



# Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender **History**

SPRING 2014

[WWW.CLGBTHISTORY.ORG](http://WWW.CLGBTHISTORY.ORG)

## FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

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We are thrilled that our penultimate co-chairs' column is running in our first-ever fully digital newsletter. We have our editor Stephanie Gilmore to thank. She has consistently pushed our organization to undertake this cost-saving measure that will also make the publication more dynamic and easier to produce. At the 2014 AHA, the membership agreed. You will find information below on how you can "opt-in" to receive a paper copy (you will need to pay a slight premium), if that is your reading preference.

The Committee on LGBT History has confronted a number of challenges this year. In response to [the 2015 AHA](#)

[theme, "History and the Other Disciplines,"](#) we created the "Promiscuous Interdisciplinarity" CLGBTH subtheme. We knew this would further the success we have had enhancing LGBTQ representation at the AHA though the queer "conferences within a conference" we have run the past two years. Boy, did it—the folks who answered our call came from all over, some trained as historians, some from different (and multiple) disciplinary perspectives, some artists, some grad students, some recent PhDs, and some senior folks, spanning periods and regions. The AHA Program Committee, however, only approved four of the twelve panels we put forward, leading us to wonder if we got a little too interdisciplinary for their liking. Undeterred, we brought the other proposed sessions on through the affiliate program that allows groups such as the CLGBTH to approve programming independent of the AHA Program Committee. Unfortunately, this year a new AHA cost structure charges affiliates by the panel, so we took a hit

to make things right. We are confident that this was the right decision.

When you see the amazing slate we have for 2015 (check out the fall newsletter!) we think you'll agree. Still, it raises a set of questions about how we intervene in the AHA program in future years.

We have also kept active in multiple dialogues about public history as this becomes a larger part of our work. When Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell announced [a new National Park Service initiative to consider LGBT historic sites for federal designation](#), we were thrilled. The activist group GetEQUAL, however, saw things differently. Planning an action called "No More Studies—Give Us Freedom!" the group claimed that "we're tired of studies," instead demanding immediate Obama administration action on a number of current fronts. The CLGBTH mounted a social media campaign and emailed the group's leaders to request that they publicly retract the "No more studies--give us freedom!" slogan and change the frame through which they pursued justice. As we wrote, "Pitting the tireless and ongoing work done by LGBTQ historians in scholarship, public history, education, and reform against the present priorities for LGBT equality is not only wrongheaded, it attacks some of the very people who have played and continue to play vital roles in ushering in that equality." While they never responded directly to us, within 24 hours the messaging had shifted to "'Don't Stop at Our History — Full Federal Equality Now!' More importantly, CLGBTH members and

leaders were among the 20 scholars brought to D.C. on June 10 for preliminary discussions to set into motion the process of determining LGBT sites for the National Registry, hopefully by 2016.

In May, the CLGBTH responded when Organization of American Historians President [Patty Limerick put out the call in May for historians](#) to send her their stories of public service. She wants to counter New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof's claim that academics are disengaged and ensconced in our ivory towers. We wrote Limerick that, in addition to our work with the National Park Service, our members "engage actively with their communities, schools, and museums, in addition to providing crucial perspectives for judicial and political struggles. One only has to think of the historians' amicus brief in *Lawrence v. Texas*, or the expert testimony provided in many marriage equality cases, to see the huge impact our members are making. We have been leaders in LGBT community history projects across the nation...."

In addition, historians have played a key role in the passage and implementation of California's 2011 Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act, which made history as the first state law to mandate inclusion of LGBT history in public K-12 social science education."

Speaking of the FAIR Act Framework Revision Report that we have been working on since last summer, we are happy to report that it will be going public in August, right before the public

comment period begins for the California Department of Education's consideration of revisions to the K-12 History-Social Science Framework. Much more to be said soon, but know that nearly 20 historians have helped produce a robust report with suggested revisions in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. history elements to bring the framework into line with the last 40 years of scholarship regarding sexuality, gender, race, and class, particularly as they relate to LGBTQ history. This month, the GSA Network is running focus groups of K-12 educators from across the state on our report, and the initial responses have been encouraging. One educator said that the adopted revisions "will be normalizing for [teachers]...talking about these issues.... Its just a way to embed all of these issues into the curriculum we already have and I actually think it might almost be a relief!"

LGBTQ history has never had a larger public profile than it does today, and our organization can play a guiding role in this moment. We need you to help steer us into the future! It's time to find new co-chairs for the committee and four members of the governing board (two to replace folks cycling off, two to fill slots we added after the 2014 AHA). We would love to see a tradition emerge in which two differently gendered people take on the chairship together. It has really worked for us and allowed us to do this rewarding and critical leadership role in partnership with one another. If co-chair sounds like too big a commitment, consider running for the governing board. The committee

needs your service and can only function if people step into these roles.

The election will be run using survey monkey sometime in fall 2014. Keep your eyes open for it.

Finally, it's time for prize nominations again! Be sure to check out the information about the 2015 prizes: The John Boswell Prize for an outstanding book on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer history published in English in 2013 or 2014; and the Joan Nestle Undergraduate Prize for an outstanding paper on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer history completed in English by an undergraduate student in 2013 or 2014. We need you to nominate yourselves as well as your students and colleagues.

Have a wonderful rest of your summer!

*If you wish to receive a paper copy of the newsletter in addition to the electronic version, please email Stephanie Gilmore [shgilmore1@gmail.com](mailto:shgilmore1@gmail.com) (editor) and Phil Tiemeyer [tiemeyerp@philau.edu](mailto:tiemeyerp@philau.edu) (secretary/treasurer). The cost is \$10 per year (payable on [Paypal](#) or by check) or \$100 for lifetime members. The editor and secretary/treasurer will be tasked with ensuring opt-in members receive a hard-copy newsletter.*

**CALL FOR NOMINATIONS:**

**COMMITTEE ON LGBT HISTORY BOSWELL AND NESTLE PRIZES**

The Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender History will award the John Boswell and Joan Nestle Prizes in 2015.

The John Boswell Prize is awarded for an outstanding book on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer history published in English in 2013 or 2014.

Learn more at <http://clgbthistory.org/prizes/john-boswell-prize/>

The Joan Nestle Undergraduate Prize is awarded for an outstanding paper on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer history completed in English by an undergraduate student in 2013 or 2014.

Learn more at <http://clgbthistory.org/prizes/joan-nestle-prize/>

Students, faculty, authors, readers, editors, or publishers can nominate. Self-nominations are encouraged. For John Boswell Prize-nominated books, authors/editors should work with publishers to mail one copy to each member of the Prize Committee. Please email PDFs of Joan Nestle Undergraduate Prize submissions to each committee member with the nominee's name in the subject line. Questions can be addressed to prize committee chair Estelle Freedman.

**2015 Prize Committee:**

\*Dr. Estelle Freedman, Chair, Department of History, Stanford University, 450 Serra Mall, Building 200, Stanford, CA 94305-2024, [ebf@stanford.edu](mailto:ebf@stanford.edu)

\*Dr. T.J. Tallie, c/o Jennifer Ashworth, Newcomb Hall, 204 West Washington Street, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia 24450, [ttallie@gmail.com](mailto:ttallie@gmail.com)

\*Dr. Mir Yarfitz, Department of History, Wake Forest University, Tribble Hall B101, P.O. Box 7806, Winston-Salem, NC 27109, [yarfitmh@wfu.edu](mailto:yarfitmh@wfu.edu)

Mailed submissions must be postmarked by 3 October 2014; emailed submissions must be postmarked by 11:59pm (Pacific time), 3 October 2014.

*Please note that the deadline is earlier this year than in years past.*

Winners will be announced at the Committee on LGBT History's annual reception at the 2015 American Historical Association Conference in New York City.

## ***Interested in joining the CLGBTH leadership team?***

Consider running for governing board or assembling a co-chair ticket. Working in this organization is a terrific way to serve the profession at a national level (important, we are told, for promotion and tenure) and to get and stay connected to queer folks engaged in historical work. The requirements are not too onerous--2-3 conference calls a year, trying to attend the AHA for the length of your term, and whatever projects you take on as a board member.

Don and Jennie's term as co-chair ends at the 2015 AHA, along with two members of the governing board. We will run an election in October or November for co-chairs (two people of different genders) and four new governing board members (we expanded the board by two at the last AHA). We also need people interested in serving as newsletter editor and book review editor, as Stephanie and Katie's terms are coming to an end. New terms start in January 2015.

Interested? Please contact Jennie ([jbrier@uic.edu](mailto:jbrier@uic.edu)) or Don ([romesbur@sonoma.edu](mailto:romesbur@sonoma.edu))

## **Call For Papers**

Special issue of the [Oral History Review](#):  
"Listening to and for LGBTQ Lives"

Deadline for submissions:

**September 1, 2014**

Publication date: Winter/Spring 2016

Guest Editor: [Stephanie Gilmore, Ph.D.](#)

As we commemorate anniversaries, such as the upcoming 45th anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall Riot in New York City, and challenge recent developments, including the criminalization of same-sex sexuality in Uganda, scholars, activists, and citizens are compelled to examine and deepen historical and contemporary perspectives on the importance of the lives and experiences of LGBTQ people. Oral history has become a significant way to uncover the hidden histories of LGBTQ people; and scholars, activists, librarians, archivists, and organizations are using oral history theory and methods to put LGBTQ people at the center of analysis and understand the multifaceted lives and experiences of LGBTQ people around the world.

The editorial staff of the Oral History Review is actively seeking short-form (3,000-4,000 word) and long-form (8,000-12,000 word) articles for a special issue devoted to the theme "Listening to and for LGBTQ Lives."

Submissions might address any aspect of oral history—theory, practice, methodology, pedagogy, uses/applications of oral history, editing and writing oral history, as well as narrative and analytical pieces based on oral history sources. We also welcome experimental forms and multimedia dimensions.

We invite submissions that raise innovative points about the use of oral history in researching and writing about LGBTQ people; highlight the promises and pitfalls of developing archives devoted to LGBTQ lives and organizations; explore pedagogical developments in courses on LGBTQ histories; and elevate new theoretical and/or practical developments in the growing field of LGBTQ histories.

#### Mission Statement: The Oral History Review

The Oral History Review, published by the Oral History Association, is the U.S. journal of record for the theory and practice of oral history and related fields. The journal’s primary mission is to explore the nature and significance of oral history and advance understanding of the field among scholars, educators, practitioners, and the general public. The Review publishes narrative and analytical articles and reviews, in print and multimedia formats, that present and use oral history in unique and significant ways and that contribute to the understanding of the nature of oral history and memory. It seeks previously unpublished works that demonstrate high-quality research and that offer new insight into oral history practice, methodology, theory, and pedagogy.

Work published in the journal arises from many fields and disciplines, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of oral history. While based in the U.S., the Review reflects the international scope of the field and encourages work from international authors and about international topics.

Direct inquiries and submissions to:

Stephanie Gilmore, Ph.D.  
Interim editor, The Oral History Review  
Email: [shgilmore1@gmail.com](mailto:shgilmore1@gmail.com)

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### Archives and Archiving

Special issue of [TSQ](#)

Guest Editors: [Aaron Devor](#) and [K.J. Rawson](#)

This issue of TSQ will investigate practical and theoretical dimensions of archiving transgender phenomena and will ask what constitutes “trans\* archives” or “trans\* archival practices.”

While transgender-related experiences have long been captured by archives to some extent, the last few decades have witnessed an increased commitment to collecting trans\* materials. Consequently, sizable trans\* collections can now be found in a range of institutional contexts including grassroots archives, nonprofit organizations, and university-based collections.

Given this trend, myriad practical considerations that trans\* materials present for archiving warrant further attention. What should or should not be included in trans\* archives? What are the best practices for acquiring, processing, preserving, and making transgender materials accessible? Given practical limitations of space and money, how do we decide what to prioritize? And who decides? What are the implications for history when archivists make such decisions? How should archives negotiate ethical concerns specific to trans\* archives? What relationship—if any—do trans\* materials have to broader LGBTQ collections? What cataloguing tools are available and how do they obscure, distort, or make meaning of the lived experiences of trans\* people? What are the benefits and limitations of using “transgender” or “trans\*” as umbrella terms in an archival context? How are archivists and archival practices changed by the challenges of dealing with trans\* materials? What role can digital technologies play in collecting and accessing trans\* materials, particularly born-digital materials?

These practical considerations would be incomplete without a closely related theoretical exploration of trans\* archiving. How, for example, are bodies representable (or unrepresentable) through archival documents? How can embodiment itself be considered an archive of memory and feeling, a sedimentation of social practices, a living medium for the transmission of cultural forms? What power do archives have in shaping popular understandings of transgender phenomena? How are

researchers affected by their encounters with archival materials? How do archives steer researchers in particular ways with metadata, organizational systems, and finding aids? Can archives help construct community and personal identity? Does digitization inherently change trans\* historical artifacts?

We welcome submissions of full-length academic articles on a wide range of topics related to trans\* archives and archiving. Such topics might include:

- practical and philosophical considerations for developing transgender collections independently or within broader archives
- how transgender archival materials intersect with and depart from LGBTQ archival materials
- critical reflections on working in trans\* archives and/or with trans\* archival materials
- sex, desire, and pornographic collections
- considerations of the body within and as represented by archives
- understandings of embodiment itself as an archive of affects, memory, practices, and social forms
- capturing lived experiences with archival artifacts and ephemera
- recontextualizing historical materials within the context of the archive
- affective encounters
- ethics of historical representation

- archival temporality and considerations of time and timeliness
- the role of archivists
- institutionality of government, state, academic, non-profit, and grassroots collections
- processing and interpreting trans\*-related materials
- hidden collections
- archival language practices, cataloguing, and classification
- digital technologies within archives, digital archiving, and archiving born-digital materials
- intersectional identities
- access and accessibility
- archival activism

We will also consider for publication shorter essays, opinion pieces, first-person accounts, practical advice, how-to guides, or interesting archival documents. We encourage contributions from a wide range of authors including academics, independent researchers, archivists, and activists.

Please send a complete manuscript by October 15, 2014 to [tsqjournal@gmail.com](mailto:tsqjournal@gmail.com) along with a brief bio including name and any institutional affiliation. The expected length for scholarly articles is 5000 to 7000 words, and 1000 to 2000 words for shorter works. All manuscripts should be prepared for anonymous peer review. For articles engaging in scholarly citation, please use the Chicago author-date citation style. Any questions should be addressed by e-mail to both guest editors for the issue: Aaron Devor ([ahdevor@uvic.ca](mailto:ahdevor@uvic.ca)) and K.J. Rawson

([kjrawson@holycross.edu](mailto:kjrawson@holycross.edu)). We plan to respond to submissions by early January, 2015. Final revisions will be due by March 1, 2015.

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**CONGRATULATIONS to CLGBTH Member Christina Hanhardt on winning the Lambda Literary Award in LGBT Studies for her book, [\*Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence\*](#).**



[Click here](#) to see all of the 26<sup>th</sup> Lambda Literary Awards recipients.



## BOOK REVIEWS

Ashley Currier. [Out in Africa: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa](#), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

Review by [Amy Harris](#), Purdue University

“Visibility matters.” For Ashley Currier this statement is not abstract but reflects the reality that for activists visibility has “material consequences for social movements (9).” In her debut monograph, *Out in Africa: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa*, Currier examines the use and value of visibility to LGBT groups in Southern Africa. Rather than taking the value of public visibility as a given factor, Currier problematizes the assumption that visibility is and should be the main goal of any social movement. Currier presents visibility as a strategy to be employed by activists within different socio-political and cultural contexts. By examining the strategic use of visibility and invisibility in Namibian and South African LGBT organizing Currier argues scholars and activists must resist the urge to privilege visibility as a main goal for all LGBT movements and instead understand how organizations negotiate the opportunities and limitations presented by specific sociopolitical conditions and cultural spaces to achieve their goals.

Currier begins her work by tracing the roots of LGBT activism in both South Africa and Namibia. Emerging in the

1960s and 70s alongside anti-Apartheid movements, South African LGBT organizing began largely among white South Africans, but grew to encompass multicultural communities in the 1980s and 90s. With the creation of the post-Apartheid state LGBT activists brought the campaign to secure gay and lesbian rights into the national spotlight. South Africa’s Apartheid policies concerning homosexuality were deeply entwined within the country’s history of racial, gender and sexual oppression.

Colonial authorities viewed homosexuality through the lenses of degeneracy and eugenics. Therefore, policies were put into place to protect the purity of race and class as well as prescribe proper gender norms (27). In post-Apartheid South Africa, the dismantling of racial and class discrimination also included the undoing of legal restrictions on homosexuals. In Namibia, LGBT organizations such as the Rainbow Project gained visibility when they publically opposed homophobic comments made by members of the South West African Peoples Organisation, Namibia’s ruling party. While liberation from apartheid rule brought the opportunity to create a new democratic state, lawmakers did not ensure the rights and safety of LGBT Namibians. Rather than working hand in hand with the state, Namibian LGBT organizations challenged the newly independent state to recognize gays and lesbians as part of Namibian society.

The second chapter examines issues concerning LGBT organizing and women’s activism. ‘The Lesbian Issue,’ refers to the ways the Forum for the

Empowerment of Women (FEW) and Sister Namibia employed specific strategies of visibility to counter anti-lesbian sentiment within their respective societies. In response to the high level of violence against gender non-conforming women, FEW favored providing “safe space” for lesbians to meet and cultivate female-exclusive organizations. Sister Namibia favored taking a public role to counter the open defamation of homosexuals by Namibian lawmakers. Sister Namibia’s visibility drew support from the international community but garnered negative consequences for their domestic projects (73). Sister Namibia then turned to framing lesbian rights as ‘women’s rights’ and took aim at issues of safety and political participation that affected all Namibian women. In South Africa, the acquittal of President Jacob Zuma on rape charges illustrated the widespread backlash against feminism and gay rights.

However, Currier convincingly argues that the publicity surrounding this trial also allowed activists the opportunity to bring issues of women’s rights, safety and sexuality back into the spotlight. Chapter three, “Disappearing Act” probes the value of LGBT invisibility as a tool of both self-protection and survival. Examining recent campaigns for marriage rights, Currier argues that so-called “missed opportunities” for visibility can actually be strategically chosen incidents of invisibility. While groups such as FEW organized black lesbians to publically challenge the perceived hegemony of white activists in the South African marriage equality movement, other groups failed to show

public support. Currier attributes these absences to organizational delays and the prevalence of coalitional groups in the lobbying process. Although coalitions brought activists together to maximize their efficacy, they reduce opportunities for visibility for individual organizations.

The final chapters examine how visibility politics frames the way the media views LGBT activists and the struggles in building international and pan-African coalitions. These chapters provide some of the strongest analysis of the book by examining how African LGBT identities relate to racial, ethnic, and post-colonial identities. Most notably, Currier chronicles the continuing struggle for LGBT movements to be regarded as authentically African and problematizes the idea of a single notion of “African” identity.

There is no doubt Currier has produced an excellent study of organizational structures in South African LGBT organizing that deftly draws from a variety of sources including interviews, organizational records, the popular press, as well as a wealth of secondary material. However, there are limitations to this work. Currier bases her work on English language sources only. While Currier justifies this decision by arguing that activists mostly engaged with the popular press in English, this choice potentially limited the visibility of culturally-specific organizing methods and attitudes towards visibility. Further linguistic diversity within the source pool could have shed additional light on the role of indigenous identities and customs in LGBT organizing. Currier’s

choice of title is both fitting and somewhat perplexing. On the one hand it perfectly encapsulates the goals of her chosen organizations; on the other hand the sole focus on plural organizing implies that affiliation with an organization is the preferred way to be “out in Africa.” I wonder how a more expansive definition of being “out” as applied to LGBT identity in Southern Africa could have both widened the scope of this study and provided a point of comparison to the strategies employed by the examined organizations. Rather than condemning Currier’s work though, my criticisms merely illuminate areas for further scholarly research. With “Out in Africa” Ashley Currier has made an important and substantial contribution to the history of LGBT organizing and visibility that is of great use to scholars of postcolonial and African history and reminds us of the importance of recognizing diversity among LGBT rights movements around the world. This text would be a valuable addition to any graduate-level course examining organizational structures and political activism in a global context.

Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, [Against the Closet: Black Political Longing and the Erotics of Race](#), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.

Reviewed by Jared Leighton (University of Nebraska-Lincoln)

In *Against the Closet*, Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman examines the ways racial identity is “conceived, regulated and

disciplined through sexuality” (2) and how black writers “have deployed constructions of transgressive sexuality tropologically to challenge popular theories of identity, pathology, national belonging, and racial difference in American culture” (3). While recognizing the efforts of black writers to highlight normative sexuality and employ the politics of respectability to advance equality, Abdur-Rahman insists, “it is within constructions of sexual perversions that we find the most searing, astute illustrations and indictments of race-based inequality in the United States” (5). In the course of four chapters, she highlights important and underappreciated aspects of black protest fiction.

Abdur-Rahman employs feminist, queer and critical race theory as well as psychoanalysis and sociology to examine the intersections of race, sexuality and politics in African American literature and American culture, more generally. In so doing, she hopes to relocate queer studies from its central association with gender studies and place it in African American studies. In each chapter, Abdur-Rahman looks at a different form of “sexual aberrance” through close readings of multiple texts. She examines queer sexuality in antebellum slave narratives; black political activism and the homoerotics of lynching; desire in protest fiction in the mid-twentieth century; and the use of incest as a motif in black women’s literature of the post-civil rights era. In some cases, she analyzes the ways black writers represented the sexual perversity of whites, particularly in the chapters on slavery and lynching, while

at other times she addresses representations of sexuality in black communities.

In the first chapter, Abdur-Rahman analyzes the ways that slave narratives revealed the sadism of slave owners and masochistically reenacted those scenes in the text. Here, she reads Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Abdur-Rahman characterizes slavery as "a totalizing regime of domination" (4) and places emphasis on unspeakable experiences by reading "sites of suggestive silence and...representational impossibility" (28). Moreover, she traces contemporary sexual epistemologies back before the late nineteenth century, suggesting, "representations of sexual perversity under conditions of enslavement have contributed to notions of sexual alterity and to the ideologies by which aberrant sexual practices were named, domesticated, and policed in the first decades of the twentieth century" (26).

Abdur-Rahman turns her attention to lynching in the next chapter and reads William Faulkner's *Light in August* and Pauline Hopkins' *Contending Forces*. She chooses a work by a white male and black female to analyze the different investments each had in representing lynching. She argues that Faulkner presents lynching as "a gory homoerotic act meant to divest black men of the civic recognition, economic self-sufficiency, and patriarchal authority made possible by emancipation and enfranchisement" (53) while Hopkins recovers "the absent black woman in

the scene and script of spectacle lynching" by emphasizing "the rape of black women as the foremost expression of white racial terrorism" (53). This chapter emphasizes the role of sexuality "in waging racial warfare to manufacture white superiority" (78).

While the first two chapters focus on sexuality and oppression, in the third chapter, intersecting depictions of desire and resistance become much more apparent as Abdur-Rahman turns to interracial longing in African American literature of the mid-twentieth century. By reading Chester Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Ann Petry's *The Narrows*, and James Baldwin's *Another Country*, Abdur-Rahman shows how "These writers investigate the possibility of transforming the felt desire of sexual intrigue into a broader political vision and enactment of social and racial equality" (85). In this, the strongest chapter, Abdur-Rahman's readings raise important questions about the standardization of racial identities and, especially, the importance of interpersonal relationships in efforts to advance equality.

In the final chapter, Abdur-Rahman looks at the use of incest to depict "black familial ruin" as well as the decline of black nationalism from 1970 onward. The author analyzes Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*, Gayl Jones' *Corregidora*, Octavia Butler's *Imago*, and Sapphire's *Push* to uncover the way that incest, like literary depictions of lynching, represents a new way "to narrate the misshapen world, as a way to name a certain mechanism for

keeping specific people decidedly unfree in an environment of excessive license” (150). Incest serves as a motif which shows the legacy of slavery, critique notions of racial purity in black nationalist discourse, and show the destructive effects of capitalism, patriarchy and racism.

Abdur-Rahman concludes with a brief meditation on the death of Michael Jackson and how he challenged notions about black sexuality and highlighted its elusiveness. She closes by reaffirming the importance of representations of sexuality in African American literature “for conjuring the manifold crises that plague black life and for imagining a way beyond them” (155).

While she indicates from the outset that this is not a historical study, Abdur-Rahman constructs her monograph around four key time periods: slavery, the post-Reconstruction, post-war civil rights, and the post-civil rights era. The Harlem Renaissance and New Negro Movement are curiously absent from the text and might challenge her contention that the depiction of desire in black literary production was strongest in mid-twentieth century protest fiction. Some may also question Abdur-Rahman’s broadly construed definition of her queer subject, which includes armed revolutionaries, extraterrestrials, religious fanatics, lynch mobs, and much more.

Though Abdur-Rahman employs some historical approaches, *Against the Closet* is primarily a work of literary criticism. Still, it may be useful for the author to consider the historical context of these

works a bit more. For example, I wonder if the depiction of lynching in Hopkins’ *Contending Forces* and Faulkner’s *Light in August* might have been affected by the thirty-two years which separated their publication, during which time lynching declined significantly. Those who study African American history and the history of sexuality may glean useful material from this monograph when re-examining theoretical approaches to their research. Moreover, while this book may not find a home in any course offerings in history, *Against the Closet* would be a good addition to any advanced undergraduate or graduate course in queer theory.

Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman concludes her study by writing, “I have sought to illuminate the potential of transgressive sexuality to create a representational structure that expresses the longings of African Americans to achieve individual and collective freedom” (156). *Against the Closet* makes a strong case for the importance of this literary tradition in challenging inequality and offering a unique politics of liberation.

Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed, [\*If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of a Queer Past\*](#), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

By [Sean Grattan](#)

Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed’s fine book *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of the*

*Queer Past* begins with the declaration: “the sacrifice of spaces and rituals of memory to the lure of amnesia has weakened gay communities, both our connections to one another and our ability to imagine, collectively and creatively, alternative social presents and futures for ourselves” (1). In their telling, acts of un-remembering and amnesia have separated generational memories, which are systematically replaced by normative and conservative narratives that foreclose what gay world-making both could look like and has looked like.

By drawing on narratives of memory ranging from AIDS memorials, television shows like *Will and Grace*, manifestos, a reading of queer theory as a reaction to the AIDS epidemic, and art explicitly dealing with the AIDS epidemic, Castiglia and Reed describe an urgent need to critically engage in the particular ways that history shifts, is forgotten, or is reconstructed around a structure of “temporal isolation” between generations that they call “degeneration” (9). In following a desire to excavate and remember affective histories, Castiglia and Reed search for reparative collective memories that signal the paucity of sexual possibilities in the present.

Castiglia and Reed see important distinctions between history and memory that make memory a more useful category for archiving feelings, affects, and acts that might escape the historical record, and, crucially “because it is incomplete, fragmented, affect-saturated, and for these reasons continually open to the imaginative

processes of rearticulation, reinvention, and adaptation” (23). These incomplete and affect-saturated moments help lift the shroud off the remarkable effulgence of the past.

Unlike neoconservative gay commentators such as Gabriel Rotello, Michelangelo Signorile, or Andrew Sullivan who merely want to describe anonymous gay sexual cultures as destructive, traumatic, and immature, Castiglia and Reed (like Michael Warner, Jose Munoz, Samuel Delany, and others) describe the incredibly important role bathhouses played in educating gay men about the transmission of AIDS, and also, crucially, they highlight the networks of communication that arose from these anonymous, yet intimate, moments of contact.

Again, in avoiding the narrative of stigmatization disseminated by neoconservative commentators, Castiglia and Reed reposition the energy of the sexual liberation movement of the 1970s as informing the AIDS crisis in positive rather than negative ways. Thus, they demand a difficult and complicated grappling with the experiential fullness of the past instead of the winnowing down of the past and, concomitantly, a degradation of possible presents and futures.

The call for a battle over gay past moves into ways of memorializing that past. Castiglia and Reed wonder at the paucity of theoretical engagement with markers of queer pasts, most notably the Gay Liberation monument located in Greenwich Village in New York City.

Although it “stands at—arguably the—significant site in queer history, the banality of the figures in Gay Liberation contributes to its failure to create a place of memory” (79). In other words, as illustrative of the whitewashing of queer memory, Gay Liberation hides both the passion of lovers and the passion of the uprising. In doing so, the monument fails to capture the affective resonance of what it seeks to memorialize, and, like so many objects under consideration in *If Memory Serves*, the distance between affect and memorialization, memory and narrative, generates a reading that argues for the importance of holding onto the thickness of the past.

Though each chapter in the text offers exciting and surprising readings of representations of queer pasts, as someone deeply invested in queer theory Castiglia’s and Reed’s remarkable interrogation of the rise of queer theory as a multifaceted traumatic response to the AIDS crisis is the most striking insight in *If Memory Serves*. They argue that much second wave queer theory, with its insistence on mining negative affects like shame, rage, and loss, is a “post-traumatic response to the first wave’s own traumatized forgetting not only of AIDS but of the critical work of gays and lesbians living before AIDS” (146). Though they are the first to admit that linking a critical theory to a psychological diagnosis might seem far-fetched, Castiglia and Reed offer a nuanced and inspired reading of the second wave queer theory’s obsession with negative affects centered around questions of what kind of queer

experiences are lost if only sadness, rage, and loss hold any theoretical capital. As they remind us during a critique of *South Atlantic Quarterly’s* 2007 issue “After Sex?”, “focusing on negative feelings is not a psychic or historical inevitability, but a choice, and while that focus provides a useful counterbalance to the uncritical ‘pride’ and liberationist romanticism of some earlier rhetoric, much second-wave queer theory since the mid-1990s has privileged pessimistic affects in ways that not only seem, in Snediker’s words, ‘strangely routinized’ (Queer Optimism, 4) but that erase the sexual cultures of the 1970s while normalizing the traumatized loss of the post-AIDS generation” (156). Like the rest of *If Memory Serves*, their attack on “After Sex?” serves to remind us that there are other critical possibilities available and that always falling for the critical pull of the sad might, actually, become an uncritical and easy move. This is one of the central insights of Eve Sedgwick’s “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re so Paranoid You Probably Think this Essay is about You” (2003), and though Castiglia and Reed place Sedgwick in the pot of first-wave queer theorists avoiding AIDS (a move I disagree with), *If Memory Serves* is a profoundly reparative project.

Above all Castiglia and Reed ask us to think about the worlds foreclosed by the refusal to remember or to connect to the past and to rely, instead, on a normalized and “de-generational” conservative narrative. As Castiglia and Reed title their first chapter, this is a battle over the gay past, and it is a battle they seek to invigorate with

counter-narratives of love, passion, visibility, and joy, not with the aim of subsuming negative affects to positive ones, but with the hope that we remember life as a series of messy exchanges that are not easily straightened into a coherent and easy narrative.

Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed enter conversations with histories of AIDS, the rise of queer theory, memorialization, and the transformation of public space in *If Memory Serves* and, as such, the text would be useful to anyone interested in a thick and complex reading of the recent LGBTQ past.

Colin R. Johnson, [Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America](#). Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013.

[Lee Arnold](#), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania

Indiana University's Colin R. Johnson focuses his first book on the sex-lives of rural gay men. The sex lives of rural folk, in general, have always been a topic of interest, if not always scholarly at least in ribaldry. Johnson traces the interest in rural folks sex lives back to the eugenics movement in the country and draws a thread between these beginnings, through the Great Depression, World War II, and into the post-war era. Unlike other texts that focus on a region, *Just Queer Folks* straddles coast-to-coast, border-to-

border, documenting various aspects of (mostly) white gay male rural history in the first half of the century. Johnson's scope is ambitious and most of what he writes makes sense to the 20<sup>th</sup> average reader (rural or not), but one may not come to the same conclusions—namely that rural gays were fertile ground for same-sex expression and had a parallel, if not perhaps equal, experience as urban gays.

Like Johnson, this reviewer also grew up gay in the rural Midwest, yet I don't see the case he makes as clearly as he (or the writers of the blurbs on the back cover) does. His chapters remind me of columns of a building. Each of them are fine in their own right, but they seem to be missing a roof.

His first chapter, "Life Science: The Agrarian Origins of American Sexuality," deals with eugenics. Johnson writes, "Many American eugenicists were breeders--literally [his italics]. Their interest in eugenics had just as much to do with the nation's agrarian past as with its scientific future. This interest also had just as much to do with their desire to rationalize sex as an actual reproductive process as it did with their desire to rationalize preexisting racist sentiment, although eugenical thinking managed to accomplish both of these goals." (p. 49) Despite these portentous sentiments, eugenics took off in rural America. Johnson argues that eugenicists courted favor with the rural population by "...flattering them with claims that the future of the race depended heavily on their continued commitment to sound agricultural practice and country life."



(p. 49) This I understand, but not necessarily how it relates to the next (and remaining) chapters of the book. This stance does not necessarily imply that rural gay men were more apt (or not) to act out on same-sex expression in the decades to come.

Chapter two deals with rural vice and sex education. The dilemma was, does too much sex education increase vice rather than prevent it? Like eugenicists, early-twentieth-century moral reformers saw something special in rural life. For them, the countryside represented both an opportunity and a challenge...Unless rural youth were regularly reminded that they lived in a state of constant moral and physical peril where the matter of sex was concerned, there existed a very real possibility that the open countryside could fall victim to the same kind of degenerative forces there were slowly sapping urban populations of their strength, virility, and moral rectitude. (p. 79)

The above two chapters comprised Section One. Section Two proved more cohesive. Chapter Three, "Casual Sex: Homosociality, Homosexuality, and the Itinerant Working Poor," masterfully weaves accounts of same-sex bonding among drifters, grifters, and shirkers. These men, without families or societal ties were freer to deviate from the norm, sexually. If they got into trouble in one town, they could simply move on to another. Of particular interest was his take on Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. The two main protagonists, while not gay, are also not typical men: "If George and Lennie's relationship seems difficult

to categorize, it is probably because the notions of gender and sexual identity exclude the possibility that men can be truly intimate without being sexual." (p. 84)

Chapter 4, "Community Standards: Village Mentality and the Queer Eccentric," documents how rural and small town folk deal with the different in their own communities Johnson provides stories to rural folk who were sexually different who seem to also be tolerated in the day arguing, "...we have been mistaken, or at least too quick in making sweeping generalizations, about the inherent toxicity of rural areas and small towns with respect to queer behavior and queer forms of life." (p. 113)

Chapter 5, "Camp Life: The Queer History of 'Manhood' in the Civilian Conservation Corps," tells of life in the CCC camps during the Great Depression. These were six-month experiences for young men, to strengthen the nation's ecological balance. Run by the Department of the Army, they were regimented and (at least in the early years) very campy. Men dressed as women in entertainment revues and no one thought, apparently, anything about it. When not in drag, there was plenty of homoerotic horsing-around. The irony of this is not lost on Johnson. "...even as homosexuality was undergoing a process of exclusion from the public sphere in U.S. cities, droves of men were actively participating in the creation of their own uniquely homosocial publics in some of the most isolated and remote areas..." (p. 156)

All of the above chapters focus primarily on men. The next chapter, “Hard Women: Rural Women and Female Masculinity,” therefore seems to be borderline tokenizing. He documents the un-girliness of rural women, tethered either with children or (perhaps literally) the plow. He gives particular (and peculiar) attention to women’s feet and their lack-of proper, attractive footwear. While proper footwear was always a problem for poor rural women, does being shoeless really make a woman masculine? This is the weakest of Johnson’s chapters and propositions.

The last chapter, simply “Conclusion: Mansfield, Ohio,” focuses on gay male sex-stings in the bathroom below a public park, in lovely downtown Mansfield—an evidently accurate toponym—in the 1960s. Hidden cameras revealed men having sex with other men in stalls, irrespective of their marital status. Some was for fun; some was for money. It is an odd segue to one of his conclusions: “...the struggle for sexual freedom depends on the efforts of all sorts of folks, including queers who have figured out ways to live, and in many cases live quite comfortably, in small towns and rural areas. This does not mean that we should all be packing up and heading back to the land. But it does mean that the political interests of city-dwelling lesbians and gay men are actually quite well served by queers who choose to do their world building in out-of-the-way places.” (p. 196) While the argument is clear, he fails to explain what the description of a sex-sting in Ohio has to do with gay “world building”?

The book is well written with sharp wit and soundly researched, but still doesn’t all fit together for me. It is primarily about gay white rural men. The chapter on women is a stretch and is, ultimately, disposable. The chapter on Mansfield also seems to be oddly placed, bordering on pandering. Only chapters 3-5 seem to really make sense in relation to one another—with possibly chapter 2 inserted as more of an introduction.

However, students of gender studies will find this study both useful and interesting—if not in the full sense which Colin Johnson had envisioned. Since Johnson’s result is not as seamless as the jacket blurbs imply, it may better serve as supplemental reading, as opposed to being a required text.

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