

“START HERE. WE EXIST.”

A Roundtable Discussion of the US LGBTQ Heritage Theme Study

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In the fall of 2016, the National Park Service (NPS) released a twelve-hundred-plus-page document titled *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*. The theme study’s thirty-two chapters will help State Historic Preservation officers, NPS staff, and community members identify and evaluate the importance of LGBTQ historic sites, thus helping to preserve this history. The study itself requires careful and critical consideration, especially in the current political climate. On February 3, 2017, six of the study’s thirty authors came together to discuss its production, meaning, and future. The study was published in October 2016 by the National Park Foundation and the NPS and independently funded by the Gill Foundation. The goal of the study is to provide a broad historical context for LGBTQ history in the United States of America designed to serve as a foundation for identifying, evaluating, and preserving LGBTQ history and historic sites across the country. Participants read one another’s chapters as well as additional chapters from the larger study, covering

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more than two-thirds of the entire study, which totals 1,263 pages and mentions over 1,300 places of LGBTQ history across the US. Against the backdrop of a drastically different national political landscape from the one in which the study was written, we reflected on the theme study project from our different disciplines, identities, experiences, and geographies, including the labor involved, and the meaning, potential, role, and limitations in producing and shaping future queer histories through this study.

Jack Giesecking: Let's start by sharing what struck us about what we read. Why are these essays important? And why are we reading them now?

Megan E. Springate: Two of the driving goals I had in editing the theme study were to be as holistic as possible in representing the huge diversity that is encompassed by the LGBTQ umbrella and to provide many different voices and approaches to telling LGBTQ history tied to specific places. I have seen respectability politics shape the LGBTQ rights movement since I came out in 1987, silencing and rendering invisible some of the most bad-ass activists who fought for the rights of all of us, including the drag queens, leather daddies, sex workers, trans folks, bisexuals, people of color, and innumerable combinations of these identities.

I've also seen respectability politics result in the leaving behind of some of the most vulnerable of us, including the differently abled, the homeless, the elderly, trans folks, people of color, sex workers, immigrants, and innumerable combinations of these identities. A "respectable" history that leaves these issues and people out is not a complete history and does not allow us and our allies to understand how we got to where we are and how to move forward—politically, personally, and in the realm of historic preservation. It was impossible to include the histories of everyone under the LGBTQ umbrella, but I hope that ways of telling those histories are modeled here so that others can pick up the baton.

The variety of authors in the theme study was part of this approach: there are many ways of doing the history of place. The historians, public historians, geographers, archaeologists, community activists, preservation professionals, journalists, and educators who wrote and reviewed chapters all contributed their different perspectives and voices to the theme study. All of these approaches are valid, and all bring something important to the work. I hope that the theme study serves as a springboard for future work, discussions, debates, and preservation of LGBTQ history.

In editing the volume, I was struck by how much I didn't know about LGBTQ history in the US—for example, the number of people who have been

hailed as gay rights heroes who identified as bisexual, and about the trajectory of Asian American activism in LGBTQ rights.¹ Why don't we all know who Rose Bamberger is?² I spent a lot of time thinking about what I don't/didn't know, why those histories have been silenced or not spoken, and the implications of that.

Katie Batza: The LGBTQ Heritage Theme Study is unique in that it offers an incredibly far-reaching and diverse representation of queer life and experiences over space and time. The effort to include as many voices and take a truly intersectional approach shaped my writing, but also shines throughout the entire study. I also was struck by a willingness to look at the aspects of LGBTQ history that wouldn't fit within the “respectable” frame and also to challenge the notion of the American historical narrative as a steady progression toward equality. There are parts of each chapter that are ugly and I like that. While clear in its aim to include, and speak to, LGBTQ folks in the National Park Service's (NPS) recounting and preservation of US history, it translates well beyond members of those groups by truly weaving the histories into the larger national landscape and narrative.

From this perspective, LGBTQ history matters and informs US history more broadly (Bronski 2012). The study works as a corrective that shines light on many stories and people historically relegated to the shadows. Just as the erasure of experiences and marginalized people from history fuels and reinforces further discrimination and marginalization, the potential of this study of histories rarely told rests in its ability to link members of LGBTQ communities to their own histories and to the larger history of the United States and to challenge those who wish to exclude them.

I think the fact that we all learned so much in our readings of one another's work suggests that this theme study is valuable to those of us who study LGBTQ history in a way that I wasn't anticipating. Initially, I imagined that the theme study would serve as a sort of LGBTQ history primer from which nonacademic preservationists could expand on as they nominated sites. Instead, I think this serves multiple purposes and has more layers than I can count.

JG: I definitely agree with you, Katie. When the people asked to write the theme study learn so much from it—people who focus on LGBTQ histories, geographies, and lives for a living!—it reveals the profound absence of LGBTQ history and the siloed knowledges we hold but are still yet unaware of. I was moved and inspired by these chapters. The essays that dug into the queer histories of certain places (Reno, Miami, New York City, Chicago, San Francisco) brought out connections and effects I would have never been able to piece together. In his essay, Julio's description of the role of the Mariel boatlift in reshaping pro-LGBTQ immigration

policies from an anticommunist administration blew my mind. The details of the queer lives and spaces discussed throughout the theme study reasserted that complexity of place and diversity of LGBTQ community.

As a cultural geographer, seeing the close attention paid to space and place across scales, contexts, and time periods is really inspiring. I focus so deeply on this work and know that other geographers of sexualities were invigorated to see our work in dialogue with anthropologists, archaeologists, preservationists, historians, architects, and others. Other theme studies like the Asian and Pacific Islander and American Latino do similar, thoughtful, cross-boundary work.³ Seeing that work done on behalf of LGBTQ people is a rare moment. Our history is so often erased and obscured that the work of the *LGBTQ America* theme study to bring all of this together and recount those stories and places makes being part of this project feel very special, likely how many of the authors of the other theme studies may have felt.

MS: I'm so thrilled that it's useful in cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts.

Julio Capó Jr.: I too really enjoyed reading or rereading these and several other pieces in the theme study. There are so many things that struck me, but I'll try to stay focused on a few larger themes that I think speak to the monumental nature of this collective work and its potential for years to come. First, like the others, I learned a lot of new things. It's so wonderful to see a project of this scope and breadth welcome such a wide range of voices across disciplines, methods, and backgrounds. The study serves as a most effective teaching tool; to say nothing, of course, of its accessibility and power to connect with people across region, age, class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, among many others.

I was also struck by how it pushed me to think about space and place in new and innovative ways. As an urban historian, I certainly spend a lot of my time thinking about space. I think about the regulation and policing of neighborhoods, districts, and the people who frequent them, for instance. I think about zoning laws and gentrification. I think about municipal incorporation and annexation, among many other aspects of spatial development and utilization. But this project forced me to think about all of this in new and I think most productive ways.

Coming Out, Again and in History

KB: I remember, when I was a thirteen-year-old history fanatic in the coming-out process: going to the library and looking for any LGBT history book. I would

come away empty-handed and feeling my internal homophobia swell in the face of my realization that apparently LGBTQ folks weren't even worth a history book or worth including in my library's history section. That was when I decided to become an LGBTQ historian—and I think that the theme study has been the greatest opportunity I have had to date to ensure that fewer people have that experience. Similarly, as a professor of women, gender, and sexuality studies, I regularly watch my students respond with amazement and often frustrated disbelief at having never known the ways in which LGBTQ history shapes their understanding of history and their experiences of the present. The theme study's intent to increase the number of sites nominated as historic landmarks and monuments will only amplify that.

JG: I feel the same! Growing up attending Catholic schools in Baltimore was filled with not only erasures but also, at times, anti-LGBTQ discussions. At the same time, our high school librarian ordered another copy of the YA lesbian novel *Annie on My Mind* (Garden 1992) after I stole a copy (which I still have). The idea that this extremely long theme study exists, alongside so many incredibly important geographic histories and other studies of LGBTQ lives, is a profoundly different moment in which to live and breathe as a queer person.

Surely the way we feel is not just the group of us who wrote this theme study, or the students who take women's, gender, and sexuality studies courses, but so many other lesbians and queers who do not understand how to tell their own stories because of the lack of history. This exchange reminds me of one of my research participants. As part of the research for my book-in-progress on the lesbian-queer role in the production of the city as it relates to capital, I interviewed forty-seven lesbians and queer women from New York City who came out between 1983 and 2008. She was my age about a decade ago, so late thirties now, and white, middle-class Marianne, who came out in '99, shared:

“So we're reading history—and the way that the social studies book was laid out was like [opening her own book and pretending to read], ‘Oh, it's a bunch of stuff about white men! With—oh, who were rich! Awesome!’ And then there'd be like three sentences about . . . women. And maybe some about some poor guy. So that's the history. We're reading about something and there's this one page and it's about a polygamist. There's a paragraph about polygamy, and I'm in seventh grade. It was like, ‘The women lived together and raised the children. And the men didn't live with them.’ And I was like, ‘This is a great idea!!!’ [All: Laugh.] So I'm sitting in Catholic school in social studies in seventh grade saying to myself, ‘I'm a polygamist.’ [All: Laugh.]”

JCJ: I really want to thank Katie and Jack for sharing these personal stories with us. That's at the very center of this project: the extraordinary nature of mundane lives and acts, everyday forms of resistance, and the eternal quest to see pieces of ourselves in the rich tapestry of the past. I too saw my own childhood and adolescence in many aspects of this study and suspect many others have or will also. When I was first learning to drive, I'd borrow my mother's car and drive around "practicing" adulthood and independence in the way cars and mobility can afford us. Whenever I could, I'd make it a point to always drive by a popular gay nightclub in Miami Beach called Salvation, both during the day, when it was closed, and at night, when scores of (mostly) men lined up waiting for the bouncer to admit them.

Not yet "out," I wanted so desperately to be a part of this world, a world I imagined would also mirror Miami's own diverse demographics and offer alternatives to gay representations I managed to see in popular culture that were predominantly white and English speaking. What that space, and several others like it, represented to me, even though I never managed to go inside then, is really difficult to put into words. I had such high hopes that such a space would one day be where I'd find a home and a community, to say nothing about a lover or partner.

J. Jeffery Auer IV: Julio, you bring up a great point: we talk about dance clubs as part of the history but not the space outside the clubs. These spaces form their own interesting dynamic that runs the gamut from people waiting in line to get in, people leaving the club, or people just hanging out in the club environs. That place was different than inside the clubs but just as rich and not explored as fully. I witnessed this space in cities such as New York and Los Angeles in the early 1990s, and that space was a large part of my coming-out process.

MS: I grew up in a small town about forty-five minutes outside Toronto. As a teenager, I'd take the bus into the city and walk around, always ending up hanging around on the streets of Toronto's gay village, soaking it up, but never quite going inside. It was a big day when I got up the gumption to actually go inside Glad Day Books and the Women's Bookstore in Toronto. I knew I was gay, but was terrified about what that meant. Actually going in to a gay place felt like . . . a commitment? And also I had a fear of somehow not fitting in, of being rejected by the gay community I craved just as I feared being rejected by my friends and family.

JA: That's similar to my experience as well, Megan. Growing up in Chicago, I would similarly just walk around the Boystown section of Lakeview in Chicago. Actually, getting up the nerve to go into a place did seem like a commitment that

you aren't quite willing to make when you are young. It's crossing a line that you have to work up to!

Structure, Focus, and the Queer Archive

MS: The thematic structure of the theme study (vs. chronological) came directly from the roundtable of twenty-plus folks who met at the outset of the project as an informal group of advisers.⁴ This structure then developed in conversations with authors, community members, and others calling me to the mat throughout the process, challenging how, who, and what was being included. There were a lot of good and challenging conversations, and they greatly improved the final work.

JCJ: This project pushed me to rethink the very nature of what's at stake in these spaces beyond the primary source documents we traditionally associate as "the archive" for queer history. Perhaps most pressingly, while I certainly often engage with how past actors traversed and navigated particular spaces, reading others' works in this study and being engaged with this project more broadly helped me think about questions of memory, commemoration, and preservation and the central role that has in shaping our understanding of the past and present (to say nothing about future), particularly as it was tied to physical spaces.

KB: I think the study's design goes a long way toward its success in being so inclusive and intersectional. I liked that it had chapters focused on specific themes, locations, and identities. Just earlier this week I gave a guest lecture about this theme study in an undergraduate seminar on the politics of memory, and I was struck in much the same way you were, Julio.

JA: As someone who teaches LGBTQ history, I was very happy to see that not just the usual big cities (New York) were included, but other cities that have rich histories such as Reno and Miami were included as well. I think LGBTQ scholarship that centers on urban areas is starting to finally recognize these places and include them. In that way the study is on the cutting edge.

JG: Julio's point about what is in the "queer archive" struck me and reminds me of work by Jack Halberstam (2005), José Esteban Muñoz (1999), and Ann Cvetkovich (2003) on this, as well as the *Radical History Review* special issues on queering archives (Marshall, Murphy, and Tortorici 2014, 2015). One quote especially sticks out: Halberstam calls for "new models of queer memory and queer history capable of recording and tracing subterranean scenes, fly-by-night clubs, and fleeting trends; we need, in Muñoz's words, 'an archive of the ephemeral'"

(Halberstam 2005: 161). Zoning laws and building design histories must be part of that next wave of ephemera.

KB: I think even with the complexity of the scope of the study, the writing remains accessible and the structure provided a clear frame. The charge to write for the NPS made me even more determined than I normally am that my writing should make sense to a seventh grader on a school field trip. Did others have that experience? How did writing for an NPS study influence your approach?

JG: As I wrote this, my determination to represent queer life at its fullest and most diverse in our spaces and places became invigorated on a new level. We often work from a diversity of identities, but I want to drive the diverse geographies of our lives home as well, and the unique way public/private, the body, site, and scale work for LGBTQ people. Since I imagined most of the applications that are submitted would be for the National Historic Register of Places, which are administered by state historic preservation officers, I wrote this essay not only for LGBTQ publics but for those administrators. I felt like my work was to frame the breadth of “LGBTQ Spaces and Places,” as I vaguely named the chapter, across scales, contexts, and time periods so that LGBTQ history wouldn’t merely be reduced to bars, neighborhoods, and, as Jeff mentioned, cities.

KB: Good point, Jack. That reminds me of Julio’s earlier point about driving around. I think the idea of a car as a safe space that doesn’t require commitment but allows exploration of the LGBTQ landscapes is fascinating!

JG: It is really powerful. At the same time, it reminds me that the absence of a chapter on the rural—which was lost because the author had to drop out—is the biggest absence in the document for me. Also, because of our own limited histories, I see that many of the authors tended to represent their own stories foremost. Cis-men tended to highlight men’s spaces more and vice versa for cis-women, and so on—a fault of much research. At the same time, it was a wildly diverse group of authors and their backgrounds, and they share a dedication to speak for justice across identities and spaces. Even though I’ve read everything by Susan Stryker, her chapter on transgender spaces presented an entirely new lens on trans history and spaces for me through her focus on space and a real nuanced discussion of trans identities.

KB: This goes back to Julio’s point on memory and my interaction with the seminar earlier this week on the shifting politics of memory. The theme study is clearly saying “welcome LGBTQ folks into the American historical narrative.” I eagerly

answered its call with a chapter, but this study will, in turn, shape the larger narrative in ways we can't foresee but can assume will not be all good.

Politics of Preservation

Shayne Watson: I want to bring up what I see as one of the few deficiencies in the theme study. This is coming from a purely practical perspective. One of the primary goals of the theme study is to preserve places associated with LGBTQ history. But we can't preserve anything without changing the guidance on how we evaluate physical integrity of these places. As a preservationist with boots on the ground, the most crucial chapter in the theme study for my work is Megan's essay with Caridad de la Vega, “Nominating LGBTQ Places to the National Register of Historic Places and as National Historic Landmarks: An Introduction”—specifically, the guidance on how to evaluate integrity.

The theme study has already been put to the test in San Francisco when this chapter was used by decision-makers in a recent evaluation of LGBTQ-associated buildings on Market Street proposed for demolition this past fall of 2016. Like most of our beloved LGBTQ places, these buildings are hugely important to our history, but their physical appearance has changed over time (i.e., their physical integrity has been compromised). People looked to chapter 30 (“Nominating LGBTQ Places to the National Register of Historic Places and as National Historic Landmarks: An Introduction”) for potentially new guidance on how to evaluate integrity of LGBTQ resources, but instead found the same guidance preservationists have been using for the last thirty years (i.e., foregrounding architecture over intangible aspects of history). The result? The buildings, which housed two of the city's earliest queer bars, will be demolished next month.

We cannot preserve any of this history unless we convince decision-makers at the top (NPS, State Historic Preservation Offices, local planning departments) to publish and embrace new guidance on integrity. I'm curious if there's a backstory about why chapter 30's guidance on integrity doesn't reflect the many and evolving conversations we've seen nationwide that promote new ways of looking at integrity of socially or culturally important sites.

MS: The interpretation of registration requirements is done by staff at National Historic Preservation Offices, the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), and in the National Historic Landmarks (NHL) programs. Interpretations are not directed from theme studies. It isn't a secret that there has been a lot of conversation about how architectural integrity is weighted when a place is being considered

for its history versus its architecture. It has been a topic of conversation both informally and at meetings like the National Trust for Historic Preservation's annual PastForward conference. There is also a published literature that is several years old in considering exactly these issues in evaluating African American places—issues that hold true for all marginalized communities.

KB: I agree with Shayne that the most frustrating aspect of the study is that, though many of these sites already are included in the various registries, many are not, and it seems that the political will to get them all included has shifted in Washington.

JCJ: I want to build on Shayne's and others' excellent points concerning the nitty-gritty of nominating a site for either the NHL or the NRHP. I'm not entirely embarrassed to admit (and I hope that doing so can prove productive, as I again suspect I may not have been alone), when I first got involved with this project with that initial meeting in Washington, DC, I immediately brushed up on some of the larger issues connected to historic and site-specific preservation and interpretation—areas of study and processes that I only had limited experience with.

Like others who broadly identify as public historians, at the very least for their deep commitment to reaching audiences outside the traditional academy, I was far less engaged with practices of preservation, architecture, and museum studies, for instance. In this way, for me, this project also helped demystify what can at first appear to be quite intimidating to those who have not done this before. I note this to encourage those who may be anxious about doing this kind of work or nominating a site, perhaps because it seems unfamiliar, to read the pertinent and most accessible chapters and literature that can serve as a roadmap. Similarly, one can also reach out to other members of the community who have done this kind of work before and offer their support. At this juncture, I can't help but think about what comes next. Now that hundreds of significant LGBTQ historic sites have been identified, how do we make good on seeing them recognized as such through these designation-specific avenues?

SW: Good question, Julio. After identification, designation (i.e., landmarking) is an obvious next step—but landmarking is a time-consuming and expensive process. In places like San Francisco that are experiencing dramatic redevelopment and gentrification, it seems like we've lost the luxury of landmarking these places, and instead it's a desperate and often last-minute fight to preserve them through legal channels, such as through the State of California environmental laws. But like I

said before, we can't preserve most of these places if we don't change the published guidance on integrity. In other words, if we don't “queer” it.

JG: If we don't queer the historical narratives that we write—reveal them as in flux, against hierarchies and binaries—why write them at all? That is so much of the basis of queer life.

KB: Yes. The queering potential of the theme study is real. This certainly touches bigger questions about Audre Lorde's (1983) concept of the “master's tools” and the role of the state à la Michel Foucault (1990), Cathy Cohen (1997), Dean Spade (2015), and so on. I think Shayne's point about queering integrity is a good one here. The NPS has provided us a useful vehicle to in effect queer the state-sanctioned national historical narrative, but at the same time that limits the extent of the queering we can do.

MS: Shayne, you bring up a really important point. How do we find energy, resources, time, support to do the (often long) work of preservation on a broad scale when so many of our resources are going to put out the fires of imminent loss?

SW: So true, Megan. So much of what we do is a labor of love: fighting to preserve these places on our own time, much like the people before us who fought to start preserving the history of our history. Gerard Koskovich eloquently outlined these ideas in his chapter of the theme study, “The History of Queer History: One Hundred Years of the Search for Shared Heritage.”

The Gentrification of History

JCJ: Connected to some of these issues, I thought I'd note that—and this is certainly another way this study resonated with me both professionally and personally—the Miami Beach gay club I mentioned earlier, Salvation, is now an Office Depot. Rows stocked with office supplies and corporate orders have replaced the very space where eager queers once sweated, danced, and gyrated in the refuge of that space into the wee hours of the morning. This, of course, is not unique.

JG: Starlite, the longest-running LGBTQ bar in NYC and a bar mainly frequented by people of color, is now a MetroPCS.

SW: In San Francisco, one of our last lesbian bars (Lexington Club) is now a heteronormative nightspot specializing in breakfast negronis. Same with our last queer Latinx nightclub (Esta Noche). I'm not sure what's worse: Julio's Salvation convert-

ing to an Office Depot or a long-running and beloved queer safe-space converting to yet another hyper-hetero hangout for bros and the women who love them.

MS: I think there's a fascinating study/meditation on what the queer places have become . . . Office Depot, MetroPCS, and so on.

KB: Yes, as well as the fights and lack of fights that occur in those transformations. So many sites have been lost as a result of gentrification (which LGBTQ communities are often blamed/credited for bringing). But I also sometimes think about what Nan Alamilla Boyd brought up in the initial meeting in DC of the informal advisory council of scholars, historians, and preservationists in June 2014. Nan brought up her concerns about how this project could speed gentrification by creating more historical landmarks that would raise a neighborhood's cachet or profile. It could be useful to go a step further to think about how the identification and preservation of LGBTQ historic sites with the NPS relates to Jasbir Puar's (2007) notion of homonationalism.

JG: As a geographer, I've thought a lot about how these historic sites could affect gentrification, but, in this new administration, the claim to history becomes so much more amplified. It's as if we're in the 1980s all over again and Manuel Castells (1983) publishes his famous study that we're not in a "ghetto" but a "neighborhood"—and there is an undertone that supports gentrification: have you seen what these gays have done to the housing in the Castro? Given how the political economy of cities is driven by real estate developers and neoliberal city- and state-wide policies to support constant "growth" (by whom? for whom?), the roles of LGBTQ people in gentrification have changed significantly. We still must be held responsible for our role in creating inequality in cities today, but we are no longer leading this charge.

JCJ: Indeed. From the initial meeting, this was a question that I think all or most of the scholars were very much aware of and sensitive to. Along with Nan Alamilla Boyd, Jack, and several others, Christina Hanhardt—who has written extensively about these and intersecting issues—guided us through some of the potential issues at stake here in her chapter of the theme study as well as in her book, *Safe Space* (2013). There's a growing literature on this, and I think the theme study is both directly and indirectly contributing to our understanding of how site preservation and interpretations and museum tourism, for instance, adds new and important dimensions to larger questions of structural inequality and access to space and capital.

KB: And, despite all our efforts to include the voices and experiences, beyond a narrow "respectable" frame, the study as a whole does the work of making LGBTQ history respectable. Or at least more respectable and palatable for the larger public.

JG: I agree, Julio. Hanhardt's essay was just stunning. I am not sure if she was the only person to dive into Grindr and other social media/networking apps' roles in the reformation of the queer landscape, but it was key to record. The gentrification we witness is not just condos replacing queers, people of color, and the poor, but also the gentrification of the mind (to borrow from Schulman 2012) that as queer space becomes even more ethereal, fleeting, and fragmented, that we must find it online.

Katie, your point about legitimizing and making respectable LGBTQ history is well taken. While this is antithetical to queer politics of refusal and radicality, I do think paying honor to those respected is important, especially the poor, sex workers, drug users, and others who are referenced throughout the study without malice or rejection but rather with actual respect. Issuing such statements as a US government-sanctioned document are important to produce a government of the people.

Absences

JG: All of our discussion here speaks to questions of absence: what was missing from the study? What could have been done better? What is left to yet do?

KB: I think what is left to do is to protect the sites, as Julio and Shayne both addressed.

JG: And what you are saying may exactly be what is left out, what is left to do.

MS: One of the things that most theme studies do that wasn't included was to identify places eligible for listing on the National Register or designation as National Historic Landmarks. Time and money kept us from doing that level of work. We didn't look at the integrity of any of the properties, nor did we think specifically of the criteria they might be listed for, and so on. Instead, we focused on tying LGBTQ history to place, setting the stage for the next steps.

JA: In terms of what was missing, I do feel we now have to move toward protecting actual places, but as Megan has said, the whole process is wrapped up in quite a bit of red tape. In Reno I've been working on trying to get the Washoe County

fairgrounds nominated on the National Register of Historic Places, but it is a time-consuming job.

KB: Another thing that I wish the study had been able to capture (though I have no idea how it would, given its focus on specific places) was the transiency of LGBTQ lives.

MS: Personally, I'd like folks to read the theme study and *not* come away with the idea that the NRHP and NHL status are the only legitimate ways to recognize queer history. They are two of the many ways that LGBTQ history can be documented and commemorated, but not the only or even necessarily the most important ways.

KB: We see specific examples and people capture this concept, and even mention it here in discussing our own experiences of coming out, but the ability to move (both locally and across state lines) seems tied to coming out for many.

JA: The theme study, at least here, has started to inspire some members of the community to understand that places like the fairgrounds are of national importance. Before this theme study, members of the Reno LGBTQ community here couldn't even conceive of the places in their city as being of importance.

KB: Yes, Megan. I hear that too! While I would love to have queer landmarks in every town and a big LGBTQ monument on the Mall, I think one of the great strengths of this theme study is that it shows that LGBTQ history is everywhere and affects everyone regardless of their sexuality.

JCJ: Returning to the points about respectability and, perhaps, also the integrity of the physical sites, I think the theme study is an excellent starting point for us to consider how many historic sites (many of which already exist in the Register, for instance) have “scrubbed” away the queer through various curatorial efforts. This can take many forms. It can be the throwing away of works deemed pornographic, the (mis)interpretation of sources, or the writing of narratives that preclude the reading of nonnormative gender and sexual histories; these are all processes that ultimately serve to buttress the erasure of queers from history, or what Adrienne Rich (1980) called “compulsory heterosexuality.”

JG: Regarding transiency or even placelessness, I brought that up in my essay in regard to the AIDS Quilt and then the sense of isolation and disconnect from place. It's actually one of the harder things to get the public—the mainstream audience and not queers, I find—to reconnoiter with: the absences, erasures, and loss.

KB: I really appreciated the opportunity to examine existing register sites and view them from a queer lens. It was remarkable how many of them could've reflected a queer history but had been "scrubbed," to use Julio's terms. My students were also struck by this.

MS: I think recording queer history as part of a National Register of Historic Places never even occurred to folks during much of the history of the Register. The Register is itself a product of history, reflecting what people have felt are important / not important things to commemorate/remember (or not). For a very long time, LGBTQ and Two-Spirit history wasn't even on people's radar, never mind being explicitly excluded. There was probably also a lot of self-censorship too and people rightfully afraid for their reputations and careers if they did LGBTQ history. Conversations I've had over the years with other archaeologists tell me that this fear continues. In the past, I've also self-censored and not pursued avenues of inquiry.

Transience

JCJ: In my initial flirting with navigating the nomination process, like many others, I've also learned that *amending* existing historic sites is a most effective way to incorporate queer history. To rewrite an existing site's narrative to incorporate queer perspectives (or, to "queer" those phenomena more broadly) also speaks to our firm commitment to intersectional analyses.

I also want to reiterate Megan's really important point that many other important avenues exist to recognize queer history beyond receiving either Landmark or Register status. Of course, this is the work queer scholars and activists have been doing for decades. Local activists, community centers, archives, and even queer-owned and -operated businesses have preserved and kept our histories alive; they have served as counterattacks to systemic efforts to erase and underscore queer folks and our contributions. That's a really important point to make.

I also agree about your points regarding missing the impact, importance, or prevalence of transiency. This prompts questions of how do you recognize a place as important if the use of that place was transient?

KB: Yes, Jack, I think that the study did show transiency in a handful of places and in relation to certain historical events (AIDS being one of them). I think the theme of transiency as something that binds and shapes LGBTQ history slipped through the study on a larger scale. Megan, that is what I found to be a very productive conversation with my students. The politics of memory and commemoration is constantly shifting, and the Register is just one entry point from which to gain a

snapshot of a particular time and place in memory. And that's why I said it wasn't really a fair thing to ask of this study, a study tied to place.

JG: To build off this, I thought often of: how do we recognize the nods of "I see you," "you're cute," and/or "you're not alone" that fill the streets of the world among queers? The moments of passing by and connection that offer community, connection, and even, at our worst times, salvation in fleeting recognition.

MS: I wonder about this too. Do we put historical markers in front of every house where a group met? All the church basements? How do we mark what we are doing right here, right now?

JCJ: The idea of transience-as-site-of-historical-inquiry is fascinating and a key one that has shaped the field of queer studies and history, including (im)migration, displacement, gentrification, and urbanization and industrialization, among many others.

KB: The study appears to have done such a great job at the topics it took up, but I do wish we could've found a way to better address transiency, but I think that would've required a different framing if not a different focus altogether.

JG: Anne Cheng (1997) writes beautifully of the "melancholia of race," the pain and anguish, absence and perpetual mourning that people of color pass down from generation to generation. For years now I've been thinking on the "melancholy of homosexuality," a sort of knowledge that (almost always) cannot be passed down through biological family but rather through Families of Choice we find in adolescence and adulthood. It is those in-between years that cause such agony, and that agony, which is a form of placelessness in the world, the nation-state, the personal geography, goes with you throughout your life.

KB: And it is those in-between years that often require transience in one form or another.

JG: To respond to Megan's point, I've turned my senior seminar's research project into doing the research and writing applications for possible historic sites. I'm already working with Megan on this, and I hope to share it with others in the future. What other ideas are each of you thinking of?

MS: In the archaeology essay, I briefly discuss the material differences of different life stages, although this needs more attention. Regarding transience, it makes me think of default identities, how many of us are not gay to someone until we come

out to them, and the parallel: how history is considered straight until we know the other stories.

JCJ: I want to build a bit on Jeff's earlier point about the challenges of doing this work. This project can only be as effective as the government agencies (and the administrations that fund or defund them) that administer them. We can certainly discuss more of these challenges (there are many), especially in light of more recent news (i.e., the NPS going "rogue" and creating its own nonofficial account following efforts from Donald Trump's administration to censor its discussion on climate change).⁵ In such dire circumstances, do we anticipate funds will be made available to make the work of preservation, commemoration, and interpretation possible?

It's also important to note, of course, that so many of these nominations and processes are tied to local and state bureaucracies, too, and receiving the support of an understaffed or underfunded or perhaps altogether disinterested local or state historic preservation office can add yet another hurdle. This is not meant to discourage people from doing this kind of work. Rather, I make this point in hopes that we are all made aware of such hurdles and directly engage with how to overcome them.

KB: I think in terms of creating and maintaining energy for preservation, LGBTQ historians could be incredibly helpful in the classroom, like Jack, but also in expanding the notion of LGBTQ history classes to include sites specifically and "heritage."

MS: I love some of the work that's starting to be done around intangible heritage. Thinking of work that Donna Graves and others are working on in San Francisco to recognize the intangible heritage of, for example, Asian American communities . . . the festivals, the food, and so on.

SW: The City of San Francisco threw its weight behind intangible (and living) heritage by adopting a Legacy Business Registry & Legacy Business Preservation Fund that provides financial incentives for existing businesses. Several longtime queer establishments are being stabilized by this program. The city has also just embarked on a Citywide LGBTQ+ Cultural Heritage Strategy that should result in other ways of stabilizing intangible aspects of our queer heritage.

The DIY and Nonprofit Industrial Complex Political Economy of Queering History

MS: When considering funding, remember that the NPS didn't pay for the study; the Gill Foundation donated money for it via the National Park Foundation. Money is always going to be an issue, but funds don't have to come top-down.

JA: To respond to Julio's points, I've been contacted here to work on a state-level theme study for Nevada, but there is literally *no* money for the project. The project is now on hiatus. I think there is definitely a lack of will by politicians to build off the theme study and actually start recognizing at the local level the work that needs to be done with the places in their midst.

MS: The underrepresented communities grants will hopefully continue for 2017.

KB: I think there is outside grant money to be found sometimes, but it seems that at some point (and I think Shayne spoke to this earlier) the political will has to be there for preservation. It has to be there from the city, state, and federal levels.

JCJ: Surely, again, there is so much we can continue to learn from the ways our community centers, archives, and so on have existed for decades, so frequently through community and donor support. One such inspiring example is how the I, Too, Arts Collective has successfully raised enough money to lease Langston Hughes's Harlem home as a community space (Watson 2017).

Under this particular political climate, however, we must also factor how issues of preservation may take a backseat to issues more pressingly viewed as tied to our communities' survival (surely, we can, and I think should, argue that preservation *is* a form of survival; our existence is resistance). No doubt, as Jeff's example points to, many local and state offices lack the necessary funds or support to carry some of this out (to say nothing about the federal level). I'm so grateful to hear Megan bring up the underrepresented communities grant. It's wonderful and most encouraging to hear the prospect that it may continue. It's an important resource for local and state governments and those working with making any given nomination.

MS: Fund-raising remains the key way forward to raising funds to preserve our history. There are also possibilities from places we don't usually think of. For example, Scarlets Bake Sale, a leather-based organization here in DC that raises thousands of dollars every year for community groups both within and outside the queer community, is giving this year's proceeds to the Rainbow History Project, an organization dedicated to preserving DC's queer heritage. On a national level,

the Rainbow Heritage Network advocates to recognize and preserve LGBTQ sites, history, and heritage.⁶ The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence also raise money for community organizations.

JA: The Sisters are great philanthropists. The Nevada LGBT archives got a grant for them last year for the Reno National Gay Rodeo exhibit.

JCJ: It's already been mentioned, in both direct and indirect ways (i.e., when we talked about nominating key sites that are deemed less respectable, such as bathhouses or leather bars), but homophobia and transphobia, as well as interlocking forms of violence such as racism, Islamophobia, classism, and so on, certainly continue to play a massive role in determining the viability of successfully navigating these processes at various levels of the government.

SW: Yes, Julio. Even in our most progressive enclaves.

KB: Fortunately, the LGBTQ communities have learned (repeatedly) to thrive without state support and in the face of discrimination and the desire to erase their existence. However, it was nice to have that support from the National Park Service.

JA: The bathhouse situation is very complicated here. Reno has the second-longest continuously operating bathhouse in the country, but the owner is *very* publicity shy and does not want to embrace this. Apparently there has been an upswing in vandalism against it in the past year.

JG: So the DIY model of survival continues not only for LGBTQ organizations but also are spaces. And yet the politics has shifted . . . or did shift.

SW: Fortunately, queers are seasoned at DIY.

JG: Ha, and unfortunately! We definitely rely on and yet are increasingly refused by the nonprofit industrial complex. At that same time we continue to see DIY projects to string together queer history and spaces, the funding for the project also reminds us that as much as this study is a very new thing to us, it also depends on the nonprofit industrial complex for its creation. Perhaps the next generations will take us to new ways of operating. It will be great to work with them in that.

JCJ: Yes, none of this seeks to detract from the excellent work the NPS has done or will continue to do. It's important to acknowledge, however, the limitations of relying on the multilevel forms of government to promote and preserve our history.

Queer Document, Queer Site

KB: I also think it is important to again note the importance of the theme study as a document, as its own site of preservation.

JCJ: Absolutely. I was excited to learn from Megan's introduction to the theme study that England was doing something similar now.

MS: Yes, the UK's Pride of Place Project via Historic England.

SW: Megan, what's the likelihood that the theme study will be expanded or amended someday? Or is it pretty much set in amber?

JA: Good question, Shayne, I was wondering that as well.

MS: Someday . . . perhaps. But right now, it is what it is. I hope that folks will take it and run with it . . . it was never meant to be the be all and end all, but a beginning.

JA: I see it as a beginning as well.

KB: I don't know if folks want to go there or not, but thinking about it as its own site that sits in a very particular historical context is interesting to me.

JG: I do! I think it pulls all of this together, and it's key to address.

KB: As weird as it is to say this about something in which I was a part, this document is historic and unprecedented. I think the landscape from which the study grew has already shifted and become inhospitable to creating another like it. But I do like to think of it as a beginning.

JCJ: I think it's most fair to say LGBTQ communities found new levels of support and acknowledgment under the Obama administration. This very study is a product and marker of that. With that, I am by no means suggesting that all queer people necessarily lived better lives under his presidency; rather, the administration sought to incorporate queer voices and representation in new and unprecedented ways.

KB: In the class that I spoke to last week, many of the students wondered how the work of this theme study fit into the new political landscape.

JCJ: In direct conversation with many of the chapters in the theme study, any future theme study can and should include queer subjects, spaces, and events.

That is, I hope too that future studies will continue to push for intersectional analyses, the way these recent studies have; I suspect they will.

KB: Agreed, Julio. I know that many examples of intersectional analysis exist out there, but I think this study is exemplary in its scope, breadth, depth. And yet so much more needs to be done!

The Future Life of the Theme Study

SW: Are the discussions about the theme study suddenly disappearing under the new administration hyperbole or a real possibility?

JG: We will not stop our work, and we know others like us—scholars, activists, historians, preservationists—will not stop either. We encourage others to join in that work with us.

KB: I think that the current administration's steps to limit the speech of the NPS is concerning.

JG: I find it concerning. And violent.

SW: I think a lot of what we do in this realm moving forward might feel more like activism. Preservation as resistance.

MS: We're survivors; it's why we even have a history.

JCJ: More than ever, the preservation of history must be front and center. This project resonates today in ways perhaps we did not suspect it would three years ago. We have lots of work to do.

JG: Indeed. To finish with the words that begin Mark Meinke's introduction to the theme study: "Start here. We exist."

Notes

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ions or policies of the US government. Mention of trade names or commercial products does not constitute their endorsement by the US government. The full theme study is available at www.nps.gov/subjects/tellingallamericansstories/lgbqtthemestudy.htm.

1. On these topics, see sections of US Department of the Interior, National Park Service (2016) by Loraine Hutchins and Amy Sueyoshi.
2. Rose Bamberger, a Filipina, was instrumental in the founding of the Daughters of Bilitis, hosting initial organizing meetings in her home.
3. See US Department of the Interior, National Park System Advisory Board 2013, and Odo 2017.
4. In 2014 a team of scholars, activists, architects, and preservationists was invited to speak directly with the head of the NPS and Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell about recommendations for the next steps. The group spoke at length about the positive and negative outcomes of this process, namely in regard to issues of race, gender, sexual, and class representation in the notion of “America,” and the effects on properties themselves, particularly related to the LGBTQ history of gentrification. An open forum was held in DC and live streamed, including a brief introduction by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.
5. For coverage of this incident, see Ingram 2017 and Perez 2017.
6. These projects can be found on their respective websites: rainbowhistory.org/ and rainbowheritagenetwork.org/.

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