of *The Crimson White*, though that public discussion did end quicker than it had in the Spring. This was possibly due to the fact that many students would have been preoccupied with other concerns, most notably football which was incredibly

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<sup>29</sup> Susan Cullen, “YAF to Stay Lawsuit Against UA Until November Meeting of Trustees,” *The Crimson White*, September 14, 1983.

<sup>30</sup> Susan Cullen, “YAF to Stay Lawsuit Against UA Until November Meeting of Trustees,” *The Crimson White*, September 14, 1983.

<sup>31</sup> Dan Condra, “UA Had to Recognize GSU, Joab Thomas Tells Faculty,” *The Crimson White*, September 14, 1983.

<sup>32</sup> Mike Brantley, “University’s Move to Recognize GSU Draws Mixed Reactions From Students,” *The Crimson White*, September 12, 1983.

significant on campus, during the fall when this controversy was going on.<sup>33</sup> In the letters to the editor that were published on this issue, many of the same points were brought up that came up the previous spring, ranging from concerns about homosexuality as a health issue to religious objections.

Visitors to campus also expressed their thoughts on the GSU, with the most notable being the Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell, who spoke on campus in September of 1983, just weeks after the GSU had gained recognition.<sup>34</sup> Though he arrived on campus in the midst of the GSU controversy, there would not appear to be any direct connection between his visit and the recognition of the GSU; his visit would seem to have been organized in advance of that event. He claimed that university presidents around the nation had been pressured by the “left leaning” ACLU to recognize organizations like the GSU.<sup>35</sup> While he spoke on a number of issues, most of the questions he received were regarding the newly recognized GSU. He claimed that if there was to be a gay student group on campus “they ought to have a union for incest or bestiality, or create a little fraternity for promiscuous heterosexuals.”<sup>36</sup> Despite this, *The Crimson White* stated that Falwell agreed with University president Thomas’ decision to recognize the GSU due to the First Amendment. However, he did state that he personally opposed gay student organizations on

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<sup>33</sup> Clark E. Center, “University of Alabama (UA) | Encyclopedia of Alabama,” [encyclopediaofalabama.org](http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org), <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1678> (accessed April 4, 2019); Athletics have been a significant part of student life at the University of Alabama throughout the twentieth century and chief among them was football which was always covered in depth by *The Crimson White*. The student newspaper also regularly received letters to the editor on this topic.

<sup>34</sup> Kent Faulk, “Falwell Speaks Before Supportive Audience,” *The Crimson White*, September 21, 1983.

<sup>35</sup> Kent Faulk, “Conservative blames ACLU for UA’s Recognition of GSU,” *The Crimson White*, September 21, 1983.

<sup>36</sup> Kent Faulk, “Falwell Speaks Before Supportive Audience,” *The Crimson White*, September 21, 1983.

any university campus, saying that “Because a person has selected a perverted lifestyle, it should not be endorsed.”<sup>37</sup>

Most of the crowd supported Falwell though throughout the speech he was heckled by Stell Simonton, a member of the Tuscaloosa Feminist Alliance who opposed the use of student funds to bring Falwell to campus.<sup>38</sup> In addition to questioning Falwell at the event, Simonton also wrote a letter to *The Crimson White* in which she criticized Falwell as well as the Moral Majority for numerous stances, such as their opposition to the ERA. She also criticized the Moral Majority’s opposition to federal funding for child and spouse abuse services while simultaneously supporting tax exemption to Christian schools that Simonton believed were often racist.<sup>39</sup>

As demonstrated by Simonton’s strong opposition to Falwell’s views, as well as those of YAF, conservative views were not universal on the UA campus. While the Gay Student Union was certainly a major issue for many, it was hardly the only concern on campus and not the only issue which more left leaning students and community members criticized Falwell or YAF over. In an opinion piece Walter Guthrie, a student that would go on to regularly criticize conservatism and its leaders in written as well as cartoon forms, criticized YAF because “the actions being taken to restrict the First Amendment rights of certain students are being initiatives by a group calling itself the Young Americans for Freedom,” claiming that better names for the group would be “Young Americans for Repression” or “Young Americans for the Maintaining of the Status Quo,” ultimately stating that “Mr. Johnston’s case is as bankrupt legally as his organization is

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<sup>37</sup> Kent Faulk, “Conservative Blames ACLU for UA’s Recognition of GSU,” *The Crimson White*, September 21, 1983.

<sup>38</sup> Kent Faulk, “Falwell Speaks Before Supportive Audience,” *The Crimson White*, September 21, 1983.

<sup>39</sup> Stell Simonton, “Falwell Represents Intolerance,” *The Crimson White*, September 21, 1983.



intellectually.”<sup>40</sup> Mike Caswell, while more sympathetic to YAF than Guthrie, also criticized the legal thinking of YAF in the pages of the student newspaper. However, Caswell did not seem to fully endorse the views of the GSU either, comparing them to the North American Man/Boy Love Association, a group known for its advocacy of pederasty and pedophilia.<sup>41</sup>

Over the following weeks, *The Crimson White* received a number of additional letters supporting and opposing the GSU, including a response to Guthrie from YAF’s Johnston<sup>42</sup> as well as a letter from Natalie Maiden, President of the GSU.<sup>43</sup> Overall, most of the published defenses of the GSU were on the basis of the first amendment and ideas of individual liberty, rather than explicitly agreeing with the organization’s mission. Some of those that wrote letters in support of the organization also made a point to emphasize that they were not gay themselves, possibly fearing that simply speaking out in favor of the GSU would lead to assumptions about their sexuality.

Discussion of the Gay Student Union was not limited to the campus of the University of Alabama. The organization was also discussed in the Alabama Forum, a publication geared towards the gay and lesbian community of Alabama which was first published in 1981. Unsurprisingly, the Alabama Forum was quite sympathetic to the GSU and critical of YAF, who GSU members writing to the forum described as having an “ironic name” and generally teaching falsehoods about AIDS and the gay community.<sup>44</sup> The members of the GSU continued to face

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<sup>40</sup> Walter Guthrie, “Group Limits Basic Freedoms,” *The Crimson White*, September 26, 1983.

<sup>41</sup> Mike Caswell, “YAF Needs to Avoid Lawsuit,” *The Crimson White*, September 28, 1983.

<sup>42</sup> Rusty Johnston, “YAF Opposes GSU Subsidy,” *The Crimson White*, October 10, 1983.

<sup>43</sup> Natalie Maiden, “Gay Student Union Has Rights,” *The Crimson White*, October 14, 1983.

<sup>44</sup> Bridget and Rachel, “Gay Students Union Opens Booth at UA’s Get-On-Board Days,” *The Alabama Forum*, October 1983.

strong reactions on campus ranging from being told that they would rot in Hell to pleasure at the GSU's recognition. They claimed that their immediate plans were to make the group library available to the university community and continue their speaker's bureau, a program dedicated to providing panels of gay and lesbian focused speakers to any group that was interested which was regularly advertised in the classified section of *The Crimson White*.<sup>45</sup> Beyond even the state of Alabama, the GSU and the YAF's decision to the university received coverage from the *Atlanta Journal* in its Friday, September 9 issue.<sup>46</sup>

As the debate raged on in the newspapers, YAF was still waiting for the next meeting of the UA board of trustees which was to take place on November 10. YAF worked with attorneys from Montgomery and Texas to write a bill to "prohibit the use of any public school facility by any group which promotes, advocates, or encourages deviant sexual intercourse."<sup>47</sup> Despite the fact that the trustees had not yet met, they decided that even if the board would revoke the status of the GSU, the bill against the GSU should be proceeded with anyway. This bill was pre-filed with the Alabama State Legislature by Representative J.T. "Jabo" Waggoner, a Democrat from Birmingham and would also be sponsored by Representative Bob McKee, a Republican from Montgomery.<sup>48</sup> Johnston said that "I don't think we are going to have a big problem. [passing the bill] I haven't talked to anyone who's against it." Representative McKee also believed that the

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<sup>45</sup> Bridget and Rachel, "Gay Students Union Opens Booth at UA's Get-On-Board Days," *The Alabama Forum*, October 1983.

<sup>46</sup> James A. Tucker, "GSU," *The Crimson White*, October 10, 1983.

<sup>47</sup> Beverly Cox, "YAF Co-Authors Bill Against Gay Groups," *The Crimson White*, November 7, 1983.

<sup>48</sup> Beverly Cox, "YAF Co-Authors Bill Against Gay Groups," *The Crimson White*, November 7, 1983.

bill would pass “handily.” When asked about his reason for the bill, he claimed it was not about picking on individuals, but simply “a matter of state and money.”<sup>49</sup>

This bill was strongly opposed by the editorial board of *The Crimson White*, who called it “blatantly unconstitutional” and claimed that the ACLU would challenge it as soon as it passed, causing the state to waste money defending it. The editorial board proposed that the real reason for the GSU controversy had nothing really to do with the GSU at all, and was really about attracting attention to YAF.<sup>50</sup> Though the bill was filed with the legislature, *The Crimson White* did not report on any further action on this bill suggesting that it never reached the governor’s desk to become law. The board of trustees also did not revoke recognition of the GSU at their November meeting so the status of the organization was fairly secure by the end of 1983.

In January of 1984, *The Crimson White* spoke to Steve Palmer, who had succeeded Natalie Maiden as GSU President, to discuss the organization’s activities within the previous year.<sup>51</sup> Palmer claimed that they had a successful year, stating that “many people in the administration have been wonderful in helping us” and “(University President Joab Thomas) really stuck his neck out for us.”<sup>52</sup> Palmer also believed that the presence of the GSU on campus led to a shift in acceptance of homosexuality on campus, claiming that “I think that most students are behind us now.”<sup>53</sup> Of course, this increase in acceptance was relative. The following month *The Crimson White* discussed a national survey of freshmen entering college in 1983 conducted by researchers at UCLA which stated that freshmen were becoming moderate. Among the survey

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<sup>49</sup> Beverly Cox, “YAF Co-Authors Bill Against Gay Groups,” *The Crimson White*, November 7, 1983.

<sup>50</sup> Editorial Board, “GSU Again,” *The Crimson White*, November 7, 1983.

<sup>51</sup> Stacy Hutchins, “GSU’s Initial Year Brings Major Gains,” *The Crimson White*, January 13, 1984.

<sup>52</sup> Stacy Hutchins, “GSU’s Initial Year Brings Major Gains,” *The Crimson White*, January 13, 1984.

<sup>53</sup> Stacy Hutchins, “GSU’s Initial Year Brings Major Gains,” *The Crimson White*, January 13, 1984.

questions was a statement “Homosexual relations should be prohibited,” which 49% of those surveyed either strongly or somewhat agreed with.<sup>54</sup> This suggests that even if things had improved universities, for that matter were likely far from a utopia for gay and lesbian students. The GSU was also somewhat controversial among the gay community of Tuscaloosa, with Palmer claiming that some felt that “the timing is bad, that we [the GSU] don’t need to be here.”<sup>55</sup> Palmer stated that the fight for gay rights still had a long way to go, and believed that even twenty years later there would still be plenty to do. Notably, this interview made no mention of YAF, their proposed lawsuit against the university, or the proposed bill against groups like the GSU.

One of the next mentions of the GSU in *The Crimson White* was in their 1984 April Fools edition of the paper, a tradition that existed at UA for much of the 1980s. In a front-page article of the joke edition Bob Barfield, who the paper labeled as their “Yellow Journalism Editor” wrote a piece about blaming the gay community for making one of the men’s restrooms dirty due to the presence of orgies. The obviously satirical piece went on to suggest that Espey, the university official that granted formal recognition to the GSU, may be gay himself as well. The piece was also accompanied by a cartoon depicting a bathroom door labeled “men” and a sign stating “G.S.U. meeting today.”<sup>56</sup> This piece, unlike many others discussing the GSU, did not receive a response in the viewpoint section, though that is perhaps unsurprising given its obviously humorous intent and the fact that the April 1 edition of the paper was full of similar pieces on other individuals and events that had occurred throughout the past year.

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<sup>54</sup> Unknown Author, “College Freshmen Become Moderate,” *The Crimson White*, February 17, 1983.

<sup>55</sup> Stacy Hutchins, “GSU’s Initial Year Brings Major Gains,” *The Crimson White*, January 13, 1984.

<sup>56</sup> Bob Barfield, “Restroom Rabble-Rousers Wreak Wrath on Watercloset,” *The Crimson White*, April 1, 1984.

In July of 1984, *The Crimson White* ran a piece about homophobia, referencing a Tuscaloosa couple, both of whom were recent graduates of UA and one of whom had been in a sorority, that preferred to remain anonymous due to concerns about losing their employment. One of those interviewed, who was referred to only with the name “Sara” was a teacher. Her partner, who was referred to as “Cynthia” stated that “the main discrimination against gays is still in the area of careers.”<sup>57</sup> Both of them believed that the nation was shifting towards the right, and this was a threat to gay students as well as the gay rights movement in general. Like many others, they believed that “as more gays become involved and speak out, more acceptance will come.”<sup>58</sup> Based on this idea, both of them were frequent participants in the GSU’s speakers bureau, a group of students with the GSU that was willing to speak to university classes about their experience in subjects such as human sexuality, nursing, or psychology. This fits into a common theme across gay student activism in Alabama and beyond.

Over the following years, the organization’s activity would occasionally be discussed by *The Crimson White*. There would often be a few letters in response to such articles, but no major controversy. Despite the perception of increased acceptance and its officers willing to use their full names in the newspaper, the organization would remain protective for much of the 1980s, requiring potential members to be screened. While announcements about meetings were sometimes published in *The Crimson White*, they never included a room number. However, not all such announcements in general included specific information, so it is possible that this was simply going along with the institutional norms. As time went on a number of the group’s leaders were willing to have their full names, and even pictures of their faces, included in articles

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<sup>57</sup> Michael Canup, “Gay Couple Fears Right-Wing Attitudes,” *The Crimson White*, July 12, 1984.

<sup>58</sup> Michael Canup, “Gay Couple Fears Right-Wing Attitudes,” *The Crimson White*, July 12, 1984.

about them and their involvement with the organization. However, as the 1980s went on, the fears of people like Sara and Cynthia were realized as homophobia at UA and beyond began to grow due to the looming specter of AIDS.

## Chapter II.

### AIDS and the Eighties

By all appearances, the first years of the Gay Student Union (GSU), were fairly successful. It remained an active student organization, and in 1985 changed its name to Gay/Lesbian Support Services (GLSS) in order to reflect the fact that it was a space for all, not just students and was quickly becoming a center for gay community of Tuscaloosa. For most of this time the GSU would be the only university recognized student organization focused on gay and lesbian issues in the state of Alabama and it gained some attention as such. However, this positive momentum did not last, as the group in increasingly had to deal with the issue of AIDS and everything that came with it. As the 1980s progressed the group began to put a huge focus on AIDS education.<sup>1</sup> AIDS had been an issue for the gay community for a number of years at this point, and had been mentioned on a few occasions on campus in 1983, but it was not until 1985 that it would be seriously discussed in campus newspapers such as *The Crimson White* at the University of Alabama. Though AIDS was hardly the only issue faced by gay students in the 1980s, AIDS and the mass hysteria that accompanied it would continue to loom over queer student organizations in Alabama for many years to come.

One of the first pieces on AIDS in *The Crimson White* occurred on the editorial page on September 20, 1985 which was critical of Reagan's minimal funding for research and asked for more action from the administration on this issue.<sup>2</sup> The editorial board believed that "instead of fighting the disease, Reagan is ignoring it and hoping it will go away," ending stating that

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<sup>1</sup> Alecia Sherard, "Gay Support Group Provides AIDS Facts," *The Crimson White*, March 5, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Editorial Board, "AIDS Research," *The Crimson White*, September 20, 1985.

“Cancer once was considered a mere scare. Tell us, Mr. President: What if someone hadn’t sought to make cancer less frightening? Where would you be?”<sup>3</sup> The next week this was followed by a cartoon by Walt Guthrie demonstrating similar concerns, depicting AIDS as Godzilla while Reagan sat in his office doing next to nothing in response.<sup>4</sup> The same week as the cartoon, *The Crimson White* published a letter from Jeff Lasher, a student at UA, discussing the rapid spread of the disease and providing some facts about how the disease is spread.<sup>5</sup> By October of 1985, the newspaper reported that the student health center was already preparing to treat AIDS patients.<sup>6</sup>

Overall, much of the reporting on AIDS in *The Crimson White* was in a factual manner; receiving relatively little response from the campus in letters to the editor. This reporting on AIDS would come in waves, with late fall of 1985 seeing a mention of the disease in almost every issue, ranging from its impact on blood donations to how fear of the disease led a gay bathhouse in Connecticut to close.<sup>7</sup> This reporting on AIDS roughly coincided with increased attention on AIDS throughout the state as well as the founding of Birmingham AIDS Outreach, an organization that claims to be “Alabama’s First AIDS Service Organization.”<sup>8</sup>

While the GLSS was still the only gay student organization in Alabama, other institutions in the state were paying attention to AIDS as well. At Auburn University, *The Auburn Plainsman*

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<sup>3</sup> Editorial Board, “AIDS Research,” *The Crimson White*, September 20, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Walt Guthrie, “Cartoon,” *The Crimson White*, September 27, 1985.

<sup>5</sup> Jeff Lasher, “Wiping Out Fear is Key to Victory,” *The Crimson White*, September 27, 1985.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Henry, “UA Health Center Prepares Campus for AIDS Victims,” *The Crimson White*, October 28, 1985.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth McKenzie, “Local Blood Donors Safe From AIDS,” *The Crimson White*, October 16, 1985; United Press International, “AIDS Fright Closes Homosexual Bathhouse,” *The Crimson White*, November 6, 1985.

<sup>8</sup> Birmingham AIDS Outreach, “Our Story,” [birminghamaidsoutreach.org](http://birminghamaidsoutreach.org), <https://www.birminghamaidsoutreach.org/our-story> (accessed March 26, 2019)



began reporting on AIDS at a similar time, though there were generally many less stories on the disease than at UA. Much of this would seem to be because of the difference between the two student papers. The *Crimson White* was published more frequently and regularly covered national and international events while *The Auburn Plainsman* was a weekly newspaper that focused primarily on the Auburn area and issues that were thought to directly impact Auburn University students. Like *The Crimson White* though, some of the first mentions of the AIDS in *The Auburn Plainsman* appeared in the opinion section. On August 15, 1985, two pieces were published on AIDS, both of which connected the issue to the gay community including one written by John Polio which stated that “In modern day language AIDS and homosexuality are synonymous. Both are major problems. Both are of epidemic proportions.”<sup>9</sup> The other piece was more sympathetic, though it also suggested that AIDS was, or at least had been, primarily a gay disease.<sup>10</sup> The words used in the discussion of AIDS and the gay community by Polio did garner some response. The following week the opinion page was dominated by numerous letters to the editor with harsh criticism for Polio.<sup>11</sup> Though *The Auburn Plainsman* did not discuss the issue as frequently as *The Crimson White*, fear of AIDS in the Auburn area was significant and led to a reduction in blood donations due to the fact that potential donors feared the possibility of getting AIDS from the procedure.<sup>12</sup> Many did not understand how the disease was transmitted, believing

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<sup>9</sup> John Polio, “AIDS and Homosexuality Both Sickesses,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, August 15, 1985.

<sup>10</sup> Phil Pierce, “Hypocrisy Hinders AIDS Research,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, August 15, 1985.

<sup>11</sup> Laure Bell, “Many Not Disgusted by Homosexuality,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, August 22, 1985; Michael H. Hicks, “Scriptures Don’t Support Condemnation of Gays,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, August 22, 1985; Kathy O. Jones, “AIDS Not Acquired Through Giving Blood,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, August 22, 1985; H. David Williams, “Prejudice Dangerous Sickness,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, August 22, 1985; Al Kratzer and Nick Logiotatos, “Polio’s Logic on Neanderthal Level,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, August 22, 1985.

<sup>12</sup> Lee Ann Landers, “Fear of AIDS Causes Summer Blood Shortage,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, October 17, 1985.

that it could be received from anything ranging from giving blood to toilet seats to consuming food touched by an AIDS victim.<sup>13</sup>

AIDS was of course known among the gay student community of Alabama. Steve Palmer, president of the GLSS spoke to *The Crimson White* about how little was known about the disease, and how this ignorance in the general community contributed to homophobia. He suggested that this was part of a greater issue, stating that “I really think the gay people have always been a scapegoat for society.”<sup>14</sup> Palmer, like many gay men, said that he was quite angry with the way that AIDS had been handled, having received so little funding for research. David van der Griff, another officer of GLSS, stated that the gay community was doing a great deal support to those fighting AIDS, and that gay business were donating millions to research.<sup>15</sup> He believed it was important that gays engage in dialogue with the rest of the community on this issue.

AIDS did cause significant fear within the gay community including Palmer and van der Griff, though it also contributed to anger. Van der Griff said that he was angry about how gays had been blamed for the disease. Van der Griff had experienced frequent harassment on campus, to the point that he felt it necessary to move out of the dorms and consider transferring to another, less hostile, institution.<sup>16</sup> *The Crimson White* reported on this story, leading one student to write in to the paper stating “[*The Crimson White*] should do us a favor and stop publication”

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<sup>13</sup> Jennifer Stowers, “Alabama Not Immune to AIDS,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, December 5, 1985.

<sup>14</sup> Yaleria Walton, “Gays Disturbed with Paranoia About AIDS,” *The Crimson White*, October 28, 1985.

<sup>15</sup> Yaleria Walton, “Gays Disturbed with Paranoia About AIDS,” *The Crimson White*, October 28, 1985.

<sup>16</sup> Susan Cullen, “Gay Student Says He Faces Ridicule,” *The Crimson White*, April 18, 1986.

calling the story on van der Griff's difficulties on campus "an embarrassment to this University and the city of Tuscaloosa."<sup>17</sup>

While newspapers did not report on any AIDS diagnoses on an Alabama university campus until 1987, AIDS made its first appearance in Alabama public schools in late 1985, when a 17-year-old boy from Crenshaw County was diagnosed with the disease. At the time, the Alabama Department of Public Health attempted to ease fears by claiming that "the average citizen has little risk of contracting the disease."<sup>18</sup> A representative of the department also stated that "the best way to stem the threat of AIDS is to convince the high risk groups to change their lifestyles."<sup>19</sup> While this could be interpreted as simply advocating for more condom usage in the gay community or asking intravenous drug users not to share needles, similar language about changing lifestyles was often used by figures such as Jesse Helms, a North Carolina Senator that adamantly opposed federal money going to AIDS research and blamed every case of AIDS on the act of sodomy. Stating that "the average citizen" had a low risk could also be seen as the Department of Public Health othering the gay community, and other high-risk groups, demonstrating the social climate of Alabama at this time.

As the 1980s went on Alabama universities, including Auburn University and the University of Alabama, became increasingly concerned about AIDS and braced for the impact that the disease would inevitably have on their own campuses. By 1986 UA had been developing plans should a student at the institution be diagnosed with AIDS. These plans included isolation

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<sup>17</sup> Ronald Price, "CW Can Do UA Favor and Stop Publication," *The Crimson White*, April 23, 1986.

<sup>18</sup> John Archibald, "AIDS Threat Probed After Initial Discovery of Student Infection," *The Crimson White*, November 15, 1985.

<sup>19</sup> John Archibald, "AIDS Threat Probed After Initial Discovery of Student Infection," *The Crimson White*, November 15, 1985.

of the patient as the first step and that the student may be removed from a program if they might pose a risk to others. John Baier, the UA Vice President for Student Affairs, gave the example that “If a student is a nursing major we will have to remove her from the program because nursing students have to learn to give intravenous injections to one another, they also have to learn how to give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation” going on to state that “We would prefer to make a mistake of being overly protective.”<sup>20</sup> Baier also mentioned that there would be an emphasis on protecting the confidentiality of patients. This type of response was based on universities around the country.<sup>21</sup> By August of 1987 the UA Student Health Center had begun offering AIDS testing, though students were required to pay for the test due to a lack of funding for the health center.<sup>22</sup> This fact angered some, who felt that AIDS testing should be made available freely due to the severity of the disease.<sup>23</sup> The health center also was advised not to promote AIDS testing on the premises due the inavailability of counselors, who would be necessary should a student test positive.<sup>24</sup> Also in 1987, UA began forming an interdisciplinary committee on AIDS with the goal of educating the campus about the disease as well as to develop “a University-wide policy on AIDS.”<sup>25</sup>

UA faculty and staff were not the only ones on campus concerned about AIDS education. In September of 1987 the Alabama Student Party (ASP), a group that was initially founded to oppose The Machine in SGA elections and had contributed to the election of John Merrill as

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<sup>20</sup> Legan Oguntoyinbo “University Makes Plans to Handle AIDS,” *The Crimson White*, October 31, 1986.

<sup>21</sup> Legan Oguntoyinbo “University Makes Plans to Handle AIDS,” *The Crimson White*, October 31, 1986.

<sup>22</sup> Staff Reports, “AIDS Testing Available Here,” *The Crimson White*, August 26, 1987.

<sup>23</sup> Steve Rebrenick, “AIDS Tests Should be Less Expensive,” *The Crimson White*, September 30, 1987.

<sup>24</sup> Christi Parsons, “ASP AIDS Panel Stresses Education,” *The Crimson White*, September 30, 1987.

<sup>25</sup> Sloan, “AIDS Committee Looking for Ways to Education,” *The Crimson White*, November 11, 1987.

SGA President in 1986, hosted a public forum on the issue of AIDS. AIDS was widely discussed by administration and the campus newspaper, but what made this event significant is the fact that the panel was managed by a relatively mainstream student group as well as the fact that the ASP invited Steve Palmer to speak as a panelist.<sup>26</sup> The panel occurred with van der Griff ended up serving as the representative for GLSS in the place of Palmer. Van der Griff stated that he had “mixed feelings” about the forum, lamenting the fact that many were still uninformed about the issue, which he believed often led to discrimination against homosexuals. He went on to cite a recent case of a lesbian that lived on campus having the message “You will get AIDS” written on her door despite the fact that “Lesbians are not even a high-risk group.”<sup>27</sup> The reporting on this is interesting in that the fact that someone was writing on a lesbians door was referenced because of its inaccuracy on the issue AIDS, and did not even mention this as an incident of homophobia. It is possible that van der Griff states such during the panel and these additional words were simply not printed by *The Crimson White*. However, the lack of emphasis on this possible incident of vandalism could be seen as a suggestion that such events were so common that they were barely worth mentioning unless there was something else notable about them, such as factual inaccuracies about AIDS.

Also in the fall of 1987 the Kappa Alpha Theta sorority held a workshop on AIDS, which reinforces the notion that students wanted to play a part in educating the community on the disease at UA.<sup>28</sup> At Auburn University, student leaders also attempted to get involved in AIDS education. John Guglieli, Auburn SGA Director of Student Safety, wrote a letter to *The Auburn*

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<sup>26</sup> Christi Parsons, “ASP Sponsors Forum Discussion of AIDS,” *The Crimson White*, September 25, 1987.

<sup>27</sup> Christi Parsons, “ASP AIDS Panel Stresses Education,” *The Crimson White*, September 30, 1987.

<sup>28</sup> Chris Gagliano, “Sorority Sponsors AIDS Workshop,” *The Crimson White*, November 18, 1987.

*Plainsman* advertising an AIDS teleconference indicating that there was interest in having students involved with the issue of AIDS on that campus as well.<sup>29</sup>

Though these and other groups of students were taking AIDS seriously, this did not mean that all students were on board and some simply ignored the issue, with others using it as an opportunity for a joke. At the University of Alabama some used the epidemic as an opportunity to, in the opinion of *The Crimson White* Editorial Board, wear their homophobia in the form of a shirt. On October 5 of 1987, an editorial was released describing a shirt worn by many students that depicted “two figures engaged in anal sex, with the circle-and-slash symbol superimposed over the figures. The caption below reads ‘Stop AIDS.’”<sup>30</sup> Thousands of shirts like this were sold in Tuscaloosa.<sup>31</sup> This shirt angered the GLSS, who called for a boycott of The Varsity, the shop that sold them. The GLSS was also concerned about how homophobia in other business such as Solomon’s Deli, a business that GLSS claimed had fired a gay employee due to his sexual orientation. Norman and Howard Weller, the owners of the Solomon’s Deli disputed this, claiming that he only fired the employee because the deli was overstaffed. This was challenged by another student who had worked for the deli and claimed that the establishment was not overstaffed and that the firing only occurred after a complaint from customers that they were served by a gay.<sup>32</sup> Weller claimed that this was untrue and that his business was not homophobic, adding that “AIDS is the bigger phobia.” Howard went on to state that he could understand if a

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<sup>29</sup> John Guglielmi, “Auburn to Participate in AIDS Teleconference,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, March 6, 1986.

<sup>30</sup> Editorial Board, “AIDS Shirt,” *The Crimson White*, October 5, 1987.

<sup>31</sup> Christi Parsons, “Accusations Not Bothersome for Two Local Businesses,” *The Crimson White*, March 30, 1988.

<sup>32</sup> Christi Parsons, “Accusations Not Bothersome for Two Local Businesses,” *The Crimson White*, March 30, 1988.

customer was afraid of AIDS and said that if he knew that an employee had AIDS, “He would be medically unfit to handle food.”<sup>33</sup>

The University of Alabama was not the only Alabama institution concerned about the student awareness of AIDS. UA planned to partner with other Alabama institutions including Auburn University, Auburn University Montgomery, Alabama A&M, Tuskegee, North Alabama, Troy State, and the University of Alabama at Huntsville to survey their students on the issue.<sup>34</sup> A conference was also held to discuss the issue of handling at on the campus of the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), which the presidents of seven different Southeastern institutions planned to attend.<sup>35</sup>

The conference could not have come sooner as the first reported diagnosis of AIDS in an Alabama university student occurred at Auburn University in late November of 1987.<sup>36</sup> This diagnosis created a significant stir around the state and the story reached the front page of the Sunday Edition of the Birmingham News.<sup>37</sup> Auburn University did offer free testing and some AIDS education programs at the time, but unlike the University of Alabama where thousands of students had been reached by AIDS education, few at Auburn attended the programs. According

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<sup>33</sup> Christi Parsons, “Accusations Not Bothersome for Two Local Businesses,” *The Crimson White*, March 30, 1988.

<sup>34</sup> United Press International, “Higher Education May Check Students’ Knowledge of AIDS,” *The Crimson White*, September 30, 1987.

<sup>35</sup> Jennifer Hale, “Campuses to Deal with AIDS at UAB,” *The Crimson White*, October 12, 1987.

<sup>36</sup> Editorial Board, “Auburn and AIDS” *The Birmingham News*, December 4, 1987.

<sup>37</sup> Sheila Howard, *The Birmingham News*, December 6, 1987, page 1.

to Harold Melton, Auburn's SGA President,<sup>38</sup> the general feeling among most Auburn students was that AIDS as something that would not happen on campus.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the fear that could quite naturally come with the appearance of a deadly disease, the diagnoses of AIDS created significant concern among the gay community of Auburn. They believed that the community's fear and ignorance of the disease was creating a climate of homophobia.<sup>40</sup> One member of Alpha Lambda Omega (ALO), a community gay and lesbian organization that was not officially recognized by the University, told the Birmingham News that they had heard of a group of people getting in a pickup truck with sticks to "find some (homosexuals) to beat up on" and that this was only one of the cases that caused him concern.<sup>41</sup> Another member of ALO that went only by the name "Pat" stated that "I'm scared – I'm not even going out to dinner ... I actually heard a guy say 'I'm afraid to go in the bathrooms because I'll get AIDS.'" <sup>42</sup> Years later Pdraig McLoughlin, who was a gay graduate student at Auburn in 1987, recalled that "Panic overtook the campus" and "at one point, an effeminate man's tires were slashed. He wasn't even gay, just effeminate."<sup>43</sup> It was not just ALO and Auburn's gay community that connected AIDS to an increase in homophobia though, others familiar with the situation saw this connection as well. *The Birmingham News* reported that "Pat Ellis, nursing director at Auburn's student health services and who conducts AIDS seminars, agrees that anti-

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<sup>38</sup> Melton is also notable in that he was the first African American student elected to the position of SGA President at Auburn University.

<sup>39</sup> Angela Mynatt, "AIDS on Campus Creates Varied Reactions," *The Auburn Plainsman*, December 3, 1987.

<sup>40</sup> ALO Board of Directors to Barnes, January 1988, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).

<sup>41</sup> Kimberlee Allen, "ALO Cautions Gay Students," *The Auburn Plainsman*, November 12, 1987;

<sup>42</sup> Kimberlee Allen, "ALO Concerned About attitude Towards Gays," *The Auburn Plainsman*, January 14, 1988.

<sup>43</sup> Samuel T. Harper, "AU Grad Seeks Gay Alumni Group" *The Opelika-Auburn News*, February 23, 1992.



gay attitudes are growing because of AIDS. She says studies point to the increasing negative attitudes and violence toward the gay community.”<sup>44</sup>

The case at Auburn caused significant interest in the habits of the patient himself, who was not named but was mentioned as a gay sophomore at the university who had relations with over thirty other men during the previous winter. Some of this sexual activity was allegedly occurring within the bathrooms of the Haley center, the largest classroom building on Auburn’s campus. This particular detail gained so much attention that Auburn University President Martin felt it necessary to comment on it, stating that “I was surprised this was happening in Haley Center.”<sup>45</sup>

Following the diagnosis at Auburn, there were numerous stories at the University of Alabama about whether the institution was prepared to cope with the disease.<sup>46</sup> Joab Thomas, President of the University of Alabama, was forced to respond to the story and stated that while there was no student on the UA campus with AIDS, but after being questioned further he ultimately conceded that there was in fact someone associated with the university that had the disease, but it was someone that was not on campus and had been working from home.<sup>47</sup> The fact that this was kept secret angered some, though administrators insisted that they had not lied as they had generally only been asked about students with AIDS.<sup>48</sup> The Auburn University administration was also accused of hiding AIDS on campus prior to the announcement in

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<sup>44</sup> Sheila Howard, “AIDS On Campus: Fear Is A Complication,” *The Birmingham News*, December 6, 1987.

<sup>45</sup> Angela Mynatt, “AIDS on Campus Creates Varied Reactions,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, December 3, 1987.

<sup>46</sup> Eric Johnson, “AIDS Is the University Prepared to Cope?” *The Crimson White*, December 2, 1987.

<sup>47</sup> Legan Oguntoyinbo, “AIDS Case Acknowledge by UA,” *The Crimson White*, December 4, 1987.

<sup>48</sup> Legan Oguntoyinbo, “AIDS Case Acknowledge by UA,” *The Crimson White*, December 4, 1987.

November of 1987. Prior to the announcement of the diagnosis Pat of ALO stated that “People have died here in Auburn of AIDS and the University won’t admit it.”<sup>49</sup>

Even before the university officially announced the diagnoses, AIDS was already causing an increase in homophobic attitudes in Auburn according to ALO. One member of the organization named only as “John” told *The Auburn Plainsman* about an experience where he received a message on his car stating “I hope you die of AIDS, you faggots.”<sup>50</sup> In the same article a member of ALO claimed that “I knew this guy that was in the last stages of AIDS. We took him to a clinic, and when he told them he had AIDS they wouldn’t even touch him ... He waited six hours and nobody even came to bring him some water.”<sup>51</sup> This last example demonstrates that even those that were supposed to help patients were hesitant to do so.

In attempts to limit the epidemic as well as to possibly ease the homophobia of the area, many of the public statements from ALO during the late 1980s focused on safe sex. One anonymous officer of the group told the *Opelika-Auburn News*, the primary newspaper of the Auburn area, that “We’re not promoting any kinds of sexual acts except safe sex.”<sup>52</sup> The same individual also referenced violent gay bashing, claiming that it was at an all-time high and that the ALO PO box regularly received threats of abuse and death.<sup>53</sup> Some of these threats explicitly mentioned AIDS. For example, one of these threats addressed the group as “AIDS dick suckers,” and went on to say that “you are going to die. Watch over your shoulder you dipshit. We are

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<sup>49</sup> Kimberlee Allen, “ALO Cautions Gay Students,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, November 12, 1987.

<sup>50</sup> Kimberlee Allen, “ALO Cautions Gay Students,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, November 12, 1987.

<sup>51</sup> Kimberlee Allen, “ALO Cautions Gay Students,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, November 12, 1987.

<sup>52</sup> Elison, Louise, “ALO: SGA Rules Restrictive.” *The Opelika-Auburn News*, March 6, 1989.

<sup>53</sup> Elison, Louise, “ALO: SGA Rules Restrictive.” *The Opelika-Auburn News*, March 6, 1989.

wiping out AIDS and Fags in AU.”<sup>54</sup> Another note closed by threatening to “fucking shoot y’all’s asses.”<sup>55</sup> These letters serve as yet more evidence connecting the fear of AIDS to open homophobia within the Auburn community. Despite this, it would appear that at some members of ALO were at least somewhat comfortable in handling these issues. In a response to one of these threatening letters, ALO’s vice president told the sender that his actions were “not smart” and “On a personal note, I think you should go to Mary Martin Hall and see psychological help for your aggressive homophobic behavior.”<sup>56</sup>

ALO was of course not the only local organization to respond to AIDS on Auburn’s campus. Within a week of the diagnosis in Auburn, the University responded by forming a committee to review the issue. This response was commended by *The Birmingham News*, though that paper did ask the university to “broaden its AIDS review committee to include a representative of a group such as Alpha Lambda Omega to bring to the panel the experiences and point of view of that segment of the student population one would expect to be the most affected by the school’s AIDS policies.”<sup>57</sup> At this time ALO had no official recognition from the university. The primary reason for this was a fairly unique Auburn SGA policy that required the publication of the names of at least fifteen members of a potential group in the campus newspaper before a group could gain recognition. There was some debate as to the exact reason for this policy, but many within Auburn’s gay community claimed that it was created with the intention of limiting their activity. Auburn’s SGA denied this, claiming that it was solely a way

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<sup>54</sup> Anonymous to ALO, date unknown, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).

<sup>55</sup> Patrick to Clarke, January 12, 1988, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).

<sup>56</sup> Patrick to Clarke, January 12, 1988, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).

<sup>57</sup> Editorial Board, “Auburn and AIDS” *The Birmingham News*, December 4, 1987.

to ensure that a new organization had enough members to function.<sup>58</sup> However, the policy was created just months after the GSU was granted a charter at the University of Alabama, which may suggest otherwise.<sup>59</sup> In addition to this rather convenient timing, there exists testimony from Bill Matthews, a student senator who voted for the rule when it was created. In an article about AIDS and gay organizations on campus in Auburn, Matthews told *The Birmingham News* that “I knew it [the regulation] would affect the gays on campus.”<sup>60</sup>

AIDS was and would continue to be a major concern for gay and lesbian students and their organizations in Alabama but it was far from the only barrier they faced. Another difficulty that arose came from the Supreme Court upholding the constitutionality of anti-sodomy laws in the 1986 case of *Bowers v. Hardwick*. *Bowers v. Hardwick* received some attention from *The Crimson White*, which first reported on it in a front page article on November 8, 1985.<sup>61</sup> In a subsequent issue of that newspaper, the editorial board came out strongly opposed to anti-sodomy laws asking “How, in good conscience, can a law be allowed to remain on the books that so flagrantly limits the rights of individuals.”<sup>62</sup> They also emphasized that the majority of these laws, including Alabama’s which defined sodomy as “any sex act involving the sex organs or one person and the mouth or anus of another,”<sup>63</sup> also included some sexual acts between heterosexual couples. *The Crimson White* continued this focus on heterosexual couples impacted by sodomy laws after the court ruled on the case of *Bowers v. Hardwick* with a front page article

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<sup>58</sup> Louise Elison, “ALO: SGA Rules Restrictive.” *The Opelika-Auburn News*, March 6, 1989.

<sup>59</sup> Louise Elison, “ALO: SGA Rules Restrictive.” *The Opelika-Auburn News*, March 6, 1989.

<sup>60</sup> Sheila Howard, “AIDS On Campus: Fear is a Complication,” *The Birmingham News*, December 6, 1987.

<sup>61</sup> John Morrison, “Sodomy Decision by U.S. Justices Could Undo Laws,” *The Crimson White*, November 8, 1985.

<sup>62</sup> Editorial Board, “Sodomy,” *The Crimson White*, November 13, 1985.

<sup>63</sup> Editorial Board, “Sodomy,” *The Crimson White*, November 13, 1985.

titled “State law protects married couples.”<sup>64</sup> The article opened by stating that although the Supreme Court had upheld the constitutionality of Georgia’s anti-sodomy law, married couples in Alabama were safe from prosecution. It also stated that this exemption did not apply to homosexual couples, though enforcement was rare.<sup>65</sup> Steve Palmer of GLSS stated that even though the law was not enforced, “as long as there is sodomy law being gay is illegal and you can go to prison, it will promote a climate of fear (among homosexuals).” The editors of the paper criticized the court decision and stated that “The ruling had a special irony coming as it did one day after Gay Pride celebrations across the country. This irony is not unusual. It is slowly becoming the prevailing mood of the decade.” The student paper also ran a cartoon by Walt Guthrie that was critical of the court decision, but like the front page article, the cartoon focused on heterosexual couples.<sup>66</sup> At Auburn University, a less politically engaged campus, there was no coverage of the case in *The Auburn Plainsman*, with letters to the editor at the time the case was decided being more focused on issues such as dating and pornography.<sup>67</sup> However Auburn students, even if many did not pay much attention to the ruling, were still influenced by it as in a few years sodomy laws would be referenced as one of the primary reasons Auburn’s SGA denied a charter for the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association.<sup>68</sup>

The rare enforcement of sodomy laws did not mean they could not have an impact on the gay community. The mere existence of these laws was used by as a justification for limiting the

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<sup>64</sup> Alecia Sherard and Mike Brantley, “State Law Protects Married Couples,” *The Crimson White*, July 3, 1986.

<sup>65</sup> John Morrison, “Sodomy Decision by U.S. Justices Could Undo Laws,” *The Crimson White*, November 8, 1985.

<sup>66</sup> Walt Guthrie, “The Untouchables,” *The Crimson White*, July 3, 1986.

<sup>67</sup> *The Auburn Plainsman*, July 10, 1986

<sup>68</sup> For more information on the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association and the difficulties it faced in receiving recognition see Chapter III.

activities of gays and lesbians well beyond private sexual activity. David Miller, the faculty advisor of GLSS, stated that “sodomy statutes are the keystones of oppression of gay people,” emphasizing this point by referencing how a few years earlier the Young Americans for Freedom chapter on campus cited Alabama’s sodomy law as one of their reasons for opposing the formation of the GSI.<sup>69</sup> In subsequent years, Alabama’s anti-sodomy laws would also be one of the most common arguments against recognizing the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association.

Other minority student communities also saw difficulties during the 1980s. The Hillel house, a Jewish student center in Tuscaloosa, saw a Nazi flag draped on a railing just outside of the entrance.<sup>70</sup> In a cross was burned to protest the moving of the Alpha Kappa Alpha House to the sorority row which was previously all made up of only white organizations.<sup>71</sup> This event gained so much negative attention that it caused the UA Kappa Alpha Order Fraternity (KA) to stop using the Confederate Battle Flag at its annual Old South Party to avoid increasing racial tensions, a decision that was applauded by at least one student at Auburn, a school whose KA typically had faced more criticism for its actions.<sup>72</sup> Auburn saw tensions during the 1980s as well, with regular debates about the Kappa Alpha Order (KA) Fraternity’s use of the Confederate Flag as well as its annual Old South Parade, a tradition which would ultimately end in 1992 due at least in part to action from members of the Black Student Union working together with the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> For a discussion of the Young Americans for Freedom’s opposition to the Gay Student Union at the University of Alabama see Chapter I.

<sup>70</sup> Editorial Board, “Nazi Flag,” *The Crimson White*, June 10, 1987.

<sup>71</sup> Beth Hughes, “Racial Unrest Smolders at Alabama,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, April 3, 1986.

<sup>72</sup> Jan Crawford, “Fraternity Says UA Unity More Important Than Flag,” *The Crimson White*, April 16, 1986; Siona Carpenter, “Alabama KAs Learn How to Sacrifice,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, April 17, 1986.

<sup>73</sup> For a closer examination of the Old South Parade at Auburn University see page 67.

Overall, the 1980s saw an increase in concerns for gay and lesbian student groups in Alabama, with AIDS being among the most notable and creating a sense of urgency around the country. This urgency about AIDS contributed to the founding of queer student organizations in Alabama, with new groups springing up at universities around the state. Though each of them faced struggles, by far the most visible and controversial of the them would be the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association.

### Chapter III.

#### A Spirit that is Not Afraid

On November 25, 1991, the Student Government Association (SGA) at Auburn University met to approve a permanent charter for the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association (AGLA). Normally the vote to approve a new student organization would simply be a rubber stamp, especially considering that the group in question on this particular day had already received approval from the organizations committee, committed no violations of university policy, and kept excellent records of its activities. However, instead of a quick unanimous approval, there would be a long debate before student senators would reject this organization in a vote of twenty-three to seven. Though AGLA did not expect to be welcomed with open arms on that day, this decision was disheartening to the its members. Even after the votes were cast, none expected that this organization in Auburn, Alabama, a place often affectionately called “the loveliest village on the plain,” was about to become a center of gay rights activism, appear on national television, and have laws passed against it that would remain on the books for years to come.

The Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association first received a temporary charter in 1990, seven years after the founding of the Gay Student Union (GSU) at the University of Alabama. By this period legal precedents had been established that state universities had to charter these groups like they would any other. Despite these developments around the country, the process of gaining university recognition was particularly difficult for Auburn’s gay community and received significant attention throughout. In fact, while the founding of AGLA began in a way



that is quite similar to the story of the GSU at UA, the case at Auburn arguably had a much larger impact on the state as a whole.

While there is not a great deal of data to make an objective statement as to how Auburn compared to the University of Alabama at this time in terms of campus climate as it related to homosexuality, there certainly is enough to say that many individuals within Auburn's gay community felt that the area was particularly conservative. For example in 1990 Fred Deneke, an officer in Alpha Lambda Omega (ALO) the primary gay and lesbian community organization in the area which was the second chapter of an organization first founded in Tuscaloosa, suggested that "the degree of conservatism and homophobia in this area is greater than other parts of the state,"<sup>1</sup>

One may also point to the fact that for much the institution's history, the preservation of tradition has been a core component of what it meant to be an Auburn student. Many within the university then, and even today, saw Auburn values as set in stone during the 1940s by George Petrie when he wrote his *Auburn Creed*, a document that he composed with the intention of embodying the spirit of the school shortly after retiring after over fifty years of service to the institution.<sup>2 3</sup> A university having a set of values espoused in a creed is unique in itself, but it serves as only one of numerous pieces of evidence demonstrating the conservative culture that Auburn embraced. During the 1960s, Auburn University students did not engage in significant anti-war demonstrations and the campus had a generally tranquil atmosphere.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Deneke to Rubenstein, February 7, 1990, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Auburn University, "Auburn University 2019-2024 Strategic Plan," [http://ocm.auburn.edu/strategic\\_plan/](http://ocm.auburn.edu/strategic_plan/) (accessed March 29, 2019)

<sup>3</sup> George Petrie, "The Auburn Creed," <http://www.auburn.edu/main/welcome/creed.php> (accessed March 29, 2019)

<sup>4</sup> Kristin Grabarek, "Protest Activities in Southern Universities, 1965-1972," MA Thesis, (Auburn University, 2006), 52.

While the socially conservative environment was significant and would impact the group throughout its fight for recognition it was not the most immediate barrier for AGLA. Perhaps the most important reason as to why AGLA was not formed until 1990 was the fact that for much of the 1980s, Auburn University's SGA had a policy requiring all new recognized organizations to publish the names of at least fifteen of the potential group's members within *The Auburn Plainsman*, the main campus newspaper.<sup>5</sup> The effectiveness of the Auburn SGA policy in keeping Auburn's gay community from achieving official recognition is yet another example of the historical significance of anonymity to LGBT individuals which has been well documented by Brett Beemyn who discussed its importance since the founding of the Student Homophile League (SHL) at Columbia University, the first official campus gay and lesbian group in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

While the policy on anonymity is certainly a primary reason that AGLA was not officially chartered until 1990, to fully understand the context of AGLA one must further examine the culture of Auburn University and the issues faced by the campus during the period. Perhaps the best place to begin is football. While football was a popular sport throughout the country, it was uniquely important to the identity and culture of Auburn University. Dwayne Cox described Auburn football in the second half of the twentieth century as "king of the campus gods with the power to depose presidents."<sup>7</sup> In 1991, the year in which AGLA applied for a permanent charter, saw Auburn's worst football record in a decade. In fact, the football game

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<sup>5</sup> For more on this policy see page 45.

<sup>6</sup> Brett Beemyn, "The Silence Is Broken: A History of the First Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual College Student Groups," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no. 2 (April 2003): 207.

<sup>7</sup> Dwayne Cox, *The Village on the Plain: Auburn University, 1856-2006* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2016), xiii.

played immediately before the SGA vote on AGLA's permanent status was an Auburn loss in its annual game against the University of Georgia, a game often referred to as the Deep South's Oldest Rivalry. While this alone may not be enough to explain the entire vote, it potentially contributed to the resentment felt by Auburn's SGA when deciding how to vote on AGLA.

In addition to having a losing team, Auburn's football program was also being investigated for violations of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) rules, an investigation that likely led media outlets to look at the university more closely. The investigation was due to a number of allegations made by Eric Ramsey, a former Auburn football player who secretly recorded conversations with coaches which were aired on CBS' *60 Minutes*.<sup>8</sup> The tapes demonstrated that Pat Dye, Auburn's athletic director and head football coach, knew that numerous players were being paid by assistant coaches as well as at least one fan yet failed to prevent this. Ramsey also claimed that coaches were assisting players in getting loans, another violation of NCAA rules.<sup>9</sup> This scandal was unraveling throughout the fall of 1991 at the same time that AGLA applied for a permanent charter. The scandal continued to play out for some time, ultimately culminating in harsh penalties taken against the 1992 and 1993 Auburn football teams, including prohibiting the team for participating in postseason games and a ban on airing their games on television, a penalty that was rarely used in the 1990s and went beyond the minimum possible penalty.<sup>10</sup> Ramsey's reason for releasing the tapes was frustration with what

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<sup>8</sup> Unknown Author, "College Football; Silence in '60 Minutes' Is the Issue for Auburn," *The New York Times*, December 23, 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Unknown Author, "College Football; Silence in '60 Minutes' Is the Issue for Auburn," *The New York Times*, December 23, 1991.

<sup>10</sup> Ed Sherman, "Auburn Hit With 2-Year Probation, TV Ban," *The Chicago Tribune*, August 19, 1993.

he saw as racism within the institution. He claimed that while the university was happy to have him on the field, many did not support his educational goals due to his being black.<sup>11</sup>

This football scandal was hardly the only incident to occur on Auburn's campus due to concerns of racism at Auburn. During the 1960s, Auburn, like Alabama and almost every other southern institution, struggled with the issue of desegregation. Auburn was ultimately desegregated in the beginning of 1964, when Harold Franklin registered for classes. Unlike at the University Alabama, desegregation at Auburn received very little attention outside of the immediate area, with *The Auburn Plainsman* referring to the event as "Just Another Day on the Plains."<sup>12</sup> Much of this can be attributed to the nature of Auburn's administration, and extreme precautions taken by university administrators in the days leading up to Franklin's first appearance on campus.<sup>13</sup> These extreme precautions were successful, and desegregation occurred without creating a national scene. Despite the fact that desegregation went much smoother, race relations at Auburn would not seem to be significantly better than at Alabama, and the two universities saw many of the same issues into the 1990s.

At the time AGLA was founded, the most visible racial controversy was over the existence of the Kappa Alpha Order's (KA) annual Old South Parade, which was frequently criticized as insensitive and racist.<sup>14</sup> Social issues such as AGLA and the Old South Parade were not the only concern for the university, the institution was also under censure from the American

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<sup>11</sup> Unknown Author, "College Football; Silence in '60 minutes' Is the Issue for Auburn," *The New York Times*, December 23, 1991.

<sup>12</sup> Hunter Smith, "Just Another Day on the Plains," *The Auburn Plainsman*, January 8, 1964.

<sup>13</sup> Kristin Grabarek, "Protest Activities in Southern Universities, 1965-1972," MA Thesis, (Auburn University, 2006), 52.

<sup>14</sup> For a more in-depth description of the Old South Parade and AGLA's involvement with it see page 67.

Association of University Professors (AAUP) due to a case a few years prior involving a denial of tenure that allegedly involved religious discrimination. The censure case, in addition to the ongoing football scandal, likely led some media outlets, particularly those focused on higher education, to look more closely at what was going on at Auburn than at other universities in the country.

Outside investigations over academics and athletics, complaints about racism, a football team that was seeing its worst season in a decade, and a coach who was caught violating NCAA guidelines likely led many straight, white students to feel that Auburn and its traditions were under attack from all sides. Public opinion of gays and lesbians in the United States as a whole was fairly low at this time and the state of Alabama was no exception to this, being among the most conservative states in the nation. Recognizing AGLA meant accepting change, and change comes especially slowly to institutions that define themselves by their traditions and traditional values. Change came to define the 1991-1992 academic year and would be the theme of that year's *Glomerata*, Auburn's annual yearbook. AGLA, while it was not listed as an organization in its own right that year, was mentioned within the edition on a number of occasions as one of the largest examples of the changes Auburn was facing.<sup>15</sup> AGLA's request for permanent recognition may have been seen by the SGA and others as simply one change too many.

Auburn had seen some form of gay organization since the 1970s with the formation of a Gay Liberation group in 1971, though they never sought university recognition and were primarily a social organization.<sup>16</sup> During the 1970s Auburn also saw the creation of Auburn Gay Awareness which was first documented in 1975. Auburn Gay Awareness went through a number

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<sup>15</sup> *The Glomerata*, Auburn University, 1992. 4, 32, 500-501

<sup>16</sup> *Sears, Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 64-66.

of name changes before ultimately voting to become a chapter of ALO in 1987. Throughout the 1980s there were discussions within the organization regarding becoming an officially recognized campus organization. The vote to become a chapter of ALO suggests that there was at least some collaboration between the gay community in Auburn and that of Tuscaloosa.<sup>17</sup> The Gay community of Auburn was certainly a part of the larger state community, and since the 1980s at least one organization in the area would be a distribution point for the Alabama Forum.

While there were discussions about potentially forming a university recognized organization in the early 1980s one may date the first attempt to gain official recognition to early 1988, when a member of ALO contacted Lambda Legal, a national organization founded in New York in 1973 with the goal of protecting the rights of gay and lesbian individuals. Lambda Legal followed up on this with a letter containing legal recommendations about how Auburn students may go about forming a group that could obtain recognition from the university.<sup>18</sup> Based on this early letter there were certainly concerns about how the university and the student government would respond to the group. The next year it would appear that another member of ALO, Fred Deneke, contacted the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) with similar concerns.<sup>19</sup> While records from ALO do not mention Deneke's background, research reports from Auburn University mention an individual named C. Fred Deneke who served as an assistant professor of horticulture around the same time. ACLU involvement with AGLA would raise the profile of the case and, like other factors mentioned previously, would contribute to it becoming a national story. The ACLU was known for taking on controversial cases with the intent of setting legal

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<sup>17</sup> ALO Board of Directors to Barnes, January 1988, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Ettelbrick to McLoughlin, January 13, 1988, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Deneke to Rubenstein, June 22, 1989, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).

precedent and by the 1980s had a strong history of supporting the rights of gay and lesbian groups on university campuses, a fact that was lamented by Jerry Falwell when he spoke at the University of Alabama in 1983. ACLU involvement in gay rights is a common theme throughout the literature on campus gay organizing. ACLU involvement in a case has often raised that case's profile significantly and simply the mention of the group had been enough to cause many universities to allow an LGBT organization to meet, as was the case at the University of Alabama.

Despite reaching out to Lambda Legal and having regular contact with the ACLU, ALO would take some time to begin the process of forming an official student organization. The primary reason for this in 1989 would appear to be a lack of interest among Auburn's gay community. Deneke, then the secretary of ALO, hypothesized that "the degree of conservatism and homophobia in this area is greater than other parts of the state."<sup>20</sup> In a later letter Deneke further emphasizes this concern about a climate of homophobia at Auburn, stating that "this area is different from other places I have lived. This area strives to be conservative, homogenous, and intolerant of diversity. Many worthwhile organizations face problems ... as well as gays and lesbians." Interestingly, Deneke also blames the local gay community themselves as a major problem, claiming that they have no interests beyond "cruising" and "risky sexual behavior."<sup>21</sup> This may be seen as yet more evidence of Auburn's relatively apolitical nature as well as its conservative climate.

Despite Deneke's concerns, the apathetic climate among Auburn gays did not last. Just two months after this letter was sent, a letter was sent to Pat Barnes, Auburn University's vice

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<sup>20</sup> Deneke to Rubenstein, February 7, 1990, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Deneke to Rubenstein, March 10, 1990, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).

president for student affairs, requesting the creation of a gay and lesbian focused student organization. While this initial letter does not mention specific names due to concerns about anonymity, it is made clear that the group had already begun meeting and average meeting attendance was twenty five people. It is also worth noting that this initial letter was also sent to William Rubenstein, the ACLU attorney that had been in contact with ALO.<sup>22</sup>

AGLA continued communicating with university administration and provided a list of names with the condition that they remain anonymous; however it would not be until the SGA repealed the rule regarding the publication of members that they would gain their temporary charter due to concerns about anonymity.<sup>23</sup> During these conversations with administration AGLA began to be more visible on campus and advertised alongside official organizations for the first time in late October of 1990. One of the group's officers named only as "Pam" told *The Auburn Plainsman* that "there wasn't much harassment that day and some showed their support."<sup>24</sup> Pam also stated that the only reason AGLA had not yet received a formal charter was due to the aforementioned SGA policy which she claimed was "unconstitutional."<sup>25</sup>

Within a month of AGLA going public, SGA had removed the publication requirement and the group was granted a probationary charter. The vote for this was not unanimous, with at least one individual opposed the charter on the grounds that "I don't see why they have to meet here on campus."<sup>26</sup> There were a few letters on the AGLA charter in subsequent issues of *The*

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<sup>22</sup> Green to Barnes, May 29, 1990, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Green to Barnes, May 29, 1990, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Daphne Shi, "Gay and Lesbian Club Goes Public," *The Auburn Plainsman*, November 1, 1990.

<sup>25</sup> Daphne Shi, "Gay and Lesbian Club Goes Public," *The Auburn Plainsman*, November 1, 1990.

<sup>26</sup> Ramon Scott, "Approved: SGA Discusses, Allows Gay and Lesbian Charter," *The Auburn Plainsman*, November 8, 1990, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).



*Plainsman*, however the debate would appear to have died down after just a few weeks. One of the comments about AGLA came from SGA president Terry McCarthy, who stated that “Legally, we had to pass it, because if we didn’t there could have been a lawsuit.”<sup>27</sup> Based upon this article and other comments from the time, it would appear that while many may not have liked AGLA, they were willing to tolerate the group’s existence to some degree. This is a stark contrast with the announcement of the GSU at the University of Alabama in 1983, when students sent in letters to *The Crimson White* for months and threatened a lawsuit should the group receive any sort of recognition. The controversy that did occur following the announcement of AGLA would appear to be due to the fact that repeal of the publication requirement was done in order to accommodate AGLA, and less about the mere existence of the organization.<sup>28</sup> There are numerous reasons for this, but one could assume that part of this was due to a general ambivalence among the Auburn student body, who throughout the university’s history has been relatively apolitical.

At this point within AGLA, there would appear to be some optimism according to both letters sent to the ACLU and minutes from the organization’s meetings. They now had to only stay active and, so long as they received approval from the SGA, their charter would be made permanent at the end of 1991. The group’s average attendance increased throughout the year and it held numerous events. The group did attempt to get involved in campus issues by inviting Charles Curran, the professor who had been denied tenure by the administration, to come and speak to the group.<sup>29</sup> They also participated in demonstrations outside of the local Cracker Barrel

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<sup>27</sup> Stuart Churchwell, “SGA Petitions to Reopen Nest,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, November 15, 1990.

<sup>28</sup> Daphne Shi, “Gay and Lesbian Club Goes Public,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, November 1, 1990.

<sup>29</sup> AGLA Meeting Minutes 1991-1992, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).

restaurant when it was revealed that the restaurant chain had been discriminating against gay and lesbian employees. For the purposes of education, some members of the group were invited to speak to classes in disciplines such as psychology much like other campus gay and lesbian groups had done since the 1960s. Within the group's meetings, there were discussions about topics ranging from HIV and AIDS to gay parenting to screening and discussion of gay and lesbian themed films.<sup>30</sup> Throughout its first year, AGLA was also remarkably open to the campus, going as far as to publicly announce its meeting time and place in *The Auburn Plainsman*, a notable contrast when compared to the GSU at the University of Alabama.

During the organization's first year, the student government association presidential election was uncontested, which *The Auburn Plainsman* claimed was the first time in institutional history.<sup>31</sup> The only student to run for president, and therefore Auburn's new SGA President, was Jon Waggoner who would become a major figure in the controversy over AGLA.

As November of 1991 approached, AGLA discussed the chartering process to ensure they were prepared for the vote. Despite the apparent optimism, they still maintained contact with William Rubenstein of the ACLU in case any issues would come up. In the week leading up to the vote, SGA senators discussed AGLA with the student body. At this time a number of students did not like the idea of AGLA gaining permanent status so they began circulating a petition which, by the time of the vote, had collected the names of over four hundred names of students opposed to AGLA.<sup>32</sup> Auburn University's office of student affairs caught wind of this so, in order to ensure that the process followed proper procedures, Dr. Pat Barnes attended the

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<sup>30</sup> AGLA Meeting Minutes 1991-1992, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> Paige Oliver, "SGA Elections Night Makes History Books," *The Auburn Plainsman*, April 12, 1991.

<sup>32</sup> Paige Oliver, "SGA Vote Denies Permanent Charter to AGLA." *The Auburn Plainsman*, December 5, 1992.

SGA senate meeting and asked that student senators vote solely upon the criteria laid out within the organization guidelines and not take their personal feelings on homosexuality into account.<sup>33</sup>

Despite these precautions, the debate went on for some time and many student senators talked about the morality of homosexuality. The petition against AGLA was presented and after significant debate, a secret ballot vote occurred and the group was denied its charter on a vote of twenty three to seven.<sup>34</sup> Jon Waggoner, who was in attendance at that meeting despite not having a vote on the issue, said that the student senate was carrying out the will of the students that did not see a group like AGLA as compatible with the beliefs of the “Auburn Family.”<sup>35</sup>

Following this decision, the ACLU immediately contacted university officials, threatening them with a lawsuit if they did not overrule the SGA decision by the start of the next quarter.<sup>36</sup> The University was hesitant to comment for some time, but the day before classes of the next quarter began, the division of student affairs officially overruled the SGA decision and granted a charter to AGLA on January 7, 1992.<sup>37</sup>

Within a week Waggoner, on behalf of Auburn’s SGA, officially asked the university president to overrule the decision made by the office of student affairs and reinstate the SGA ruling.<sup>38</sup> At the same time students began organizing against AGLA, calling themselves “Students for a Healthy Auburn.”<sup>39</sup> On January 13, Students for a Healthy Auburn started a

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<sup>33</sup> Paige Oliver, “SGA Vote Denies Permanent Charter to AGLA.” *The Auburn Plainsman*, December 5, 1992.

<sup>34</sup> Paige Oliver, “SGA Vote Denies Permanent Charter to AGLA.” *The Auburn Plainsman*, December 5, 1992.

<sup>35</sup> Paige Oliver, “SGA Vote Denies Permanent Charter to AGLA.” *The Auburn Plainsman*, December 5, 1992.

<sup>36</sup> Paige Oliver, “SGA Vote Denies Permanent Charter to AGLA.” *The Auburn Plainsman*, December 5, 1992.

<sup>37</sup> Christy Kyser, “Administration Approves AGLA Charter.” *The Auburn Plainsman*, January 16, 1992.

<sup>38</sup> Christy Kyser, “Administration Approves AGLA Charter.” *The Auburn Plainsman*, January 16, 1992.

<sup>39</sup> Students for a Healthy Auburn, “Students Ignored.” *The Auburn Plainsman*, January 30, 1992.

petition to ask the university board of trustees to overrule student affairs and reinstate the SGA's original decision. Over the coming months this and similar petitions would gain the support of much of the student body as well as numerous citizens of Alabama. On January 30, Students for a Healthy Auburn purchased an ad in *The Auburn Plainsman*, which claimed that the University had ignored the voice of the student body, AGLA should not be permitted a charter due to the connections between homosexuals and AIDS, and that this information should be forwarded to the board of trustees.<sup>40</sup> Waggoner continued to be an incredibly vocal opponent of the university's decision, and used his position to regularly speak out against AGLA who he claimed encouraged "Criminal activity." He also stated that "in the student senate's opinion, sexual orientation was not a basis for an organization, and more than that, sexual activity that is against the law was not a basis for an organization... we don't have a murder society; we don't have a pedophile society."<sup>41</sup> This claim that AGLA was in violation of state law quickly became one of the most discussed arguments against the group's charter.

With this much opposition, supporters of AGLA also made statements through writing letters to the editors of various newspapers, though they did not create a formal petition of their own. Steven Migalski, then co-president of AGLA, saw creating a petition as giving legitimacy to the one put together by groups such as Students for a Healthy Auburn.<sup>42</sup> Statements in support of AGLA were not restricted to just the Auburn area, an Auburn alumnus from New Jersey sent a letter to the editor of *The Birmingham News* which ran the piece on February 12.<sup>43</sup> Another letter

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<sup>40</sup> Students for a Healthy Auburn, "Students Ignored." *The Auburn Plainsman*, January 30, 1992.

<sup>41</sup> Blair Robertson, "Gays Encourage 'Criminal Activity,' SGA Leader Says," *The Alabama Journal*, January 9, 1992.

<sup>42</sup> S Migalski, "Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association 1991." YouTube.com. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8bLO5zr02w>, (accessed December 1, 2017).

<sup>43</sup> Louis Crew, "Gays Have Right to Associate," *The Birmingham News*, February 12, 1992.

of support for AGLA was sent directly to the President of Auburn University from a professor who served as faculty advisor to a gay and lesbian student organization at Pennsylvania State University.<sup>44</sup>

With this increased attention, the story of AGLA began appearing in media outlets outside of Auburn. There were at least two nationally broadcasted stories about AGLA aired on PBS and CNN during January of 1992.<sup>45</sup> The PBS report was aired on Wednesday, January 22 of 1992 and included interviews with Barnes, Migalski, and Waggoner as well as a number of unnamed students. In this interview, Migalski stated that the resistance to AGLA came from his perception that “Auburn is trying to hold on to a certain image,” likely referring to the generally conservative and reactionary climate of Auburn during the period. In addition to addressing the climate, Migalski emphasizes AGLA’s role as an educational organization, continuing a trend that gay student organizations had been maintaining since the announcement of the GSU in 1983. Waggoner’s primary argument at this time was that AGLA, by becoming an organization that could potentially receive student activity fees, was infringing upon his rights and the rights of students that believed homosexuality was immoral.<sup>46</sup> Though this debate may have been new to Auburn, these primary arguments were almost identical to those made at UA in 1983 by the GSU and YAF.

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<sup>44</sup> D’Augelli to Muse, April 13, 1992, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).

<sup>45</sup> S Migalski, “Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association 1991.” YouTube.com. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8bLO5zr02w>, (accessed December 1, 2017). ; YouTube, “Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association CNN 1992.” YouTube.com. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5cfbYCYjcoc>, (accessed December 1, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> S Migalski, “Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association 1991.” YouTube.com. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8bLO5zr02w>, (accessed December 1, 2017).

Around the same time as the PBS story, CNN ran a story. CNN managed to interview another member of AGLA, though this individual's face was concealed and only identified by the name "Beth." Beth stated that "There is a lot of personal risk involved with this kind of issue, especially here with so much hostility against us." The CNN report connects the controversy over AGLA to the football controversy just a few months prior, referring to the time as "tumultuous year at Auburn." At this point the future of the group was not certain as tens of thousands of Alabamians, including numerous students, had signed a petition to the Auburn University board of trustees, asking that they overrule the administration.<sup>47</sup>

Unlike the GSU at Alabama in 1983, the controversy and media attention surrounding the chartering of AGLA continued to escalate. In fact, January was only the beginning of the public debate over AGLA's status. At the end of that month supporters of AGLA were allegedly shot at with a pellet gun after putting up posters in support of their organization.<sup>48</sup> This sparked another wave of attention that led to a rally in Auburn that February which people attended from all around the South. The rally was planned primarily by Outsouth, an Atlanta-based LGBT advocacy organization and included numerous speakers from around the region, showing that there was significant interest in this issue from outside Auburn and the state of Alabama. One flier advertising the event within the Montgomery area claimed that Oprah Winfrey had confirmed that she would be present, though there is no record of this beyond the single flier.<sup>49</sup> There is however an article in *The Opelika-Auburn News* which states that AGLA had been

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<sup>47</sup> S Migalski, "Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association CNN 1992." YouTube.com. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5cfbYCYjoc>, (accessed December 1, 2017).

<sup>48</sup> Christy Kyser, "Shooting Reported: Violence Underscores Controversy," *The Auburn Plainsman*, January 30, 1992.

<sup>49</sup> Outsouth flier, <http://jwbales.us/agla/>, (accessed March 20, 2017).

contacted by producers of the Oprah Winfrey show as well as *Rolling Stone* and *Vanity Fair* magazines.<sup>50</sup>

The rally occurred and though tensions were high, there was no violence likely due to a strong police presence.<sup>51</sup> The rally did however incite further controversy due in part to police confiscating signs of protestors opposed to AGLA, but also due to an extended gay kiss that was photographed and shared with a number of newspapers. While the Montgomery Advertiser did publish an image of the kiss, it was deemed too controversial to show by the editors of the *Opelika-Auburn News*. The kiss was however too much of a story to ignore entirely so, on February 16, they ran an article entitled *The Picture We Chose Not to Run* in which the paper's editorial board explained their reasoning behind not showing the kiss.<sup>52</sup>

In the week following the rally there were numerous articles in newspapers in and outside of the state. The Alabama state legislature took notice as well, with the senate passing a resolution in support of Auburn's SGA. The state house initially opposed this resolution, claiming it was merely a distraction from more serious issues, but later changed its mind and passed a similar resolution against AGLA.<sup>53</sup> Alabama governor Guy Hunt also weighed in on the issue, stating that "I support the SGA's position."<sup>54</sup>

Within weeks of the rally in Auburn, the state legislature also passed a law on sex education. These new regulations were based upon the policy of the conservative Eagle Forum, a group founded by Phyllis Schlafly as a part of her fight against the Equal Rights Amendment in

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<sup>50</sup> Harper, Samuel T, "AGLA: Act 'Deplorable, Outrageous,'" *The Opelika-Auburn News*, February 2, 1992.

<sup>51</sup> Harper, Samuel T, "Gay Rights Rally Peaceful," *The Opelika-Auburn News*, February 9, 1992.

<sup>52</sup> Jeff Herrin, "The Picture We Chose Not to Run," *The Opelika-Auburn News*, February 16, 1992.

<sup>53</sup> Samuel Harper, "Lawmakers Do Flip-Flop on Gay Issue," *The Opelika-Auburn News*, February 28, 1992.

<sup>54</sup> Samuel Harper, "Hunt Sides with SGA on Gay Issue," *The Opelika-Auburn News*, February 27, 1992.

the 1970s. While the new law included requirements that teachers emphasize abstinence, most notable to the story of gay student organizations is the law's mention of homosexuality. The new law stated that "an emphasis, in a factual manner and from a public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state."<sup>55</sup> While there is no one specific document making a direct link between the AGLA controversy and this law, at the very least this clearly shows the position of the state legislature on the issue of homosexuality and strengthens the case made by the gay community of Alabama that this state was quite conservative on the issue of homosexuality.

The debate over AGLA both before and after the rally led to similar debates at other universities across the state. Both the University of Alabama and the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) had similar groups that had been active for a number of years, this event led their respective SGAs to look into the legality of the organizations. The student government at the University of Alabama in particular discussed a resolution asking the state attorney general whether the group at their university was in accordance with state law.<sup>56</sup> While Alabama's SGA president vetoed this action, claiming that it was waste of the attorney general's time, Alabama Attorney General Jimmy Evans weighed in on the controversy anyway by issuing an advisory opinion that campus gay and lesbian organizations were not permitted under Alabama law.<sup>57</sup>

The increase in public attention led many to lobby Auburn's board of trustees, asking that they make a final decision on the status of ALGA. Though the board of trustees allegedly

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<sup>55</sup> 1992 Sex and Drug Education Act, *Alabama Legislative Acts* 1, No. 92-590, 320-324 (1992).

<sup>56</sup> State, "UA SGA to Discuss Homosexual Group," *The Birmingham News*, February 6, 1992.

<sup>57</sup> "Attorney General Rules on AU Homosexual Issue," *The Opelika-Auburn News*, March 20, 1992.



contained numerous members opposed to AGLA, including Governor Hunt, it refrained from making any official statements on the issue, likely due to the fear of legal consequences and continued media attention. It was not until Auburn had its spring break in March that the board decided to refer the issue to a federal court in Montgomery so that it could make a declaratory judgement.<sup>58</sup> SGA President Waggoner was pleased with this decision to make this a legal issue, stating to *The Auburn Plainsman* that he was willing to take this issue all the way to the Supreme Court.<sup>59</sup> This case however did not last long, as it was dismissed by the court leaving the question of AGLA's status in question.

In the midst of the AGLA controversy William V. Muse took over as Auburn's president, succeeding James E. Martin who had held the position since 1984.<sup>60</sup> Though Muse had significant experience in higher education administration, he was not familiar with many of the issues Auburn faced including the AGLA controversy upon taking the position of president.<sup>61</sup>

Another major incident to occur while the controversy over AGLA raged on was KA's annual Old South Parade which consisted of fraternity members marching in Confederate Uniforms, sorority members dressed as Southern Belles, and other students waving rebel flags.<sup>62</sup> Migalski, who was a participant in the protest against the parade, also recalled that the parade included direct allusions to slavery in the form of black children from Tuskegee who were paid

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<sup>58</sup> John Zenor, "Court Inherit AGLA Controversy," *The Auburn Plainsman*, April 10, 1992.

<sup>59</sup> John Zenor, "Court Inherit AGLA Controversy," *The Auburn Plainsman*, April 10, 1992.

<sup>60</sup> Dwayne Cox, *The Village on the Plain: Auburn University, 1856-2006* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2016), 220-222.

<sup>61</sup> Wayne Flynt interview with William Muse, April 6, 2001, Box 1, William V. Muse Oral Histories, Auburn University Archives and Special Collections, Auburn University Libraries.

<sup>62</sup> Dwayne Cox, *The Village on the Plain: Auburn University, 1856-2006* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2016), 222-224.

to play the role of slaves.<sup>63</sup> This display demonstrated the socially conservative nature of much of the community and many students at the time saw this as evidence that the university was not only unconcerned about diversity, but actively hostile to it. A coalition of students, including members of AGLA as well as the Black Student Union protested the event by locking arms in the middle of the road, blocking the parade's path. Ivory Fuller, one of the organizers of the protest against the parade, stated that "I want them [the administration] to be sensitive to the needs of the people who do not fit their white, Anglo-Saxon W.A.S.P. category... I want them to be sensitive to black issues, to gay issues, to any issues that are not in the majority."<sup>64</sup>

The protest against the Old South Parade led to significant media coverage, and a meeting between the leaders of KA and the newly appointed President Muse. While Muse did not directly order an end to the parade, the result of these events was the decision that 1992 would be the last parade held.<sup>65</sup> Muse was from the South himself, but before coming to Auburn had served as president of the University of Akron in Ohio. Within months of taking the job as Auburn's president and returning to the South he likely angered many by comparing AGLA to the KA Old South Parade in a letter to the editor of the *Montgomery Advertiser*, in which he quite openly spoke out against the behavior of many on campus as they related to the social issues of the day. In the piece, Muse made an appeal to ideals of free expression and called out Auburn's SGA on its apparent hypocrisy as it had "vigorously tried to deny First Amendment rights to the AGLA while supporting the exercise of those same rights by a campus fraternity."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Steven Migalski, "My Life as an Activist." Lecture, Adler University, Chicago, January 27, 2018.

<sup>64</sup> Sheila Hall, "Campus Leaders Address the Old South Issue," *The Auburn Plainsman*, May 2, 1991.

<sup>65</sup> William V. Muse, *The Seventh Muse* (New York; Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2008), 180-182.

<sup>66</sup> William Muse, "All AU Students Entitled to Constitution Rights," *The Montgomery Advertiser*, May 10, 1992.

He went on to discuss how this issue was not unique to Auburn and lamented that this type of hypocrisy was present around the world. He concluded the article by stating “Unless and until we learn and understand the basic precepts of a democracy, and practice it more fully and consistently, we are at risk of losing it.”<sup>67</sup> Muse claimed that he saw the piece as fairly basic and was “startled” by the reaction to it, stating that it was “almost as if the pronouncements I was making were just kind of a total revelation to the folks here” and “as the head of a large university in the state, making those kind of statements was a total novelty.”<sup>68</sup> This transition in institutional leadership to someone that was willing to be so outspoken about a controversial social issue may have made it more difficult for Auburn’s administration to control the story of AGLA once it reached the media.

In an attempt to end the debate over AGLA and limit its activity, State Representative Pete Turnham, a Democrat from Auburn, proposed bill 454 with significant support from the student governments of both Auburn and the University of Alabama. This bill would appear to be quite similar to the law proposed in 1983 in response to the recognition of the GSU at UA. The intention of Turnham’s bill was:

To prohibit any college or university from spending public funds or using public facilities, directly or indirectly, to sanction, recognize, or support any group that promotes a lifestyle or actions prohibited by the sodomy and sexual misconduct laws; to prohibit any group from permitting or encouraging its members or others to engage in or provide materials on how to engage in the lifestyle or actions.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> William Muse, “All AU Students Entitled to Constitution Rights,” *The Montgomery Advertiser*, May 10, 1992.

<sup>68</sup> Wayne Flynt interview with William Muse, April 6, 2001, Box 1, William V. Muse Oral Histories, Auburn University Archives and Special Collections, Auburn University Libraries.

<sup>69</sup> Act Prohibiting Colleges and Universities From Spending Public Funds For Groups Promoting Sodomy, *Alabama Legislative Acts 1*, No. 92-439, 869-870 (1992).

Representative David Barnes, a co-sponsor of the bill stated that “The bill will pass in a minute” and “People are saying if you vote against the bill ... people will think you’re a homosexual, and that’ll send the wrong message back home.”<sup>70</sup> Barnes’ prediction was correct as the bill passed the state house with broad support, the state senate unanimously, and was approved by Governor Hunt on May 14, 1992 to become Alabama 16-1-28. By enshrining this position in law, gay and lesbian student organizations around the state were now faced with new questions about their legitimacy, questions which Alabama universities were forced to reckon with as students returned to campus in the summer and fall.

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<sup>70</sup> Author Unknown, “Montgomery Journal; Leaping into the Fray Over Gay Group at Auburn,” *The New York Times*, March 22, 1992.

## Chapter IV.

### Equal Justice Under Law

Following the creation of Alabama 16-1-28 universities were put in a difficult spot. Some used it as a reason to crack down on gay and lesbian groups while others attempted to ignore it. The law would impact Alabama campuses for the next five years until it was ultimately struck down as unconstitutional by federal courts. The overwhelming support of the law in the legislature demonstrated the strong opposition to gay and lesbian groups in Alabama. With this strong opposition throughout the state even the campuses that chose to back down from enforcing it or avoided the law entirely saw opposition to gay groups in the form of vandalism and violence. No matter how much the universities wanted this issue to just go away, state government continued to press it resulting in more national news coverage.

Though the new law was focused on student organizations, the creation of Alabama 16-1-28 led to increased political involvement from the gay community throughout the state. In response to the passing of the bill, as well as Alabama's sex education law which included a section asked teachers to inform students that homosexual behavior was not acceptable in Alabama, organizers held the first gay pride march in the city of Montgomery on June 13, 1992. The march was held in June due to that being the traditional period for pride parades marches. It was primarily symbolic, as by this time the state legislature's regular session had ended for the year.<sup>1</sup> In 1993, a coalition of gay activists from around the state came together to lobby the state

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<sup>1</sup> Tracey McCartney, "Dozens March on Capitol to Protest Anti-Gay Laws," *The Montgomery Advertiser*, June 14, 1992.

legislature as an organized group for the first time in Alabama history, mentioning the passage of bill 454 as a significant reason why they felt the need to organize.<sup>2</sup>

The law's impact was of felt at Auburn University as well. Following its passage, the Auburn University student senate passed a resolution requesting that the university "uphold the newly enacted state law" by revoking the charter of AGLA.<sup>3</sup> This request was not successful, and AGLA's charter remained. However, Auburn University was still concerned about being compliant with the new law. At the start of the fall quarter of 1992, Auburn attempted to comply with the new law by requiring the officers of campus organizations to sign a pledge stating that they would not use their position to endorse sodomy. Out of over three hundred student organizations on campus the vast majority of them accepted this; according to *The Auburn Plainsman*, there were only five groups that elected not to sign the pledge. These groups included AGLA (who refused to sign after consulting with the ACLU), Amnesty International, Students for Progress, Environmental Awareness Organization, and English Honorary Sigma Tau Delta.<sup>4</sup> As a result of complaints from these organizations as well as mentions of possible ACLU involvement, the university ended the requirement within weeks of introducing it though the law prohibiting universities from supporting groups that promote sodomy remained on the books throughout the state.<sup>5</sup> This university decision would marks the end of the question over AGLA's status as an organization.

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<sup>2</sup> AP, "Homosexuals lobby Legislature," *The Opelika-Auburn News*, April 7, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Sitten, "SGA Pleading Case Again," *The Opelika-Auburn News*, June 4, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Kim Chandler, "Student Groups Refuse to Sign," *The Auburn Plainsman*, October 22, 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Sitten, "AU Suspends Anti-Sodomy Form," *The Opelika-Auburn News*, October 25, 1992.

Though the group's right to exist was no longer in question, extreme homophobia continued to rear its head in Auburn. Steven Migalski, an officer of AGLA and one of its most visible supporters, was beaten after coming out of a movie theatre bathroom by a group of people that knew him as "that queer guy who was the president of the gay group."<sup>6</sup> The attack left Migalski in the Emergency Room though he did not report this activity to the police at the time.

The violence against Migalski was only one example of the climate of Auburn following AGLA's recognition. When the organization attempted to publicize itself in the area its signs would often be taken down. The most notable incident of this occurred when the group participated in the Adopt-A-Mile Program, becoming the first gay and lesbian focused organization in Alabama to do so. Though the program took months to file AGLA's paperwork and prepare a sign, significantly longer than usual, by January of 1994 two Adopt-A-Mile signs with AGLA's name were erected at two sites in Auburn. One of these locations was directly adjacent to the house of the Kappa Alpha Fraternity (KA), the same fraternity that held the Old South Parade that numerous AGLA members protested against less than two years prior.<sup>7</sup>

Though the group had a legal right to have a sign there were concerns within the group that the broader community may not tolerate such signs, particularly since once of them was so close to the KA house.<sup>8</sup> As a result of this John Bales, AGLA's Service Committee Chairman, anticipated vandalism and urged readers of the Alabama Forum that saw the sign to call him immediately so that precautions could be taken. Bales' prediction was correct and within hours

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<sup>6</sup> Steven Migalski, "My Life as an Activist." Lecture, Adler University, Chicago, January 27, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Blair Robertson, "Homosexual Group's Sign Taken," *The Montgomery Advertiser*, January 18, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Unknown Author "State News and Events," Alabama Forum, March 1998.

of going up, the sign was stolen.<sup>9</sup> A few days later, the other sign was knocked down. Members of AGLA took this sign and erected it on the site next to the KA house where the other one had been stolen. Migalski stated that attacking a sign was “cowardly” but still better than the attacks against people that had happened in previous years.<sup>10</sup> According to Cheryl Gladden, then chairwoman of the Adopt-A-Mile program, these were the first acts of vandalism she had seen since she began heading the program.<sup>11</sup>

The sign would be replaced a number of times though within weeks, if not days, it would end up either stolen or vandalized.<sup>12</sup> The presence of the signs also drew complaints from the local community. Wayne Snoddy, a resident of the Auburn Area, complained to the city council about the fact that one of the signs was close to a residential area. He stated that “I (have a) 3-and-a-half year old, and at 6 or 7 years old I don’t want (my child) to come to me and start asking about an alternative lifestyle when I’m trying to teach (my child) about our lifestyle.”<sup>13</sup> AGLA’s John Bales stated that people have the right to have opinions such as that of Snoddy, but “We are not going to give up our rights because someone has an opinion of which we disagree.”<sup>14</sup>

Despite this initial strong stand, AGLA did compromise somewhat by moving the sign near the KA house away from the house slightly, after receiving pressure from the city over a

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<sup>9</sup> Blair Robertson, “Homosexual Group’s Sign Taken,” *The Montgomery Advertiser*, January 18, 1994; Jennifer Acevado, “AGLA Sign Stolen After Standing Three Hours,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, January 20, 1994.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel T. Harper, “AGLA Replaces Stolen Sign,” *The Opelika-Auburn News*, January 25, 1994.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel T. Harper, “AGLA Replaces Stolen Sign,” *The Opelika-Auburn News*, January 25, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Blair Robertson, “Vandals Spatter Paint On Gay Group’s Sign,” *The Montgomery Advertiser*, February 2, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> Tonya Ponds, “AGLA’s Adopt-A-Mile Sign Continues to Draw Complaints from Community,” *The Opelika-Auburn News*, February 2, 1994.

<sup>14</sup> Tonya Ponds, “AGLA’s Adopt-A-Mile Sign Continues to Draw Complaints from Community,” *The Opelika-Auburn News*, February 2, 1994.



code issue despite being unsure about whether the complaint was legal.<sup>15</sup> As the weeks went on, more community members began to weigh in on the issue. Among those that spoke out was the Auburn Ministerial Association, a group made up of local pastors, who opposed the vandalism. Also opposed to the vandalism was Wayne Flynt, a prominent historian who was quite active in university politics, though he added at the time that he did not approve of the gay lifestyle as “It’s inconsistent with biblical teachings.”<sup>16</sup>

The Adopt-A-Mile Program was only one of the service projects that AGLA participated in, in its early years as a chartered organization it also supported community organizations such as Lee County AIDS Outreach and a battered women’s shelter.<sup>17</sup> Throughout this time AGLA also advocated for amending Alabama’s hate crime laws to include sexual orientation.<sup>18</sup> In April of 1993 members of AGLA as well as students from the University of Alabama, traveled to the nation’s capital to participated in the March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Freedom.<sup>19</sup> The march did not receive much coverage on Auburn’s campus, though it did lead James Foster, sports editor for *The Auburn Plainsman*, to write an opinion piece in which he came out as a homophobe.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Samuel T. Harper, “AGLA Concedes, Removes Sign from Fraternity Property,” *The Opelika-Auburn News*, February 8, 1994.

<sup>16</sup> Blair Robertson, “Ministers Condemn Sign Vandals,” *The Montgomery Advertiser*, February 23, 1994. Flynt has since changed his views regarding the relationship between Christian theology and the gay community. There are likely others mentioned in this document that have changed their views on this over the years as well.

<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Acevedo, “AGLA To Adopt Mile,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, April 29, 1993; Photographs, *The Opelika-Auburn News*, January 4, 1993.

<sup>18</sup> Kristi Kevern, “Gay Students Should Continue to Display Pride,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, March 3, 1994.

<sup>19</sup> Invisible Histories Project, “Projects and Collections,” [invisiblehistory.org](https://www.invisiblehistory.org/projects--collections.html), <https://www.invisiblehistory.org/projects--collections.html> (accessed April 7, 2019)

<sup>20</sup> James Foster, “If Homosexuals Behaved with Dignity, People Would Respect Them,” *The Auburn Plainsman*, April 29, 1993.

While the AGLA signs caused significant controversy in Auburn, that was hardly the only Alabama community to receive increased opposition to gay student visibility in the early 1990s. Despite the fact that Earl Roger Sayers, President of the University of Alabama, was firm in his belief that the new law did not apply to the organization at UA that campus still saw multiple controversies over the activities of the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance (GLBA), formerly known as Gay/Lesbian Support Services.<sup>21</sup> In October of 1993, the GLBA decided to recognize national coming out day as well as publicly celebrate its ten year anniversary with a week long program, an event which garnered some criticism from across campus, including from *The Crimson White* which up until this point was generally supportive of the gay and lesbian group.<sup>22</sup>

GLBA coming out week included a number of events including a video and lecture series, a panel discussion on being gay, and a memorial for victims of gay bashing. The event that attracted the most attention though was titled “Out in the Daylight” and asked participants to wear specific articles of clothing throughout the week.<sup>23</sup> On Monday, October 4, participants were asked to “Wear a ‘Roll Tide’ shirt or hat if you know someone who is Lesbian, Bisexual, or Gay.”<sup>24</sup> This caused some outrage among the community, with a number of students writing to *The Crimson White* to express their views. One of the first to do so was Richard Parker, a graduate student in Arts and Sciences. Parker stated that “Events like this really turn my

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Sitten, “SGA Pleading Case Again,” *The Opelika-Auburn News*, June 4, 1992.

<sup>22</sup> Editorial Board, “A Cheap Trick,” *The Crimson White*, October 8, 1993.

<sup>23</sup> Coming Out Week Poster, “Coming Out Week ’93 Poster: We Are Everywhere!” 1993, Miller-Stephens GLBT UA Student Organization Collection, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

<sup>24</sup> Coming Out Week Poster, “Coming Out Week ’93 Poster: We Are Everywhere!” 1993, Miller-Stephens GLBT UA Student Organization Collection, The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

stomach” and lamented that UA did not have an SGA that could tell the GLBA to get lost, as the SGA did at Auburn.<sup>25</sup> Parker went on to propose an alternative “Conservative, Heterosexual Spirit Week” and concluded his letter stating that he would like to get lunch at Cracker Barrel.<sup>26</sup> *The Crimson White* was also critical of the Out in the Daylight event, publishing an editorial calling it “a cheap trick” and “a childish game.”<sup>27</sup> Though they claimed to believe that coming out was a legitimate issue to be discussed, the editorial board believed that the GLBA should have used gay pride specific clothing so as not to draw unwilling people into participation.

Officers of GLBA including Lisa Spadafora, the GLBA President, and Louis Cooper, the Coming Out Week Chair, made an exception to their usual policy of avoiding commenting on what they saw as misguided criticism by responding to the editorial piece. They claimed that the reason they selected such commonly worn articles of clothing was to allow closeted students a means to participate as well as those that were comfortable being out on campus. It was also intended to show that gay people were as common as an arbitrary piece of clothing. The Roll Tide shirt was chosen specifically for the event that Monday as it was about showing that the wearer knows a gay person. By using such a commonly worn article of clothing the GLBA was demonstrating that practically everyone, even if they didn’t know it, knew at least one person

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Parker, “Straight Alternatives to Coming Out Week,” *The Crimson White*, October 7, 1993; At this time the University of Alabama SGA was on suspension and not functional. For this reason, student fees were distributed not by elected leaders, but by a panel of students selected by university administrators that were not held accountable to the student vote.

<sup>26</sup> This reference to Cracker Barrel was almost certainly a jab at gays and lesbians due to the fact that during the early 1990s the restaurant chain was well known for having discriminatory attitudes towards the gay community and was protested by members of gay and lesbian student groups in Alabama on multiple occasions.

<sup>27</sup> Editorial Board, “A Cheap Trick,” *The Crimson White*, October 8, 1993.

who was gay, lesbian, or bisexual. In their response to the editorial Spadafora and Cooper also added that “People who are secure in their heterosexuality wouldn’t worry about such things.”<sup>28</sup>

Louis Cooper would continue to be vocal, the next year she wrote biweekly opinion pieces for *The Crimson White* which usually touched on gay, lesbian, or bisexual issues. One of the most notable pieces was on the one year anniversary of the Out in the Daylight event, in which Cooper once again criticized *The Crimson White* for its editorial, stating that the attitude of the board demonstrated that “The members of the editorial board dislike homosexuality so much, are so afraid of it, they don’t want someone to mistake them for someone who is gay.”<sup>29</sup> Such a strong response and one year later suggests that this editorial had a lasting impact on at least some members of the GLBA.

Coming Out Week continued to be one of the most visible and controversial GLBA events at the University of Alabama and the suggested dress code from 1993 was brought up again in 1995. What drew the most attention that year though was chalk. That year, members of the GLBA wrote messages in chalk on the campus quad which were washed away a week later by a new, unrecognized, Neo-Confederate student organization that called themselves the “Southern League.”<sup>30</sup> The Southern League would go on to seek recognition for their organization, creating significant debates on campus over free expression and igniting old tensions over the use of the Confederate Flag that had been present for decades.

Also during coming out week of 1995, the GLBA announced that they would be hosting a conference in the spring. At the time the conference received little attention, with most people

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<sup>28</sup> Lisa Spadafora and Louis Cooper, “GLBA Defends Coming Out Week,” *The Crimson White*, October 14, 1993.

<sup>29</sup> Louis Cooper, “GLBA Responds to Editorial,” *The Crimson White*, October 14, 1994.

<sup>30</sup> Editorial Board, “Battle of Words,” *The Crimson White*, October 16, 1995.

discussing issues such as chalk and the Southern League.<sup>31</sup> This changed however as the year went on and the conference approached. The conference, officially titled “Voices of Diversity,” garnered attention from not just the campus, but throughout the nation. Some within the state government, particularly Attorney General Jeff Sessions who was campaigning for a seat in the United States Senate at the time, were concerned about this conference coming to Alabama and attempted to stop it by invoking section 16-1-28. Despite these concerns, the conference occurred without any major incident due at least in part to the ruling in the case of *Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance v. Sessions*, which struck down section 16-1-28, the Alabama law that was created in response to the forming of AGLA.

The case of *Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance v. Sessions* began with the rejection of funding for the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance (GLBA) at the University of South Alabama (USA) by the University administration. This was despite the fact that unlike Auburn, USA’s SGA voted on a number of occasions to grant funding to the GLBA even though they had been instructed by Dale T. Adams, USA Dean of Students, not to fund the group until he received an opinion from the state attorney general. This denial of funding forced GLBA to cancel a planned event involving an invited speaker in 1992, who had been scheduled to present on gay related legal issues such as AIDS.<sup>32</sup> This denial of funding despite receiving SGA approval occurred on multiple occasions until the Attorney General issued a letter in July of 1993, stating that GLBA should not receive any funds due to 16-1-28. Notably, this letter did not go into detail about how GLBA or its activities violated the law. The vagueness of the letter led Dean Adams to initiate his own investigation into GLBA members to determine whether or not the group and its

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<sup>31</sup> Dan Rogers, “GLBA Plans Events to Celebrate Coming Out Week at University,” *The Crimson White*, October 9, 1995.

<sup>32</sup> *Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance v. Sessions*, 917 F.Supp. 1548 (M.D. Ala. 1996).

members were “fostering” or “promoting” violations of state sodomy laws as the law was intended to prohibit.<sup>33</sup>

All of these actions were brought to the attention of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) who sued both USA and the State of Alabama for violating the free speech and association rights of USA GLBA students. In addition to representing the USA GLBA, the ACLU also sought to include other organizations as plaintiffs as well to strengthen their case against the state law. The ACLU approached members of the GLBA at the University of Alabama about joining though they declined, primarily due to the fact that the University of Alabama had for the most part ignored the passage of the law and they therefore would not add much value to the case.<sup>34</sup>

After a number of years in court, a ruling was finally issued on January 29, 1996. Judge Myron H. Thompson for the Middle District of Alabama ordered “That judgement is entered in favor of plaintiff Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance and against Defendants Attorney General of the State of Alabama, President of the University of South Alabama, and Dean of Students of the University of South Alabama.”<sup>35</sup> The judgement went on to declare that the Alabama law created to oppose AGLA was unconstitutional due to violating the first Amendment, and ordered that all legal fees be covered by the defendants.

Interestingly, the Supreme Court precedent that Judge Thomson relied most heavily upon was *Rosenberger v University of Virginia*, a 1995 case in which it was decided that a Christian student newspaper was unfairly denied funding by the University of Virginia due to the fact that

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<sup>33</sup> *Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance v. Sessions*, 917 F.Supp. 1548 (M.D. Ala. 1996).

<sup>34</sup> Heath Clark, “GLBA Lawsuit Unlikely to Affect UA,” *The Crimson White*, July 13, 1994.

<sup>35</sup> *Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance v. Sessions*, 917 F.Supp. 1548 (M.D. Ala. 1996).

the university made funds available to numerous differing organizations. By denying funding to the Christian newspaper on the grounds of the views it espoused, the University was engaging in content-based discrimination. Judge Thompson stated that “[The Alabama law] similarly violates the first amendment. It provides that state colleges and universities, although making their facilities and funds available to various and differing student organizations to convey their own messages, must silence the expression of one, and only one, viewpoint.”<sup>36</sup>

The ruling in *Gay Lesbian Bisexual Association v Sessions* was reported on by national media outlets, including the *New York Times*.<sup>37</sup> The Alabama Attorney General Jeff Sessions was not pleased with the ruling and asked for a temporary stay of the judgement declaring 16-1-28 unconstitutional due to the upcoming Voices of Diversity Conference at the University of Alabama, stating “the State of Alabama will experience irreparable harm by funding a conference and activities in violation of state law.”<sup>38</sup> He claimed that this was not an attempt to block the conference entirely, only “to have the statute available should a violation occur at the upcoming conference,” indicating that he was especially concerned about a session that dealt with safe sex and sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>39</sup> This pleading did little though and the stay was not granted, allowing the conference to go on as planned.

Sessions appealed the decision to the eleventh circuit court of appeals but the original ruling was upheld in the case of *Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance v. Pryor* on April 29, 1997 in a ruling concluding that “Section 16-1-28 on its face and as applied to GLBA results in viewpoint

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<sup>36</sup> *Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance v. Sessions*, 917 F.Supp. 1548 (M.D. Ala. 1996).

<sup>37</sup> David Dunlap, “Judge Voids an Alabama Law Against Gay Campus Groups,” *The New York Times*, January 31, 1996.

<sup>38</sup> *Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance v. Sessions*, 917 F.Supp. 1558 (M.D. Ala. 1996).

<sup>39</sup> *Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance v. Sessions*, 917 F.Supp. 1558 (M.D. Ala. 1996).

discrimination in violation of the First Amendment. Accordingly, we affirm the judgement of the district court.”<sup>40</sup> This ruling ended discussion of the 1992 law within the courts. By upholding the lower ruling, the eleventh circuit solidified the legal rights of lesbian, gay, and bisexual focused student organizations to exist throughout Alabama and gave a strong signal to universities that such organizations must receive equal justice under the law.

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<sup>40</sup> *Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance v. Pryor*, 110 F.3d 1543, Eleventh Circuit (1997); The named defendant in this case was changed as Jeff Sessions was no longer the state attorney general due to the fact that he was elected to the US Senate in 1996. William Pryor succeeded Sessions as state attorney general.



## Conclusion

The case of *Gay Lesbian Bisexual Alliance v. Pryor* put an end to Alabama 16-1-28 and ensured legal equality for gay and lesbian focused student organizations in Alabama and throughout the eleventh circuit. However, difficulties remained for Alabama's queer community. *Bowers v. Hardwick* was still the law of the land until it was overturned by the Supreme Court in 2003 in the case of *Lawrence v. Texas*. The culture was also slow to change, and gay students still faced difficulties into the twenty-first century.

One may examine the debate surrounding the formation of gay and lesbian student organizations and their fight for recognition in Alabama as a part of the larger national discussion about gay rights. The Gay Student Union at the University of Alabama and the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association faced many of the same struggles as previous queer student organizations going back to the founding of the Student Homophile League in 1967 such as sodomy laws. The fact that these Alabama student organizations emerged fifteen to twenty years later suggest that the gay movement was far from identical around the country and that there is a great deal of variation in the chronology between more liberal urban centers such as New York City, and conservative southern campuses such as Auburn University.

Though many of the events and tactics were similar, organizations in Alabama were also faced with the issue of AIDS. Much of this backlash against gay rights could be attributed to the fear of AIDS, and by extensions gay people, which certainly existed on campuses in Alabama as well as throughout the nation. It would appear to be that this is the reason why AGLA, despite being founded almost a decade after the GSU, became so controversial beyond the campus of Auburn University. The 1980s and 1990s increased discussion on the topic of gay rights at the

national and international level. During this period a number of states had already passed anti-discrimination laws treating sexual orientation as a protected class. Other nations such as Denmark and The Netherlands were even discussing legal recognition for same sex relationship, all of which led to a growing concern among social conservatives in the United States.

As time went on, Alabama universities slowly began implementing changes to their policies in order to make their campuses more inclusive of the queer community. Both Auburn University and the University of Alabama have amended their anti-discrimination policies to include sexual orientation and gender identity. Both institutions have also implemented Safe Zone programs.<sup>1</sup> These changes were made at least in part due to regular activism from students.

Auburn University and the University of Alabama have also begun to examine their own role in local queer history. At Auburn University, the most notable discussion of the campus' role in the history of gay and lesbian student organizing came from the Student Senate, the same group that year earlier had voted to deny a charter for the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association. In December of 2017, the Auburn University Student Senate passed a commendation for the founding members of the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association. This marks a significant change in the culture of the institution, at least when it comes to the rights of gay and lesbian student organizations. However, noticeably absent from the commendation was any mention of SGA's role in creating so many of the difficulties which AGLA faced despite the fact that the commendation's author proposed an amendment to include this information.<sup>2</sup> At the University of Alabama there have been some attempts to preserve the story of that institution's role in the

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<sup>1</sup> University of Alabama, "Home – Safe Zone," ua.edu, <https://safezone.sa.ua.edu/> (accessed March 29, 2019); Auburn University, "Safe Zone | AU Student Counseling Services," auburn.edu, <https://wp.auburn.edu/scs/safe-zone/> (accessed March 29, 2019)

<sup>2</sup> Chris Heaney, "Founding Members of Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association Commended by SGA," *The Auburn Plainsman*, December 5, 2017.

history from the University libraries, with its Special Collections displaying a digital exhibit focused on the queer community at the university.<sup>3</sup> The University of Alabama also offers a scholarship to students concerned about the welfare of the LGBT students named after Elliot Jackson Jones, one of the founders of the Gay Student Union who died due to complications from AIDS.<sup>4</sup>

Though Alabama queer student organizations were founded later than many of the similar student groups around the country, once they did exist their willingness to be out on campus and in their communities played a key role in the queer history of Alabama. Existing at the forefront of AIDS activism and the movement for gay rights both legally and socially, groups such as the Gay Student Union and the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association embodied the goals of Harvey Milk's 1978 proclamation and paved the way for queer students in Alabama and across the South, making it easier for them to live their lives out and proud.

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<sup>3</sup> University of Alabama, "Empowering Voices," ua.edu, <https://apps.lib.ua.edu/blogs/empoweringvoices/> (accessed April 12, 2019)

<sup>4</sup> University of Alabama, "Elliot Jackson Jones Memorial Scholarship," ua.edu, <http://capstonealliance.ua.edu/initiatives/scholarship/> (accessed March 28, 2019)

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