

*Homosexuals Picket
in Nation's Capital*

In Time...
we must accept

**THE THRESHOLD
of the
FUTURE**

MEETING IN DENVER
Society Probes Problem of Perversion

Group Seeks to End Homosexual Stigma

A SYMPOSIUM
How Homosexuality Fits In

EDITORIAL

THE 'GAY' BAR -
Whose Problem is it?

6TH ANNUAL SESSION
Group to Discuss
Homosexual Needs



Archeion
JOURNAL OF QUEER ARCHIVES
STONEWALL NATIONAL MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

Archeion

JOURNAL OF QUEER ARCHIVES
STONEWALL NATIONAL MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

May 2022

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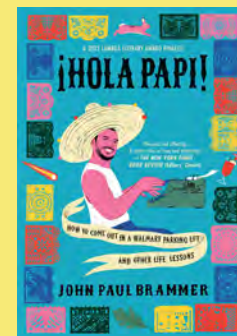
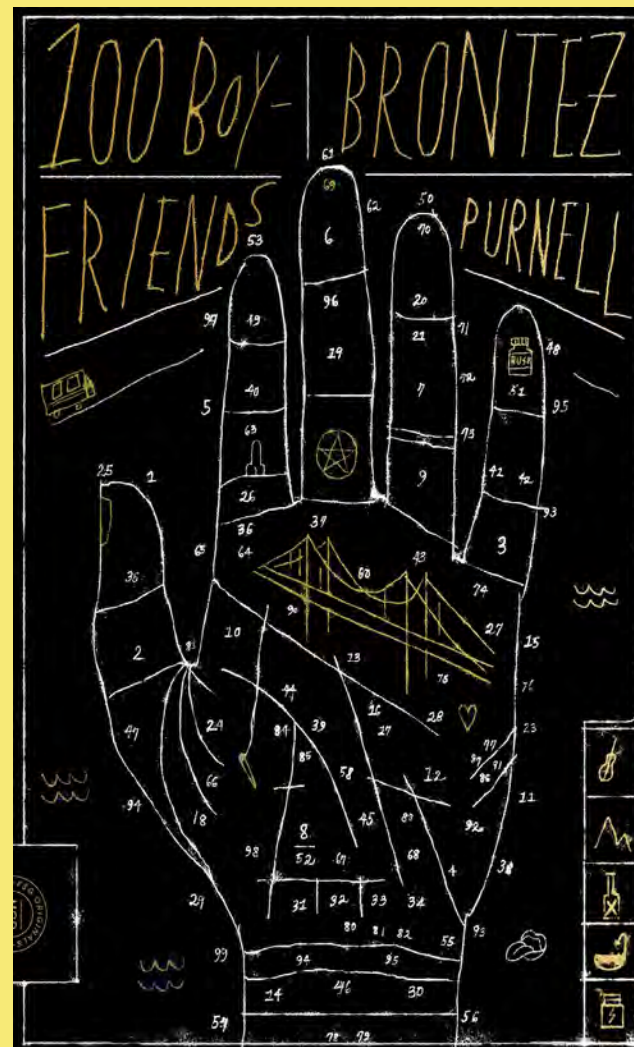
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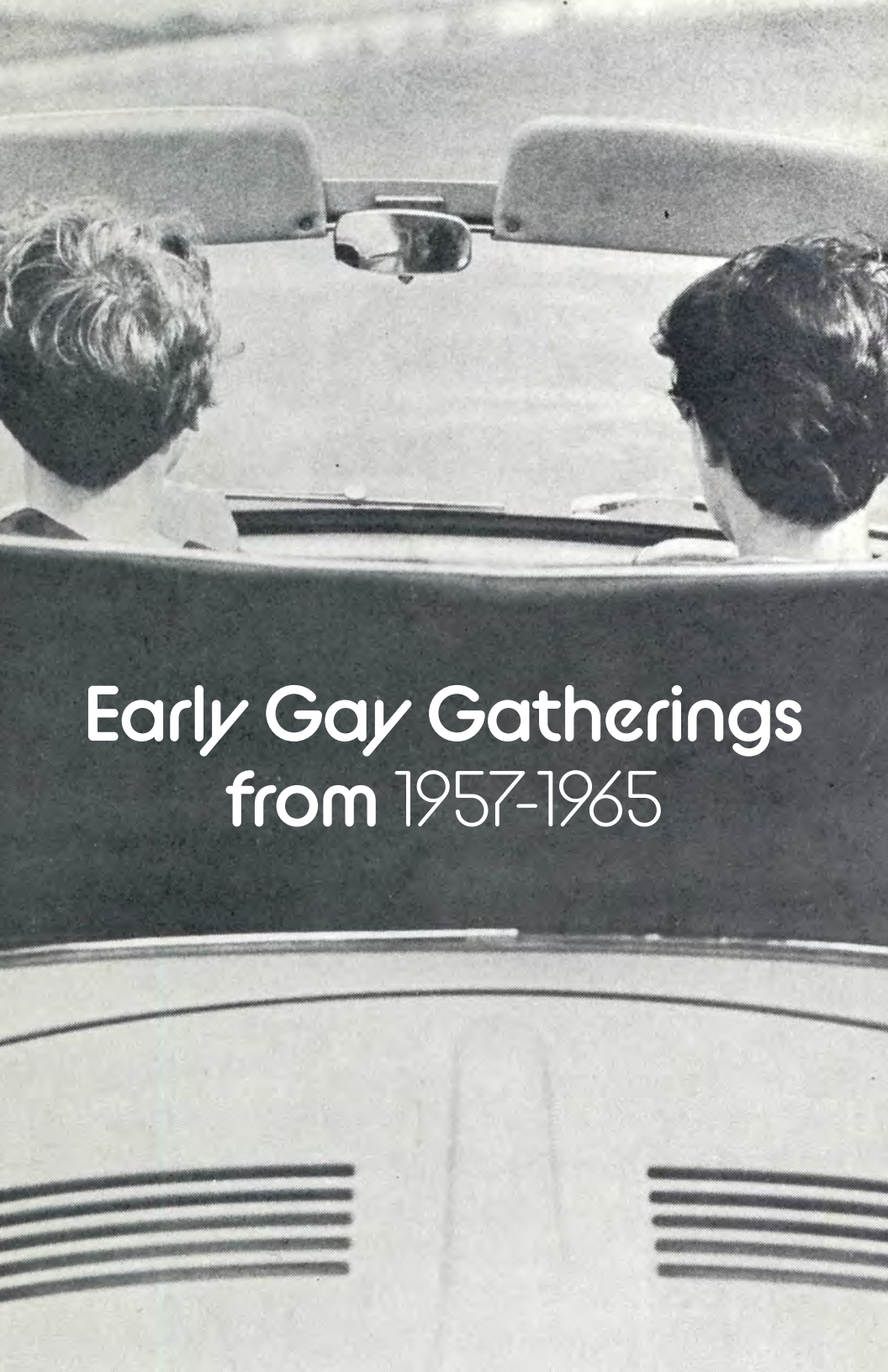
Cover: Detail of serial *The Ladder*, October 1957.



New Acquisitions
Recent arrivals to the
SNMA Library & Archives

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Early Gay Gatherings from 1957-1965

“For LGBTQ people—and especially youth and people just coming out—it’s not as easy to find out our true history. It’s not taught in schools”

- Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States for Young People* (2019)

As Michael Bronski notes in the prologue to *A Queer History*, adapted by Richie Chevat, our history is purposefully hidden, erased, suppressed, and denied. Thus, our collective tapestry is often uncovered via a piecing together of memories, a passing down of generational knowledge and history, a connecting of the dots where stories and archives left gaps. Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, as the emergence of a modern homophile movement coalesced, the infrastructure to both record and preserve LGBTQ history began to take shape. *Early Gay Gatherings from 1957-1965* traced this emergence by examining the records, publications, and communications of a pre-Stonewall era; this included organizations and newsletters such as *Daughters of Bilitis*, *The Ladder*, *Mattachine Society*, and *Mattachine Review*.

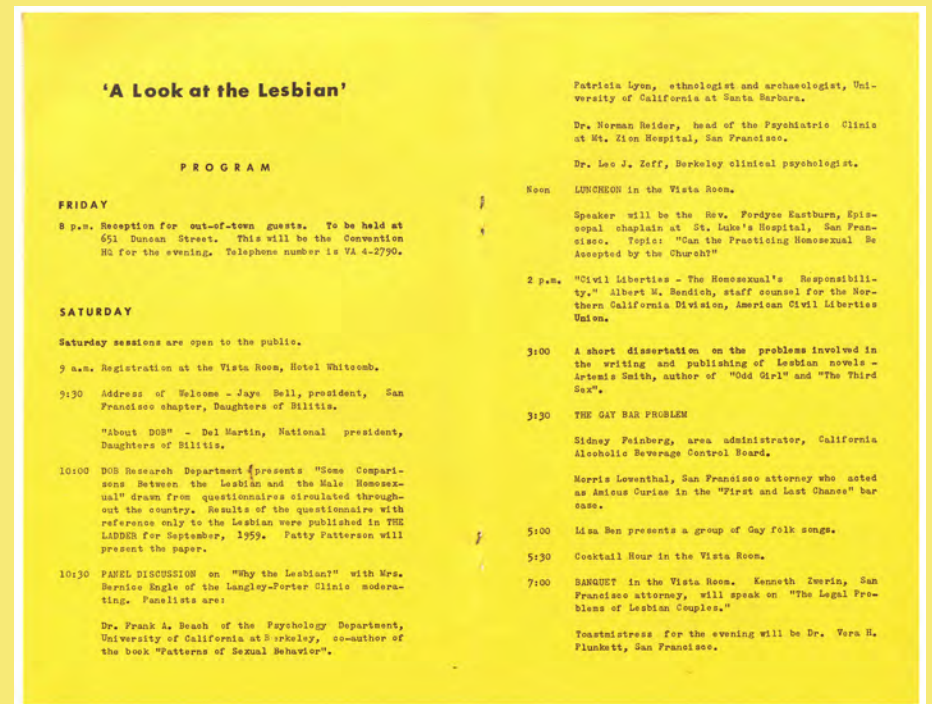
The mid-twentieth century in the U.S. was marked by two corresponding federal campaigns known as McCarthyism and The Lavender Scare. Senator Joseph McCarthy’s operation against

◀ Detail of *The Ladder*, vol. 9, no. 10-11, July-August 1965.



▲ Cover of *Mattachine Review*, vol. 4, no. 4, April 1958.

◀ Page 4 of *Mattachine Review*, vol. 4, no. 4, April 1958.



▲ Spread from *The Ladder*, vol. 4, no. 8, May 1960.

communists—and their supposed subversion—instigated President Eisenhower’s Executive Order 10450 in 1953, which enabled the government to fire thousands of alleged gays and lesbians from federal employment. During this anti-gay period, both Kinsey Reports (1948, 1953) uncovered that homosexuality was more common than suspected. It was with both pressure and momentum that LGBT people began to organize in more formalized settings. Through the examination of *Mattachine* and *Bilitis* and their newsletters, we

begin to see three major themes emerge: education and resource sharing, science and religion, and the fight against misinformation and discrimination.

Education and resource sharing became a cornerstone of not only the conferences and meetings that individuals attended but also the publications and newsletters they published. In the October 1957 issue of *The Ladder*, the publishing arm of the Daughters of Bilitis, editors highlighted the education symposium held in San Francisco and co-sponsored by

Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis. The *Mattachine* Society used their own publishing arm to promote education, including the research of Dr. Harry Benjamin. Dr. Benjamin, an endocrinologist, sexologist, and pioneer in transgender studies was known to reject binary notions of gender and supported transitions. In the April 1958 issue of the *Mattachine Review*, the editors printed the first half of a paper he wrote, titled “In Time...we must accept,” which he presented at the *Mattachine* Society Fourth Annual Convention in 1957. In it, Dr. Benjamin sheds

light on the relationship between homosexual persecution and birth control and discusses the hardships faced by effeminate gay men.

The Daughters of Bilitis’ First National Convention, themed *A Look at the Lesbian*, was held in the main meeting room of the Whitcomb Hotel in San Francisco on Memorial Day 1960. It aimed to objectively inform attendees about issues relating to “the lesbian” and disprove mainstream misinformation about them. It was the largest public lesbian

gathering up until that time with 200 lesbians in attendance. The Daughters of Bilitis organized their second national convention in Hollywood, California two years later which was themed *Potentials: The Lesbian in Society*. Professionals and researchers discussed how lesbians were positioned in and affected by their respective fields. Religion, law, psychology, and the media heavily influenced society's view on homosexuality. In emphasizing the notion of gathering, homophile movements recognized the power of information and resource sharing—including the latest trends in psychology, sociology, law, politics, economics, and more. We can see, in these moments of

gathering, a larger consciousness form around the idea of what it means to identify as LGBTQ within such a hostile and discriminatory society.

The second theme, science and religion, while often a focus during the conventions and conferences, helped to build momentum against the pathologizing of queer identity. The role of psychology, psychiatry, and Christianity specifically, proved to be deeply influential in the public's view of homosexuality. Thus, early homophile movements understood that to change the minds of Americans, their relationship to science and religion would need to change. The ninth annual

ALBERT ELLIS TO ADDRESS MATTACHINE AT SEPTEMBER MEETING

Our September 20 audience, no doubt while still in the clouds from the heavy intellectual feast proffered at the ECHO Conference, will enjoy the further treat of a second appearance within the month by one of the foremost sexologists of North America — Dr. Albert Ellis, author of "Sex Without Fear," editor of "The Encyclopedia of Sexual Behavior," and author of the forthcoming work of interest to an overwhelming majority of Mattachine members and friends — "Sex and the Single Man."

Dr. Ellis, no stranger to our Society, has been a benefactor, lecturer, well-wisher, and unflinching supporter of Mattachine since the founding of the Society. His topic on September 20 — "Sexual Freedom and Homosexuality: The Right to Be Wrong" — is sure to prove unusually provocative. Come to Freedom House and hear for yourself!

this month

SATURDAY, AUGUST 31 and SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

ECHO CONFERENCE

PHILADELPHIA

See Announcement on page 3

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 20th
Dr. ALBERT ELLIS
"Sexual Freedom and Homosexuality: The Right to Be Wrong"
8:30 P. M.

Willis Memorial Building (Freedom House)
27 West 4th Street

The Mattachine _____ Newsletter


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ECHO CONFERENCE

EAST COAST
HOMOPHILE ORGANIZATIONS

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DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS, NEW YORK CHAPTER
JANUS SOCIETY OF DELAWARE VALLEY (Philadelphia)
THE MATTACHINE SOCIETY Inc. OF NEW YORK
MATTACHINE SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON

THEME: **HOMOSEXUALITY — TIME FOR REAPPRAISAL**

Place: Spruce Room, HOTEL DRAKE - Spruce St. at 15th St.
PHILADELPHIA

Dates: **SATURDAY, AUGUST 31 and SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1**

SPEAKERS:
Professionals in the fields of MEDICINE
RELIGION
LAW
THE ARTS

Including: Dr. Wardell B. Pomeroy
Dr. Albert Ellis
Mr. Donald Webster Cory
Reverend Edward Lee
Mr. R. E. L. Masters
Dr. Wainwright Churchill
Dr. Irving Jacks
Dr. Harold Greenwald

INQUIRIES AND RESERVATIONS:
ECHO Coordinating Committee, Room 229, 34 South 17th St Philadelphia 2, Pa.

OR: ECHO Coordinating Committee, Room 304, 1133 Broadway, New York 10, N. Y.

REGISTRATION FEE, ENTIRE CONFERENCE \$15.00
(including two meals)

LECTURE SESSIONS ONLY -- both days 5.00
Saturday Sessions only -- no meal 3.00
Sunday Sessions only -- no meal 3.00
Luncheon only: \$5.00 Banquet only: \$ 9.00



Cover of *Mattachine Review*, vol. 8, no. 11, November 1962.

Changing Religious Attitudes Toward Homosexuality

REVEREND ROBERT W. WOOD

Delivered via tape at 9th Annual Conference of the Mattachine Society, August 25, 1962 luncheon, Jack Tar Hotel, San Francisco, California.

It is with extreme regret that I am unable to be present with you in person on this occasion. I had been looking forward to meeting so many of you whom I know only by correspondence and for the opportunity to become acquainted with the city of San Francisco. Your leaders know why it was necessary for me to alter my plans at this late date. I shall miss the opportunity of informal discussion which is so important a part of a meeting like this. May I take this opportunity to thank Mattachine for the Award of Merit it voted me in 1960 upon the publication of my book *Christ and the Homosexual*. Your Award came as a ray of encouragement amidst some dark reactions to the book.

For this Ninth Annual Conference I have been asked to speak on "Changing Religious Attitudes Toward Homosexuality." The casual observer might conclude that there has been no progress in the past ten years between organized religion, which I shall call the Church, and homosexuality. But a second look will reveal some positive dialogue resulting in mutual benefit. Let it be understood that I make my observations and conclusions as one Protestant clergyman and that I am not in a position to know all that has occurred in the past decade in the two areas under study. If I fail to mention some positive accomplishments of which you are aware I hope you will call them to my attention.

In my listing of positive changes in religious attitudes toward homosexuality in the past ten years I have placed them in order of overall importance. In 1955 the late Rev. Dr. David E. Roberts, Professor of the Philosophy of Religion in Union Theological Seminary, New York City, wrote in his *Foreword* to Dr. George W. Henry's *All the Sexes*: "Suffice it to say in a sentence, that there are ample reasons in the Jewish-Christian tradition for developing a more effective understand-

4 **mattachine REVIEW**

Mattachine Society conference, held in 1962 in San Francisco, highlighted the work of Reverend Robert W. Wood, author of *Christ and The Homosexual*. Featured in the November 1962 issue of *Mattachine Review*, the reverend was asked to speak on "Changing Religious Attitudes Toward Homosexuality." Unable to attend, he sent a tape to be played instead. Wood reasoned that that failure to achieve progress within the church resulted from the denial of any proximity between themselves and homosexuals. Shifting to the east coast, the East Coast Homophile Organization (ECHO) held their first conference on the same weekend as the Annual

Convention of the American Psychological Association in Philadelphia. The September 1963 issue of the *Mattachine Newsletter* listed a conference event where psychologist and sexologist, Dr. Albert Ellis, would speak weeks later. Although Dr. Albert Ellis was portrayed as an ally here, he referred to the exclusive homosexual as a psychopath at the ECHO Conference. Someone from the audience responded, "Any homosexual who would come to you for treatment, Dr. Ellis, would have to be a psychopath!" This comment and the applause that followed marked the end of LGBTQ audiences' usual silence at large public gatherings.

The third and last theme, the fight against misinformation and discrimination, focused primarily on the homophile movement and the resistance felt by the state. It was often through existing laws that state officials sought to limit the movement and freedom of LGBTQ people. *The Ladder's* December 1959 issue highlighted the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control's (ABC) mobilized legal efforts to revoke liquor licenses at San Francisco bars. Section 24200(e), under *Stoumen v. Reilly*, ruled that homosexual patronage was not grounds to suspend or revoke a bar's liquor license and it was upheld in *Vallerga v. ABC* in 1959; however, ABC was committed to finding probable cause, pointing to "improper, illegal, disgusting, or immoral acts committed on the premises" which led to a cycle of gay bars closing, patrons finding new bars to gather in, and new gay bars opening. The *Daughter of Bilitis* Newsletter in July 1960 referenced the deep levels of surveillance the government employed in order to entrap and jail targeted individuals. Undercover police identified bars where alleged homosexuals gathered regularly, and the FBI created a list of "known hangouts of homosexuals" which was then passed on to military authorities. By the end of 1959 in San Francisco, bars where gays and

lesbians gathered were subject to regular police raids which—along with entrapment—were enabled by sodomy laws, lewd vagrancy laws, and President Eisenhower's Executive Order 10450.

Early Gay Gatherings points to a critical turning point in the history of LGBTQ rights in the United States. While LGBT and queer people undoubtedly existed before such a time, we can think of the Harlem Renaissance as one such example, this moment in the mid-20th century marked a structural shift in which formal organizing and information sharing became pivotal strategies for the formation of what we know today as the modern LGBTQ movement. While we revel in the progress made in such short periods of time, we must also recognize the role that state and legal frameworks still play in the silencing and marginalization of LGBTQ communities; Florida's recently passed "Don't Say Gay" bill is just our most recent example.

Early Gay Gatherings was on view at SNMA in Summer 2022.



▲ Cover of *The Ladder*, vol. 4, no. 8, May 1960.

Our Time, Our Place

We just called it “the Coffeehouse.” It would be years after first making the scene before I knew its full name: The ENIKAlley Coffeehouse. An acronym (because, DC) for the alley’s bordering Eighth, Ninth, I, and K streets. The Coffeehouse was a renovated carriage house behind the home of Gary Walker and Ray Melrose, an interracial couple who were active in DC Black gay culture and politics. As such things tend to do, the space developed in organic fashion as an outgrowth of salons already taking place in the Black lesbian and gay cultural community. Gary and Ray had been hosting potluck gatherings of artists and activists. In a burst of inspiration, Ray began “fixing up” the carriage house space to begin hosting poetry and musical performances.

The Coffeehouse also provided space to Black lesbian and gay political organizations, such as Sapphire Sapphos, Black Lesbian

Support Group, and The Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays, of which Ray was the inaugural leader. These activities would help make DC an important part of the 1980s nascent political organizing of Black queer people that later came to fruition in the nation’s first Black Gay Pride and first AIDS service organization for Black gay men, Us Helping Us.

Washington, DC was fertile ground for the formation of the ENIKAlley Coffeehouse. The city had a long history of Black intellectual achievement at Howard University, a deeply rich musical legacy, and direct links to the Harlem Renaissance through figures such as Alain Locke and Georgia Douglas Johnson. The Coffeehouse was a crucial node in a network of Black queer cultural producers that has rightly been called a Black Gay Renaissance. Writers including Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, New York’s Other Countries

collective, and performers such as Blackberri and Casselberry/Dupree passed through the doors of ENIKAlley, drawn there in part by the magnetic energy of artists like poet Essex Hemphill and filmmaker Michelle Parkerson.

The Coffeehouse was our den, our artists’ lair. We were Black, gay, lesbian, and bisexual men and women who gathered to perform and listen to music and poetry of brilliant quality and intent. Some commenters characterize ENIKAlley and the art we shared there as a salve, a means of transmuting the pain of racism and AIDS. But our gathering there was not an escape; we would have been making art and organizing regardless. Rather, we were drawn together in that place in celebration of our own fierceness.

For many of us, the Coffeehouse was a profoundly life-shaping experience. There, we formed and

sharpened those parts of our artist selves that would later go out into the larger world to create ripples of creativity that continue to move through Black queer artistic space today.

As queer people, it is our great good fortune that, over the years, our gathering places have evolved to include institutions like churches, sports leagues, business consortiums, and more. Museums and archives such as Washington, DC’s Rainbow History Project, the Stonewall Museum, the Leslie-Lohmann Museum, and others provide us the space to house and preserve our stories. The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture houses the Essex Hemphill/Wayson Jones Collection, donated by this writer some years ago. The Coffeehouse story is now being told in the documentary *Fierceness Served! The ENIKAlley Coffeehouse*, directed by Michelle Parkerson.

Wayson R. Jones is a painter, performer, and musician. He was an active member of the Coffeehouse community and performed for many years with poet Essex Hemphill.

The Angst and Joy of Queer Gatherings:

For queer folks, the act of gathering is historically, and presently, resonant. To gather was to embrace risk, to embrace being surveilled, raided, and punished. Thus, to gather became an inherently subversive and political act. With the slow erosion of space for queer folks to gather—due in part to gentrification, displacement, rising costs, the digital methods we use to connect, lack of institutional support, and more—it has become increasingly important to intentionally underscore *why* we gather. In this conversation, we chat with members of the Thee Gay Agenda based in Austin, TX. We unpack the need for anger and joy, for resource sharing and mutual aid, and the way comedy and humor serve as effective tools in the work of movement building.

▼ *Gay Last Supper*, July 2019. Photo by Jinni J. Models (from left to right): Drake Muiyinsa, Vincent Tomasino, Aby Oviedo, Emmet Hunker, Audrey Davis, Cassandra Hayes, Kristie Denlinger, Katelynn Garza, and Rvby Knight.

Andy Johnson (he/him): Let's start with a little bit of background about the collective. How did you form, and how has your group evolved up until this point?

Emmet Hunker (they/them): Thee Gay Agenda was born in angst. I'm a stand-up comedian. I started out doing stand-up in 2018 and found it really difficult, not just because it's a difficult form of expression, but because the scene is so saturated with straightness and cisnormativity in a way that is really hard to feel like you can take up space and feel supported or feel safe in some ways. I decided

that we should make some space and talk to some of these funny people who are on the call with us. We started our first pop-up show in a vintage store that our friends own, and it was a huge success. Way more people than we thought would come showed up. Then we got a grant from the city of Austin. So, money made more things possible like an actual stage. We found the perfect venue called The North Door, and that's when we became more of a variety show. From there, it was just like a snowball of: What else can we try out? Who else can we give a platform? What other medium can we use? Both Dylan



A Conversation with
Thee Gay Agenda

All images courtesy of Thee Gay Agenda.

and Kristie were heavily involved in experimenting and trying out different things, not just at the show but in different places. The pandemic was a big ass deal and halted things in a lot of ways. We tried a lot of virtual things and then got totally burnt on that and took a pause. Now here we are, a few weeks until our first in person show since the pandemic.

Kristie Denlinger (she/her): I feel like, Emmet, what you gracefully slipped over was that we kind of ran out of queer comics in Austin. When you're doing a monthly comedy show that's all-queer comics, that pool is quite small. If you're in New York or LA, you're

probably going to have a deeper bench. I think that part of the variety aspect of it came into play partially out of a desire to diversify and partially out of necessity. When we started to have the shows be less comedy focused, it expanded the community that we were serving. A lot of comics are friends with poets, and the poets are friends with artists, and the artists are friends with fashion designers. We had shows where we're doing improv—super nerdy comedy improv—and then there's a fashion show at the end of it. Emmett, I think, has always been conscious of why we are doing this in the first place.

▼ Promotion for TGA's show *Under The Big Top*, March 2022. Photo by Roy Muyinza. Pictured (left to right): Dylan Garsee, Aira Juliet, and Tabitha Hamilton.



▶ A couple, Montana Steele & Eli Cline (left to right), pictured after they won a sensual pie-eating contest at *Under The Big Top*. Photo by Roy Muyinza.



AJ: I think humor is such an incisive and yet effective tool to create community and kinship. We'll touch upon humor a little later, but what you're saying I think really tracks with how comedy and humor have, generationally, been important tools for queer people and community building.

Dylan Garcia (they/them): It's a defense mechanism. [Laughter]. With drag you have your club girls, you have your comedy queens, and then you have your pageant girls. Austin doesn't really have a pageant scene at all. So, 90 percent of the queens here are funny. They're silly. We have PooPoo Platter, who are, to me at least, the most famous drag troupe in the world. Austin doesn't have a sort of serious art tradition. We don't really have a big theater culture. Our film scene is really

small, and when it breaks out, it's more punk music. It's either country or punk. None of our art is serious because we don't really have the population to create a serious scene of anything. And we're here to take all the fun out of it. [Laughter].

EH: I think comedy has such a subversive, sexy element to it. We've always been sex positive, comedy-centric from the start and those interrelate in so many ways, especially in the queer community. Being able to use those as tools and mediums for all kinds of crafts has been so fun.

AJ: I want to talk about the word gathering; how that plays a role for you all. I think part of this is to think how queer communities have always gathered in a sense, and thinking of yourselves within this lineage.

DG: I like that we exist in a queer space that isn't late night, that isn't Friday night, Saturday night, brunch. It feels like those are the only times that people are allowed to be gay in public. All the straight people have their kids and bring them to soccer practice and stuff. We get to come out and eat the garbage off the floor. [Laughter]. So, I like that. I've always loved that about Thee Gay Agenda. We exist outside of time. We were at The North Door, which I loved. It was very grimy. I saw a lot of punk and industrial noise shows there, and it was so interesting to just go there and recontextualize it as this queer gathering space where you would see 19-year-olds, you would see 70-year-olds, maybe 50-year-olds. So together, generationally, we were out of time and it was just the most fabulous thing to me. We existed whenever the fuck we wanted to.

EH: I think exactly what Dylan said. Unapologetically taking up space as we want to, where we want to. Our next show in a couple of weeks is a pop-up show to get back to our roots wherein we are queering spaces that aren't normally queer. Queer people were showing up knowing that it was a queer party, a queer show. Not to say that they're the straightest places in town, but they certainly are not the gayest places in town.

KD: People dressed up for our shows. There was always a strong theme, and people would dress up just to come to the show. It was a space where people would come to meet people that they wouldn't meet in any other space.

"I also think just the act of being with other queer people and, you know, getting to experience something with other queer people is healing in itself."

AJ: I wanted to ask about who you look to for inspiration or motivation. Who are you thinking about? They could be people who are still your contemporaries, but they can also be people who are no longer with us.

KD: I guess there's two ways this question can be answered depending on who's talking. I'll say that we started to intentionally include bits of queer history in our programs. I've gotten more into learning about queer history and making sure that it's incorporated in most of the things that we do. But in terms of intentionally modeling the space after someone, I personally didn't have that because I didn't know any queer history. I feel like I didn't start learning queer history until I dipped my toes, and read a bit about Eleanor Roosevelt's secret lesbian lover, and then fell down a rabbit hole. Why don't I know any of this history? What excites me the most is learning more about Austin's queer history. I came across this calendar from the 70s in the archives at the Austin History Center. It was a

calendar made by a lesbian group. It was a fundraiser, but it was the most lesbian art calendar you've ever seen. It was very celestial and had pictures of butchy basketball players in the 70s. Even that is art—and art to benefit somebody.

DG: I'm more involved in the bear community, and that primarily involves small-town gay bars. I always have that in mind. I love Robert's Lafitte in Galveston, TX. I especially love the gay bar in my hometown of Beaumont, Texas, it was called Orleans Street Pub. These were places where it wasn't, like, academic to be gay. It was just, if you're a fag, come on in. That's been the driving factor around any sort of queer activity that I do. It doesn't matter if you love him or capital H-I-M. [Laughter]. I think those are such valuable places—small, specific

▼ Tatiana Cholula's sad clown number at *Under The Big Top*, April 28, 2022. Photo by Roy Muiyiza.



queer spaces. I think there's such a treasure, a beautiful quality about being weird and gay at a bar.

EH: Yeah. Agreed. I feel like one of the most inspiring books for me was this book, *The Homosexual Agenda*. I don't remember who wrote it. He refuses to say gay because gay means happy, but in essence, he defines what the gay agenda is, where the term originated from, the belief of the erosion of family values. It goes back to the angst factor; it's motivating and also hilarious. It wasn't written that long ago, and there are still people who believe this, if not for all gay people, then at least for trans people. The haters fuel me in a lot of ways, the historical ones and the present ones, and we got a lot of those in Texas.

AJ: I'd love to hear more about your thought process around resource sharing and mutual aid, in all its forms.

EH: One of our earliest partners was the Kind Clinic which is a sexual health clinic that also provides gender affirming services for free in Austin. We had them table at all of our events because we were like, why not? Some people can get a little something to help them have sex in a safer way or get the care that they need after walking away from our event. As we got more space, we thought about the other community organizations that we could invite to table, which they loved because they got to see this awesome show and be more involved in the queer community. Kristie was really

involved in a pop-up museum that we did on community care last summer. That was really beautiful.

KD: Yeah. As I mentioned before, we started doing history bits during the shows. I started doing drunk history bits at the show—one of which I made the bad decision of actually being drunk and had a panic attack on stage. Nonetheless, we filmed these drunk history bits, for example one on ballroom culture, and we would use footage from documentaries, such as *Paris is Burning* and stuff like that. We did a pop-up museum for a show that was on World AIDS Day and it was on AIDS history. We projected panels from the AIDS Memorial Quilt. For the pop-up on community care, we worked with a couple of other curators,

Mac Irvine and Marcus Cruz-Sanchez. We talked about five different pillars of community care—mutual aid, health services, intergenerational care, harm reduction, and protest as community care.

AJ: How do we strike that balance between the anger and the joy and keeping those two pillars alive? The anger to want to change things, but the joy to also remember to embrace life as it is. I think this is where comedy and humor come into play. I think that your programming is a great example of how pleasure, play, and joy inherently continue to drive the movement work.

DG: I think Austin is an inherently angry city, at least for the past ten years or so. It's been this way

▼ Opening number of tampon string limbo with clown, Tanya Karina. *Under The Big Top*, April 28, 2022. Photo by Roy Muyinza.



because the artists are angry that they can't afford to live here anymore. The artists are angry that the city they love has changed so much. I think what I've noticed, at least, is that it's hard to present straight up anger and have people be interested in it—let's leave the house, get a sitter for the kids, and go get mad for two hours. [Laughter]. That's kind of how you get them in, with the promise of bread and circuses, and then you come in and we're a bunch of goblins that will teach you about how gay people have been here forever.

KD: I also think just the act of being with other queer people and, you know, getting to experience something with other queer people is healing in itself. You don't have to solve all your problems. You just have to remember that other people have those problems, too.

EH: Yeah, healing. I've always been of the belief that taking care of yourself will then enable you to take care of others. I think joy and pleasure and relief and healing and not taking ourselves so seriously are so integral to being okay and feeling okay—especially in this world that we currently live in, where it's that much harder to feel okay. The reason is to have fun. The reason is to be together. One of our mottos is celebrating otherness through togetherness.

Let's just get together and feel all right about being us and being with people who may or may not be family, may or may not be like me, but we all belong here.

AJ: What's next for you? Do you have anything special coming up?

EH: We've been super amorphous for a while now which is liberating and also terrifying. Nonetheless, we're about to come to our tangible form via a pop-up show on April 28. I'm excited to get back to our pop-up roots and celebrate our circus roots. It's a throwback while looking forward to the unknown. We're excited to truly prioritize the benefits of time to the creative process. Lean into that.

DG: I'm excited to do really specific queer comedy in Austin, very antagonistic, that's kind of my MO. I can't wait to be back on that stage to do something for the girlies, whatever it is; it's for the girls, the gays, and the theys.

AJ: Thank you for your time and for such a fun conversation!

▶
The incredible clowns, KD Kinetic and Tanya Karina. Under The Big Top, April 28, 2022. Photo by Roy Muyinza.





OUTWRITE

THE SPEECHES THAT SHAPED

LGBTQ LITERARY CULTURE

EDITED BY JULIE R. ENSZER

AND ELENA GROSS



"The reason we as writers do any of this—you know, forget the politics, forget the money, you know—is ultimately, **we want to be loved.**"

- Jewelle Gomez in *OutWrite: The Speeches That Shaped LGBTQ Literary Culture* (2022)

On March 3 and 4, 1990, the first OutWrite conference was held at the Cathedral Hill Hotel in San Francisco. Originally the brainchild of OUT/LOOK magazine, the editors sought to bring LGBTQ life further into the public sphere; however, with that proposition came the realization that they would need to find more writers. Thus, OutWrite became a tool to not only seek out queer writers, but also build, sustain, and further invest in the work and lives of LGBTQ writers in the United States. Running from 1990 through 1999, the conference became a pivotal moment for queer writers to convene, debate, and dance. The conference underscored and reflected a collective desire for

joy, for intersectional gathering, and for industry recognition and support.

Foremost, the OutWrite conference was a celebration, an assembly of joy in the midst of intense social and state censorship, violence, and erasure. In the search for queer writers, conference organizers discovered one of the most essential ingredients to cultivating joy—gathering. If we consider the 1990s and the preceding decade, 70,000 people had passed from AIDS and governmental/scientific silence was still palpable. In 1986, the Supreme Court's decision in *Bowers v. Hardwick* effectively affirmed the criminalization

of intimacy for queer people. Censorship began to re-emerge around debates of funding. In June 1990, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) defunded grants for performance artists whose work dealt with queer topics. In this context, literature published from LGBTQ writers found almost no support amongst the largest publishing houses in the United States. Thus, in the face of active repression and discrimination, organizers and attendees quickly understood that claiming space for peer-affirmation and joy soothed the pain caused by such pervasive invisibility and violence.

OutWrite, from the outset, sought to affirm and highlight the intersecting lived experiences of queer people. Editors and organizers understood quite clearly the varied barriers to access that existed for those of varied identities—this included Black writers, Latinx writers, Indigenous writers, disabled writers and more. During the 1998 program, the organizers designated rooms for “Jewish writers, transgender writers, sex panic, media queers, the queer Left, librarians, writers of colors...”¹ In 1993, organizers addressed the question of access and designated seating for those with disabilities. In 1995, childcare was provided free of charge. In addition, organizers were cognizant of the barrier to

attend in the first place with co-programmers G. Winston James and Kris Kleindienst positing “could we get writers to OutWrite whose marginalized position in this country, either by sex, race or class would make a trip to Boston for any reason inconceivable?”² From the conference structure to controversial opinions shared during plenary sessions and keynote speeches, things certainly went wrong and individuals misspoke. Nonetheless, the intention to carefully craft a space of intersectional resource sharing was a major focus for the conference.

Lastly, the conference placed LGBTQ writers on the publishing map in a way that had never been seen or experienced before. With each passing year, organizers witnessed the exhibition hall grow. Mainstream publishers turned their attention and an organic network of support and mentorship grew out of the notions of proximity and gathering. The third conference, the first to be hosted on the east coast, saw the largest increase in the exhibitor hall. In addition to featuring a number of gay and lesbian organizations, a handful of mainstream press—including Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Temple University Press, and Penguin USA—made their presence known, signaling a slow shift in the marker for gay and

lesbian readers. In fact, during the sixth conference in 1996, one of four main functions of the event described the conference as a “vital site for queers in the publishing industry to meet, deal, network, and do business.”³ Thus, as the conference grew in size and importance so did the marketability of queer writing and stories from the lives of LGBTQ folks.

OutWrite was, in the tradition of José Muñoz, a flicker of a queer literary utopia. A moment and space in time where queer writers could convene, discuss, and love. A pointing to what was possible when radical thought and the desire to convene collide. As editors Julie Enszer and Elena Gross note in their newly published *OutWrite: The Speeches That Shaped LGBTQ Literary Culture*, “OutWrite represented a vibrant expression of the importance of literature, language, books, and writing in the 1990s to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities growing in their power while suffering

legislative and electoral defeats and grappling with the devastating effects of AIDS.”⁴ A monumental testament to the need for joy and pleasure amongst the movement work we are so often called to.

Voices from OutWrite was on view at SNMA in Summer 2022.

Endnotes

1. Julie R. Enszer and Elena Gross, introduction to *OutWrite: The Speeches That Shaped LGBTQ Literary Culture*, ed. Julie R. Enszer and Elena Gross (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2022) 16-17.
2. Ibid, 18.
3. Ibid, 14.
4. Ibid, 19.

Dear Jewelle:

A Letter to My Black Lesbian Literary Foremother

In 2009, I enrolled as a doctoral student at Purdue University determined to study Black lesbian literature. I had been looking for it my entire life it seemed but was never able to get my hands on much. You see, I was born and reared in a mid-sized Georgia town where books on lesbians were hidden away in the sociology section, if they were stocked at all. While my memory may be failing me, I don't ever recall seeing an LGBTQ section in the bookstores in my hometown. In the late 1990s—I came out to myself in 1996, to my family in 2003—my friends and I would travel to Atlanta, and sometimes we'd visit Outwrite, the now defunct queer bookstore in Midtown, and I was thrilled to find all sorts of gay literature. Still, I continued to search for Black lesbian literature and oftentimes came up short.

But something interesting happened in my first graduate seminar at Purdue. It was entitled "Black Women Writers" and was taught by Professor Venetria

K. Patton, who would go on to co-chair my dissertation. In her class we read your collection of short stories, *Don't Explain*, and it is not an exaggeration to say that this book changed my life. I'm not sure if it was the writing style—clear, concise, powerful—or the careful attention you paid to the material realities of Black lesbian lives, but I was hooked. I went out, bought your books, and tried to find every essay you'd ever written. I loved that you called out the invisibility of Black lesbians in queer literature and critiqued queer theorists for ignoring the fact that Black lesbians were integral to queer theorizing and queer canons, although we were remarkably absent from the scholarship. I took your 2005 essay, "A Cultural Legacy Denied and Discovered: Black Lesbians in Fiction by Women" as a call to action, and my work has been focused on excavating and amplifying the material reality of Black lesbian lives, as well as their creative and cultural work, ever since.

In 2017, I attended the Golden Crown Literary Society conference in Chicago. I'd heard about this conference from other lesbian writers and, while I was skeptical (rightfully so), the highlight of the event was meeting you. I was afraid to approach you after your panel, but I knew that I had to meet you. You were kind and gracious as I stumbled over my words trying to explain how much you and your work meant to me. I felt silly when I left, but I was happy that I'd had a chance to talk to you. The next day, you came up to our table in the exhibit hall and introduced me to Penny Mickelbury, another Black lesbian writer activist. I was ecstatic! I couldn't believe that the Legendary Jewelle Gomez not only remembered me—I know that you meet lots of people at conferences—but that you took the time to engage with my work and introduce me to your friend.

Since then, you've supported my work in numerous ways: blurbing Krystal A. Smith's collection of stories, *Two Moons*; contributing a Gilda story to our 2019 collection of Black speculative writing, *Black From the Future*; celebrating the launch of my collection of Black speculative fiction, *How to Dispatch a Human: Stories and Suggestions* with me at Charis Books, and much more. Next month, my tiny Black feminist press will publish your first full collection of poetry in years, and I could not be more honored to work with you. Many famous writers purport to support the

work of emerging writers, but you have been a gift to an entire generation of Black lesbian and queer writers, not only because of your work, but due to your unwavering generosity and kindness. As a writer, scholar, and publisher, it is my goal to honor your literary legacy by pouring out as much as I have been given. You are, as I hope to become one day, a visionary force in Black lesbian and queer literature.

Queer folks have a bad habit of celebrating their heroes after they've passed on into the realm of the ancestors, but I'm a firm believer in telling folks how much they mean to you while they're still with us. I hope this letter is a small measure of how much you mean to me.

In love and solidarity,
Stephanie Andrea Allen

Stephanie Andrea Allen, Ph.D. is an interdisciplinary humanities scholar, creative writer, small press publisher, and Assistant Professor of Gender Studies at Indiana University. Her research centers Black lesbian cultural histories and Black feminisms through various expressions, including literature, film, and other print and visual media.

Dispatches

Dispatches reflect notable moments and achievements within LGBTQ culture around the globe. With each issue, we feature important milestones in our collective story.

- ▶ Currently in its planning phase, the Stonewall National Monument Education & Visitor Center will serve to preserve, advance, and celebrate the legacy of the Stonewall rebellion and Stonewall National Monument located in Greenwich Village. The Visitor Center will be an educational resource and experience that encourages communities to carry forward the legacy of Stonewall.
- ▶ A new documentary film, *Fierceness Served! The ENIKAlley Coffeehouse*, captures the spirit of one of the most pivotal, creative, Black LGBTQ spaces in Washington, DC. Operating from 1982 to 1989, the space, located just off of H Street NE, offered a community to artists such as Essex Hemphill, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Michelle Parkerson, Christopher Prince, and many more. Visit thecoffeehousedc.com to learn more.
- ▶ The Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender History will host their second Queer History Conference from June 12–15, 2022 at San Francisco State University. The conference features papers and panels from the field of LGBTQ studies in order to share, discuss, and debate the import of the collective past. A select number of panels are available online. To register, visit clgbthistory.org.

S'Wall News

S'Wall News highlights important updates, news, and achievements from within Stonewall National Museum & Archives.

- ▶ After three years, Hunter O'Hanian stepped down as Executive Director in June to focus his energies on new projects. Robert Kesten stepped in as ED and is looking forward to bringing Stonewall's vast collections to even a wider audience.
- ▶ Under the direction of Bex Mui, Stonewall recently completed its ninth Stonewall National Education Project symposium in April 2022. The conference was attended by 70 people and focused on creating LGBTQ inclusive curriculum. The next conference will be in Spring 2023.
- ▶ Pride 2022 had been very busy for Stonewall as we are scheduled to make presentations in New York, San Francisco, Toledo, and Orlando, as well as numerous locations in South Florida.
- ▶ In what was perhaps the largest exhibition—*Queer History*—undertaken by Stonewall, more than 125 objects were included in an exhibition of works from our archive at the Cortilla Gallery on the NOVA Southeastern University campus in Davie, Florida. The exhibition examined the progress made by the LGBTQ community over the past 70 years. Contact Stonewall for more information about the exhibition.

▶ Installation view of *Queer History*, 2022.
Nova Southeastern University,
Davie Alvin Sherman Library.
Photo credit: Ben Hayward Smith.



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stonewall

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