

DRASTIC DYKES AND ACCIDENTAL ACTIVISTS: LESBIANS, IDENTITY, AND
THE NEW SOUTH

by

LA SHONDA CANDACE MIMS

(Under the Direction of James C. Cobb)

ABSTRACT

Lesbian histories exist somewhere between the academic disciplines of history and gender studies. Southern lesbian histories barely exist at all. Charlotte, North Carolina and Atlanta, Georgia share an important place in New South lesbian history as sites of urban connection and identity formation. Within the social spheres of Atlanta and Charlotte, lesbians formed communities that changed over time in response to the shifting urban landscape. This historical analysis of Charlotte's and Atlanta's lesbian communities highlights the gaps in southern history, queer history, and women's history. Lesbians in these two southern cities will serve as the vehicle through which I seek to understand religion, race, politics, gender, economic development, class, and urban history in Charlotte and Atlanta. The development of Charlotte and Atlanta as bastions of the southern Sun Belt ideal rested on political and economic decisions that were heavily informed by religious influences. Religious conservatives held sizeable power in both cities, and often challenged economic or political commitments to seemingly immoral causes. These challenges necessarily informed identity and community creation for lesbians. The story I aim to tell is one of twentieth century southern identity—

created at the highest and lowest levels of power. This dissertation reshapes the story of southern women's history, but also the story of the twentieth-century Sun Belt South. Placing lesbians at the center of southern history is a vital retelling of a familiar story. My goal is to sharpen the edges of southern history and complicate traditional historical narratives. To broadly question tenacious stereotypes of gender and sexuality in the South is to topple the strongholds of southern history. By taking apart the familiar concepts of southern femininity, the southern belle, and genteel sexuality, my work seeks to upend historical narratives of southern women reframing them in a feminist, sexual, activist, and social light. Women who chose to live their lives with women in the New South challenged the traditional structures of gender, and created spaces that would define urban economies and reshape the urban landscape.

INDEX WORDS: Lesbians, Charlotte, North Carolina, Atlanta, Georgia, New South, Gay, Feminist, Identity

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DEDICATION

For Daddy, T, Copeland, and

In Memory Of

Betty H. Mims

1930-2002

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I have been fortunate to be a part of two extremely supportive departments in my academic career. While working on my master's degree at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, I came to know many fine professors, including Peter Thorsheim, Steve Sabol, Dan Dupre, Gregory Mixon, John Smail, Christine Haynes, and Mark Wilson. They are proof that historians exude goodwill, and their supportive advice has been invaluable to my development as a scholar. My advisor, Donna Gabaccia, offered a critique of my master's thesis that shaped my thoughts for the dissertation and helped me prepare for the next leg of the journey. Heather A. Thompson also offered important guidance on the thesis and the profession, and she remains incredibly supportive. Karen Cox was an excellent writing partner during this project, and I appreciate her willingness to thoughtfully read my work. Karen Flint and David Johnson have been good friends and confidantes—offering patient guidance and great company.

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human being. David introduced me to the business of this profession while working on the *Journal of Urban History*, and as his graduate editorial assistant he always treated me with the utmost respect. When I arrived at the University of Georgia, it was clear that David's words preceded me—and thankfully they were words of praise. His family has embraced mine, he shares my belief that Chilton County, Alabama grows the best peaches, and luckily he is my friend.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2002 I planned to attend a wedding in Augusta, Georgia where my partner would be a bridesmaid. We never made it to the actual ceremony though, because she was quite literally kicked out of the wedding, and ultimately her family of origin, because her family deemed her appearance too masculine and upsetting for the event. The father of the bride, and her uncle, called my partner just a few hours before the wedding. He lambasted her—taunting her appearance at the rehearsal dinner by calling her “Little Boy Blue,” and he warned that unless she could conform to the norms of their family, do something about her (clearly too-short) hair, and un-invite her guest (me), she should not attend the wedding.

This traumatic story framed the argument for my master’s thesis, in which I considered the meanings of southern femininity and lesbian identity in the South. By examining the historical underpinnings of these identities and the expectations that often surrounded them, I endeavored to expand their meanings. When I witnessed my partner’s painful experience in Augusta, Georgia, I knew that my historical research would focus on identities—southern, lesbian, and feminine, but I also hoped to finally settle my own identity frustrations as a native southerner, the granddaughter of Pentecostal tent-revival preachers, the daughter of white working-class Republicans, and a lesbian. My first encounter with southern identity, for example, came as a teenager at summer camp in Vermont. I distinctly remember how foreign my fellow campers seemed, and I was acutely aware of my appearance (big teased hair and quite a bit of

makeup) in contrast to the other bare-faced girls. Whether accurate or not, my camp friends and I quickly conflated these differences in appearance with our identities as Northern, or in my case, Southern.

When placed in a historical context this issue of identity is messy, and complex questions must be considered. For example, how do you identify or label historical actors (who might not claim a lesbian identity) for inclusion in a lesbian history narrative? What qualifies as “lesbian identity” for a particular project? In recent decades the rise of lesbian visibility in popular culture has muddied the waters of these questions. In the 1990s, tongue-in-cheek books like, *Lesbianism Made Easy*, or the unapologetic comic strip series *Dykes to Watch Out For* shared bookstore shelves with *Vanity Fair* magazine’s show-stopping August, 1993 cover photo of hyper-feminized model, Cindy Crawford performing a barbershop shave on the face of the very masculine female singer, k.d. lang, and *Time* magazine’s April 1997 cover featuring entertainer Ellen Degeneres declaring, “Yep, I’m Gay.”¹ When lesbian, like southern, is an identity infused with so many current meanings and cultural images, how do we limit or define a historical study focused on lesbian—or southern—identity? These questions provided an important methodological foundation on which I built the stories that are presented here.

The purpose of this project is to examine some southern women who loved women in the iconic New South cities of Charlotte, North Carolina and Atlanta, Georgia. As two of the leading southern urban centers these sites are connected by competing notions of metropolitan identity as presented by city leaders, and both served as home to lesbians who defined themselves in accordance with these urban identities. This study

¹ Helen Eisenbach, *Lesbianism Made Easy* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1996); Alison Bechdel, *Dykes to Watch Out For* (Ann Arbor: Firebrand Books, 1986).

stretches from the 1940s to the present and it begins with an exploration of the opportunities and connections that some southern women exploited in their efforts to find lovers and friends in private arenas and in public bar spaces. It examines the visibility that lesbian feminists embraced in the 1970s New South and the visibility displayed by Pride celebrations from the 1970s to the present. And in the final chapter, we come to understand the importance of economic, political, and religious institutions that often defined the urban landscape for southern lesbians from the 1980s to the present. This research is grounded in a mutual exchange between urban and lesbian history, and it blends these fields with women's history and queer history through a study of lesbian activists, individuals, and communities in two Sunbelt South cities. It expands our understanding of how sexuality shapes space in metropolitan environments, and demonstrates the importance of religious, corporate, city, and political leaders in defining urban spaces for queer people. New South women—lesbians—are the subjects through which we will come to understand the importance of urban history in Charlotte and Atlanta. Their stories are about money and class, and the privileges that whiteness affords. These intertwined categories often defined women's lives—in addition to, and sometimes independent from, their sexual identity.

Scholars have carefully analyzed and pondered questions of historical identity, and these concerns frame an important historiographical debate in the history of sexuality.² In a recent roundtable at the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians,

² Notable works on this topic include, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994); John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992); Leila J. Rupp, " 'Imagine My Surprise': Women's Relationships in Historical Perspective," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1980); Elizabeth W. Knowlton, " 'Only a

historian Nan Alamilla Boyd suggested that lesbian history should be understood as the history of an idea rather than a history of a defined group or people.³ This provides a useful approach for the work presented here, especially when we consider how sexual identity gained meaning in different places and spaces, or that it had little—or possibly no—meaning for others. “Earlier generations,” as the historian John D’Emilio has rightly noted, would likely be “puzzled by the categorization of a group of people on the bases of their erotic behavior.”⁴ As the medievalist scholar Judith M. Bennett argued, the troubling nature of lesbian identity and The Lesbian in history creates a conundrum for scholars in the field. Tracing identity across space and time can often paralyze researchers. For Bennett, the idea of “lesbian-like” —rather than a static and named identity—is perhaps the best approach:

It may seem crazy to create yet another piece of jargon and to link to it a troubled term like “lesbian.” After all, no one today is really sure what “lesbian” means. Are lesbians born or made? Do lesbians delight in sex with women exclusively or can the term encompass those who enjoy sex with men as well as women? . . . And, indeed, might sexual practice be less determinative of lesbianism than *desire* for women, *primary love* for women (as in “women-identified women”), or even *political* commitment to women (especially as manifested in resistance to “compulsory heterosexuality”? Lesbian theorists offer us debate on these questions, not firm agreement, and this definitional fluidity has been a source of both anxiety and flexibility. Nevertheless, the ever-changing contemporary meanings of “lesbian” have often been belied by a persistent assumption of a core lesbian identity, especially when used in such expressions as “she came out as a lesbian.” This invocation of identity is both affirming and embarrassing. To me, it still speaks powerfully about the revelation of self I felt when I first had sex with another woman in 1973, but it also, in 2000, seems to be unduly naive,

Woman Like Yourself’—Rebecca Alice Baldy: Dutiful Daughter, Stalwart Sister, and Lesbian Lover of Nineteenth-Century Georgia” in *Carryin’ On in the Lesbian and Gay South*, ed. John Howard (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); and Nan Alamilla Boyd, Introduction to *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

³ Leisa Meyer, “Roundtable: Lesbian Generations,” Conference Reports by CLGBTH: Fifteenth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Friday, June 10, 2011, entry posted June 26, 2011, <http://clgbthistory.org/2011/06/26/roundtable-lesbian-generations> (accessed March 25, 2012).

⁴ D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 9.

simple, and maybe even silly. Still worse, it can work to obfuscate critical differences.⁵

Martha Vicinus echoed Bennett's frustrations, when formulating her approach to lesbians in history: "To paraphrase Judith Bennett, I am not making a case for lesbian history, but for the central place of lesbians in history."⁶ Vicinus further observed that, "lesbian history has always been characterized by a 'not knowing,'" and this leaves historians the task of finding and identifying a history that we know exists but that has often been denied.⁷

In one of the most accessible considerations of this topic, James C. Cobb bewailed the scholarly obsession with identity—and the painstaking analysis of its varied meanings and definitions. But after grappling with a "theoretical thicket of literature," Cobb emerged with a useful analysis of southern identity that is equally applicable to lesbian identity.⁸ He observed that whether "real or imagined ... the most common foundation of group identity is a shared sense of a common past," and this is instructive when we consider how little of a common past lesbians can claim or locate.⁹ Lesbians in the South embraced a variety of identities, but none with as scant a common past as the identity of lesbian. According to Cobb identities are always formed "in relation to other perceived oppositional identities against which they are defined."¹⁰ Lesbians who identified as southerners would often be positioned against a prevailing conception of a

⁵ Judith M. Bennett, "Lesbian-Like' and the Social History of Lesbianisms," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, no. 1-2 (January/April 2000): 10.

⁶ Martha Vicinus, "Lesbian History: All Theory and No Facts or All Facts and No Theory?" *Radical History Review* 60 (Fall, 1994): 67.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁸ James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

presumably normative, northern identity, just as their homosexual identity might be placed against the hegemonic identity of heterosexuality. Finally, Cobb argues that identifying *with* a group is very different from “identifying solely *through* groups.”¹¹ Certainly this applies to lesbians and gay men in the South who sometimes identified with “southern,” “queer,” “Baptist,” “African American,” “feminist,” “wife,” “lesbian,” “parent,” “banker,” “Latina,” “activist,” and all of the countless other identities that we might imagine. Women made choices while negotiating the borders of these varied selves.

As one popular magazine recently intoned, southern women “are forever entangled in and infused by a miasma of mercy and cruelty, order and chaos, cornpone and cornball, a potent mix that leaves us wise, morbid, good-humored, God-fearing, outspoken and immutable. Like the Irish, with better teeth.”¹² Portrayed as belles, magnolias—*Real Housewives* even—but not dykes, white southern women are often conflated with Hollywood’s southern characters like Scarlett in *Gone With the Wind*, and Truvy, M’Lynn, Ouiser, Clairee, and Shelby in *Steel Magnolias*. They are the belles of country music—epitomized by Loretta Lynn and Patsy Cline. Black southern women face a different set of stereotypical portrayals having been historically cast as racist caricatures like the Mammy or Aunt Jemima, and most recently and controversially as Aibileen and Minny in the novel and movie adaptation of *The Help*. According to historian Grace Elizabeth Hale, the Mammy crossed the color line between the worlds of black and white in the South and she sacrificed self-directed femininity and sexuality for

¹¹ Cobb, *Away Down South*, 333.

¹² Allison Glock, “Southern Women,” *Garden & Gun*, August/September 2011, under “A New Generation of Women Who are Redefining the Southern Belle,” <http://gardenandgun.com/article/southern-women> (accessed June 11, 2012).

a role that simultaneously supported white women's pedestals while being defined by them.¹³ Although it is a struggle to find the history of southern black lesbians, Hale's work reminds us that black women's culturally created identities were often imposed upon them. The many layers of southern black women's identity requires a wider and more careful consideration that I will offer here, but it is important to not sweep black women into a monolithic narrative of southern lesbian history—just as we should avoid including any women who might have actively eschewed the identity of lesbian, dyke, or southerner. These identities are historically produced and I have worked hard to avoid blanket statements about identity or community that would not reflect the experiences or desires of the women examined.

If southern women are the stuff of Hollywood and popular culture, tied to their troubled racist past of identity entanglement, what does this mean for lesbians who called the South home—women who were lesbians and southerners? Southern and lesbian are not fixed and indisputable identities, therefore Bennett's concept of "lesbian-like" allows women to occupy a central place in history, as both Vicinus and Bennett condone, but without labeling or defining their identities ahistorically. I hope to expand the "shared sense of a common past" that Cobb suggests is necessary for a group identity formation, and to examine southern women on their own terms—independent from the "oppositional identities" that have often framed our understanding of southerners and lesbians.¹⁴

¹³ Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 105-6.

¹⁴ A note on word choice: I use "queer" when I mean to include the variety of identities, gender variations and sexually marginalized people that may or may not identify with neatly defined categories of lesbian, gay, or straight. It is meant to suggest behaviors or spaces that existed outside of normative gender and sexual categories. In general, I use "lesbian" to refer to women who chose this word as appropriate for their own self definition. I occasionally use the word "gay" to include lesbians and gay men as a general group.

When possible, I have chosen to use the language and labels that narrators and historical actors chose for themselves. For example, the word “struggle” appears frequently in my work, and is significant because it is taken directly from the language of the feminist movement where women referred to being “in the struggle” against patriarchy.¹⁵ In the same way that these women struggled to define their identities and agendas both personally and publicly, I struggled mightily in this research with questions of identity—southern identity, feminist identity, lesbian identity, and urban identity.

This is not a generic history of some lesbians somewhere, but it is the history of specific women who sometimes identified as lesbians or who engaged other women sexually, or who loved other women, or who sought the company of women in queer venues—all in two archetypal New South cities. In his recent book on southern autobiography, historian John Inscoe extols the value of individual experiences in history: “Just as no place is too small to contribute to the bigger picture of region or of the historical forces that defined it, no individual life is too minor.”¹⁶ Individual stories, constructed through a variety of sources including oral histories, create windows that allow us an occasional glimpse of lesbian southern life.¹⁷ This glimpse is partial and it is complex. This complexity is due in part to the use of oral history sources and the limitations of memory inherent in these sources. Some narrators for this project might remember stories and events through a queer lens simply because oral historians and the

¹⁵ When I had the great fortune to meet the southern lesbian feminist writer Minnie Bruce Pratt in 2011, she signed my copy of her book, *S/HE* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1995), with this inscription: “Yours in the struggle.”

¹⁶ John C. Inscoe, *Writing the South Through the Self: Explorations in Southern Autobiography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 4.

¹⁷ For a brief statement on a theoretical use of “windows,” see Catherine Marshall and Gary L. Anderson, “Rethinking the Public and Private Spheres: Feminist and Cultural Studies Perspectives on the Politics of Education” *Journal of Education Policy* 9, no. 5 (1994): 169, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0268093940090514#preview> (accessed June 11, 2012).

projects that they created were identified as specifically queer or lesbian and gay.¹⁸ It is possible then that narrators occasionally adopted the language of the project—defining themselves by the terminology of the project and using markers such as “lesbian,” “gay,” or “queer,” when they would not have employed these labels at the time of the actual events.

As the anthropologist Allesandro Portelli considered the methodology behind oral history he reminded scholars that: “What is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings. Thus, the specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies, not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory.”¹⁹ Memory shapes the retelling of history, and the stories produced are created through combining archival scraps with the “changes wrought” by the memories of narrators. Although I began this project with the intention of conducting many oral histories, I have chosen instead to follow the available archival sources and previously created oral sources, consciously putting aside the mire of the complexities discussed above. Archival sources produce an additional difficulty, however, since the privileges of whiteness, education, gender, and class are replicated in the archives. This is a narrative of specific people, places and memories, and it is also a story inspired by specific archival materials. This necessarily means that a vast sea of materials and experiences are not included here, and often these

¹⁸ See, for example, Wesley Chenault, “The Unspoken Past: Atlanta’s Lesbian and Gay History,” *Atlanta and Historians*, the 2007 Supplement to the 121st Annual Meeting, *Perspectives Online*, December 2006, <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2006/0612/07AMSupplement/07AMSup19.cfm> (accessed June 12, 2012). Most of the narrators who are profiled in my research participated in a project titled “Atlanta’s Unspoken Past”—under the direction of the Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center. This effort was inspired by earlier efforts of the 1990s non-profit group, “The Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History Thing.”

¹⁹ Allesandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) 52.

exclusions are based on socioeconomic class, gender, education, and race. Southern lesbian stories can be told through gay men's print culture, educated white women's journals, letters, and newsletters. The result offers some clarity while obscuring other realities.

In George Chauncey's pioneering monograph, *Gay New York*, he argues that he could not have written a history about lesbians and gay men together without making lesbian history "an appendage" to gay men's, or vice-versa.²⁰ In an effort to avoid this pitfall, I have chosen to focus solely on women, with the caveat that my access to women's experiences is often gained through archival materials devoted to, or created by, gay men. In the same way that gay men's histories are often more visible in the archives, Atlanta's lesbian past is rich in comparison to that of Charlotte. Therefore, my access to the history of lesbians in Charlotte is often gained through Atlanta's better-preserved lesbian past. This necessarily means that Atlanta occasionally receives more attention in my work due to the sheer availability of sources. For example, the first chapter is almost entirely devoted to women in the Atlanta region because there is very little information available on lesbians (or gay men) in Charlotte prior to 1970.

Just as specific women's experiences outline this history, it is also the story of specific places. Charlotte, North Carolina and Atlanta, Georgia serve as urban centers of the Southeast and symbols of the New South, and as such they offer unique opportunities to understand southern lesbians in urban communities. But this is not an apples-to-apples comparison—in population or otherwise. In its earliest years Charlotte served as a trading hamlet—a village—with an official city charter signed in 1768 and a nickname, the

²⁰ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), 27.

“Queen City,” harkening back to Queen Charlotte, the wife of King George III.²¹

Although the city of Atlanta dates to 1837—almost seventy years after Charlotte’s founding date, it formed around the final railroad stop for the Western and Atlantic lines and in less than a decade it was connected to the entire Southeast by rail.²² Charlotte, on the other hand, “functioned quietly for more than a century as an agricultural trading village,” according to historian Thomas Hanchett.²³ In spite of Charlotte’s seventy year lead, by 1900 county population numbers served as evidence of the marked difference in size, with Charlotte’s Mecklenburg County weighing in at 55,268 and Atlanta’s Fulton County at 117,363.²⁴ Charlotte and Atlanta were on divergent paths at the dawn of the twentieth century, and size would play a decisive role in the development of both.

Rather than comparing two very different urban areas, I am instead interested in exploring the ways in which Charlotte’s leaders grappled with the desire to replicate the success of Atlanta, especially after World War II, when boosters in Atlanta (whose 1950 population stood at 331,000 as compared to Charlotte’s 134,00) were clearly focused on leading the region. If they cared at all about the city of Charlotte, they would not admit it. Throughout the last half of the twentieth century and beyond, Charlotte’s leaders have strived to emulate Atlanta’s successes and ideally see their city overtake it as the beacon of the New South. In the 1970s some Chamber of Commerce leaders in Charlotte, whose metropolitan population had reached three quarters of a million compared to metro

²¹ Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 14.

²² “Atlanta,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org> (accessed June 12, 2012).

²³ Hanchett, *Sorting Out*, 14.

²⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990: Georgia*, Richard L. Forstall, ed., Population Division (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, March, 27, 1995), <http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/ga190090.txt>, and *Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990: North Carolina*, <http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/nc190090.txt> (both accessed June 11, 2012).

Atlanta's two million, recognized that perhaps a middle path of controlled growth would be the better route.²⁵ But growth has always been at the heart of city management and moderation would not satiate growth-hungry business leaders for long.²⁶ As Hanchett noted, "Charlotteans are quick to tell you that theirs is the biggest and fastest-growing city in both North and South Carolina, with a metropolitan population well over a million people, second only to Atlanta as the urban heartbeat of the Southeast."²⁷ In a recent book of scholarly articles examining Charlotte's evolution as a globalizing city in the New South, the Charlotte/Atlanta comparisons are clear. Historian Matt Lassiter chronicles the city's wanna-be status in his article titled, "Searching for Respect: From 'New South' to 'World Class' at the Crossroads of the Carolinas," while political science scholar, Stephen Samuel Smith, notes that Atlanta is "the paradigmatic New South city with which Charlotte, in the eyes of its civic boosters, has long been playing catch-up."²⁸ And in the Epilogue, geographer Owen J. Furuseth acknowledged that Atlanta is Charlotte's "longtime" rival.²⁹

Competition with Atlanta permeated the mindset of business owners.

Comparisons to Atlanta have often been a theme for writers who analyze Charlotte, and this reverberated throughout local business promotions and advertisements. Some Charlotte business owners built their persona on the "oppositional identity" of Atlanta,

²⁵ Real Estate Center at Texas A&M University, "Population MSA: Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord, NC-SC," <http://recenter.tamu.edu/data/pop/popm/cbsa16740.asp>; "Population MSA: Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, GA," <http://recenter.tamu.edu/data/pop/popm/cbsa12060.asp> (both accessed June 25, 2012).

²⁶ Matthew D. Lassiter, "Searching for Respect: From 'New South' to 'World Class' at the Crossroads of the Carolinas," in *Charlotte, NC: The Global Evolution of a New South City*, ed. William Graves and Heather A. Smith (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 33-34.

²⁷ Hanchett, *Sorting Out*, 1-2.

²⁸ Stephen Samuel Smith, "Development and the Politics of School Desegregation and Resegregation," in Graves and Smith, 210.

²⁹ Owen J. Furuseth, "Epilogue: Charlotte at the Globalizing Crossroads," in Graves and Smith, 284.

against which they were often defined.³⁰ A new gay bar planning to open in 1984 based its potential for success on the presumed standard of the popular gay bar Limelight in Atlanta and boasted that they were “shooting for a light show that’s better than the Limelight’s in Atlanta.”³¹ In a 1981 *Charlotte Observer* article, staff writers who hoped to uncover Charlotte’s “gay community” noted that patrons at a relatively new gay men’s bar in Charlotte boasted of its status in comparison to the presumed gold standards of heterosexuality and Atlanta: “Classier than any straight bar in Charlotte, they say. As nice as any gay bar in Atlanta, they say.”³² And in a recent laudatory article in the short-lived magazine *Charlotte Food & Wine*, a restaurant owner excited by his establishment’s new location in Charlotte’s posh South Park neighborhood, called it “the ‘Buckhead’ of Charlotte,” referring to Atlanta’s wealthy upscale shopping district—an area labeled by Atlanta’s tourist industry as “The Beverly Hills of the East.”³³

Charlotte’s business owners, whether gay or straight, repeated the oft-heard refrain that positioned Charlotte as a city yearning to reach the height of New South urban identity as idealized through the image of Atlanta.

Charlotte’s history has often been overlooked by historians, just as lesbians have frequently been excluded from historical narratives.³⁴ Charlotte’s political and business leaders succeeded in crafting a city with no distinctive identity, and perhaps for this

³⁰ Cobb, *Away Down South*, 6.

³¹ “Charlotte May Get Huge New Gay Bar By Easter,” *Q-Notes*, February, 1984. Front Page Records, 1999-0421, Box 51, DU.

³² Ken Friedlein and Polly Paddock, “Charlotte’s Emerging Social Scene,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 27, 1981.

³³ Pamela Shaw, “Firebirds SouthPark: Polished Casual Dining,” *Charlotte Food & Wine*, December/January, 2008-09, 7; “Buckhead, Georgia,” Atlanta.com, LLC., <http://www.atlanta.com/neighborhoods/buckhead.aspx> (accessed June 15, 2012); “Buckhead-Atlanta,” Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau, <http://www.atlanta.net/buckhead/> (accessed June 15, 2012).

³⁴ Two notable exceptions are Hanchett, *Sorting Out*; and Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

reason its history is occasionally sidelined. In a response to a 2010 blog post examining the rivalry between Charlotte and Atlanta, one commenter retorted: “Not that Atlanta’s a model city, but I’ve been to Charlotte many times and it’s boring as hell. It may be on the rise, but there’s nothing interesting about Charlotte either historically or culturally.”³⁵ As historian David Goldfield has observed, many residents who now call Charlotte home are here to make money and enjoy the excellent weather, but they are rarely committed to building a community or identifying with the city’s past.³⁶ This tangential relationship between Charlotte’s residents and their home city is transparent in the stories of lesbian and gay activism, as the Queen City’s queer organizers often encountered apathetic members who lacked an allegiance to Charlotte.

Matthew Lassiter’s study of Charlotte, Atlanta, and other Sunbelt metropolises in *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, argues that the Queen City’s moderate racial history succeeded where other comparable cities (both in the South and nationally) failed. A brief examination of desegregation, based on Lassiter’s research, provides a useful framework for understanding the subsequent experiences of lesbians in Charlotte and Atlanta. Charlotte’s city leaders created a successful plan built on an understanding that race and class are inextricably linked and that true racial integration would require socioeconomic diversity, which could only be achieved by demanding that some suburban areas join the city. Although Atlanta’s leaders led a successful campaign in 1952 to annex suburban areas, including the wealthy and predominately white Buckhead, in order to avoid a “majority-black city” and increase the tax base, a similar

³⁵ Tony [pseud.], comment on “Charlotte Who? Mayor Kasim Reed Says Atlanta Still on Top,” Political Insider with Jim Galloway, comment posted March 17, 2010, <http://blogs.ajc.com/political-insider-jim-galloway/2010/03/17/charlotte-who-mayor-kasim-reed-says-atlanta-still-on-top/> (accessed June 15, 2012).

³⁶ David Goldfield, “A Place to Come To,” in Graves and Smith, 17.

1966 suburban annexation attempt failed.³⁷ Successful suburban annexation did take place in Charlotte in 1974, and according to Lassiter, this move earned the Queen City the bottom slot in the fiftieth largest cities ranking.³⁸

Both cities possessed exceptional models based on the “politics of moderation” in the 1960s aftermath of *Brown v. Board of Education*, but it would be the triumph of busing in Charlotte, forced by the 1971 Supreme Court decision in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, undergirding the boosterism of city leaders who portrayed Charlotte as the “prosperous and progressive embodiment of the latest New South” in the 1980s.³⁹ But rather than learning from Atlanta’s mistakes, by the 2000s Charlotte repeated them. Succumbing to sprawl and class-based segregation, Lassiter observed that: “At some point during the subsequent three decades [meaning those following *Swann*], the patterns of residential segregation still clearly evident in metropolitan Charlotte simply became de facto and natural rather than de jure and justiciable, at least in terms of constitutional law.”⁴⁰

Charlotte succeeded temporarily in its quest for exceptional city status and as a beacon of the New South, until busing was repealed. Lassiter argues that this repeal was fueled by corporate interests—including the booming Nations Bank—focused on bringing northern workers (black and white) to Charlotte who did not want to be bothered with the busing issue.⁴¹ In recent years, the city faced resegregation exacerbated by the tremendous suburban growth that continued the trend of residential segregation—making

³⁷ Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 53.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

³⁹ Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 210. For further discussion on this point see, Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 99; 209-12; James C. Cobb, *Industrialization and Southern Society* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 112; and Cobb, “Too Busy to Hate,” in *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-1990*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 122-50.

⁴⁰ Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 328.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 218-221.

it difficult to maintain school integration by busing.⁴² City leaders, heavily influenced by corporate interests, followed the wishes and demands of suburban families who did not want their privileged children attending school with poor children from housing projects.⁴³ Just as corporate leaders wielded power and ultimately oversaw the return of segregation to Charlotte, religious leaders asserted their dominance in the face of a growing and visible gay community in the 1990s and 2000s. In contrast to the post-*Brown* desegregation battles, they eschewed the opportunity to adopt a “politics of moderation” in their relationship with the city’s lesbian and gay citizens—often overriding and ignoring support from Charlotte’s growing banking industry for lesbians and gay men. If Charlotte’s leaders aspired to rival Atlanta, they were willing to concede on this issue.

City and corporate leaders in Atlanta often welcomed, and even fostered, the growth of gay visibility and the resulting queer tourism. But no matter how much Charlotte’s leaders promoted growth and longed to be like Atlanta, this move was not imitated. Atlanta’s first gay Pride celebration was held in 1970, just a year after the uprising led by bar patrons at New York City’s Stonewall Inn, while Charlotte did not celebrate a community Pride event until 1981.⁴⁴ In 1993, Atlanta participants in the Southeast Lesbian and Gay Business Expo rallied around the power of the gay, albeit elite and primarily white, dollar. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*’s coverage of the expo recognized that, “Gay and lesbian consumers are finding their dollars courted more aggressively because marketing surveys show that, compared with the general

⁴² Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 213-215.

⁴³ Goldfield, “Place to Come To,” 15-16.

⁴⁴ For information on Stonewall and the gay liberation movement in the immediate aftermath of the riots, see John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 231-9.

population, they are more affluent, more educated and spend more for travel and entertainment.”⁴⁵ Supported by what would become the first gay Chamber of Commerce in the U.S. to be recognized with 501c-3 status, the 1994 expo theme for Atlanta was “The Gay Buck Stops Here.”⁴⁶

With its metro population at 5.3 million in 2011, Atlanta’s Pride festival rivals celebrations in San Francisco and New York City, with an estimated attendance of 300,000.⁴⁷ Charlotte’s fledgling festival moved to a private venue funded by Bank of America in 2006 because of virulent protests by the conservative religious group Operation Save America whose leaders urged Charlotte’s mayor, Pat McCrory, to remove the festival from its previous location in a public uptown park.⁴⁸ While Charlotte’s gay Pride proceeded in Bank of America’s privately-owned and concealed Gateway Village space, corporate sponsors such as Delta Airlines, Bank of America, Coca-Cola, and Bell South openly embraced Atlanta’s celebration in centrally-located Piedmont Park—the site of lesbian softball and bars in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁹ For many lesbians and gay men, Atlanta lived up to Mayor William B. Hartsfield’s promise that his was a city “too busy to hate.”⁵⁰ Although Charlotte’s metropolitan population of 1.8 million left it smaller relative to metro Atlanta in 2011 than it had been forty years earlier, its pattern of significant and sustained growth meant that its well-chosen Chamber

⁴⁵ “Gay Buying Power: Expo 93 to Showcase Businesses,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, July 16, 1993.

⁴⁶ The Atlanta Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, “AGLCC History,” <http://www.atlantagaychamber.org> (accessed June 11, 2012).

⁴⁷ Laura Douglas-Brown, “Atlanta Pride Celebrates 40 Years,” *GA Voice*, October 1, 2010, <http://www.thegavoice.com/index.php/community/atlanta-Pride/1228-atlanta-Pride-celebrates-40-years> (accessed June 11, 2012).

⁴⁸ On Charlotte’s struggles over gay Pride and public park usage, see Karen Shugart, “Charlotte Pride is Delayed, Not Dead: They’re Here, They’re Going to Have a Festival, Get Used to It,” *Creative Loafing*, April 26, 2006, <http://charlotte.creative loafing.com/gyrobase/Content?oid=oid%3A30103> (accessed June 11, 2012).

⁴⁹ Lesbians, softball, and Piedmont Park are discussed in chapter 2.

⁵⁰ Cobb, *Selling*, 128.

of Commerce slogan, labeling the city as “a great place to make money,” proved true for many queer people. Still their financial success in the Queen City did not buy them a supportive community, and city politicians set aside opportunities to tap the burgeoning gay market.⁵¹

Charlotte and Atlanta are not representative of all southern lesbian communities; the South is too regionally diverse to pursue such a claim. Nevertheless, these cities offer unique opportunities for this research, in part because of their urban rivalry—look no further than the 2006 fight for the NASCAR Hall of Fame—and their geographic proximity. After Charlotte won the Hall of Fame battle, Mayor Pat McCrory acknowledged that the city had “learned from Atlanta’s mistakes,” and that city leaders had enjoyed the advantage of “growing up second” behind Atlanta.⁵² In a 2010 *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* blog titled, “Charlotte Who? Mayor Kasim Reed says Atlanta Still on Top,” the increasing competition between the two cities was palpable—especially in Reed’s recognition that Atlanta would indeed lose ground to Charlotte if it did not “make strides on transportation, education, water and the arts.”⁵³ This story of the often one-sided urban rivalry offers a rich milieu where city leaders, corporations, and southern lesbians position themselves as participants in the urban New South. Lesbians carved out space for identity formation in a region that is often dismissed wholesale when one is looking for a queer place to be or a queer history to explore.

⁵¹ Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising: How the South is Shaping American Values, Politics, and Culture* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1997), 154.

⁵² Dan Chapman, “Rivalry to be Economic King of South Heats Up,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, May 10, 2009, http://www.ajc.com/business/content/business/stories/2009/05/10/charlotte_atlanta_economy.html (accessed June 15, 2012).

⁵³ Jim Galloway, “Charlotte Who? Mayor Kasim Reed Says Atlanta Still on Top,” Political Insider with Jim Galloway, entry posted March 17, 2010, <http://blogs.ajc.com/political-insider-jim-galloway/2010/03/17/charlotte-who-mayor-kasim-reed-says-atlanta-still-on-top/> (accessed June 15, 2012).

CHAPTER 1

OPPORTUNITIES

On a stormy night in Atlanta, 1942, two young women pulled over in a car at the Bobby Jones Golf Course on Northside Drive. It was there that they shared their first kiss together: “And, boy, ooh! All the pins and needles, all the carrying on!” Ginny Boyd’s mind raced with excitement and confusion as the driver of the car asked her, “Have you ever been in love with a woman?” Boyd managed to squeak out, “I think so.” She had cared for girls in junior high school, was always protective of them, and even used church as an opportunity to hold hands and pursue a neighborhood classmate. But now she knew. “All these obvious things that I had done and felt, didn’t know what I was doing, didn’t understand why. All this is running back and forth through my head.” At eighteen, Boyd suddenly understood what her feelings for girls had meant, and sitting with this woman in her car, her attraction for women began to make sense.⁵⁴

Boyd was born on May 4, 1924, in Atlanta, Georgia, and died there on March 28, 2006. She graduated from high school in 1942 as the class valedictorian, and was soon working for Southern Bell, which offered Boyd her first real chance to connect with a woman, date her, and ultimately understand her own intimate desires. As early as elementary and junior high school, Boyd wanted to be with girls, but she had “no idea at the time,” it just seemed natural.

Let’s see, I was in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. And she was a year behind me. I’d walk her to school. I’d help her with her homework. Turned out her

⁵⁴ Ginny Boyd, “Atlanta’s Unspoken Past Oral History Project,” Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center (hereafter cited as AUP-AHC).

mother was an alcoholic. So she spent almost all her time down at our house. And I protected her. Oh, I tell you, had no idea what I was doing!

But while at Southern Bell, she met a woman who would ultimately lead her to that first kiss on Northside Drive.

I went to work at Southern Bell in the accounting department, and there was a girl that worked there . . . she and I just sort of hit it off. And she said, 'Let's go to a movie one night.' Sounded great to me. So we went to a movie, and we held hands through the movie. I tell you, when I look back, everybody that came in contact with me knew, must've thought I was the dumbest human that ever walked around on two legs. So, bless their hearts. So we went back to a movie . . . the next week.

Ginny Boyd's story is quite similar to other southern women's stories of the 1940s and 1950s. The paths she followed were typical. Boyd made choices on these paths, however, that led to love, connection, and intimacy with other women. Her story is a white southern woman's history. It is a story of Atlanta's women in World War II and after. It is a story of southern lesbian history too.

In the same year that she came to understand her love for women, at the age of eighteen in Atlanta, Boyd shot herself as the result of an abusive relationship with a lover. Boyd was so overwhelmed by the painful abusive nature of the relationship, she took her lover's gun, and after a verbally abusive exchange, she shot herself in the back. "I know that sounds ridiculous," recalled Boyd, "but I picked the gun up, walked in there where she was talking on the telephone, and I had it in my hand here, leaning up against my back, with my thumb against the trigger. And I walked in there, and I said, 'Will you please tell my parents that I love them?'"⁵⁵ If this relationship was indicative of what it would be like to date women, Boyd decided she would rather die. After her arduous recovery she could have returned to work at Southern Bell where her boss held her job

⁵⁵ Boyd, AUP-AHC.

during her recuperation, but she left instead seeking a place “where there wouldn’t be people that knew” her, and probably fearing rumors after the shooting.⁵⁶

After leaving Southern Bell, Boyd threw herself into her work at what would later become Lockheed, the Bell Aircraft Company. Bell Aircraft offered better pay and improved advancement opportunities in comparison to other employment options for women. The Bell workforce also included a relatively high concentration of women, employing approximately 10,000 women out of 28,000 workers during the war. They were, according to historian Clifford Kuhn, “Atlanta’s versions of Rosie the Riveter.”⁵⁷ World War II radically altered the economic landscape in Atlanta with the help of the war industry effort. Manufacturing corporations, like Bell Aircraft, not only brought new jobs, but the influx of soldiers who passed through Atlanta on the way to Fort McPherson, located at the edge of the city limits and Fort Benning in nearby Columbus, Georgia, stimulated Atlanta’s local economy. Some black workers were able to move into positions previously unavailable to them because of their race, and as a result enjoyed an increase in earnings, thereby boosting their economic participation in Atlanta’s growing wartime economy.⁵⁸ But the importance of Bell Aircraft cannot be overstated. It “transformed Marietta from the small seat of rural Cobb County to one of the main industrial centers of the Sunbelt,” observed historian Thomas A. Scott, and it was here that Ginny Boyd met a nurse named “BeBe.”⁵⁹ According to Boyd her time with “BeBe” was not a relationship, this was true of many of her early liaisons with

⁵⁶ Boyd, AUP-AHC.

⁵⁷ Clifford Kuhn, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 362. Thomas A. Scott, “Bell Bomber,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-1014> (accessed November 9, 2011).

⁵⁸ Kuhn, 353, 364.

⁵⁹ Scott, “Bell Bomber.”

women, but she described their involvement as intimate, and there was plenty of “fooling around. We were just having a good time. And we would go out with a lot of different people. We’d go to all these different places. I think the main place that I can remember going, that I knew was where gay people congregated, was out on Peachtree.”⁶⁰ This place was the Tick Tock Grill.

Ginny Boyd “practically lived” at the Tick Tock Grill because she knew that gay people would be there. From 1948-1959 the Tick Tock, located at 1935 Peachtree Road Northwest in Atlanta, was owned by Martha Louise Allen, but Ginny knew her as “Lou.” When Allen’s father had a heart attack, Ginny waited tables (something she had never done before), collected the money, and closed the restaurant at the end of the night. Boyd was not employed by Allen, but the owner was comfortable leaving her business in Boyd’s hands. Allen trusted Boyd, and Boyd was comfortable at the Tick Tock. It was “like a Waffle House,” with a bar, booths, a jukebox, and a short-order cook. The Tick Tock offered Boyd and her peers—nurses, interns, and office workers—a place to be gay. “When there was nobody straight in there you’d get up and dance in the little bit of room you had on the dance floor, you know. And, oh, I did love to dance.” Boyd “got a lot of mileage out of dancing,” and she danced sexily, slowly, and with “close bodily contact.” In spite of the occasional “stray straight couple” that might wander in, the Tick Tock Grill was a site for lesbian community and connection.⁶¹

Historians might never know of the Tick Tock Grill as a lesbian gathering place if it were not for Boyd. The Tick Tock Grill was not strictly a lesbian bar; nor did it

⁶⁰ Boyd, AUP-AHC.

⁶¹ Ibid. Address and dates of operation for the Tick Tock were obtained from the Atlanta City Directory, accessed at University of Georgia’s Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Georgia Room.

advertise to gay clientele in any way. Yet, Boyd's memories of a restaurant resurrect a southern lesbian history that could just as easily have been laid to rest with Boyd in 2006. Studying lesbian history means locating places where alternative sexual identities were often unrecognizable to a heterosexual majority. It requires historians to take scraps of historical material and link them with the clues of human memory. When Boyd's memory failed, there were public spaces that were potentially lost forever as sites of lesbian connection. Without Boyd's identification of the Tick Tock Grill as a place for gay people to gather we would operate under the assumption that the Tick Tock Grill was just another southern diner. What would be the tragedy in that? The tragedy would lie in silencing a history of women who operated outside the social norm. These were women who, at least occasionally, lived their lives in violation of the expected norms for southern women. When Ginny Boyd, a native Atlantan, danced sexily with other women at the Tick Tock Grill in 1950s Atlanta she was a rebel and certainly not a traditional southern belle. Boyd's behavior at the Tick Tock challenged the historical monolith of southern women's history: a history about straight women, often focused on women's activism, a history that has only recently included black women, and one that has yet to expand its definition to include gay women.⁶²

Boyd's memories highlight a largely white southern lesbian history. The majority of Boyd's social public spaces during the 1940s and 1950s were probably limited to white patrons and heterosexual women with male escorts, and finding a place to dance that provided acceptance was vital. She frequented a straight bar near the current Atlanta

⁶² On this point, see Virginia Bernhard et al., eds., *Hidden Histories of Women in the New South* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 1. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr., eds., *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Meridian, 1990) It is interesting to note that this pioneering work on lesbian and gay history was seen as recuperative in the same way that southern women's history was also focused on rescuing lost voices from history.

Braves stadium location where a police officer (related to a woman in Boyd's group of friends) offered protection from straight men's unwanted attention. She also spent time at an African American bar that provided safe and accepting space. Boyd eventually bought a house not far from the same area, but unfortunately did not recall the name of the black night club. In retelling the story of her time there, the importance of her white privilege, her separation from black people generally, and black lesbians specifically is clear.

“Well, they built a subdivision along in there that was available only to ex-service people. So, we got an apartment there, and then I bought the house from there. So, we went from right around Lakewood to Forest Park. And there was a black night club close by there, and we'd all sort of gravitate with, finally wind up with one or two cars with eight or ten or twelve people (laughs), and we'd go to that black night club a lot. And dance with each other.”

When asked if “they” (the black patrons) minded the white lesbians coming in.... Boyd says that they were SO nice—“you'd have thought we were some kind of queens, you know.”⁶³ It is intriguing that she remembers feeling welcome and that she and her friends were treated as “queens,” probably speaking to her place of white privilege. It is possible that she and her friends were attracted to the black bar not only because it was close by and tolerant, but also because there was no risk of being seen or bothered by other whites. Boyd and her friends exercised white privilege in crossing this boundary, one that could not be crossed in the reverse.⁶⁴ Boyd used the black night club as a low-risk venue for connecting with her gay friends. Boyd's social circle did not regularly include black lesbians in the 1940s and 1950s, in part because the anonymity provided by Atlanta's growing populace extended to white lesbians who could pass as appropriately feminine or

⁶³ Boyd, AUP-AHC.

⁶⁴ Wesley Chenault, “An Unspoken Past: Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History, 1940-1970” (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 2008), 77-8.

seek out protection to enjoy straight spaces that would allow for lesbian socialization.

This anonymity did not extend to black lesbians who had to contend with their vulnerability as black women and as lesbians. Their visibility came with a higher risk.

In their pioneering history of working class lesbians, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis show that black lesbians in Buffalo, New York tended to socialize in private spaces, as the anonymity necessary for public socializing would not have provided protection because of their race. “A primarily Black gay and lesbian bar would have been too vulnerable to racist attack. And the process of integration of gay bars did not occur in Buffalo until the 1950s, and still caused tension well into the 1960s.”⁶⁵ It is possible if population increase truly provides greater anonymity for socialization as Kennedy and Davis suggest, that black lesbians in Atlanta did find public spaces for lesbian socializing in the 1940s and 1950s—spaces that allowed for social secrecy. Atlanta was a city with a sizeable black population in the 1940s, and by 1959, 36 percent of Atlanta’s city population was African American.⁶⁶ In comparison to Buffalo in 1940, Atlanta’s black population was almost six times greater—potentially allowing for a black lesbian gay community that was socially visible.⁶⁷ “No other city matched Atlanta,” historian Karen Ferguson observed. It was “home to the

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 43.

⁶⁶ Andy Ambrose, “Atlanta,” *The New Georgia Encyclopedia*, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2207> (accessed November 1, 2011).

⁶⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Georgia – Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Large Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990*, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/GAtab.pdf>, and *New York – Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Large Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990*, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/NYtab.pdf> (both accessed November 11, 2011). In 1940, Atlanta’s black population was approximately 34 percent (104,533) of the city’s population, in comparison to approximately 3 percent (17,694) of Buffalo’s population. The black population of Buffalo more than doubled (36,745) by 1950, whereas Atlanta’s black population remained sizable in comparison (121,285) with modest growth. This black population boom in Buffalo probably explains the 1950s integration in Buffalo’s gay bars. Additionally, it suggests that a large enough black populace existed in Atlanta in 1940 to allow for black lesbian anonymity.

South's largest population of college-educated African Americans and a crucial birthplace of the reform vision that drove the new generation of black elites." This generation was "unified in its devotion to uplifting black Atlantans."⁶⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois's "talented tenth," a concept embraced by black elites at Morehouse College in Atlanta, acted as a liaison between the uneducated and less savory black community and the white power structure. Respectability was crucial to black elites, as Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has shown, but this respectability of course would exclude the "legions of African Americans who did not and could not conform to the gender roles, public behavior, and economic activity deemed legitimate by bourgeois Americans but which the forces of Jim Crow white supremacy sought to prevent black people from achieving."⁶⁹ Black lesbians who sought a public and community identity would certainly be separate from the black elite who sought societal acceptability through uplift. They were shut out by their race from a lesbian community and by their class from a powerful black elite community.

Boyd's military service would also be a segregated experience, both racially and in terms of gender. But it offered her significant opportunities for liaisons with other women, all provided under the umbrella of her white privilege. At Fort Des Moines, Iowa, like many of her female contemporaries, Ginny Boyd would find opportunities to pursue her attraction for women. The largest and first of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps/Women's Army Corps opened there in 1942, and in 1945, Boyd left Bell Aircraft and joined the military.

⁶⁸ Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 3. On the politics of respectability, see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

When she arrived at Fort Des Moines at the age of twenty-one, she trained as a surgical technician. Boyd was an acting sergeant of her barracks at one point during her training, and she remembered working very hard to challenge a general at her base who was strongly opposed to women in military service. Her goal was to impress the base leadership in order to earn weekend passes. She was authoritarian with other women in her barracks. “The girls hated my guts, because I’d make them work their butts off when we were gonna have a white glove inspection. Out of the three barracks we were the only ones that passed, so we got a weekend pass to go into town and the other two barracks had to stay on base. So all of a sudden they couldn’t buy me enough beers.”⁷⁰ Boyd had used these passes to travel to Des Moines where she would entertain and socialize with women who were “gay” and those who were “straight as a stick.” She sought out clubs that were considered off limits and occasionally found female officers there dancing with each other. She would join them in dancing, and their shared secret was understood. “But you don’t tell on them, and they don’t tell on you.”⁷¹

Although it was clear to Boyd who was gay and who was not, she worked hard to claim ignorance when pushed on the issue. “They couldn’t force me to say what I knew.”⁷² A handbook distributed at Fort Des Moines warned against public dancing with other women while in uniform or wearing haircuts that were too masculine. Similar warnings were issued at Camp LeJeune in North Carolina, but these warnings were often ignored once basic training was over. Efforts to quash lesbian activity in World War II were not only unsuccessful, they often served to foster lesbian identities and communities. As Alan Bérubé has shown, lesbians and gay men would bring this

⁷⁰ Boyd, AUP-AHC.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

newfound awareness of their sexuality home after the war, and in the South—as in other regions of the country—this was met with varying degrees of acceptance.⁷³

Boyd’s story of her sexuality and military service during the World War II era is a classic example of the well noted importance of the war and its impact on white lesbians and gay men. Her life followed a familiar trajectory of paid work and military service and a return to paid work in a city where a lesbian community could be found for those who had the tenacity to explore. The same-sex environments available during the war fostered opportunities for women and men to explore homosexual feelings and even create public spaces for socializing. Boyd described herself as a protector of women while she served in the military, continuing her junior high interest in protecting bullied female classmates. She was a tough woman who was not afraid of being discovered as a lesbian. “You have to— to be afraid, you have to care. And I didn’t care. For a long, long—most of my life. After that—after shooting myself, I didn’t care.” Boyd dated women and actively sought their company while in the military. In describing her sexuality at the time, she actively chose the word “gay.” Some might use the labels “butch” “dyke” or “femme” but Boyd didn’t like those labels. “I’ve never wanted to be a man, in other words. I’ve never wanted to be a male substitute. I liked a woman because she was a woman. And I wanted her to like me because I was a woman. Not a male substitute, or vice versa.”⁷⁴

The culture of the 1940s was inseparable from the culture of World War II. John D’Emilio and Allan Bérubé have shown that the war set in motion a variety of factors that permanently altered lesbian and gay social life. According to D’Emilio, World War II was a

⁷³ Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (New York: Plume, 1991), 59. See also n 99, p. 304.

⁷⁴ Boyd, AUP-AHC.

national coming out experience for lesbians and gay men.⁷⁵ Kennedy and Davis show that viewing World War II and the homefront through the lens of specific lesbian experiences provides a fresh perspective on the period—for lesbians in particular—and women generally. “World War II not only provided jobs for women, but created a social atmosphere which encouraged women’s independence. More women could socialize together outside of the home without endangering their reputations. They also could decide how they would spend their money, using it for leisure as well as necessities. In addition, the absence of sixteen million men actually made work and neighborhoods safer and more congenial for women. These changes were instrumental in the movement of white lesbian social life from private networks to bars in the 1940s.”⁷⁶

World War II certainly provided Boyd opportunities for a gay social life, but she had eagerly explored and found such opportunities before the war as well. Her connections with women were not entirely private prior to her military service. The temptation to ignore this history is great, not only because it poses challenges to the dominant representations of southern women as heterosexual, but because it is so difficult to find. The result is politically focused lesbian activist histories, generalized southern gay histories that draw on limited source material, or a focus on gay men’s experiences with an occasional lesbian reference. These histories ignore the possibility that lesbians like Ginny Boyd did meet each other publicly, interact sexually, and have a damn good time in the notoriously homophobic South.

In the 1940s, Mary Hutchinson and Dorothy King began a passionate relationship that would last until Hutchinson’s death in 1970. Discovering the details of their

⁷⁵ D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 23-24; Bérubé, 6-7, 98-127.

⁷⁶ Kennedy and Davis, 64. See 398-99n11, for pertinent references to D’Emilio’s and Bérubé’s research on gay social life and World War II.

relationship paints a picture rarely seen in lesbian history of the 1940s and 1950s—an intimate sexual bond existing outside of Boyd’s bar scene and seemingly outside of a butch/femme community. Originally from Atlanta, Hutchinson was a successful artist who spent several years in New York City as a teacher in the Works Progress Administration’s Federal Art Project. She was most proud of her affiliation with the Independent Painters and Sculptors in America in New York City. Through this organization, she realized her belief that art should be taken out of the “luxury class” and placed squarely in the domain of “every day life.”⁷⁷ Hutchinson returned to live in Atlanta in 1945, and actively pursued Dorothy King, a music teacher, establishing a passionate and measured relationship with her.⁷⁸ Restraint would define their entire connection. After Hutchinson’s death in 1970, King reflected on their twenty-five-year interaction as lovers. She wrote a letter to herself expressing enormous grief and struggling with her inability to restrain herself in the way Hutchinson would have wanted: “I must work to practice the restraint that she so naturally lived . . . because my continued lack of restraint could be so easily misunderstood—as indeed it might well already have been.”⁷⁹

While trying to manage her emerging passion for King, Hutchinson was bombarded with professions of affection from Ruth Layton. The result was a dramatic triangle of affection culminating in Layton’s struggle with mental illness, which was possibly connected to her efforts to understand her own sexuality and her partnership with a man only referred to as “Pete.” Layton desperately wanted to care for Pete, but noted to

⁷⁷ Willa Gray Martin, “Mary Hutchinson of Atlanta, Whose Paintings Have Won Numerous Prizes, Failed in Art Course at College,” *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, March 24, 1940.

⁷⁸ Emory University Libraries Finding Aids, Mary E. Hutchinson and Dorothy King papers, MSS 1096, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, <http://findingaids.library.emory.edu/documents/hutchinson1096/> (accessed October 17, 2011).

⁷⁹ Dorothy King to herself, July 30, 1972, Mary E. Hutchinson and Dorothy King Papers, MSS 1096, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University (hereafter cited as HK-EU).

Hutchinson that, “he is not as good looking as you are and does not have lovely eyes as you do.” Layton could only express the hope that “someday we will be together” and seek Hutchinson’s reassurance that she still wanted that too. By 1946, Hutchinson had clearly established a relationship with King, and Layton was excited to visit Hutchinson in Atlanta. But she was cautious in her pursuit: “Frankly, do you want me to come. I can cancel my reservation and get my money back if you don’t. On the other hand if I get frightened about it and just can’t make it the last minute, you will have to understand. I do feel strange about it and afraid at times. I can’t explain it all very well but it would be so nice to see you.” Appended to her typewritten letter was Layton’s handwritten plea: “Just a sec. Rec. your letter. Answer me truthfully—Will it be hard on Dorothy or on you & Dorothy if I come? I realize I must not interfere with anything—it would not be fair from any point of view. Be sure about this because I am nothing for future & she may be.”⁸⁰

The details of the Hutchinson, Layton, King triangle are not entirely clear, but Ruth remained an important figure in both Hutchinson’s and King’s lives. The poignant and occasionally painful struggles to forge a love relationship, face up to their sexual desires, and balance these emotional trials with the daily maintenance of life are fascinating. These are not women simply out at the bar cruising for a girlfriend or seeking a community. Although this certainly may have been a part of life for King, Hutchinson, and even Layton, theirs is also a very different and even perhaps a typical story of relatively privileged white women who loved women in the middle of the twentieth century.

Remarkably candid and sexual intimacies occasionally seep through the lines of Hutchinson’s letters. Hutchinson wrote about sleeping with King—“as it should be,” and she imagined what it would be like during one of their frequent separations to have King

⁸⁰ Ruth Layton to Hutchinson, March 21, 1946, HK-EU.

there with her to “take her in” on her shoulder. On one occasion, after a missed opportunity to talk by phone, Hutchinson was blatantly flirtatious: “I was so disappointed not to speak to you at least on Saturday, even if I didn’t see you. It was my regular Saturday tub time,—and I was really all wet!”⁸¹

For the first few years of King’s and Hutchinson’s relationship, both resided with their mothers and lived for occasional visits with one another, otherwise, daily letters traveled the approximately thirty-eight miles between Hutchinson in Atlanta to King in Newnan, Georgia. Both women struggled with the responsibilities of living with and caring for their mothers, and both communicated affection from their mothers to the other. Attention to their mothers was a constant in their lives, as Hutchinson begged for King to write more letters and arrange more visits. This living arrangement was certainly characteristic of the 1940s—when women were expected to live at home until marriage. The two regularly shared information on their mothers and exchanged good wishes, food, and gifts from each woman’s mother to the other. The four women often visited together, even sharing holidays together. Certainly the two daughters hoped for more time together, but their obligations to their mothers did not inhibit their ability to foster a loving and passionate relationship. Although just how King and Hutchinson’s families understood their relationship is unclear, the arrangement was socially appropriate for unmarried women in the 1940s. Hutchinson’s career as an artist was successful and nationally recognized, but it is her identity as a southern woman that leads her identity as an artist in a 1940 South Carolina newspaper profile. Even here, Hutchinson was highly focused on her mother and

⁸¹ Hutchinson to King, date unknown, HK-EU.

her late-in-life turn to artistic expression. Her affection for her mother was a constant point of discussion and focus.⁸²

Hutchinson was featured in a *Spartanburg Herald Journal* article series titled, “Southern Accent in New York.” Her “disheveled and freckled” appearance, and her “blue slacks,” were noted in the very opening of the article, along with her “blonde, tall and lanky” features.⁸³ Wearing slacks, though certainly more common, at least temporarily, during World War II, remained an issue of concern for lesbians, women in the South, and in the United States generally. When lesbians wore slacks, however, it was an issue of discussion related specifically to a butch identity and how to assert this identity by wearing pants in the butch/femme bar culture of the 1940s and 1950s.⁸⁴ The narrators in *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* remembered that wearing pants was a most important change during World War II, “allowing lesbians to more openly express their erotic interest in women through their clothing. Since all women were now able to wear pants to work and to purchase them in stores off the rack, butches who only wore pants in the privacy of their homes in the 1930s could now wear them on the street.”⁸⁵ In 1950s Atlanta, wearing pants was a butch signal in the lesbian community. When describing her identity in dating relationships Nell Stansell of Atlanta remembered that when her partner wore dresses, “I obviously was the butch since I had on pants.”⁸⁶

When southern women wore slacks, they were challenging the longstanding expectation that the white southern woman was a southern belle, and with a belle identity came the expectation of femininity, often signaled by dresses or skirts. The *Spartanburg*

⁸² Martin, “Mary Hutchinson of Atlanta.”

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Kennedy and Davis, 39.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Nell Stansell, AUP-AHC.

Herald Journal featured Hutchinson because she was a southerner in New York—eager to claim her as a “southern artist.” By highlighting her decision to wear pants, the article noted a fashion choice that had significant implications. Hutchinson was wearing pants in 1940, prior to the common practice of women wearing pants publicly during World War II due to wartime factory work. The dramatic 1942 article “Wives—But Without Husbands,” published in *The New York Times*, detailed the supposedly sad state of women abandoned on the home front during World War II. One of the nameless women in the article, who worked as a secretary in a wartime munitions factory, bemoaned her husband's exposure to the flirtations of the stereotypical southern belle while he was stationed at Fort McClellan in Alabama: “‘If a marriage weathers this, it's foolproof,’ declares a 21-year-old-bride, with a drab aside on ‘the Southern belles’ in Alabama, where her husband of three months is stationed.”⁸⁷ The article demonstrates a tendency to automatically associate the South with southern belles—eager to steal other women’s husbands with their wily, feminine charm. A 1945 *Washington Post* article portrayed southern belles as the ultimate solution to the wartime threat of “aggressive” and masculine women:

Servicemen who have been complaining in magazines and in their own publications of American girls’ self-absorption and aggressiveness may be heartened to know that social prophets foresee women here, as their marriage bargaining power declines, developing more of the continental social deference toward men. Also, surveys of women both in service and in war plants indicate that postwar competition for husbands will top that for jobs. Certainly the present craze for feminine finery suggests a revival of southern belles rather than an upsurge of Amazons.⁸⁸

Women’s work during World War II threatened white women’s femininity, but once they put their “Rosie the Riveter” experience behind them, southern white women confronted a distinct expectation of femininity attached to the southern belle myth.

⁸⁷ Nancy MacLennan, “Wives—But Without Husbands,” *New York Times*, April 26, 1942.

⁸⁸ Malvina Lindsay, “Women vs. Men,” *Washington Post*, July 18, 1945.

Wearing pants would remain an issue of specific concern for lesbians even beyond the World War II era. The November, 1957 issue of *The Ladder*, a national publication of the first lesbian rights organization, Daughters of Bilitis, found the issue of wearing slacks worthy of note and reprinted a full page rant from the *San Francisco Examiner* on the shamefulness of women wearing pants. The reprint was titled, “On Wearing Slacks,” and the introduction suggested that questioning pants-wearing was a matter of “poor taste” and an “old beef.”⁸⁹ In this issue on the very next page, *The Ladder* took up the question of femininity and lesbianism. In a forward-thinking and almost prophetic article, the journal examined the possibility that femininity might be expanded to include a variety of traits, rather than limited and narrowly focused prescriptions. “Were we to describe femininity as merely a sex-membership, rather than a limitation on our humanity, most of us would have no trouble accepting our womanhood. But in as much as ‘femininity’ involves to some so many alleged and negative traits such as lack of courage, originality and intelligence, it is against this specific concept that so many Lesbians revolt.”⁹⁰ Even in the early 1970s, Ann McKain, a professor in Atlanta, remembered that wearing pants was a decision requiring fortitude. “I was the first woman to wear a pants suit at Georgia State University. I remember thinking, I’m going to do this. I ran into the vice provost that day and he just stared at me. I thought oh God, he’s going to tell me to go home and change clothes.”

Mary Hutchinson might have challenged some feminine appearance codes in her personal presentation, but her decision to live with her mother certainly kept her femininity intact. She did long for time alone with King, however, writing: “If I could just see you and

⁸⁹ “On Wearing Slacks: New Twist to an Old Beef,” *The Ladder*, June 1957, 11, EU.

⁹⁰ Betty Simmons, “On Accepting Femininity,” *The Ladder*, June 1957, 12, EU.

talk with you, without it being a mater party.”⁹¹ The possibility of time alone together for the couple certainly increased with King’s purchase of a new car. In comparison to Hutchinson’s letters to King, there are very few letters from King that remain. It is — perhaps purposeful—that the particular letters offering very careful descriptions of this important purchase were preserved.⁹² King rang in the new year of 1954 with a new light blue Chevrolet, and was eager to share every financial detail with Hutchinson. In the end, King was able to manage the down payment with help from her uncle, and she cautioned Hutchinson not to share the details of the financial arrangement. Hutchinson noted that the new Chevrolet would have “absolutely no ‘fandangles’ of any kind . . . no clocks—no ash tray.”⁹³ But she was eager to replace her other car and clearly eager for Hutchinson to approve. Just as Ginny Boyd would fully realize her attraction for women in a car, King excitedly anticipated a new year and also, perhaps, the opportunities a new car would bring to her relationship with Hutchinson. The car represented independence to King, and to the automobile consumer culture of the 1950s.

The impact of the automobile in the South was markedly different than in more established cities in the Northeast. In a growing and industrializing midsize metropolis like Atlanta, the city formed around the demands of the car by adapting its built environment and infrastructure based on the needs of automobile transport.⁹⁴ The increase of automobiles parked at Piedmont Park in Atlanta, for many years a site for intimate connections, became a

⁹¹ Hutchinson to King, June 19, 1957, HK-EU.

⁹² My assumption on the “purposefulness” of these letters being saved is based on the fact that King survived Hutchinson by many years, and since many of King’s letters are not included in the collection it is probable that she made some choices about which letters would be preserved.

⁹³ King to Hutchinson, January, 1954, HK-EU.

⁹⁴ On this point see Chenault, “An Unspoken Past.” He argues that transportation is “intimately” tied to Atlanta’s history and to lesbians and gay men’s ability to forge relationships with one another. On the importance of the automobile’s impact on Atlanta, Chenault draws from David Goldfield and Blaine Brownell, *Urban America: From Downtown to No Town* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), 345.

major concern in the 1950s. The increase of parking by heterosexual couples—to engage in intimate activity—brought an increased visibility to gay men who also appropriated the park’s space for cruising and sex.⁹⁵ For lesbians, this visibility would not have been possible, as their very presence in a public space without a male escort would have raised suspicion. Though increased policing would challenge gay men’s ability to use the park as a public sexual space, women alone in the park after dark would be problematic largely because they were women without men—independent of their behavior or activity.

In light of the increased policing of Piedmont Park in the 1950s, Ginny Boyd’s time at Mrs. P’s tavern on Piedmont Park is even more significant. Boyd spent a considerable amount of time and money at the Piedmont Tavern. The bar became a gay gathering place due to the frequent patronage of lesbians, especially women who played softball in Piedmont Park. Lesbians made Mrs. P’s a gay bar.

I was going to art school on the GI Bill, and this was while Jean and I were together, and I’d go down there to Piedmont Tavern . . . facing the park at lunch time. Because I had very little money, and she served a big bowl of chili for the money. So, and then I got to where sometimes after classes, I’d go down there, and Jean would come on down, or other friends that I’d talk to, would come there, the next thing they know Piedmont Tavern wasn’t a straight bar anymore. It was a gay bar.⁹⁶

As historian John Howard notes, installing lights in Piedmont Park in 1956, in an attempt to curb primarily heterosexual intimacies, literally exposed the park as a site for

⁹⁵ John Howard, “The Library, the Park, and the Pervert: Public Space and Homosexual Encounter in Post-World War II Atlanta,” in *Carryin’ On in the Lesbian and Gay South, South*, ed. John Howard (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 114.

⁹⁶ Boyd remembered, with great humor, Mrs. P telling customers that “Ginny is responsible for my first Cadillac,” Boyd, AUP-AHC. It is interesting to note that the Atlanta Tomboys 17th Anniversary Program (The Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History Thing Collection, AHC) has an entry for a “Mr. and Mrs. H.E. Phillips” as boosters for the softball team, but I have yet to make a connection between the Phillips who owned Piedmont Tavern, and those who were boosters for the Tomboys. Daneel Buring, *Lesbian and Gay Memphis: Building Communities Behind the Magnolia Curtain* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 137-142. Buring notes the importance of softball to Memphis lesbians, and also confirms that lesbians in Memphis would frequent bars that were mixed (straight and gay clientele). To document the actual change made by lesbians from Piedmont Tavern to “Mrs. P’s”—a successful gay bar that thrived throughout the 1970s—is remarkable.

homosexual intimacies as well. Howard argues further that this effort to expose gay men's presence in the park ultimately created a larger sense of gay community in general.

“Visibility fostered identity, and with identity came community.”⁹⁷ Gay men were able to rally around a shared identity of a search for sexual space. Lesbians in Piedmont Park, however, would have a very different journey. While Dorothy King's new Chevrolet would insure that she could independently, safely, and reliably travel to be with Mary Hutchinson, the extent of their visibility as two women without male escorts was still restricted. Ginny Boyd could seek the shelter and community provided in the bar off Piedmont Park with her fellow softball lesbians, but it is probable that the bar community was not an appropriate or even desirable option for Hutchinson and King. It is also important to note that in 1954, Hutchinson was forty-eight years old and King was forty-six. Ginny Boyd was thirty. Age most likely played a role in Boyd's willingness to be visibly associated with a lesbian bar and softball culture, whereas Hutchinson and King were perhaps less comfortable with such socializations because bar culture often catered to a younger clientele. Lesbians like Ginny Boyd needed the safety provided by Mrs. P's at Piedmont Park, since their very presence as women alone or coupled with another woman in the park would have been socially suspect.

Although the culture of the homefront during World War II may not have propelled all women who loved women into the public spaces of the bars, their visibility and independence was certainly aided by this cultural shift. For Ginny Boyd, World War II brought dramatic changes both in her career and in her ability to create sexual and deepening bonds with other women. But the scholar Lilian Faderman suggests that in spite of the explosion of the gay bar subculture taking place in cities like New York and San Francisco,

⁹⁷ Howard, *Carryin' On*, 118.

making it “immeasurably easier to be a lesbian” immediately following the War, some women who were “far from the nascent pockets of the lesbian subculture” would maintain “the innocence of an earlier era” in their relationships.⁹⁸ It is possible that Hutchinson and King fall into this category. In fact, they would not have necessarily labeled their relationship as lesbian. In describing one such couple in Nebraska, Faderman shows that the pathology associated with lesbianism did not jibe with the affectionate and passionate relationships that women shared. One woman’s “knowledge of the medical texts that described lesbianism as a physiological or psychological problem gave her no information about her own experience, which she knew was not sick, and did nothing to reveal to her the growing society of women who were creating a lifestyle around their affectional preferences.”⁹⁹ Further, the pathologizing of lesbianism following World War II was striking. In an era of increased conformity and consensus, the 1950s were not exactly a propitious time for many women to explore or claim a lesbian identity. According to Lillian Faderman, the 1950s saw an increase in the focus on the lesbian as a “sicko.” Stoked by the newfound independence of women during World War II, a desperate need to return to normalcy drove the psychoanalytic argument that lesbianism was a condition to be cured and one that could never truly lead to fulfillment or satisfaction.¹⁰⁰

In the postwar South, societal consensus was increasingly under assault by the racial invectives of the NAACP and an increasingly consumer-driven culture that would leave the agrarian South even further behind. The 1950s in the South were anything but staid, and the increased visibility of lesbianism—and to a greater degree gay men—played a

⁹⁸ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992) 128-9.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 130-138.

role in the southern upheaval that followed the war. The tempting narrative of postwar conformity does not always apply in the volatile, fast-growing South, where Boyd found opportunities to be gay, but where the region as a whole often missed overwhelming opportunities to achieve revolutionary change.¹⁰¹

Hutchinson's story is strikingly different from the story of Ginny Boyd. Scholars typically long to tell *the* story of lesbians—a monolithic community of like-minded and similarly identified women. Hutchinson and King's relationship is private and passionate, and not a consciously activist or public lesbian statement. It is worth noting that historians of sexuality who typically rely on oral histories to document the lives of lesbians are necessarily drawing from projects that select candidates because they strictly identify as lesbian, gay or queer, or at least support the overarching queer historical goal of the project. Such histories are important to the narrative presented here, but broadening our understanding of lesbian history requires that we mine the increasingly available sources that are not identified or archived primarily as a gay collection or part of a queer history project.

Mary E. Hutchinson's papers happen to include intimate snapshots of her vibrant lesbian relationship with Dorothy King and her other potential lover, Ruth Layton. Yet these papers are primarily those of an artist, a southern woman artist who identified herself as such. There are many conclusions we could make about her quiet lesbianism, but perhaps it is best to read the documents as they exist and conclude only what is clear. Hutchinson and King might have frequented women's bars in 1940s and 1950s Atlanta, just like Ginny Boyd, but we cannot know that from the sources that remain. In keeping with 1940s lesbian

¹⁰¹ On this point see Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

culture, King and Hutchinson might likely have avoided the bar scene for fear of losing their jobs. This was of concern particularly for teachers working with children. Middle class women might be some of the most invisible lesbians in this history, as they did not have the financial sustenance to manage large house parties or the money needed to gain access to spaces for lesbian socializing in comfortable and safe environments.¹⁰² Clearly, much of the social world inhabited by King and Hutchinson was private and primarily heterosexual. According to the path-breaking study of lesbian bar culture in Buffalo, New York, this private world excluded lesbians like King and Hutchinson from the bar community support network that focused on lesbian identity, support for family struggles, and maintaining their employment.¹⁰³ It is hard to know how much this possible isolation from a lesbian community found in bars actually affected King and Hutchinson, but they seemed to have enjoyed a vibrant network of friends, mostly women and a few men. One brief reference from a New Year's letter suggested that King and Hutchinson shared friendship with another lesbian and her partner—a partner who would be referred to simply as a “friend,” just as King would refer to Hutchinson as she grieved her death.¹⁰⁴

Had they participated in an oral history project like “Atlanta’s Unspoken Past,” as Boyd did, there might have been a very different story to tell, and it might reveal an overtly lesbian or even activist identity that they adopted later in life. That there is no evidence of this does not diminish the value of the story that their relationship offers. The more such stories are told and integrated into the larger historical landscape, the more complete that landscape becomes. Hutchinson’s story adds layers that are significant and enlightening in their own right and it is not necessary to make her something she was not.

¹⁰² On this particular point and on class in general, see Kennedy and Davis, 43-44.

¹⁰³ Kennedy and Davis, 65.

¹⁰⁴ HK-EU.

Similarly, the famed southern writer Carson McCullers did not claim a publicly visible lesbian identity, but her life opens another window into southern queer lives of the 1940s. McCullers's friendship with David Diamond, a contemporary and a successful American classical music composer, reveals her thoughtful consideration of her sexuality and desire.¹⁰⁵ Writing candidly about her struggles to understand her own sexuality, McCullers offers an interesting counterpart to the thriving love between Hutchinson and King, and the active social engagements of Ginny Boyd. McCullers identified herself as a sexual invert, and ultimately her internal dialogue—occasionally external to Diamond—became the basis for her famously troubled tomboy character, Frankie in *The Member of the Wedding*. As the literary scholar Judith Halberstam notes, the novel is “remarkable” for having come from the “repressive cultural climate of the American South in the 1950s.”¹⁰⁶ The creation of Frankie took place in McCullers's mind and in the culture of the 1940s—the very same southern culture that Boyd, King, and Hutchinson navigated while forging their own paths as southern lesbians.

McCullers was inspired by Havelock Ellis, the noted English sexologist, as she grappled with her own “inversion.” John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman credit Ellis with being part of an early twentieth century movement that associated sexuality with identity. Ellis was part of a “modern regime of sexology” that “was taking sex beyond a procreative framework.” Sex was “becoming a marker of identity, the wellspring of an individual’s true nature.”¹⁰⁷ McCullers wrestled with her own identity and sexuality and turned to Ellis’s

¹⁰⁵ On the origins and nature of McCullers's relationship with David Diamond, see Virginia Spencer Carr, *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1975), 146-185.

¹⁰⁶ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 189.

¹⁰⁷ John D’Emilio, and Estelle B. Freedman. *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 225-26.

writings for understanding and clarity. To David Diamond, McCullers detailed her crumbling marriage and referenced a “brotherly” love for her husband, but yet a passionate love for Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach, a married Swiss scholar and writer for whom she felt an immediate affinity.¹⁰⁸ “Yesterday I read Havelock Ellis’s *My Life*. His wife was an invert, and there was so much in her situation that is exactly my own. What a great man Ellis was! But even he could not help her at the last, and she went mad. I think about Annemarie often here, I shall always love her. I play Mahler and Schubert. I wonder if ever a woman will love me, and answer the part of me that so needs to be answered. But I ask so much, and expect to give so much—I am so deadly serious about such things.”¹⁰⁹

In the six-volume series, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Ellis asserted that homosexuality in women usually took on a masculine cast, much as homosexuality in men would show itself in a feminine display. Ellis suggested that homosexuality in women mirrored the findings on homosexuality in men.¹¹⁰ In women, homosexuality would be harder to detect, according to Ellis, because affection between women was more readily accepted. He also blamed women for not understanding the kinds of affection that they might be feeling. “A woman may feel a high degree of sexual attraction for another woman without realizing that her affection is sexual, and when she does realize this, she is nearly always very unwilling to reveal the nature of her intimate experience, even with the adoption of precautions, and although the fact may be present to her that, by helping to reveal the nature of her abnormality, she may be helping to lighten the burden of it on other

¹⁰⁸ On McCullers’s initial reactions to meeting Schwarzenbach, see Carr, 100-07.

¹⁰⁹ Carson McCullers to David Diamond, July 19, 1941, Carson McCullers collection, EU.

¹¹⁰ Havelock Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, vol. 2 of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1921), 195-197, <http://books.google.com/books?id=-tgTAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false> (accessed 1 November, 2011).

women.”¹¹¹ Ellis’s rather confusing approach to inversion was clearly troubling for McCullers. It is interesting to consider that perhaps McCullers was at a disadvantage in corralling her attractions for women in her probable alienation from a working class lesbian community.

The support networks that were vital to Boyd’s comfort and to lesbians generally in the 1940s and 1950s bar culture would have provided affirmation of McCullers’s feelings and struggles—a confirmation that she could only find in scholarly texts on inversion. After being separated from Schwarzenbach, who was famously connected to many female lovers, McCullers longed for connection and companionship—even turning to bars and bourbon for comfort while distancing herself from her husband.¹¹² As Kennedy and Davis have shown in Buffalo, these connections and confirmations were something that Boyd and other lesbians in the 1940s and 1950s often found in the lesbian bar culture.

Although McCullers did not need to strategize a balancing act of her sexuality between work and home, she still sought companionship and understanding in her passionate connection with Diamond, her search for lovers, and in her readings of Ellis. To label her as a lesbian would be inappropriate. Instead, McCullers was a woman who struggled with passion and desire for women and men, but her struggle was without a connection to a growing lesbian or queer community that is so often said to have existed during the 1940s. Queer community brought about by same sex connections and same sex space of World War II did not play a role in her life. On the cusp of a burgeoning bar culture for lesbians and gay men in the economically resurgent wartime and postwar South, McCullers was tied to an increasingly dated view of lesbian desire as inversion inspired by

¹¹¹ Ellis, 204.

¹¹² Carr, 145-6. See also 103-05 on Schwarzenbach’s affinity for women.

Ellis, and it is probable that Hutchinson and King’s view of sexuality was similarly formed. Through her writing, McCullers challenged the stringent gender prescriptions that were especially common in her native South, but she existed outside of a then-germinating queer social world in her native Georgia. “In her texts, homoerotic interests do not form a basis for human connection and collective activity as they do in many actual lesbian and gay male communities,” and when she connected with other gay people, it was often with gay men.¹¹³ McCullers did not allow for a lesbian “conceptual model” in her writings or in her own identity.¹¹⁴ Unlike Boyd, McCullers did not seek opportunities to explore her affections for other women. She was a thinker who toiled to understand these attractions.

Three women’s stories: white women, southern women, and women who sought the affection of other women. Their sexual desires played differing roles in each woman’s life, and the ways in which they negotiated their desires in the South mirrors in many ways the pioneering research performed by Liz Kennedy and Madeline Davis in Buffalo. According to their research, lesbians who hoped to be part of a “public lesbian community” needed a sizable city that would provide anonymity for public socializing.¹¹⁵ Atlanta was certainly that city for Ginny Boyd at a time that, as we will see, Charlotte would not have been, but expectations born of class differences seemingly prohibited such socializing for the artist Mary Hutchinson and her partner, a teacher, Dorothy King. Similarly, as an emerging writer and participant in an avant-garde artist community, Carson McCullers could not afford the risks of a public lesbian identity, and perhaps did not seek, or even want, one. Although she lived briefly in Charlotte in the early years of

¹¹³ Lori J. Kenschaft, “Homoerotics and Human Connections: Reading Carson McCullers ‘As a Lesbian,’” in *Critical Essays on Carson McCullers*, eds. Beverly Lyon Clark and Melvin J. Friedman (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996), 227.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Kennedy and Davis, 65.

her marriage, and occasionally in Columbus, Georgia just two hours from Atlanta, her class status consistently offered access to privileged outlets that did not always require her to hide her queer appearance and interests—such as private parties, travel to Europe, and summers at the Yaddo artists colony in Saratoga Springs, New York. She surrounded herself with artists, like Diamond, who often sympathized and supported her as she grappled with her sexuality.¹¹⁶

Kennedy and Davis argue that “the homogeneity of the lesbian bar population makes a striking contrast with gay-male culture, which has a long tradition of explicitly erotic cross-class socializing. In general middle-class women did not go to the bars, because they were afraid of being exposed and losing their jobs.”¹¹⁷ While upper class lesbians in Buffalo could often afford to be more public about their identity than middle class lesbians they “did not socialize with working-class lesbians in the bars or any other settings.”¹¹⁸ The stories that are detailed in this chapter support Kennedy and Davis’s assertions. The bars that Boyd frequented were primarily populated by working class women—nurses, interns and office workers.¹¹⁹ These new social groups—formed around bar communities according to Kennedy and Davis—provided a space for identity formation and friendships. “These groups explored what it meant to be lesbian, talked about the difficulties they faced as well as the fun, and supported one another to develop plans and strategies for working and maintaining relationships with families while still socializing as lesbians. Lesbians whose social life was based completely on private

¹¹⁶ For more on McCullers and her time at Yaddo, see Carr, 153-170, 212-223. On McCullers in Charlotte, 74-81.

¹¹⁷ Kennedy and Davis, 43.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Boyd, AUP-AHC.

networks, did not have to consider these issues.”¹²⁰ I would suggest, however, that even in their private networks, women like Hutchinson, King, and McCullers perhaps did consider ways to strategize their social networks while managing their sexuality. It seems that their paths were much different in that their social status largely dictated the types of social spaces that they would frequent. It is hard to say whether this outcome was agreeable to these women, but certainly they strategized about ways to create small arenas of support for their lesbian identities—even if they were indeed private. While it is true that public lesbian socializing defied southern gender norms, whether or not working class lesbians like Boyd consciously meant to challenge society is a separate issue. Similarly, we should not dismiss the challenges that women like Hutchinson and King and McCullers posed—although not in a public venue. In other words, historians should be cautious of assigning agency or activism to individuals who would not have claimed it for themselves. Claiming public bar space was not the only way to challenge heterosexual dominations of social spaces. Choosing to live one’s adult life without being married to a man, as Hutchinson and King did, or choosing to wear cropped hair and masculine dress, like McCullers, sent a different kind of societal message, as well as a powerful internal message to lesbians in different social classes who chose these paths.

Unfortunately the less visible the claim to a lesbian identity, the less visible the lives of southern women who desired the intimate company of other women become. Historical research on lesbians often depends on a personal claim to lesbian visibility—a claim that lands subjects in an archive or leads one to participate in an oral history research project specifically focused on lesbian or gay topics. The coming chapters examine the more visible manifestations of lesbian identity in the more dynamic post-

¹²⁰ Kennedy and Davis, 65.

World War II South. They focus on stories that are privileged in the archives or by women who were willing to participate in a visible lesbian sphere. Political activism and engagement in lesbian separatism often went hand in hand. Personal choices to join these movements or to participate in an increasingly identifiable bar culture helped to define the historical analysis, as did the pace of economic and demographic change. Therefore, it is important to examine the historical spaces and activism that over time some lesbians created and shared in the growing, soon-to-be Sun Belt cities of Atlanta and Charlotte.

CHAPTER 2

CONNECTIONS

Vera Phillips ran Atlanta's Mrs. P's, also known as Piedmont Tavern, and her husband, a preacher, would come in after delivering his sermon to help her manage the crowd. "It was fun," Jack Strouss recalled, and we used to get a big kick out of Mr. P coming in from having preached earlier in the evenings, putting on that apron, taking off those . . . glasses, getting behind the counter, and Vera could say, 'I got help.' It was a small place, small place. It was a one man, one woman operation, then from that . . . she became it . . . it just became her business."¹²¹ Eventually the bar moved to Atlanta's Ponce de Leon Hotel, but its lesbian clientele did not follow, partly because the convenience of the Piedmont Park location attracted lesbians who were looking for a comfortable place to socialize and drink after softball games.

Like the Tick Tock Grill frequented by Ginny Boyd, Mrs. P's was an example of the bars and diners that that were occasionally appropriated by lesbians in the 1950s and 1960s. It is difficult to say whether the history of lesbian social spaces prior to 1970 in Atlanta is similar to the New South city of Charlotte, North Carolina, but based on the marked growth of lesbian hangouts in Atlanta by the 1980s, and the dearth of similar places in Charlotte at that point, it is clear that over time women in Atlanta found more accessible opportunities to forge lesbian connections. These connections were essential to creating an identifiable lesbian population in each city. Historian John D'Emilio argues that, "as the only clearly identifiable collective manifestation of lesbian existence,

¹²¹ Jack Strouss, Jr., AUP-AHC.

the bars filled a unique role in the evolution of a group consciousness among gay women. They alone brought lesbianism into the public sphere.”¹²² Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis suggest that, prior to the 1960s, lesbian bars were “truly the only places that lesbians had to socialize.”¹²³ The history of such places is substantially documented in Atlanta, but difficult to find in Charlotte.

Scotti Hooper began frequenting gay bars in mid-1960s Atlanta, and she remembered Mrs. P’s as “awful.” In spite of the “rough” crowd at Mrs. P’s, however, Hooper wanted to go out “and meet friends and have a drink or whatever.” Just down the street was a bar named DuPree’s that Hooper remembered attracting “mostly women. I think guys were afraid to go in there, and I don’t blame them. It was just rough, dykey women.” In spite of Hooper’s disdain for the “masculine” and “butch” women she found at DuPree’s, the bar remained in business from 1957 through the 1970s, and it catered to a lesbian clientele. The first location of Dupree’s Grill was at 640 Glen Iris Drive, Northeast in Atlanta, and when the bar moved, it relocated to 715 Ponce de Leon Avenue—just a short walk around the corner. Both locations were in Atlanta’s Old Fourth Ward neighborhood, a largely African American neighborhood located less than two miles from the Auburn Avenue birthplace of Martin Luther King, Jr. By the 1960s, the once thriving black neighborhood was in disrepair due, in part, to highway construction and an exodus by middle to upper class blacks.¹²⁴ White women in Atlanta and in the South generally were taught to avoid being alone in public, but especially in

¹²² D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 99.

¹²³ Kennedy and Davis, 29.

¹²⁴ Louise Chu, “Revival of Atlanta Area Becomes an Issue,” *AP Online*, 15 July, 2004; Chenault, “An Unspoken Past”; Barbara Harris Combs, “The Ties that Bind: The Role of Place in Racial Identity Formation, Social Cohesion, Accord, and Discord in Two Historic, Black Gentrifying Atlanta Neighborhoods” (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2010), 55. In *Sociology Dissertations*, Paper 50, http://digitalarchive.gsu.edu/sociology_diss/50 (accessed May 19, 2012).

black neighborhoods like Old Fourth Ward.¹²⁵ As D’Emilio notes, “although bar attendance in the mid-twentieth century no longer defined a woman as beyond the pale, it still bore connotations of disreputable behavior.”¹²⁶ This “disreputable behavior” combined with the likely racial and sexual tensions created by white women cavorting in a predominately African American Atlanta neighborhood, is indicative of the risks that some women took to find companionship.

When the bar “moved around the corner onto Ponce de Leon” Avenue in the mid-1960s it was anything but a refuge for Hooper. “It was a women’s bar, but it was awful ... it was kind of scary at the time even. It was one of those, you go in and you just think somebody’s gong to pull out a gun or a knife or whatever. And you certainly don’t want to be seen going in one of those places. Because there really was a threat of being fired from your job.” A 1969 guide to gay establishments, labeled DuPree’s as “AYOR,” meaning “At Your Own Risk.” The guide further described the “AYOR” label by noting that “you might like the people there, but it is highly questionable that they will like you.”¹²⁷

Similar guides from the time period confirm that there were bars like DuPree’s in Charlotte, but unlike DuPree’s, none were identified as “L” for lesbian. In 1972, three gay bars in Charlotte were near the intersection of North Tryon Street and West Trade

¹²⁵ Combs, “The Ties that Bind,” 55. The Old Fourth Ward neighborhood was approximately 78 percent black, according to 1970 census data referenced by Combs. Some of Vogel’s fear was probably due to her discomfort as a white woman in a black neighborhood.

¹²⁶ D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 98.

¹²⁷ Scotti Hooper, Nell Stansell, AUP-AHC. Hooper’s entire oral history is very negative towards butch lesbian identity, and this colors her recollections of DuPree’s and Mrs. P’s. DuPree’s name changed – as did several bar names – from Grill to Tavern or Lounge. In the 1977 Atlanta City Directory, the listing reads “Dupree’s Lounge” and locates the bar at 715 Ponce de Leon. Address information from Atlanta City Directory, accessed at AHC. This same information is confirmed in the *Falcon World Gay Guide, 1977*, and *International Guild Guide, 1969: Gay Listings*, (Washington D.C.: Guild Press Ltd., 1969), Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History Thing Collection, MSS 773, AHC.

Street in Uptown—a hot spot for “men in shiny cars and expensive clothes” who cruised for male lovers.¹²⁸ A 1966 guide listed four gay bars in Charlotte, and eight establishments in Atlanta, but by 1972, when Charlotte’s metropolitan population stood at 773,600 and Atlanta’s had reached 1.9 million, the *International Guild Guide* listed nineteen “gay fun places” in Atlanta, and seven for Charlotte.¹²⁹ Atlanta’s rapid metropolitan growth—especially during the first three years of the 1970s—was matched by the growth of gay spaces.¹³⁰

Located in the same Old Fourth Ward neighborhood as DuPree’s, “The Tower” restaurant opened in Atlanta at 735 Forrest Road (later known as Ralph McGill Boulevard) in 1957—the same year as DuPree’s. It was a neighborhood bar and grill with a back room pool table, and it catered to lesbians. In the 1968 thirtieth anniversary program for the Lorelei Ladies, a women’s softball team in Atlanta, the owners of The Tower, Denny and Charley Gamas ran an advertisement in support of the team—“The Tower: The Place Where Nice People Meet and Eat.”¹³¹ The owner of The Tower was remembered as someone who “took care of the girls.” When a patron was in trouble with the police, he would bail them out of jail.¹³² The Tower continued to offer support for

¹²⁸ Darrell Sifford, “A Tour of Our Gay Nightlife,” *Charlotte News*, December 15, 1973.

¹²⁹ *International Guild Guide*, Box 252, Southern States Research Files, James T. Sears Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University (hereafter cited as JS-DU).

¹³⁰ Population and growth data from Real Estate Center at Texas A&M University, “Population MSA: Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord, NC-SC,” <http://recenter.tamu.edu/data/pop/popm/cbsa16740.asp>, and “Population MSA: Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, GA,” <http://recenter.tamu.edu/data/pop/popm/cbsa12060.asp> (both accessed June 25, 2012).

¹³¹ “The Lorelei Ladies: Their 30th Year as an Organized Team,” Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History Thing Collection, MSS 773, AHC.

¹³² Nell Stansell, Barbara Vogel, AUP-AHC.

lesbians and softball into the 1980s – sponsoring the 1984 Tower Tornadoes in the Atlanta gay pride tournament at Piedmont Park.¹³³

Although women’s softball has often been noted as a magnet and haven for lesbians by scholars such as Lillian Faderman, it is rare to find historical evidence of the connection between lesbians, softball, and their sponsors who participated in an economic exchange of mutual benefit. The Gamas’s support for the Lorelei Ladies, and another advertiser’s reference to being “Next Door To Tower Restaurant,” note the importance of the bar for women—especially lesbians—who connected publicly through softball and at the bar. Faderman’s oral history research shows that patronizing establishments, especially bars that supported their teams, was common for lesbian softball players.

‘We had no place to go after the games but the bars.’ The bars were often even the team sponsors providing uniforms and travel money. And it was an ‘unwritten law,’ according to a Nebraska woman who played during the ‘50s, that after the game you patronized the bar that sponsored you. Young and working-class lesbians who had no homes where they could entertain and were welcome nowhere else socially were held in thrall by the bars, which became their major resort despite attempts to escape such as the formation of athletic teams.¹³⁴

Nell Stansell played softball for her Atlanta employer, Retail Credit, and spent time at The Tower because the “ballplaying girls really do drink pretty heavy.” While softball opened the door for many women, like Stansell, to lesbian connections, others found this path objectionable and even frightening. Native Atlantan Barbara Vogel graduated from high school in 1957, and when she returned to Atlanta from attending college she had the opportunity to play for the Lorelei Ladies and the Tomboys. Vogel

¹³³ Shelby Jewell, “Sports Page Sports Softball,” *Pulse*, June 28, 1984, 17, Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University (hereafter cited as ALFA-DU).

¹³⁴ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 162. For more on softball, lesbians and the South, see Buring, *Lesbian and Gay Memphis*, 139-42.

avoided these teams because she thought they were “very gay, very lesbian, very activist” and she did not want that kind of “lifestyle.” The bars associated with softball teams were clearly just as distasteful to Vogel, who felt that simply by entering DuPree’s or The Tower, “you took your life in your hands.”

According to Ginny Boyd, 1950s class-based bar choices were available to two tiers of lesbians in Atlanta – nurses and office workers frequented the Tick Tock and factory workers frequented bars in the “country.” These women did not have the same “educational background” and they favored locations where they would find women with similar experiences. Similarly, Vogel recalls that “nicer” lesbians did not frequent DuPree’s or The Tower because of the clientele. Vogel’s comments speak to her commitment to invisibility as a lesbian.¹³⁵ Embracing lesbian identity was of great concern and a great struggle for Vogel. Perhaps Vogel’s disdain for the regulars at The Tower was based on social class, race, or perhaps her own discomfort with being publicly associated with lesbians. Bars are a place to gather and where people have “traditionally exercised” the “freedom to associate,” argues writer Christine Sismondo.¹³⁶ For some lesbians, however, this association was too great a risk.

In the 1960s Stansell took her partner Carol to DuPree’s, a bar so close to Carol’s mother’s house that she ducked when people passed the door of the bar. Like Hooper, Stansell remembers DuPree’s as a “rough” bar that was actively policed for serving alcohol to minors.¹³⁷ DuPree’s and The Tower were butch-femme bars – bars in which lesbian clientele often presented themselves in hyper masculinized (butch) or feminized

¹³⁵ Boyd, Vogel, AUP-AHC.

¹³⁶ Christine Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar: A Spirited History of Taverns and Saloons, Speakeasies and Grog Shops* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), xiii.

¹³⁷ Stansell, AUP-AHC.

(femme) roles. Jack Strouss visited The Tower and quickly recognized the butch-femme dynamic in the dress of the lesbian patrons, and felt uncomfortable as a gay man in a lesbian bar. “The bar was on Ralph McGill and we went in there one night and I said, ‘Oh’ I looked at the gals and they were having a wonderful time, but at the bar I saw some gorgeous young looking men sitting up there and I thought, ‘Oh boy.’ But then I got closer, they turned around, and they were not men, they didn’t have mustaches or beards.” Strouss was “surprised” and felt out of place. He remembers that mixing lesbians and gay men in the same public space was a rarity. For Strouss, the femme/butch scene was a signal to leave.¹³⁸

The Tower would be a favorite bar of 1970s lesbian feminists in Atlanta—women who were largely educated and white but were also occasionally unemployed. The bar was conveniently located within walking distance of Georgia State University where some of these women were students. They did not concern themselves with the social or political implications of being visibly associated with a bar or other women. In fact, they embraced this association. Though many of the women in Atlanta’s Lesbian Feminist Alliance were white college students, and in spite of its location in a primarily African American neighborhood, they preferred The Tower in the 1970s. The presence of educated lesbian feminists at The Tower suggests that the social stratification that Boyd remembered from the 1950s changed over time in some venues.¹³⁹ The favored gathering spots for lesbians in cities like Atlanta often reflected the class, geographic, and political affinities of the patrons, but these choices were not always possible in Charlotte. There

¹³⁸ Strouss, AUP-AHC.

¹³⁹ Combs, “The Ties that Bind,” 54-5,100. By 2000, due to gentrification, the Old Fourth Ward neighborhood experienced significant growth in its white population. According to sociologist Barbara Harris Combs, as of 2010, the neighborhood was home to many lesbian and gay couples.

were very few gay-friendly bars, and for lesbians who wanted to be out in the scene this meant that they primarily frequented gay men's bars prior to the 1980s. Charlotte's lesbians found ways to divide along lines of race, gender, and class, as discussed in the next chapter, but in the bar scene this was not always a possibility due to their limited options.

For some women, bars provided a place of community and offered a sense of family, and as expanding bar options in Atlanta offered women various choices, social class, race, and personal comfort were key factors in selecting their bars of choice. "The Sports Page," a popular women's bar in 1970s and 1980s Atlanta, sponsored a women's softball team and is remembered as a nice place—as THE place—to go.¹⁴⁰ When Dorothy Muse was injured playing for the team, she was forced out of work temporarily. The team held a benefit at the bar to support her, and it was covered in the local gay magazine, *Pulse*, which was a unique publication in that it attempted to reach both women and men in its local coverage. Similarly, The Sports Page bar was unique in that it advertised events for "guys & gals together"—combined drag nights with softball team sponsorship and nights exclusively devoted to women's bands. The images in *Pulse*—a magazine with obvious connections to The Sports Page bar—suggest that a majority, if not all of their readership and community was white. As for whites in general in Atlanta and elsewhere, for white lesbians, a nice place to go often meant a white place to go.¹⁴¹

Like most bars in the South, lesbian bars were white spaces because their white owners had the necessary viability and political, economic, and police connections to exist. In Anne Enke's study of sexuality and space in the upper urban Midwest, women's

¹⁴⁰ Charlene McLemore and Barbara Vogel (interviewed together), AUP-AHC.

¹⁴¹ *Pulse*, ALFA-DU.

bars proliferated in the 1960s and 1970s, and they became “primary locations for newly politicized enactments of social segregation; the assertion of gender, race, and class hierarchies among women; and the publication of a newly defined feminist subject.”¹⁴² Enke further shows that black women who were seeking the company of other women would be excluded from the hierarchies of white economic power and therefore could not afford to pay police for protection or persuade them to look the other way when nightclubs catered to homosexual dancing. The cost of drinks was high at these bars in order to afford the lease payments and payments to law enforcement.¹⁴³ This seemed to be the case for Atlanta and Charlotte bars as well. Gay bars in these two cities existed because of white and often heterosexual owners who were willing to use their connections to maintain a queer social space.

Scotti Hooper’s earliest recollections of bar life included her white friend circle. She never knew any black gay people, and assumed that because there were so few gay people in the world, perhaps being gay was simply a foreign concept to blacks. It was not until the 1960s or 1970s that Hooper remembers frequenting some bars on Atlanta’s Southside where she became aware that a black gay nightlife existed.¹⁴⁴ These recollections and snapshots of southern queer bars defy the tempting myth that lesbians were always united by their deviance as lesbians—or with gay men in their deviance as gay people. For example, in one Greensboro, North Carolina gay men’s bar, the unofficial policy was “no dykes and no blacks allowed” —suggesting that bars occasionally worked to divide lesbians and gay men or at least accommodated prevailing

¹⁴² Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 29.

¹⁴³ Enke, 30.

¹⁴⁴ Scotti Hooper, AUP-AHC.

social/cultural divisions on issues of class, race, and gender at the same time that they created space for identity and community for some.¹⁴⁵

Perhaps in response to such divisions, the Atlanta bar “Ms. Garbo’s” opened its doors on August 27, 1976 under new management. The newly remodeled bar advertised itself as “The Southeast’s First Bar for Professionals.” The new menu offered steak and lobster, and the bar was actively seeking a particular class of gay clientele. As noted in *Cruise* magazine, a 1970s guide to southeastern gay life published in Atlanta, Ms. Garbo’s was now open to gay men, having previously been a private club for women. The women who frequented Ms. Garbo’s were known to be “upwardly mobile,” and they existed in a separate social realm from the lesbians of the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance who preferred the more familiar comfort of The Tower.¹⁴⁶

When Garbo’s opened its doors to men, it was clear that a lesbian and gay professional population with a certain amount of economic clout had arrived in Atlanta. The commentary in *Cruise* was particularly interesting in its assessment of class at the bar, and the opportunity for lesbians and gay men to interact in a bar setting:

As straights are now accepting gays, so are the gay women now accepting the gay men and the group that attended the cocktail party to celebrate their reopening contained a lot of both. The record turnout of professional businessmen and women drained the well stocked bar and it had to be replenished in the middle of the night in order for the fun and festivities to continue. I think this all goes to prove that men and women with a tish of class can gather in this newly decorated bar with its understated elegant atmosphere and drop their inhibitions.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ James T. Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 159.

¹⁴⁶ On this point, see Saralyn Chesnut and Amanda C. Gable, “‘Women Ran It’: Charis Books and More and Atlanta’s Lesbian-Feminist Community, 1971-1981,” in Howard, *Carryin’ On*, 278-79, n42.

¹⁴⁷ *Cruise*, September 2-9, 1976, 12, Billy Jones Papers, AHC. According to this issue of *Cruise*, Garbo’s was previously located in “King’s Kastle” for 3 1/2 years prior to the 1976 opening under new management.

Gay men's bars dominated the Atlanta gay bar scene in the 1970s and this commentator's presumption that women and men *should* be mixing in the bar community certainly ran counter to the active Atlanta lesbian feminist movement of the 1970s, but the economic success of Garbo's ultimately depended on opening its doors to the gay male dollar. Separate bar space for gay women was crucial in forming their identity as lesbians and as women, and the above assessment of Garbo's opening suggests some gay men's lack of understanding for this need, simply reading Garbo's opening to men as a progress of acceptance of gay men within the lesbian community. In the same issue that *Cruise* celebrated the mixed crowd at Garbo's, The Tower advertisement read "Where The Women Come First," recognizing the desire for differentiated women's bar establishments, and now quite openly claiming its place as a lesbian bar. Clearly The Tower could not compete in the same league as Garbo's, however, as Charlene McLemore remembers arriving in Atlanta in 1978 and finding The Tower was still a "dive"—too questionable for her partner at the time to patronize.¹⁴⁸

Ms. Garbo's was recognized with an Atlanta Bar Award for the "Best Women's Bar" as early as February of 1977 – just six months after their reopening. In the 1976 awards, there was no category for a women's bar, and it is interesting that this award, probably the first award given for a women's bar, was granted to a bar that *Cruise* (primarily a gay men's bar guide) celebrated in its welcoming of gay men. For Jack Strouss it was a great place to mingle with gay women and men in a restaurant atmosphere. Strouss remembers Ms. Garbo's as not "overtly gay" but just a "lovely restaurant" where he and his partner could enjoy the company of their lesbian friends, a

¹⁴⁸ *Cruise*, September 2-9, 1976, AHC. McLemore, AUP-AHC.

space that was historically hard to find for these two couples.¹⁴⁹ By the mid-1970s, some upwardly mobile lesbians were disinterested in the activism of groups like the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance, or at least a bar like The Tower. Garbo's is an example of a place where this professional lesbian population could associate with other women, but not in a lesbian feminist arena. In 1967 Ann McKain came out as a lesbian but it took her several years to feel comfortable being out in public with another woman. As a professor at Georgia State University, McKain was concerned with seeing students out in public, but McKain and her partner decided that they could no longer hide from an open life together. She remembers Ms. Garbo's as her first foray into a gay bar scene. It is interesting that Strouss and the male writer at *Cruise* magazine identified Garbo's as a bar that brought gay women and men together, but McKain's memories of Garbo's are focused on women being together in public and being able to eat together in a public place. In spite of the eventual male presence at Garbo's, the establishment was clearly important to McKain as women's territory.¹⁵⁰ Like McKain, Vogel worried about being out and being recognized because of her career as a nurse at Grady Hospital. "I did not talk about my life outside of the hospital. There were very few people that knew. There were maybe about half a dozen people that knew."¹⁵¹ Vogel thought of overt lesbian bars with disdain, and McKain sought out socially comfortable lesbian spaces while waiting to "fully" come out as a lesbian until after she left her position at Georgia State University. Both women's commitment to a closeted lifestyle, and their perceived social

¹⁴⁹ Strouss, AUP-AHC.

¹⁵⁰ Ann McKain, AUP-AHC. It is not clear when McKain began frequenting Garbo's, but she remembered Garbo's as significant because she could dine out alone with another woman – something she felt that was not acceptable in the 1960s. This comfort was probably due in part to McKain's personal acceptance of her own sexuality. It is also possible that McKain's memories relate to frequent Garbo's visits when it was still a private club for women only—prior to 1976.

¹⁵¹ Vogel, AUP-AHC.

class status as intimately related to their jobs, defined their choice of lesbian social spaces.

In spite of the lesbian closet, often viewed as a professionally necessary position, by the 1970s gay bar and travel guides made it clear that Atlanta was the gay mecca of the South. These guides catered to men, but throughout the decade their coverage of lesbian bars increased. They actively labeled noticeably identifiable women's bars, or bars that primarily attracted women, while appropriating New South rhetoric to sell Atlanta's thriving gay men's bar scene:

You may or may not have heard of the "New South." This refers to a rapidly progressing economic and social climate in this warm and lovely region of the country. To be sure the old south (sic) of extreme poverty and ignorance can still be found; however, signs of exciting changes are evident in the more urbanized sections. Atlanta is sort of the Star of the Fleet in this progress and has emerged in the last decade to be one of the United States' most rapidly advancing cities. Southern boys have always had their charms. . . . here both southern boys and their charms abound.¹⁵²

Despite its reputation for a relatively inordinate racial climate, the same could not have been said of Charlotte at this point. In 1977, the *Falcon World Gay Guide* listed both DuPree's Tavern and Ms. Garbo's as "G," which was defined as "Girls, means lesbian action. Only in a few places, generally larger cities, are the girls' bar (sic) so exclusive that a guy would feel unwelcome. Frequently, bars that cater to both guys and girls are the wildest."¹⁵³ The guide also noted eateries such as Denny's at 621 Ponce de Leon and the Prince George Inn at 114 6th Street for welcoming "gay guys and girls."¹⁵⁴ Although Strauss did not remember many "girls" at the Prince George, McKain recalled the Prince George and another meeting place, Gene & Gabe's on Piedmont Avenue

¹⁵² *Falcon World Gay Guide*, 1977, 8, 40-41, Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History Thing Collection, MS 773, AHC.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 40-41. This particular Denny's is noted for being gay friendly after bars closed for the night.

(located in Midtown Atlanta's gay-friendly Ansley Mall) as part of a growing group of gay eating establishments emerging in 1970s Atlanta. These establishments were also catering to straight clientele and supporting music that appealed to lesbians or gay men, engaging a varied audience in an establishment that was not solely focused on selling alcoholic beverages. For McKain it was significant that "we were gathered around a content that was separate from gender or you know sexual orientation. It was around music."¹⁵⁵ The ability to gather and interact publicly was a triumph for Atlanta's lesbians and gay men.

According to historian Martin Meeker, establishing communication networks for lesbian and gay identity formation was central to locating gay-friendly places: "By the early 1970s there existed a highly complex yet widely known homosexual geography of the United States that had points for national meccas, regional capitals, and small-town outposts and lines drawn around gay enclaves, other safe zones, and dangerous places." Atlanta was a "regional capital," to be sure, and gay southerners were apprised of Atlanta's gay community through a variety of what Meeker labels as communication networks. In the 1960s and 1970s, an increasingly common way of finding bars like The Tower was through local gay magazines and newspapers. Printed material in gay guides such as *Cruise* or the *Falcon World Gay Guide* also served this purpose by making it easier for lesbians and gay men to locate one another and identify establishments where they would feel welcome. Gay publications in Atlanta and Charlotte cross-advertised, as

¹⁵⁵ Strouss, McKain, AUP-AHC. It is interesting that the *Falcon Guide* does not list Gene & Gabe's as a "G&G" establishment—meaning that it catered to women and men, but McKain recalls this meeting place as pivotal for bringing gay women and men together.

did gay bars. They recognized the importance of connecting these two gay communities, and their role in assisting lesbians and gay men who traveled between the two.¹⁵⁶

With an initial circulation of five thousand, the *Atlanta Barb* newspaper premiered in the early 1970s. The *Barb* was “The Groovy Newspaper serving Atlanta and Surrounding Cities,” and like most gay newspapers it primarily promoted bars for men. Occasionally, a lesbian bar—such as The Tower Lounge—could afford to place a few printed lines in the classified advertisements section of the *Barb*, but the quarter page advertisements (often handwritten) were devoted to bars that catered to gay men who could afford the economic cost and the price of social visibility. Neither cost was regularly feasible for lesbians.¹⁵⁷ As John D’Emilio has argued, going to a bar “implied a comparatively open acknowledgement of one’s sexual identity.” For gay men this level of visibility could be reached in “stages by participating in street cruising and other forms of public liaisons,” but similar “transitional opportunities” were not possible for lesbians.¹⁵⁸ In addition to the challenge of social visibility, lesbians faced the economic challenge of lower earnings. A 1982 Bureau of Labor Statistics report examined the sluggish rise of women’s wages as compared to men’s, noting that “the overall sex earnings ratio... was 62 percent in May 1967 and had risen only to 64 percent by ... 1981.”¹⁵⁹ Women’s average weekly earnings in 1981 were \$224, in comparison to men’s

¹⁵⁶ Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s – 1970s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 12.

¹⁵⁷ *Atlanta Barb*, ALFA-DU.

¹⁵⁸ D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 98. Although D’Emilio makes these assertions primarily in reference to the 1950s, my research suggests that these conditions remained for women in Charlotte and Atlanta in the 1970s.

¹⁵⁹ Earl F. Mellor and George D. Stamas, “Usual Weekly Earnings: Another Look at Intergroup Differences and Basic Trends,” *Monthly Labor Review Online* 105, no. 4 (April 1982):17, <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/1982/04/contents.htm> (accessed June 1, 2012).

\$347.¹⁶⁰ At least one economist suggested that educational differences had little impact on this disparity, but argued that occupation played the greatest role noting the overrepresentation of female workers in low-paying sectors. In 1982, for example, 78 percent of all clerical workers were women. The report suggested that women's earning potential also peaked at a much earlier age than men, noting that by their early thirties women had often reached their maximum income.¹⁶¹ Although it is hard to say how lesbians and gay men in Atlanta or Charlotte compared to these national averages, it is probably true that women in each city reached the peak of their earning potential during their prime bar years.

Whether it meant gathering at a bar or a church, the *Barb* was committed to supporting gay community in Atlanta. The opening service for the new home of the primarily gay Metropolitan Community Church in Atlanta's cosmopolitan Virginia Highlands was celebrated at the communion table decorated with flowers donated by the *Barb*.¹⁶² Yet, Chattanooga's Powder Puff Lounge boasted in the *Barb*, "You Bet Your Sweet Ass We're Open on Sunday." Both gay social spaces found an opportunity in the pages of the *Barb* to reach their parishioners and patrons, and the paper represented the growing cosmopolitanism of Atlanta and its gay citizens. Politics occasionally made an appearance in the *Barb*, especially when African American candidate Maynard Jackson won his highly contentious mayoral bid in 1973. The *Barb* celebrated the victory noting this as a "step in the right direction toward equality for all." The newspapers were often divided by a clear focus on politics and activism, or on social spaces and drag

¹⁶⁰ Mellor and Stamas, 16.

¹⁶¹ Earl F. Mellor, "Investigating the Differences in Weekly Earnings of Women and Men," *Monthly Labor Review Online* 107, no. 6 (June 1984): 17-18, <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/1984/06/contents.htm> (accessed June 1, 2012).

¹⁶² For more on Atlanta's MCC church, see chapter 4.

performances. In Atlanta, both the *Barb* and the 1980s bar guild paper *Phoenix* served as examples of publications that often made the crossover between religion, bars, politics and even race.

The *Atlanta Barb* promoted “The Showplace of the South” the club known as the Sweet Gum Head. Charlene McLemore and Barbara Vogel were impressed with the club: “The Sweet Gum was primarily a purely gay bar, and predominantly male. The females sat kind of on the left side, and the guys kind of at the right side, in the back.”¹⁶³ In between the drag performances, couples would take the floor to dance. They saw it as a good place to take straight people, and noted that there were often more straight patrons than gay. The Sweet Gum “maintained a decorum that was above, quite a bit above, The Tower and DuPree’s.” Although it catered to men, there was a butch femme lesbian scene at the Sweet Gum and lesbians frequented the club as one of the best options for queer space in 1960s and 1970s Atlanta.¹⁶⁴

Bars that featured drag entertainers, like the Sweet Gum, could be found throughout the Southeast. According to the writer, James T. Sears, “the heroes for midseventies southerners, were not gay liberationists with queer placards and clenched fists but [drag queen] heroines adorned with rouge and rhinestones.”¹⁶⁵ This was certainly true in Charlotte. When compared to Atlanta, it is hard to say how lesbians connected socially in Charlotte prior to the 1970s. But eventually, drag took over in

¹⁶³ McLemore and Vogel, AUP-AHC.

¹⁶⁴ *Atlanta Barb*, ALFA-DU. McLemore and Vogel, AUP-AHC.

¹⁶⁵ Sears, 159. See 153-54 for information on the Sweet Gum Head show bar.

Charlotte, and the show bars are the earliest documented hangouts for lesbians in the Queen City.¹⁶⁶

One of the most memorable was Oleen's Lounge, in operation until 2000. The bar advertised in 1976 as "The Oldest Show Bar in the Southeast" and as "Charlotte's 1st and only SHOW BAR," catering to a professional and national drag performing community.¹⁶⁷ Oleen's predated Atlanta's Sweet Gum Head, opening on May 9, 1970 and hosted equally big name drag entertainers. Operated by Martha Oleen Love, known as Oleen, and her husband Don, Oleen's was born out of The Brass Rail a 1960s straight bar co-opted by gay men and managed by Oleen herself. A patron of both bars, Ed DePasquale, recalled that at 10:00 p.m., the Brass Rail switched to a gay bar "as though a switch was thrown."¹⁶⁸ Oleen noticed the frequency of gay male customers and began to reserve tables for them. It was at the Brass Rail that an idea for Oleen's gay bar developed. According to an article marking her death in 2003, Oleen offered gay people "refuge" from their often closeted lives: "A solitary outside bulb barely illuminated 'Oleen's' written on the door. Patrons squeezed through narrow portal (sic), cramped into an entryway to pay and get stamped. No neon here, but people always found it anyway. It was magnet to our bi-polar, duplicitous lives. Sanctuary, even."¹⁶⁹ It is interesting to note that Oleen's played up the southern identity of her bar by hosting "Hee Haw" and country and western nights.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Sears, 137-38. The Neptune Lounge was probably one of the first gay bars in Charlotte, and some lesbians did spend time there. According to the writer James T. Sears, an African American lesbian identified by the pseudonym, "Karla Brown," discovered her lesbian identity in 1970 at the Neptune in Charlotte.

¹⁶⁷ *Charlotte Free Press*, May 17, 1976, private collection.

¹⁶⁸ "Gay History – Gay Pride," *Q-Notes*, June/July, 1988, 6, private collection.

¹⁶⁹ "We Lost the Mother of Gay Charlotte," *Q-Notes*, May 10, 2003, private collection.

¹⁷⁰ *Whatever*, #72, private collection. Oleen's was located at 1831 South Boulevard primarily, but there is an advertisement referencing Oleen's Lounge at 3511 Wilkinson Boulevard in 1975. This was right next to

Oleen's was known primarily as a drag bar but it also hosted special events that catered to lesbians. In November of 1975, the bar welcomed female folk singers "Jill and Marty" from Atlanta to entertain their lesbian clientele signifying the important connection between these two cities and their gay communities. Oleen's also hosted a Thursday night for women in the 1980s, offering free admission and drink specials, in recognition of an often necessary crossover in Charlotte between gay women and men in the bars in a city that struggled to support both.¹⁷¹ A memorable night at Oleen's could provide an unforgettable story:

You walked in the back door and had a person sitting in a window kind of set-up that took your ID and money and then buzzed you thru a door. Once you walked in there was a big round burgundy chair with a high round back on it that multiple (sic) could sit on all around in a circle facing outward. The floors were black and white checked. There was a runway for the drag queens. This was a mixed bar men and ladies...One of my most vivid memories was: one night my friend Chere and I were doing upside -down Margaritas. It was the week of Hurricane Hugo and the National Guard came busting in checking IDs. They had their M-16s waving around harassing everyone. They especially were picking on Chere because she looked younger. I remember one of the female National Guard members was really bothered by the way some of her counterparts were acting. She did not say anything and could hardly look us in the face. It dawned on me that she must have been gay. I will never forget that moment as long as I live. This was a good place to hang out with current friends.¹⁷²

Charlottean Sarrah Kelly remembered Oleen's as a rough bar, a good place for a "Friday night fight." The brawls usually centered on "somebody trying to talk to somebody else's girl" and the end result might be a high-heeled shoe "popped" at the offender's head.¹⁷³

the 3513 address of the Brass Rail – a bar that Oleen's managed in the 1960s. It appears that there was a disco called Oleen's Too, advertised in 1981, open at the South Boulevard location for a period of time. The 1831 South Boulevard location is now a Dunkin Donuts, housed in the original Oleen's building. Information on country night from advertisement in the Charlotte bar guide.

¹⁷¹ *Charlotte Free Press*, December 1, 1975, and August 11, 1975; *Whatever #17*; *Q-Notes*, March 1987, June, 1987, all accessed through a private collection.

¹⁷² "Examples of Charlotte Bars for your Research," anonymous email message to author, April 10, 2007.

¹⁷³ Sarrah Kelly, interview by author, Charlotte, North Carolina, May 12, 2003.

By the 1970s, Charlotte also supported promising gay newsletters, and within these periodicals a fledgling bar scene advertised regularly while the publications documented their struggles to survive and their successful commitments to the Charlotte gay community. These print media efforts served as evidence of an organizing queer community. As its economy and population grew, Charlotte boasted media outlets, activist groups, and bars that all suggested a vibrant community. Although these media networks, bar communities, and marginal activist commitments were in place, however, the ability to maintain the level of 1970s possibility and transform it into a continued vitality that would survive the coming decades was not to be realized for Charlotte.

One of the most promising 1970s gay media ventures was the *Charlotte Free Press*, a free paper comparable to the *Barb* in Atlanta, and published every two weeks in Charlotte. The paper began publication on April 7, 1975, and it was proud of its “straight” advertisers, promoting them as an indicator of their distinctiveness when compared to other gay publications at the time: “The inclusion of straight advertisers in a predominately gay newspaper is a sign of the changing times. Every advertiser in the CFP knows it is a gay paper and wants to advertise to gays. That’s good news!” Distributed in Charlotte, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill, the *Charlotte Free Press* began with a circulation of one thousand. By 1976 the editors celebrated its distribution “all over North Carolina,” in Charleston and Columbia, South Carolina, and Atlanta, Georgia with a circulation of thirty-five hundred. A budding gay market was developing in Charlotte, although unlike Atlanta, its potential would never be fully realized.¹⁷⁴ Perhaps Charlotte

¹⁷⁴ “On Homosexuality,” *Charlotte Free Press*, August 25, 1975, 10; “Happy Birthday Free Press!,” *Charlotte Free Press*, April 5, 1976, 12, private collection. According to *Q-Notes* staff, the *Charlotte Free Press* is North Carolina’s first gay newspaper, <http://goqnotes.com/2902/timeless-pride/> (accessed February 15, 2012.)

missed the economic gay boat in the post-Stonewall potentiality of the 1970s. The 1969 riot at the New York gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, catapulted the gay rights movement into a national spotlight, at least momentarily. The riot also galvanized New Left and gay activists across the country. These activists were willing consumers ripe for a dynamic gay marketplace that materialized in Atlanta, but not Charlotte.¹⁷⁵

Unlike many gay publications at the time that were owned and operated by gay men, the *Charlotte Free Press* covered news of interest to lesbians specifically, but this coverage was most likely contributed and written by lesbians. In its coverage of 1976 meetings to plan for a lesbian community center in Charlotte, the paper noted that the center would be for lesbian women only—“men would not be allowed, period.”¹⁷⁶ The sarcastic language of Atlanta’s *Cruise* magazine, in their coverage of Ms. Garbo’s 1976 opening to gay men, is nowhere to be found in the *Charlotte Free Press* article focused on lesbian community. While the bar-focused *Cruise* magazine celebrated a supposed long-awaited lesbian “acceptance” of gay men in the re-opening of Garbo’s, ignoring men’s ability to utilize public spaces for socializing with women and men in a way that women often could not, the more political *Charlotte Free Press* recognized the importance of separate lesbian space. The article ended with a cheer, “Let’s get it together, Lesbians of Charlotte!” in support of women’s meeting space in the 1970s—space that would be separate from men and straight women and politically identified as such.¹⁷⁷ The *Free Press* advertised heavily for bars as well, although very few identified

¹⁷⁵ On the activist aftermath of Stonewall, see D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 233-39. On the growth of gay people as a target market, see Alexandra Chasin, *Selling Out: The Gay and Lesbian Movement Goes to Market* (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

¹⁷⁶ These efforts are discussed in detail in chapter 3.

¹⁷⁷ “Charlotte Group Plans Lesbian Center,” *Charlotte Free Press*, April 5, 1976, 9, private collection. See Sears, 248-253, for information on lesbian separatist activism in Charlotte. Coverage of Ms. Garbo’s opening in *Cruise* was written by “Mother ‘S,’” probably a drag queen. There is no byline for the article on

themselves as exclusively devoted to lesbians. It is possible that the cost of advertising prohibited this visibility. Lesbian social opportunities were feasible but extremely rare outside connected circles of economic privilege.

In the October 4, 1976 issue of the *Charlotte Free Press* an advertisement ran for “The Greenhouse.” The Greenhouse was “A Bar For Females (Males admitted as guests only).” Located at 119 South Brevard in Uptown Charlotte, The Greenhouse opened every day but Monday, required a membership, and boasted of a game room and a “Female Disco DJ.”¹⁷⁸ Earlier that year in an April issue of the *CFP*, the “Blueberry Hill Disco” in Durham, North Carolina advertised the opening of “N.C.’s 1st Exclusive Women’s Club” in the same complex as the primarily gay male bar. Women would have a separate front entrance, a game room, and the “Latest Lesbian Music.” A 1977 issue of the *Charlotte Free Press* promoted its support of lesbians with a full page advertisement of a white woman reading the publication. The paper encouraged women to subscribe to the publication with a picture of the young woman proclaiming, “A lot of gay newspapers have bar news and token women’s stories. But I don’t want token stories. I want a publication that really cares about both men and women. For me, the *Free Press* really cares!”¹⁷⁹

a lesbian center in Charlotte in the *Charlotte Free Press*. Although the editors were both men, John Freese and Robert Freese, Jr., the lesbian content was most likely contributed by lesbians who were originally involved with the Charlotte Women’s Center, but in 1975 separated themselves and operated under the name, Charlotte’s Drastic Dykes.

¹⁷⁸ Unfortunately, without an oral history to document this bar, its story is lost as a site of 1970s southern lesbian community.

¹⁷⁹ *Charlotte Free Press*, April 19, 1976, and May 30, 1977, private collection. Finding the history of Charlotte’s lesbian bar community is difficult. A focus on gay men’s bars is the only option to find lesbians in gay bar spaces. Unlike Atlanta, there is no archive actively collecting lesbian and gay materials or oral histories. And prior to the gay publications of the 1970s, there is no way to assess the pulse of the bar community in Charlotte without oral history connections.

In the mid-1970s “The Scorpio,” currently the oldest operating gay bar in Charlotte, advertised in the *Charlotte Free Press* and other gay publications in the Southeast. The club opened in 1972 at 2209 South Boulevard, in the South End neighborhood of Charlotte— just two miles out of Uptown and not far from the eventual location of its chief competitor, Oleen’s Lounge. In 1974 the bar briefly moved to 4316 Tryon Street, further from Uptown in an area known for gay men’s cruising.¹⁸⁰ The Scorpio then moved to its current Freedom Drive location to celebrate its third anniversary, now located just west of Uptown near the historic and crime-infested Wesley Heights neighborhood.¹⁸¹ The May 30, 1975, anniversary party made the cover of the June issue of the *Free Press*, and an advertisement for the new bar read, “Scorpio invites you to the most exciting new DISCOTHEQUE in the SOUTH!!” Scorpio hosted drag shows, offered giveaways, and even served a southern Sunday dinner, with a 1975 holiday menu of ham, chicken, potato salad, bean salad, baked beans, sandwiches, and pineapple/cheese/marshmallow salad. In June, 1981 Scorpio celebrated the first community gay pride event in Charlotte by supporting “The Stinging Scorpions (sic)” a winning coed softball team.¹⁸²

The 1980s brought significant changes to the bar communities in Atlanta and Charlotte. Bars had solid outlets for advertising in gay news media and the identity and locations of these bars become much easier to locate. A 1981 *Charlotte Observer* exposé

¹⁸⁰ Sifford, “A Tour of Our Gay Nightlife”; “Carolina Bars Celebrate,” *Charlotte Free Press*, June 2, 1975, 1-2, private collection. Address information from the Charlotte City Directory and the Charlotte phone book, both accessed at PLCMC. Like other bars referenced in this paper, “The Scorpio” has used several names during its existence, such as Scorpio Lounge and Scorpio Disco, increasing the difficulty of tracing its physical location.

¹⁸¹ Edward Martin, “Wesley Heights’ Decline Halted With New Interest,” *Charlotte Business Journal*, March 13, 2000, <http://www.bizjournals.com/charlotte/stories/2000/03/13/focus3.html?page=all> (accessed May 21, 2012).

¹⁸² *Little David*, September 15, 1974, 54, Billy Jones Papers, AHC; *Charlotte Free Press*, December 1, 1975, 16, private collection; “PRIDE WEEK!”, *Q-Notes*, June, 1986, private collection.

on Charlotte's gay community mentioned "at least six bars [that] cater to gay patrons," but also noted that "gay life in Charlotte remains less obvious and less open than in larger cities." One of the most significant bars to open in Charlotte was The Odyssey in 1980—a dance bar that welcomed women and men, although the majority of the crowd was gay men. It was recognized regionally as a chic bar that put Charlotte on the gay map, and heralded by the *Charlotte Observer* in its coverage of the growing gay community in Charlotte: "The Odyssey is more than just another gay bar. Even those who seldom go, who find it too loud, who disdain the hunting ground it affords gay men seeking partners, speak of the place with pride. Classier than any straight bar in Charlotte, they say. As nice as any gay bar in Atlanta, they say. The Odyssey . . . is part of an emerging gay life, part of Charlotte's coming out."¹⁸³ Recognizing the important class and gender divisions that divided the mythically united gay community, however, one Charlotte lesbian remembers the bar less fondly, describing it as "snooty" and primarily welcoming to gay men.¹⁸⁴

In 1980, following a fire, Scorpio underwent a major renovation in order to compete with the success of the Odyssey. "When the new Odyssey . . . opened last winter," the *Observer* noted that, "it placed Charlotte at a new level of sophistication in bars—gay or straight. Now the city has another at the same level: the new Scorpio." The article covering the renovation noted the importance of Oleen's presence at the Scorpio private opening party and an "impressive" flower arrangement sent to the party courtesy of Odyssey, suggesting that the "vague tension" that divided the Charlotte bar owners for

¹⁸³ Friedlein and Paddock, "Charlotte's Emerging Social Scene." This article was part of an *Observer* series on gay life in Charlotte, beginning on April 27, 1981. There was an "Odyssey 1" located at Morehead and Tryon Streets in 1979, but the "Odyssey" referenced here was located at The Plaza and Eastway Drive, and it opened in 1980.

¹⁸⁴ "Examples of Charlotte Bars for your Research," anonymous email message to author, April 10, 2007.

years was now giving way to more “cordiality.”¹⁸⁵ In September, 1980 a group known as the Gay/Lesbian Caucus of Charlotte organized a voting drive in the Charlotte gay community by working directly in the bars, recognizing these establishments as vital to political organization and action for gay people. The following year a political action group, the “Queen City Quordinators” put the degree of cordiality among bar owners to the test. The group convinced the bar owners in Charlotte to come together and promote a St. Patrick’s Day event at Odyssey in support of political action for lesbians and gay men in Charlotte.¹⁸⁶ These events were only marginally successful, however, and by the end of the 1980s, the Caucus, the Quordinators, and Odyssey were all kaput.¹⁸⁷

Charlotte’s exclusively lesbian bars came and went in the 1980s, some lasting just a few months. In February, 1988, a columnist in the Charlotte-based gay newspaper *Q-Notes* noted her concern for community among Charlotte’s lesbians as yet another exclusively lesbian bar closed:

Last month I talked about the need for more organization and activities in the Lesbian community. That column hadn’t gone to press when Flamingo’s, our only all-women’s bar, closed on December 31st. I happened to stop in about 1:00 with some friends . . . and the first thing I heard was, ‘This is their last night.’ It was a sad beginning to the New Year. I looked around and remembered the evenings I shared with friends there in just the three short months Flamingo’s was open. I really felt comfortable there. I liked the bar area where you could have an intelligent conversation without shouting. I liked the music because I recognized the songs . . . and I enjoyed slow dancing, which I was beginning to think was taboo in Charlotte. The pool tables and the video games and pin-ball weren’t always so crowded that by the time you found one you lost interest. . . . Maybe it wasn’t the immediate success y’all envisioned, but I think from that will be born other ideas and other places that will capture the community spirit that was starting to build there and carry it to new heights this year.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Friedlein and Paddock, “Charlotte’s Emerging Social Scene.”

¹⁸⁶ *Whatever* #81, December, 1980, #87, 1981, and #76, probably 1980, private collection.

¹⁸⁷ For more on the Queen City Quordinators and their efforts, see chapter 4.

¹⁸⁸ “The Soft Spot,” *Q-Notes*, February, 1988, 4, private collection.

A 1984 ad for the Charlotte lesbian bar “Diana’s” warned, “Sorry, gentlemen, but Diana’s is for women only.” This women’s only space would not last long – Diana’s did not advertise regularly, and none of the interviewees for this project remember the bar, but it was obviously gone by the 1988 demise of “Flamingo’s,” noted above as the only exclusively women’s bar in Charlotte.¹⁸⁹

In March, 1987 a café and bar known as “Steven’s” opened to “fill three needs of Charlotte’s gay community: an after-work bar close to downtown, a restaurant, and a ‘quiet’ bar with no dance floor.”¹⁹⁰ By July of 1989, however, Steven’s was no more and Liaisons Restaurant opened for business in the same site. Lesbian owners Linda Swinson and Pat Sizemore hoped to offer something new to the gay community in a comfortable restaurant setting with an upscale menu of French Continental Fare.¹⁹¹ The 1994 *Damron Women’s Traveller* (sic), a national guide to lesbian travel, listed Liaisons as a very popular restaurant and bar with a lesbian following. There were no bars in Charlotte exclusively devoted to women or even receiving the guide’s designation of “mostly women.”¹⁹² The food concept did not last at Liaisons, but the bar did. Swinson ran the bar affectionately referred to as “The Pink House,” until it closed twenty years later in 2009. Over the years, Liaisons was increasingly frequented by gay men, and it was quickly transformed after closing by new owners who were committed to maintaining the gay social space in the house that is no longer pink.

Like many people in our community, we are a group of friends that met having drinks at the bar in this location several years ago. We know that many people

¹⁸⁹ *Q-Notes: A Monthly Newsletter*, August 1984, private collection. This ad was from the first version of *Q-Notes*, published in a newsletter format and organized by the Queen City Quordinators.

¹⁹⁰ “Gay Café/Bar Opens March 13,” *Q-Notes*, March, 1987, 1, private collection. Steven’s was located at 316 Rensselaer Avenue in Charlotte.

¹⁹¹ “Liaisons Open for Business,” *Q-Notes*, August, 1989, private collection.

¹⁹² Beth Rabena Carr, ed., *Damron Women’s Traveller* (sic) (San Francisco: Damron Co, Inc., 1994), 309, Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History Thing Collection, MS 773, AHC.

over the years have developed special friendships and built long-term relationships at this bar. We developed our partnership to re-invent the bar so that this historic icon in our community would continue beyond the 20 years it has served us.¹⁹³

Although both Charlotte and Atlanta boasted promising bar communities, but in larger, more cosmopolitan Atlanta, options for women in the 1980s worked out better. In 1981 a “long-anticipated” bar named Arney’s opened at 2345 Cheshire Bridge Road. Arney’s welcomed women and men and received significant coverage in Atlanta’s growing gay media. *The Gazette*: “*The Gay News Source of the South*” covered the sneak preview opening of the bar heralding the arrival of the “beautiful new business to the Cheshire Bridge ‘Great Gay Way.’” Several bar owners and clientele attended the opening parties at Arney’s, including women from The Sports Page bar, located just down the road.¹⁹⁴

By 1994, the *Damron Women’s Traveller* (sic) titled Atlanta “the unofficial capital of the Southeast.” According to the *Damron* guide, Arney’s and the Sports Page were gone from the lesbian bar scene, but the lesbian travel guide recognized Atlanta as a refuge “from the rural South and the hustle-bustle of the Northeast. The laid-back, friendly attitude here makes for easy mingling in the bars, while the big city energy breeds trendy discos and high-style-with-a-smile.” The guide listed only two bars that year, “Revolution” and “Bellissima,” whose clientele were “mostly women,” but also listed a “very popular” bar owned by women, frequented by lesbians and gay men, called “The Otherside: Where the Mix is Perfect!” Located at 1924 Piedmont Road, just north

¹⁹³ This quote taken from the defunct Web site for the “Bar at 316” (accessed February 15, 2012).

¹⁹⁴ *Gazette*, January 22-28, 1981, and January 29-February 4, 1981, Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History Thing Collection, MS 773, AHC.

of Cheshire Bridge Road, “The Otherside” represented decades of commitment to the bar industry for owner Barbara McMahon.¹⁹⁵

Although the *Damron* guide recognized that the South’s “turbulent past” could still be felt in Atlanta, it also suggested that, “Atlanta’s history is a valuable agent for future understanding.” Just three years later, on February 21, 1997, “Olympic Park Bomber” Eric Rudolph targeted “The Otherside,” because it was a gay bar. With the bombing, the hopeful language of both the *Damron* guide, and the *Falcon* guide twenty years earlier, seemed suddenly hollow. Some were angry that the national and local media coverage at the time of the bombing occasionally failed to recognize The Otherside as a lesbian bar, obscuring the nature of the crime as hate-motivated. The bombing of The Otherside defied the notion of a New South for gay people, and it showed that the Atlanta of the 1996 Olympic games, an Atlanta, according to historian James Cobb, whose leaders were driven by “a desire to avoid any potential association” with “its racially objectionable past,” was still a city unwilling to lay bare the nature of a crime directly aimed at lesbians and gay men in their city.¹⁹⁶ “The City too Busy to Hate” had supposedly moved on from its past, but clearly this busyness did not always extend to hatred aimed at gay Atlantans.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Carr, ed., *Damron Traveller* (sic), 166, Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History Thing Collection, MS 773, AHC.

¹⁹⁶ James C. Cobb, *Redefining Southern Culture: Mind and Identity in the Modern South* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1999), 144.

¹⁹⁷ Ryan Lee, “Decade After Bombing, Bar Owners Find Peace,” *Southern Voice*, February 16, 2007, <https://groups.google.com/forum/?fromgroups#!topic/alt.rasap/hpdbYd1nDGQ> (accessed July 1, 2012). Although some newspapers at the time of the bombing noted that The Otherside was a gay bar, they rarely named it as a predominately lesbian bar. Some national gay activists were able to draw attention to the crime as specifically anti-gay as noted in this article: “Another Atlanta Bomb Raises Fear of Terrorist,” *St. Petersburg Times*, February 23, 1997. The connection of the bombing to the need for hate crimes legislation and discrimination protection for lesbians and gay men living in Georgia was openly discussed several years later. See for example, Andrew Jacobs, “For Bomb Victims, a Sense of Relief After Years of Anxiety,” *The New York Times*, June 1, 2003. For more on The Otherside bombing, see chapter 5.

When gay travel guides made oblique references to the South's troubled past, they were certainly referring to southern race relations and connecting these problems to potential problems for gay travelers. As lesbian civil rights activist Mab Segrest noted, "I knew deep down that people who said *nigger* also said *queer*—and killed both if they could. I sensed that white resistance to Black civil rights struggles came from not wanting to give these other people space to be alive. I was not sure then that there was such space for me either." The history of the gay bar is a history of making space – a history of making public room for public interactions so that lesbians and gay men could find one another. Historicizing the lesbian bar requires acknowledging the double-edged sword of being lesbian and a woman. According to historians John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, the postwar bar subculture of the 1950s "took somewhat different shape for men and women. Reflecting a long historical tradition of greater access to public space as well as a gender socialization that encouraged sexual expression, gay men sought partners in a variety of settings besides bars." Lesbians faced significant issues as women entering bars, a social taboo in the 1950s and 1960s, and as southern women, lesbians were often chained to past understandings of, and tenacious popular culture references to, the southern belle.¹⁹⁸

Lesbian bars struggled to maintain a separate identity and separate space for women but the financial imperative of the gay male dollar made this difficult. Men's escape from the responsibilities of family and children and their ability to command a

¹⁹⁸ Mab Segrest, *My Mama's Dead Squirrel: Lesbian Essays on Southern Culture*, 166-67; John D'Emilio, and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 291. In recognizing the fun experienced at these bars, I do not want to deny the very real history of bar violence and fear that women – especially lesbians – might have experienced. For more on this see Faderman, *Odd Girls*, 163-67, and Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather*, 67-112.

higher paycheck in the workplace allowed them frequent access to bar spaces. Gay women often remained tied to children and family responsibilities, and even in a stable lesbian relationship they could not match the financial power of a gay male couple. These complications impeded women's ability to participate in the bar community with the same regularity as gay men. A bar devoted exclusively to lesbians provided important community potential for women, but if they excluded men, these bars struggled to survive.

There is significant research to support the importance of lesbian bar space, but the fleeting nature of these spaces makes the story hard to tell. The silence that surrounded lesbian gathering spaces in the 1940s and 1950s continued into the 1970s and 1980s, with lesbian bars unable to afford the level of visible advertising necessary to spread the word and financially sustain the physical spaces for significant periods of time. Oral histories help to identify public social gathering spaces for lesbians, but the failures of memory often lead to dead ends when attempting to reconstruct an uninterrupted story of lesbian bar spaces. Publications that catered to a gay audience often focused primarily on the interests of gay men. Men and male advertisers operated and financially supported these papers, although occasional snippets of lesbian life and community seeped through the male-dominated pages.

When lesbian bar histories are reconstructed, they are often framed in terms of struggle or as a political action. When I came to this history, I viewed the bar as a site of resistance and a place to claim as politically activist space. This research, however,

suggests a somewhat different story.¹⁹⁹ The narrators remember bars not as sites of contention, but of social interaction. When Mrs. P's moved from Piedmont Park, softball-playing lesbians in Atlanta did not follow. They found other places to socialize and have a beer after the game. Certainly owners and patrons of these other places needed to be accepting of women socializing with other women, and they often needed to provide anonymity necessary to avoid possible job loss.

Bars are often equated with disrespectable behavior and they represent an effort by lesbians to disengage or separate from the mainstream sites of heterosexual power. Bars typically mirror the segregations of both local neighborhoods and of larger society, and lesbians in Atlanta and Charlotte sought social spaces that would allow them to get a drink, share a dance, and maybe a meal in a non-oppressive but socially familiar (in terms of race and social class) environment. Lesbian recollections reveal adamant opinions about the bars as lesbian social spaces. For Nell Stansell, bars were for a particularly defined group, not just in terms of race and social class, but also in terms of age. "There's no old people bars. That's not where they hang out."²⁰⁰ Charlene McLemore rightfully lamented the need to understand the lesbian past through bars:

I think one of the most significant things in the gay community is that when we talk about the past, we refer to this bar, that bar. That's where we were put. And I believe that's where the gay community has really – we earned our stereotyping; we earned the reputation that we have, because we were put there. Now we're becoming a people . . . that God loves. Even though we were back then, we are realizing it now. And the places that the gay community meet now is not necessarily a bar; it's a church, it's a friend's home, a Christian atmosphere, a Bible study, if you will, a Christian fellowship time, and I think that is absolutely the sign, the true sign of growth in the homosexual community.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ On this point, I am grateful to Pippa Holloway for her comments on an earlier version of this research presented at the Southern Association for Women Historians Conference, 2009. On bars as political or prepolitical, see Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, and Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*.

²⁰⁰ Stansell, AUP-AHC.

²⁰¹ McLemore and Vogel, AUP-AHC.

Were these bars sites of activism? Were the women inside seeking to advance an aggressive agenda in search of a political or social end, as a dictionary definition of activism suggests?²⁰² My research does not support this interpretation. Instead, I find women primarily seeking the comfort and anonymity that a bar in a large urban setting can provide—a chosen queer community, but not necessarily an activist or even a concerned one.²⁰³ As one gay North Carolinian noted in 1974, ““Even when, on Thursday of Gay Pride Week, there was trouble over the bar’s liquor license . . . was there a riot anywhere near that of the Stonewall? Hardly. Everybody simply went up to the other bar in Chapel Hill for the weekend and resigned themselves to the circumstances during the week.””²⁰⁴ In her examination of feminism, historian Anne Enke notes that “the movement was built by more than the people who embraced the name.”²⁰⁵ Perhaps the same is at least partially true in the lesbian South. Some activists proudly claimed labels and embraced visibility, as we will see in the next chapter, and some women simply sought comfort, convenience, and anonymity. Did they pave a way for future opportunities? Probably. Should we then reach back through history and label New South lesbians in general as a community of activists? Probably not.

It would be difficult to define a lesbian community in Charlotte or Atlanta based solely on bar spaces or the disparate experiences profiled in this chapter. As Sears argues:

Localities from Atlanta to Charlotte are better understood as local queer ecologies: queer spaces occupied by various groups with differing beliefs, symbols, identities, lifestyles, languages, and interests operating inside a common

²⁰² Encarta Dictionary, Microsoft Office 2003 online ed., s.v. “Activism.”

²⁰³ On the role of anonymity in urban bar communities, see Kennedy and Davis, 42-43.

²⁰⁴ Sears, 158.

²⁰⁵ Enke, 254.

border and within a cultural context of homophobia and heteronormativity. While southern towns such as Charlotte did not have the ecological diversity of Atlanta, neither were they protozoans of queer life.²⁰⁶

Lesbians enjoyed a greater opportunity for social connections in Atlanta because of better sustained institutions like the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance, more bars that were frequented by lesbians, and occasionally, greater political and corporate support.²⁰⁷ But this potential for visibility was inconsequential to some, like Atlantan Scotti Hooper. She did not equate her queer identity to a political identity—she was never a “flag carrier.”

You know I am who I am. I’m a good person and what I do is nobody’s, really nobody’s business. . . . And you know I get calls from certain gay organizations and I do contribute some but I really, I have a hard time doing that. I feel like we’re all people, we all make our own way. And probably because I had to do it. I came through and I’m like you know, ok, why should I make it even easier for everybody in the world.²⁰⁸

While some lesbians like Hooper cared little about claiming an activist identity, in the early 1970s, many were eager to assume the identity of “flag carrier”—their political agenda proudly displayed for all to see. In both Charlotte and Atlanta, lesbian feminists established spaces, held conferences, created print media outlets, and worked to create a visible community that would be central to the urban identity of each city. These efforts are the subject of the next chapter.

²⁰⁶ Sears, 319.

²⁰⁷ Political and corporate support for lesbians and gay men is discussed at length in chapters 4 and 5.

²⁰⁸ Hooper, AUP-AHC.

CHAPTER 3

VISIBILITY

“So you women want a Women’s Center. Tell me about it. Tell me about a house in Dilworth that provides space for women to go, a space where the warmth between women may be shared. Tell me about the tears of joy and pain that have been freely given, experienced and shared, and I’ll tell you about a place that no longer exists. I’ll tell you about bitterness, I’ll tell you about hostility, I’ll tell you about no cooperation, I’ll tell you about weary women who no longer want to keep on telling you.”

Kristin, September 1975

At the height of the feminist movement some Charlotte lesbians and feminists were eager to claim a separate space in Charlotte. Their goals were unclear, and their lack of direction often broke down along lesbian separatist and feminist lines. Although few women were ultimately involved on a daily basis, the results of their organizational efforts would have a lasting impact on both the local and the national stage. On June 1, 1971, organized southern lesbian feminism had come to Charlotte with the founding of the Charlotte Women’s Center, a center that would be integral to the roots of national lesbian culture.²⁰⁹

A cozy purple bungalow in Charlotte’s Dilworth neighborhood provided the physical space where women sought to create a hub for political, spiritual, sexual, and social growth for all women. Located on Lyndhurst Avenue in a neighborhood of families and communes, the founders intended the house to be a “women’s commune”

²⁰⁹ Minnie Bruce Pratt, “Out in the South: Writers in Conversation” (reading, Duke University, White Lecture Hall, Durham, NC, September 23, 2011). In her remarks Pratt identified the important role that Charlotte feminists played in the national lesbian feminist movement.

and a “center for subversive activities.”²¹⁰ “On a green desk in the office . . . a blue loose-leaf notebook” served as a log book. Connections for the women who frequented the Center were documented in this notebook, and notes from this log—a 1970s social networking tool—reflected women’s disparate concerns and the mundane activities of operation. Just as a twenty-first-century social networking web site records everything from the banal to the tragic, the Center’s log reflected a wide range of concerns. Women met there to create feminist handouts for the annual “Festival in the Park” at Charlotte’s nearby Freedom Park, and they partied on a Saturday night playing “Risk” while eating and drinking too much. Women eagerly anticipated the arrival of a party featuring “turnip greens and sangria” and complained about house problems with moth infestation and “dog shit in the back room.”²¹¹

The Center hosted meetings such as a writer’s workshop, a theater group, a television group concerned with a recently released “videotape on women’s culture,” and lesbian consciousness raising groups. Discussions of organizational structure, the content of the newsletter, and current events related to sexism, sexuality, women’s education, unemployment, abortion rights, rape, and women in prison were noted frequently in the Center’s log book. A young lesbian’s traumatic exit from home and her need for shelter resulted in the following entry: “A woman called, wonders what to do about sixteen year old lesbian who’s moved out of parent’s home—needs place to live.” When “Mr. Robertson,” a chemistry professor at Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) made sexist jokes and handed out sexist material in class, the Center log served as a

²¹⁰ Charlotte Women’s Center Newsletter, ALFA-DU (hereafter cited as CWC, ALFA-DU). In a conversation with the author on August 22, 2011, Dilworth neighbors (Kathy Sparrow, Sara and Joe Spencer, and John and Lorena Cochran) remembered several houses where groups of individuals lived together during this time.

²¹¹ CWC, ALFA-DU.

communication board to publicize his actions, and to call for a response. Committed to educating women about women, the Center newsletter regularly advertised local academic classes such as “Women in Modern America,” offered at CPCC in 1975. A frustrated diatribe printed in the following year’s newsletter lamented the cancellation of a 1976 women’s history course due to low enrollment.

Feminist causes of regional and national interest were paramount concerns for the Charlotte Women’s Center. When North Carolinian Joan Little was charged with murder, women at the Center rallied to offer their support. As an indigent female inmate charged with the murder of a white male prison guard who tried to rape her, Little was the only woman in the Beaufort County jail at the time of the incident -- a proverbial sitting duck. The Center served as a hub for organizing, and in August, 1975 Charlotte women traveled to Raleigh to support Little during her trial.²¹² The Little case garnered national media attention, and according to coverage in *Time* magazine, “It took the six white and six black jurors only 1 hr. and 25 min. to reach the obvious decision: not guilty.”²¹³

Little’s case is characteristic of the causes that were vital to the goals of the feminist movement, and in bringing women together across borders. Regional causes and connections with other feminist groups—especially with the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (ALFA)—were the lifeblood of the Lyndhurst Avenue house. The women regularly mailed their newsletter to ALFA as was common between women’s centers across the country, and when Charlotte Center women visited Atlanta to participate in activist causes, they stayed at ALFA’s house. These types of visits were not simply

²¹² Angela Davis, “Joan Little: The Dialectics of Rape (1975),” *Ms.Magazine*, Spring 2002, www.msmagazine.com/spring2002/davis.asp (accessed May 10, 2012).

²¹³ “Trials: Joan Little’s Story,” *Time*, August 25, 1975, 16.

politically motivated, they were also social calls. Political activism, social connections, and sexual opportunity overlapped as lesbian feminists worked to advance their cause. In January, 1975, a woman identified as Claire, noted her attendance at the Atlanta, Georgia ERA march in January, 1975, and especially her enjoyment of a “damn good women’s dance!” When the Charlotte Center was struggling to survive in 1979, a member included a handwritten note to ALFA, reporting that they were experiencing some changes, but moving forward and anticipating an upcoming dance and concert to be held at the “Y.W.” Dances such as these provided safe and defined spaces for lesbians to find one another—even across the miles that separated Charlotte from Atlanta.

The Charlotte Women’s Center was typical of many lesbian feminist gathering places—exchanging newsletters with other like-minded women’s groups, and housing and welcoming visiting women from across the country. For example, in March, 1975, a San Francisco feminist singing group contacted the Center about their upcoming tour and their desire to play in Charlotte. A note on the Center log read, “letter from women in San Francisco—touring country—singing. Will be here April 21-26. Want to play. Doesn’t say anything about money. Assume feminist. Might be neat.” Money was a constant concern. Financial limitations regulated many Center efforts and activities. These limitations would ultimately cause the demise of the Charlotte Women’s Center.

Financial struggles seeped through the pages of the Center’s newsletter, often controlling the content focus. These struggles were common among alternative New Left publications, yet dedication to producing voluminous amounts of written material was integral to the foundation of the movement generally. Through newsletters such as the one produced in Charlotte, matters of national and international feminisms brought

women together through the written word—a staple of the movement.²¹⁴ In keeping with the national feminist movement, women at the Charlotte Center sought a variety of outlets for documenting and expressing their feminist goals. One such outlet was *The Road*, an alternative newspaper based at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The Women’s Center ran advertisements in the paper describing the Center as a “life space.” They promoted the Center as “staffed by feminists” and described it as a “place for all women.” Jan Millsapps worked with *The Road* on their “women’s content,” as did J.C. Honeycutt. Honeycutt covered the Joan Little case for the paper, while Millsapps called for an integrated approach to the woman-focused content in *The Road*. She rejected a tokenistic layout which would relegate the “woman” information to a special focus section—a special highlight box. Millsapps argued that women’s interests were important to all readers and should be included as such. In a 1975 survey of its women readers, *The Road* reported that they ranged in age from eighteen to over forty, were married, divorced, and had lover(s), but overwhelmingly these women were “definitely interested in women’s sexuality (69 percent responded favorably to that).”²¹⁵ *The Road* was woman-oriented, but not lesbian-oriented. The interests and identities of lesbians were not addressed, and though the Center’s openness to all women was advertised here, the word lesbian was not used.

Although *The Road* did not serve to promote the lesbian feminist goals of some women at the Center, a primary outlet for publishing this rhetoric—one that would gain national attention—would take shape in Charlotte. Discussion of a published journal, or possibly a collection of short stories and poems at a 1974 writer’s workshop at the

²¹⁴ On the importance of a “print-centered” movement, see Chesnut and Gable, 257.

²¹⁵ *The Road*, September 1975, Alternative Press Collection, UNCC (hereafter cited as AP-UNCC).

Lyndhurst Avenue house was a typical weeknight activity. Writer's workshops were typical of the larger feminist movement—an effort to find space and opportunity for women's words. As a direct result of workshops such as these, the lesbian feminist literary journal, *Sinister Wisdom* began publication in Charlotte in 1976. This publication is perhaps the most significant legacy of the Charlotte Women's Center.

As the oldest surviving lesbian literary journal, *Sinister Wisdom* is still currently published with a total commitment to lesbian writing and self expression. Southern lesbian poet, educator and activist, Minnie Bruce Pratt published her first poem in the fifth issue of *Sinister Wisdom*, and this publication would lead her to intimate connections with Charlotte and the women at Lyndhurst Avenue. Pratt met editors, Harriet Desmoines and Catherine Nicholson, when she was invited to read her poem at the Southeastern Women's Studies Association Annual Conference held in Charlotte in 1978. “I never went to the *Sinister Wisdom* production parties in Charlotte, but I understood . . . these were big community events—and also that participation faded so much so that Harriet and Catherine couldn't put out the magazine with regularity.”²¹⁶

At the end of the 1970s, *Sinister Wisdom* would relocate to Lincoln, Nebraska where it received support from a vibrant community of lesbians, but while in Charlotte, Desmoines and Nicholson ran the journal from their home in a quiet Cold War-era neighborhood near the Charlotte Country Club.²¹⁷ Just a few blocks from a bastion of

²¹⁶ Minnie Bruce Pratt, email message to author, January 23, 2012.

²¹⁷ Sears, 246-48, 263-64, 34-40, 107-118. Harriet Desmoines, and Catherine Nicholson formed an early connection with Julia Penelope (Stanley) at a Gay Academic Union conference in 1975, New York City. Penelope had a colorful history as a lesbian professor at the University of Georgia before she landed in Lincoln, Nebraska, and it would be Penelope who encouraged Desmoines and Nicholson to move *Sinister Wisdom* to Lincoln. As of 2012, the journal is edited by Julie R. Enszer and Merry Gangemi. In a telephone conversation with the author on June 15, 2012, Enszer noted that although the journal has often been associated with academics, like Adrienne Rich, Penelope, and Enszer, the journal has never had university funding. This is particularly interesting given that the University of Nebraska—Lincoln now

wealthy white heterosexual privilege, writings from Audre Lorde, Tee Corinne, Karla Jay, Adrienne Rich, Rita Mae Brown, Pat Califia, and other radical lesbians were gathered for production. Academics, activists, mothers, a poet in Paris, an editor of *The Ladder*, and a founder of Daughters, Inc., who famously published Brown's path-breaking southern lesbian coming-of-age novel, *Rubyfruit Jungle*, all came together through their words in a small home in Charlotte for an international lesbian feminist audience. A 1976 editorial statement from Des Moines revealed the activist roots of the publication:

We're lesbians living in the South. We're white; sometimes unemployed, sometimes working part-time. We're a generation apart. Catherine directed university plays for twenty years. . . . I was an erratic activist in the civil rights movement, the Left, and then the radical feminist women's movement. . . . The consciousness we want *Sinister Wisdom* to express is...that of the lesbian or lunatic who embraces her boundary/criminal status, with the aim of creating a new species in a new time/space. We're using the remnants of our class and race privilege to construct a force that we hope will help ultimately destroy privilege.²¹⁸

While *Sinister Wisdom* worked to "destroy privilege" in Charlotte's Country Club Heights neighborhood, not far away in Chapel Hill, the editorial collective *Feminary* sought similar goals. Production began in 1969 and *Feminary* was initially funded by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. By the 1970s *Feminary* was already hailed as one of the longest running feminist publications. "Women's sole control over production gave them an opportunity to be portrayed on their own terms. In addition, newsletters of this type helped to build a sense of community locally."²¹⁹ Like the

claims the journal as a "spectacular cultural complement" to its women's studies program: Moira Ferguson, "The History of Women's Studies at UNL," Women's and Gender Studies, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, <http://www.unl.edu/womenssp/about/history.shtml> (accessed June 20, 2012).

²¹⁸ Harriet Des Moines, "Notes For a Magazine," *Sinister Wisdom*, July 1976, 3-4, ALFA-DU.

²¹⁹ "Feminary (Newsletter)," 1970s North Carolina Feminisms, March 2011, http://sites.duke.edu/docst110s_01_s2011_bec15/print-culture/feminary-newsletter/ (accessed May 10, 2012).

Charlotte Women's Center newsletter, *Feminary* provided an opportunity for women to "learn about the initiatives of other activists around the country." The exchange of publications between Charlotte and Chapel Hill was indicative of a national feminist trend, "as more women's organizations began to swap publications. People who would have never come into contact were able to share information through this print culture, specifically about the different initiatives they were undertaking. *Feminary* as a publication, and as a representation of collective action within the feminist movement, can be viewed as an example of feminist activism."²²⁰ Intimate bonds and sexual liaisons were an integral part of these activist connections. The activism of *Feminary* and *Sinister Wisdom* was intertwined with sex and desire. Just as women who frequented bars were eager to find lesbians, at the heart of the lesbian feminist print culture and its ensuing activism was a deep desire to find like-minded lesbians for sexual connection.

Minnie Bruce Pratt and Cris South's love affair would be fundamental to Pratt's emergence as lesbian feminist writer. Pratt was referred to simply as "MB" in the Center's newsletters—reflecting her frequent visits and interactions with the women in Charlotte. Her national presence as a writer in the lesbian feminist movement was uniquely formed by her identity as a southerner and her ties to places like the Charlotte Women's Center. "I met Cris at a NOW conference that was held in Charlotte . . . she spoke at one of the workshops on being a lesbian mother—and I was in the process of having my children taken away, so we gravitated toward each other." At this same

²²⁰ "Feminary (Newsletter)."

conference, Pratt remembers that several women, both straight and gay, went out to see a drag show at the Charlotte bar, Scorpio:²²¹

I was living in Fayetteville, NC, at the time and there was no gay gathering space except for a couple of bars. These conferences in Charlotte made me think there was a significant lesbian presence and energy there, since “everyone knew” that lesbian participation was very high in Women's Studies & NOW! After Cris & I became lovers, and I stayed with her in Charlotte at the Center, I had the impression that there were lesbian cultural events going on regularly.²²²

Pratt’s ties to Charlotte are an example of the often intertwined relationship between lesbian feminists in North Carolina and the greater Southeast region. These connections meant that the Charlotte Women’s Center followed closely developments in the Research Triangle—another hub of North Carolina lesbian feminist activism. In 1978, the Center newsletter noted a new direction for *Feminary*. The members of the collective were shifting from a local feminist focus to a southern regional lesbian feminist—with an effort to expose the stories of southern women while noting the divide between the southern “values and traditions” that both shaped them as individual women yet also worked to destroy their identities as women and lesbians. The full title of *Feminary: A Feminist Journal for the South, Emphasizing Lesbian Visions*, reflected this focus. Pratt was involved with *Feminary* before this shift, and she remembered that the southern lesbian writer, Mab Segrest, suggested that *Feminary* make this move in order to fill the void when *Sinister Wisdom* made its exit from Charlotte.²²³ After the transition, a 1979 issue of *Feminary* thanked Nicholson and Desmoines of *Sinister Wisdom* for their

²²¹ It is interesting to note that nowhere in the newsletters is there a mention of bars—lesbian or otherwise. The Center held dances and social activities, and occasionally they promoted some social events that were exclusively for lesbians. But, a relationship with any lesbian or gay bar community is not referenced or acknowledged.

²²² Minnie Bruce Pratt, email message to author, January 23, 2012. I am grateful to Pratt for allowing me to quote from this informal email exchange.

²²³ *Ibid.*; CWC, ALFA-DU.

“encouragement and example” and “their work for lesbians in the South.”²²⁴ In the same issue, the journal featured Pratt’s poem, “My Cousin Anne,” Segrest’s article, “Southern Women Writing: Toward a Literature of Wholeness,” and reviews of work by the notable southern writers, Lillian Smith and Rita Mae Brown.²²⁵

Sinister Wisdom was the result of intimate and sexual connections formed at the Charlotte Women’s Center, and it emerged on the heels of a major split among local women. The activism at the Center and the pages of *Sinister Wisdom* could not be separated from intimacy, friendship, and personal pain. A group who labeled themselves Charlotte’s Drastic Dykes began to meet at the Lyndhurst Avenue house in January, 1975. Members of the group briefly lived in the upstairs apartment of the Center, and caused substantial concern for women at the Center. After extensive infighting among the women of the Center, the group eventually vacated the premises and branched off to form their own Lesbian Center. Among those who left were the newly-involved lovers Desmoines and Nicholson. The emotional frustration of their exit and their love for one another would find a literary home in *Sinister Wisdom*.

In her description of the troubled origins of *Sinister Wisdom*, Nicholson recalled that some women at the Center wanted a different format than the magazine that Nicholson and Desmoines envisioned. “Neither of us was interested in a local newsletter. We were interested in literature, philosophy, and theory. They thought that was elitist. So we left.”²²⁶ In fact, their departure did represent an elitist effort led by Nicholson who had recently resigned her teaching position at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She viewed the university system as a tool of patriarchal

²²⁴ *Feminary*, 1979, *Front Page Records* (1999-0421), Box 51, DU (hereafter cited as FP-DU).

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Sears, 248.

domination, and leaving her job was a symbol of her commitment to lesbian separatism.²²⁷ Although Desmoines and Nicholson were aware of their class and race privilege, and wrote about it often, they left behind women at the Center who struggled to maintain jobs and who did not necessarily share the education or privileged ability to devote themselves fully to literary pursuits.

Joy Justice detailed the split at the Women's Center in an article for *Sinister Wisdom*. "We did not become separatists because we wanted to separate ourselves from the world. In fact, for the first five or six months that Drastic Dykes met, we met at the Women's Center, and were individually still very much involved with the straight women at the Center."²²⁸ This tense coexistence did not last:

"When straight women and other lesbians were frightened and angry with us because of what we thought . . . we became more angry, until finally there were no straight women coming to the Center. We were left with the choice of continuing to run a women's center for women who would not come to meetings because we were there, or leaving. We left."²²⁹

Justice hoped that those who remained at the Women's Center would come after them and beg them to stay, but instead "isolation was the ultimate result."²³⁰ The Dykes who left the Charlotte Women's Center were determined to live "emotionally" beyond the bonds of patriarchy, and it was in this mindset that *Sinister Wisdom* took shape in Charlotte.

The Women's Center newsletter devoted significant space to information about the separatist collective group, noting that in July, 1975, the Drastic Dykes no longer met at—or had anything to do with—the Center. In August of 1975, Jan Millsapps published

²²⁷ For more on the origins of *Sinister Wisdom*, and Nicholson's exit from UNC Charlotte, see Sears, 248-53.

²²⁸ Joy Justice, "Vision," *Sinister Wisdom*, Fall 1977, 68, ALFA-DU.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

a cry for help. She noted the struggles that the Center faced—especially with bringing women of disparate beliefs and goals together to support a space. Based on the letters that the Center received from “all over,” Millsapps recognized that the Charlotte Center was not alone in its struggle. Millsapps noted the importance of the Center as place—a place like no other for women, but she lamented the fact that “only a handful seem to need facilities which can accommodate many more . . . the house stands as a shell which once contained workshops, discussion groups, and lots of women getting down to business. The business of being themselves.”²³¹ The struggle to define the usage of the Charlotte Women’s Center ultimately defined the Center itself. In 1975, the Lyndhurst Avenue home was definitely contested space.

By September, the Dykes HAD made their ideological exit with a thorough explanation submitted to the newsletter by Justice. “We are gone from the Women’s Center because remaining involved with the Center meant continuing to put a lot of energy into women who were in turn giving a lot of energy to men. It is much more complicated than that of course. Lots of anger, lots of hurt all round.” An additional viewpoint, offered by Concetta Hinceman attempted to understand the stance adopted by the Dykes. “The current residents are political separatists; now I can’t explain that, except that this particular kind of separatism excludes all other people who are not of the same political ideologies, which means the upstairs residents exclude all women except women like them.” Hinceman went on to argue that no one “should be living in the house that contains the Women’s Center” if they were not willing to accept all women. “Just think how hard it has been letting women know that the Center is open to all women.” The continued dissension among the women at the Center led to significant

²³¹ CWC, ALFA-DU.

fissures that crippled their efforts to create a lasting community. Although the Drastic Dykes continued to live in the upstairs apartment until December 1975, they did not support the mission of the Center or interact with the Center as a whole.²³²

The Center was founded as a place to welcome all women—especially lesbians. A paper presented there by a women’s socialist group in 1972 highlighted ten major areas of action for the women at the Lyndhurst Avenue house. Number ten was to “end the discrimination against our Lesbian Sisters.” Though this was an early goal for women at the Center, by the mid-1970s it was a touchy debate. The Center was clearly a space of anger and frustration—not unity—in 1975. During the next two years, the focus of the Center newsletter was on community outreach, abortion rights, and women in prison. Only occasionally did a reference to a lesbian dance warrant inclusion. In a survey to determine what groups would garner the most support for meetings at the Center, a lesbian group was not even listed among the options.

Reflecting national debates over lesbian separatism, the Charlotte Women’s Center could not find sufficient common ground for lesbians, lesbian separatists, and heterosexual feminists. As historian Anne Enke showed in her examination of the feminist movement in the urban upper Midwest, between 1969 and 1976 “community spaces came into being alongside activists’ intense efforts to define themselves and their politics.” Enke argues that “to the extent that struggles over politicized community were about generating and achieving feminist goals, they were equally about defining

²³² The Drastic Dykes were specifically inspired by Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch, eds., *Lesbianism and the Women’s Movement* (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975), and looked to this national publication for direction. They noted in their exit statement that the book was available locally at Crazy Horse Bookstore on 110 E. Kings Drive in Charlotte.

space.”²³³ The space at Lyndhurst Avenue was contentious, political, activist, and as Charlotte women worked to define the Center’s house and its mission, their struggle mirrored similar contests in other urban areas. The Center hoped to provide a space for all women, but in actuality only a relatively small, predominantly white group of women found the Center to be common ground. Efforts to define the physical space of the Center ultimately divided the women who tried to claim the space according to their sexual or political preferences.

Joy Justice struggled internally with her own commitment to separatism. She could not abide a theoretical position that would require her to abandon her biological sister because she was heterosexual. When she wrote about this personal turmoil in the pages of *Sinister Wisdom*, she concluded that she could only live as an “individual.” As she put aside the label of separatist, she still embraced many of its ideals—especially with regard to issues of race, class, sex, and age. “I still need to always remember the things I learned from separatism about society, because otherwise the world would be an incomprehensible ball of goo.” In leaving separatism as an identity, she was unwilling to leave her need for lesbian camaraderie. She “needed to be around lesbians,” and found this opportunity in meetings for the newly formed Lesbian Center Group.²³⁴

Discussions of a separate lesbian center, and dances to raise funds for this center, received attention in the Charlotte Women’s Center newsletter, but by the fall of 1976, the Lesbian Center Group produced a separate newsletter.²³⁵ Quite similar in format to the typewritten and Xeroxed format of the Women’s Center newsletter, the “Lesbian

²³³ Enke, 100-01.

²³⁴ Justice, “Vision,” 66-71, ALFA-DU.

²³⁵ Like the other publications, this newsletter was produced in a Charlotte home on East Shade Valley Road.

Center Journal” newsletter covered their local activism, devoted space to personal thought pieces, and hoped to form lesbian consciousness raising meetings. When a local restaurant worker, Jennifer Justice, was fired from the Stonehenge Restaurant allegedly because she “wouldn’t do sexual flirtations with her bosses and the male customers,” there was some debate among the Lesbian Center group as to whether they should support this action since Justice was not a lesbian, but eight women did march in protest of the firing.²³⁶ They carried signs and chanted songs of protest such as:

I don’t know but I’ve been told
waitresses are bought and sold,
I don’t know but I really feel
man’s cooked up a dirty deal,
Dykes unite we’re marching now,
make them know we take this vow,
to fight the state and fight the prick,
that makes this world so goddamn sick.²³⁷

Although police tried to disband the protest on the grounds that the group had no permit, the women argued successfully that they did not need a permit and had access to legal counsel. The police left the protest after this exchange, and the women “arrived home safely.” According to “Penny,” who submitted the coverage for the newsletter, the Lesbian Center women viewed the protest as successful, and they hoped that they “slowed down . . . business that night.”²³⁸ Thereafter came calls to boycott the

²³⁶ Jennifer Justice, was probably the heterosexual sister to whom Joy Justice referred when struggling with her own lesbian separatism.

²³⁷ Lesbian Center Journal, Charlotte, NC, ALFA-DU.

²³⁸ Ibid.

Stonehenge in the future, and for waitresses, and women generally, to demand a respectful workplace.²³⁹

Just three years after the Drastic Dykes exited the Charlotte Women's Center, some lesbian involvement returned to Lyndhurst Avenue. Pratt recalled that it was also at this time that participation in the production of *Sinister Wisdom* appeared to wane. A lesbian support group met at the Center, but one woman worried about participating in a group with women who were previous lovers. Two lesbian support groups would allow "more freedom to air feelings," and avoid inhibition for former lovers who might be forced to participate in the same group. Charlotte's lesbian population was still small enough in the 1970s that gathering like-minded women—especially those who identified as activist and lesbian—would sometimes mean interacting with former lovers. Activism and support would have to take a back seat to sexual tension in organizing at the Center.²⁴⁰

At the same UNC Charlotte Southeastern Women's Studies Association conference where Minnie Bruce Pratt met the editors of *Sinister Wisdom*, a featured workshop focused on women's centers. J. C. Honeycutt represented Charlotte on the panel, with other participants from Knoxville, Tuscaloosa, and Asheville. The Charlotte Center stood apart as a uniquely autonomous entity in comparison with other centers. Center member Gloria Knotts editorialized: "Our autonomy and control by women for women, our length of existence, our focus on 'women's liberation' and consciousness-raising rather than on issues, social services, funding or 'respectability' were all facts of a

²³⁹ Lesbian Center Journal, Charlotte, NC, ALFA-DU.

²⁴⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population of the Largest 75 Cities: 1900-2000*, HS-7, <http://www.census.gov/statab/hist/HS-07.pdf> (accessed February 5, 2012). Between 1960 and 1980, Charlotte's population grew by over 112,000, reaching 314,447 in 1980.

different approach.”²⁴¹ Knotts noted the Center’s choice to avoid governmental monies as a freeing and autonomous approach. Other centers represented at the workshop suffered under bureaucratic controls, but the women in Charlotte saw their control of the Center as vital to their comparative longevity. They saw their autonomy as a release from any societal respectability necessary to garner community and/or government support/funding. Other centers received funding from the American Association of University Women and were largely supported and attended by university women. Charlotte’s Center was independent of UNC Charlotte in important ways that fostered some social and class diversity, and allowed it to be located closer to the center of Charlotte proper. The University stood on the edge of the city and did not serve as an anchor for the events and activities of the Charlotte Women’s Center.

Ultimately, however, the Center was more dependent on outside support than its leaders might have recognized. The loss of Comprehensive Employment and Training Administration (CETA) funding in 1979 came just a year after the Women’s Studies Association conference, and it would cause substantial financial hardship at the Center. The Charlotte Women’s Center’s only static financial support came from a CETA-funded coordinator position. Signed into law under President Nixon in 1973, CETA funding allowed many community organizations like the Charlotte Women’s Center to pay for basic expenses. The funds were handled entirely at the local level, and in the case of the Women’s Center, they could only be used to support one clerical or coordinator position. Center members were eager to use the funding for basic operational costs, but this was not allowed. By June of 1979, it was clear that CETA would probably cut all financial

²⁴¹ CWC, ALFA-DU.

assistance by October of that year leaving the Center in a state of desperation: “We need to come up with possible alternatives to having a full time coordinator. We need people who are willing and able to help us deal with ceta and its ‘people in power.’ We need you!!”²⁴²

In 1974, the newsletter highlighted the discouragement at the Center, and an effort to motivate “raving women” toward involvement at the Center. The women “got even more discouraged when it finally dawned on us that what most women need is money, and we didn’t have any of that. The only way to get money was to apply for grants, and that would take away our independence and transform the women’s center into another liberal social service agency.” Try as they might, the women at the Center struggled for years with the dilemma of autonomy versus survival. Identity debates and finances worked mightily to divide the women and their mission. By 1979 the Center faced a stark financial reality. Autonomy was no longer the priority, and the Center’s survival was questionable, with one issue of the newsletter signing off, “See you next month, maybe.” The newsletter begged for any money and any help in writing grants or dealing with the power structure at CETA. The loss of this funding in October, 1979 would prove to be a death knell. By November of 1979, the Center was out of money. It was now an all volunteer organization, and the newsletter tone was desperate with women begging for help to lick stamps.²⁴³

²⁴² CWC, ALFA-DU. For more on CETA, see Yvonne Yen Liu, “Trained to Fail,” *Colorlines*, April 13, 2010, http://colorlines.com/archives/2010/04/trained_to_fail.html (accessed May 10, 2012), and “The American Presidency Project,” under “Richard Nixon, Statement on Signing the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973,” <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=4088> (accessed July 15, 2012).

²⁴³ CWC, ALFA-DU.

While Charlotte women struggled to maintain the Charlotte Women's Center, the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (ALFA) enjoyed relatively more success. If Charlotte was a hub for southern lesbian activity and organizing, Atlanta was a mecca. Boasting not only ALFA, but the successful alternative newspaper, *The Great Speckled Bird*, a local chapter of the Gay Liberation Front, and the lesbian-owned feminist bookstore, Charis Books and More, lesbians in Atlanta sustained a level of activism throughout the 1970s that their Charlotte counterparts found difficult to achieve. Charlotte had an energetic chapter of the National Organization of Women—it would be a NOW meeting in Charlotte that would draw Minnie Bruce Pratt to the Queen City and facilitate her love affair with Cris South. Charlotte also attempted to sustain a Gay Liberation Front chapter, and briefly formed an organization known as Charlotte Gay Alliance for Freedom. In spite of these organizations, the visibility that was necessary to sustain activism in Charlotte was too high a price for many. As James Sears noted, “social life defined gay liberation in the Queen City.” While gay men's bars and baths thrived, activist groups struggled against a tide of queer Charlotteans who were not willing to identify themselves with the movement or even as gay.²⁴⁴ In a city that struggled with its own identity, gay liberation activists and lesbian feminists mirrored this identity struggle—often preferring to remain within Charlotte's invisible demimonde.

In Atlanta, the impetus for ALFA came from women who were committed to New Left activism and frustrated with the gay liberation and women's liberation movements. Gay activist organizations were often hotbeds of sexism, with the Gay Liberation Front in both Atlanta and Charlotte largely controlled by gay men. In ALFA, “young leftist women who had joined the Venceremos Brigades and had come to Atlanta

²⁴⁴ On this point, see Sears, 157-58.

as one of the staging areas for the Brigades,” found an opportunity to focus solely on their lesbian feminist goals. In the funky “Little Five Points” neighborhood close to Emory University, “there was a home in Atlanta for lesbians who found the women’s liberation movement too heterosexist and the gay liberation movement, as well as most leftist groups, too sexist.”²⁴⁵ Lesbian awakening in Atlanta’s Little Five Points can be traced to 1971 in the visible and often political organizing and communal living by women who were predominately white, educated students at nearby Georgia State University and Emory University, and who defined the development of the neighborhood. Once decimated by white flight, Little Five Points now attracted freethinkers, political activists, artists, lesbians, and feminists who were free to pursue their “‘anything is possible’ view of the future.”²⁴⁶

At first, the Alliance operated from the “Edge of Night” —a communal household, much like the Charlotte Women’s Center. “The three-story wood frame structure on Mansfield Avenue in Little Five Points,” a neighborhood of lesbian communal households, featured “concrete steps that led from the street past the wild garden to the front porch of this twenties-style house.” The house offered a place for women in and outside of Atlanta “to just be with other lesbians.”²⁴⁷ Eventually ALFA would move to a rented home on McLendon Avenue in the same Little Five Points neighborhood.²⁴⁸ From its formation, ALFA quieted the divisive debate over lesbian separatism. As James T. Sears observed, “Despite differences in ideology, temperament,

²⁴⁵ Chesnut and Gable, 254. For a detailed look at the formation of ALFA and the direct connections to the Venceremos Brigades, see 252-57. For more on ties between the Gay Liberation Front and the Brigades, see Sears, 86-95, and 108-110.

²⁴⁶ Chesnut and Gable, 252-53.

²⁴⁷ Sears, 110. Feminists in the movement often named their houses, and referred to their centers and houses using the pronouns “she,” or “her.”

²⁴⁸ Sears, 110.

and tactics, they were united in their commitment to fight against sexism and heterosexism.”²⁴⁹ According to ALFA member Vicki Gabriner, “Atlanta Women’s Liberation ‘was too straight and the Gay liberation Front was too male.’”²⁵⁰ ALFA would be lesbian focused, but according to early ALFA organizers Lorraine Fontana and Gabriner, there would not be a “‘litmus test—you don’t have to pull out your lesbian ID card!’”²⁵¹ ALFA provided “a home in Atlanta for lesbians who found the women’s liberation movement too heterosexist and the gay liberation movement, as well as most leftist groups, too sexist.”²⁵² “For the first time in the history of lesbians in the South, there were social spaces outside the bars where lesbians could meet other lesbians and public activities in which they could participate as lesbians, without fear of persecution by police and with the knowledge that if they did encounter harassment or persecution from anyone, they had a community of strong, activist women to support and defend them.”²⁵³

The ALFA house offered more than refuge, it offered education. ALFA managed to create an impressive library (the Southern Feminist Library and Archives) of feminist and lesbian feminist newsletters and periodicals. Their *Atalanta* newsletter often listed these receipts and acquisitions as a community service for lesbians seeking information, and locating regional and national connections. ALFA’s commitment to the print culture of feminism meant that the history of women’s centers across the world—including the Charlotte Women’s Center—would be preserved.²⁵⁴ ALFA’s ability to maintain the

²⁴⁹ Sears, 110.

²⁵⁰ Vicki Gabriner, quoted in Sears, 110.

²⁵¹ Gabriner and Lorrain Fontana, quoted in Sears, 110.

²⁵² Chesnut and Gable, 254.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 255.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 257. The substantial collection of newsletters included in the ALFA Periodicals Collection at Duke University’s Sallie Bingham Center for Women’s History and Culture is evidence of the vitality

archives and the organization speaks to the relative affluence of women in Atlanta generally. For example, based on data from the 1973-76 Current Population Survey, women in Atlanta earned real—cost of living-adjusted—wages that were 11 percent higher compared to the combined averages of hourly wages for women in the remainder of the South’s six largest metro areas at the time (Houston, Miami, Dallas, New Orleans, and Tampa.)²⁵⁵ This affluence was apparent to African American lesbian, Karla Brown, who moved from Charlotte to Atlanta in the early 1970s and found the women at ALFA to be more welcoming than those at the Charlotte Women’s Center. She was also keenly aware that the women at ALFA house often had their own places to live, unlike Brown at the time, and were largely middle-class whites who were older than her and had completed their educations.²⁵⁶ Atlanta operated on a profoundly larger economic and population base in comparison to many New South cities, including Charlotte, and organizations like ALFA benefitted from this. Atlanta’s economic climate for women boosted the state’s status as evidenced by Georgia’s 1998 rank, a position that the state had maintained since 1987, as the state with the second highest growth rate in the number of women-owned firms nationally.²⁵⁷ In a 1984 issue of Atlanta’s *Pulse*, the article, “Celebrating a Woman’s Space,” showed that over twelve years after ALFA settled into

important role that this organization occupied in the movement. The collection includes over 800 newsletters and journals (forty-seven boxes of materials) in addition to organizational records for many other radical women’s groups: “Inventory of the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Periodicals Collection, 1962-1994,” <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/alfaperiodicals/> (accessed June 20, 2012).

²⁵⁵ George E. Johnson, “Intermetropolitan Wage Differentials in the United States,” in *The Measurement of Labor Cost*, ed. Jack E. Triplett (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 327, <http://www.nber.org/chapters/c7381.pdf> (accessed June 24, 2012). I am grateful to James C. Cobb for locating and analyzing this data.

²⁵⁶ Sears, 137-38. Brown did attend a “white women’s college near Charlotte,” according to Sears, but it is unclear whether she graduated. Although Brown uses the word “most” to describe her observations of the women of ALFA, it is hard to say whether Brown’s perceptions are representative of a large or small group of the members.

²⁵⁷ U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy, *Women in Business*, Office of Economic Research, October 1998, <http://archive.sba.gov/advo/stats/wib.pdf> (accessed May 25, 2012).

the Little Five Points Neighborhood, its spirit was still strong. The article praised the vital role of ALFA's library in preserving Atlanta's "herstory", and the continued if controversial importance of providing a "male-free zone," noting that "even if the gay men didn't really want to hang out with the lesbians all the time, they resented an area that was forbidden to them."²⁵⁸

ALFA and southern lesbians benefitted from the success of Atlanta's alternative paper, a publication of the Atlanta Cooperative News Project, titled " *The Great Speckled Bird*."²⁵⁹ Promising a "radical perspective from Atlanta," the *Bird* offered significant coverage of lesbian news.²⁶⁰ The 1975 Great Southeast Lesbian Conference was featured on the front page. The conference focused on "Building a Lesbian Community," and was touted as a move away from separatism toward inclusion of all women. Notably, this effort toward lesbian community building came in the same year that the Drastic Dykes made their ideological—and eventually physical—exit from the Charlotte Women's Center. According to the *Bird*'s coverage, the theme of community building in Atlanta laid the groundwork to "generate much or nothing. On this weekend of a full moon eclipse which moved from Scorpio to Sagittarius, tremendous energy was generated, tremendous potential uncovered, tremendous possibilities realized."²⁶¹ The paper celebrated the conference's focus on change—a move away from "choking anger" toward an inclusiveness that was seen as refreshingly free of "women hysterically

²⁵⁸ Rita Leda, "Celebrating A Woman's Space," *Pulse*, September 6, 1984, ALFA-DU. As noted later in this chapter, when women's content was included in predominately male publications like *Pulse*, it was often contributed by women (like Rita Leda).

²⁵⁹ "History of the Bird," *The Great Speckled Bird*, <http://www.greatspeckledbird.org/history.html> (accessed May 10, 2012).

²⁶⁰ There was a move in 1971 to increase the *Bird* coverage of gay issues, and according to James T. Sears, this culminated in a 1973 walk out by heterosexual staff members, see Sears, 89.

²⁶¹ Sharon Evans and Kathy Ellison, "Coming Together at ALFA Conference," *Great Speckled Bird*, June 5, 1975, ALFA-DU.

needing to proclaim how good the gay life is or hanging all over other women.”

Conference attendees hoped to set up regional and national community networks for lesbians, and they worked under the recognition that “lesbians who are self-supporting and live outside the nuclear family present a challenge” to the oppressive system of capitalism. The *Bird* article concluded that socialism would be the ultimate route for the lesbian movement.

At the same 1975 conference, Charlotte’s Drastic Dykes led a workshop on the topic on lesbian separatism, but even at the conference there was confusion about how to proceed and whom to include. The Dykes wanted to meet exclusively with separatists in their workshop, but according to Atlanta attendee, Elizabeth Knowlton, “nonseparatists could not accept this; therefore the meeting became a movement from room to room, as the separatists attempted to separate themselves.”²⁶² The *Bird* article noted that the conference’s focus on the issue suggested that “lesbian separatism is a tool for survival and for developing women’s strengths.” The goal put forward at this conference was to remove the need for separatism, but to recognize the ideology as temporarily strategic.²⁶³ Knowlton faced a difficult decision on where to fit in the separatist debate. She “didn’t feel part of either group.” When she lived in the Research Triangle of North Carolina, she was a separatist, but at the time of the conference she felt a kinship with “puzzled lesbians who wanted to discuss the issue.”²⁶⁴

Black women at the conference pushed for future work on “third world women.” Recognizing that “both separatism and racism are very heavy issues,” the troublesome assumption that black women would join the movement was often the norm, rather than

²⁶² Elizabeth Knowlton, quoted in Sears, 185.

²⁶³ Evans and Ellison, “Coming Together.”

²⁶⁴ Knowlton, quoted in Sears, 185.

the movement “expanding to include” the needs and desires of black women.²⁶⁵ The conference concluded with a call for further examination of both racism and separatism. Women from the Charlotte Center attended and promoted the conference, with the highest state contingents from Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida. All told, eighteen states were represented, 325 women attended, and featured speakers hailed from Northampton, Massachusetts and San Francisco. While Charlotte’s activists made regional connections and sought to make their city a hub of feminist—and occasionally lesbian—activity, the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance made national connections through the Great Southeast Lesbian Conference and challenged New Left ideological boundaries with the help of the *Bird*’s coverage of the event.

In March 1976, the *Bird* celebrated International Women’s Day by devoting an entire issue to women, as it had done since 1969. In the opening statement on the issue, the staff (the newspaper explicitly shunned labels such as “editors”) focused on “new areas” of struggle for women. One such area was issues of concern for lesbians, but unfortunately the issue itself contained nothing specifically aimed at lesbians. Unless an event was specifically labeled as lesbian, such as the Great Southeast Lesbian Conference a year earlier, general content of specific interest to lesbians was often sidelined in alternative papers like the *Bird* and *The Road*. In both cities, lesbians largely remained outside the category of woman—even in the alternative press of the 1970s. If lesbian content was included, it was usually contributed by lesbians themselves. This was certainly true of the Charlotte publication, the *Free Press*. As noted in the preceding chapter, the paper attempted to reach both lesbians and gay men, but content for lesbians

²⁶⁵ Evans and Ellison, “Coming Together.”

often came primarily from women such as J.C. Honeycutt, Jan Millsapps, and Harriet Desmoines—women who were central figures at Charlotte’s Women’s Center.

Desmoines wrote a review of a lesbian anthology for the *Free Press*, and occasional classified advertisements in the paper contained information on how to order *Sinister Wisdom*. *Free Press* served as a tool to bring lesbians together in both social and intellectual spaces as advertised and promoted in the paper. Like *The Road* it was heavily connected to the women from the Charlotte Women’s Center, but it offered an additional venue for Queen City lesbian content in the 1970s, and served as an identifier of potential meeting spaces outside of the bars. It is interesting to note that 1977 was the third year of production for the *Free Press*. *The Road* struggled to survive and ultimately failed in 1975. The relative success of the *Free Press* was probably due to its promotion of men’s gay bars, which meant important advertising dollars that a solely political and heterosexually oriented newspaper like *The Road* could not attract or did not pursue. *The Great Speckled Bird* maintained its political focus and managed to survive, but unlike *The Road*, the *Bird* was supported by an activist Little Five Points neighborhood. Such a sizeable and activist neighborhood did not exist to sustain 1970s leftist efforts in Charlotte.

Although there was little lesbian-specific content in the women’s issue of the *Bird*, a small handwritten advertisement ran for “Charis: Books & More.” The ad promoted Olivia records, the growing record label devoted specifically to lesbian music, whose musicians worked to bring lesbians together for gatherings around the country—and in Atlanta and Charlotte. This small advertisement could have served as an opportunity for an isolated or new-to-town woman seeking lesbian relationships. Olivia

recordings opened up a world of lesbian music to a national audience—a primarily white audience. In 1977, Charlotte’s *Free Press* featured Meg Christian, one of Olivia’s most popular artists, on its front cover, and ran advertisements for where to buy Olivia records in Charlotte. A chance meeting over an Olivia record shopping excursion could lead to a significant lesbian connection. Locating lesbians was often a matter of locating a place that sold Olivia recordings. When Christian came to the Charlotte area in 1979, the excitement in the Center newsletter was palpable.²⁶⁶

Olivia records played a fundamental role in the early formation of Charis Books & More—a haven for lesbian feminist community building. Located in unconventional Little Five Points, which was “‘crawling with lesbians,’” the store opened in November 1974, and it quickly became part of the neighborhood, as Little Five Points served as a breeding ground for volunteers and patrons who claimed Charis as their own.²⁶⁷

According to Charis historians, Saralyn Chesnut and Amanda C. Gable, the women who opened the store were unaware of the important role that it would play in supporting feminism: “Although Barbara Borgman remembers thinking of the store as a ‘radical social alternative bookstore,’ Linda Bryant remembers envisioning a store with a focus on women’s books as well as children’s books (Barbara’s expertise) and radical theology books.”²⁶⁸ Bryant and Borgman were accidental lesbian activists.

Linda remembers Chris Carroll and Karen Gold as the first self-identified lesbians from the Little Five Points neighborhood that she met; Chris was distributing Olivia records, and Charis began selling women’s music early on. Linda also fondly recalls going to the favorite bar of the Little Five Points

²⁶⁶ CWC, ALFA-DU.

²⁶⁷ Chesnut and Gable, 241-44, 254.

²⁶⁸ Saralyn Chesnut, Amanda C. Gable, and Elizabeth Anderson, “Atlanta’s Charis Books and More: Histories of a Feminist Space,” *Southern Spaces* (November 3, 2009), <http://southernspaces.org/2009/atlantas-charis-books-and-more-histories-feminist-space> (accessed February 9, 2012).

lesbians, The Tower, around 1975 to hear Olivia recording artists Cris Williamson and June Millington. Even though she identified as heterosexual at the time, she was thrilled by the experience.²⁶⁹

In the same 1984 issue that celebrated the separate space of the ALFA house, *Pulse* carried an article promoting the importance of Charis. “For feminists, lesbians, and Feminist-lesbians, Charis may provide an adventurous pilgrimage inward. Customers can kick back on the ratty, but comfortable, reading sofa . . . breathe freely,” and experience the “ambience.” According to the article, patrons could use Charis as an information hub to find an electrician or locate a woman’s bar; the store served as a “community resource center.” The article also noted the importance of Olivia music and its availability at Charis, referring to the best-selling artists such as Meg Christian and Cris Williamson by their first names, like friends who offered the “no longer hidden music of women loving women.”²⁷⁰ This intimate portrait of Charis is exactly the service that ALFA hoped to provide with its commitment to archival preservation. ALFA archived periodicals like *Pulse*, and as a result we are able to capture the essence of Charis in Atlanta’s Little Five Points.

Chesnut and Gable argued that Charis represented a chief “contribution of lesbian feminism: its construction of a new lesbian identity.” This new identity meant that lesbians left behind the “realms of sickness and sin” that defined them in the first half of the twentieth century, and they entered a public and political arena through “the production and widespread dissemination of new and diverse representations of lesbian life and culture.”²⁷¹ Historian Anne Enke argues that bars were “primarily locations” for the “publication of a newly defined feminist subject,” but Charis Books and More

²⁶⁹ Chesnut and Gable, 262.

²⁷⁰ Frances Patton, “Women’s Creativity a Priority at Charis,” *Pulse*, September 6, 1984, ALFA-DU.

²⁷¹ Chesnut and Gable, 246-47.

also served this role in Atlanta²⁷². It offered a place outside of the bar for women to congregate, communicate, and identify as a lesbian and a woman.

Lesbian feminism radicalized women in Charlotte and Atlanta. Both cities were home to activist groups who demonstrated the increasing visibility of lesbians generally. As evidence of their stamina, foundational institutions like *Sinister Wisdom* and Charis Books and More remain in operation. Lesbians in the two cities made connections across geographical boundaries because of feminist print media like *Sinister Wisdom*, ALFA's *Atalanta* newsletter, the Charlotte Women's Center newsletter, *Feminary*, and bookstores like Charis that carried this material, and ALFA's library that preserved it. But *Sinister Wisdom* left Charlotte for Nebraska, and the Drastic Dykes seemed to disappear with it. Charis and ALFA remained in Atlanta, however, and their tenacity is an example of how lesbian feminism in Atlanta differed from the Queen City. Quiet writing was one thing, but a permanent visible and physical space devoted to, or at least encouraging of, lesbians was much harder to achieve in Charlotte. As Enke observed, "While print media disseminated feminist ideas widely, it was the localized places of their dissemination that produced movement communities."²⁷³ Atlanta sustained these "localized places," Charlotte did not. The causes and consequences of these differences are examined in the final two chapters.

²⁷² Enke, 29.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 64.

CHAPTER 4

PRIDE

For the Drastic Dykes of 1970s Charlotte, activists who certainly would have rallied around the opportunity for Stonewall-style visible defiance, there was no community gay Pride event until the 1980s. But the male-dominated Pride events that eventually took place in Charlotte would not appeal to those lesbians who still valued their separate identity and their separate goals for socialization. Lesbians who continued to crave separate social space in the 1980s would turn to newly-formed and short-lived social groups and lesbian bars, when they existed. They occasionally attended Pride festivals, but were rarely involved in the planning or in the majority of Pride events. For lesbians in Atlanta, however, the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (ALFA) served as a major presence in the early origins of Atlanta's gay rights parade—the first in the Deep South debuting in 1971. ALFA first participated in June, 1973, and in the years following, the group was vital to creating activities that kept the event focused on lesbian interests such as lesbian films shown at ALFA's open house, and especially lesbian softball.²⁷⁴

Gay Pride festivals played an important role in the activism of the 1970s, but increasingly in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s these festivals served as public social events and as mega media spectacles with substantial corporate support and branding. They brought many lesbians and gay men together in a rare group setting, and during the light

²⁷⁴ *Atlanta Barb*, 1974, ALFA-DU.

of day. For many citizens of Charlotte and Atlanta these festivals would be the only time that they were forced to recognize the growing gay populations in their cities. The history of gay Pride celebrations is rarely critiqued historically, but in Atlanta and Charlotte these celebrations served as a barometer of the environment for lesbians and gay men in each city. Whether or not lesbians or gay men participated in—or even attended—the events, Pride celebrations demonstrated the level of queer acceptance and community in a city. They highlighted the businesses, politicians, public safety, and community organizations that were available to, or supportive of, gay people. In this chapter, gay Pride serves as a lens through which the climate for lesbian lives in Charlotte and Atlanta is understood. Atlanta’s long history with a gay Pride celebration and support for gayborhoods, offers an interesting comparison to Charlotte’s reluctant relationship with gay Pride festivals and its lesbian citizens. The festivals played a role in lesbian life in each city—through political players and activism, through business involvement, and through the bars. How did gay Pride become what is currently and what does it tell us about the urban environment for lesbians in Atlanta and Charlotte?

During the decades since the Stonewall Riots, Pride celebrations have become an institution for many cities and regions of all sizes. In North Carolina, there is currently a separate event for the Outer Banks, Raleigh, Boone, and the Triad—which is also home to Triangle Black Pride and the North Carolina statewide event. Charlotte hosts both Charlotte Black Gay Pride and Pride Charlotte. In addition to Atlanta’s Black Pride and the Atlanta Pride Festival, Georgia is home to celebrations in Athens, Savannah, and South Georgia. Most cities that host a Pride event recognize the history of the celebration and its origins based on police harassment and arrests of lesbians and gay men at the

Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village that led to frenzied rioting on the volatile weekend of June 28, 1969.

Several factors contributed to the success of Atlanta Pride and Charlotte's difficulties in gaining and maintaining a Pride festival. Atlanta had neighborhood, business, economic, and mayoral support. ALFA and stand-alone lesbian bars played a huge role in making sure there were opportunities for lesbians to participate in Pride, whereas any comparable organizations or bars were nonexistent in Charlotte. Mayor Maynard Jackson's early support of Atlanta Pride in the 1970s played a huge role in securing its longevity and success. Yet, in the 1970s Charlotte boasted two significant gay media outlets: the lesbian feminist journal *Sinister Wisdom*, and the lesbian and gay newspaper, *Free Press*. With the arrival of the newspaper *Q-Notes* in 1983, Charlotte equaled and possibly surpassed Atlanta with its homegrown gay media. Gay people in Charlotte could spread the word, but could not sustain a substantial and visible gay business district, locate a publicly supportive mayor, or maintain long term lesbian organizations like ALFA or the lesbian social group, Fourth Tuesday. Without these structures, lesbians and gay men in Charlotte would face difficulty in sustaining an annual gay Pride event in the 1980s and 1990s. Signs of a visible queer presence would serve as a beacon to attract lesbians looking to relocate and even heterosexuals seeking a southern life without the traditionally expected biases against socially-liberal lifestyles. Many who chose to live in the South, especially transplants who were relocating for employment, used the tolerance for and visibility of a gay community as a factor in determining where they would live. Pride celebrations were often the most perceptible representation of this acceptance and tolerance. Charlotte could maintain gay media

outlets like newspapers, largely invisible forms of lesbian and gay community, but Atlanta boasted a visibility that made such publications secondary—only a component of a vibrant network of lesbian and gay support in the city.

The earliest Pride festivals in Atlanta, grounded in activism and visible protest, always took place in Midtown near Piedmont Park. To commemorate the Greenwich Village Stonewall Riots a year earlier, Atlanta activists handed out gay informational literature in Piedmont Park in 1970.²⁷⁵ The next year marked the first march. Approximately two hundred attendees encountered police questioning because they did not have a permit, but the event proceeded with marchers wearing lavender Gay Power t-shirts, carrying a matching banner and signs such as, “Jimmy Carter Uses Hairspray.” They chanted “TWO FOUR SIX EIGHT, GAY IS TWICE AS GOOD AS STRAIGHT.” Cars passed by with Sunday church goers who were “freaking out.” The protesters acknowledged that their event was in solidarity with other national events including New York City and Chicago; this was the “Gaysouth rising up.” This was Atlanta Gayday, 1971.²⁷⁶ By June 1972, the Georgia Gay Liberation Front had organized a leaflet campaign targeting bars as venues for promoting the events. They viewed the rally as a “Southeast-wide demonstration” and prepared to welcome supporters from around the region. They hosted a booth at the planned activities in the city’s Grant Park on the day prior to President Nixon’s June 19 visit and simultaneous antiwar demonstration. During this Pride weekend, the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance held its first meeting on June 23, 1972. Just two years later, Atlanta’s 1974 celebration featured worship services at the

²⁷⁵ “Pride History,” The Atlanta Pride Committee, Inc., <http://atlantaPride.org/about/Pride-history> (accessed April 17, 2012).

²⁷⁶ *Carolina Plain Dealer*, no. 11, James T. Sears Papers, 1918-2008 and undated, Box 132, DU. See also, Sears, 67.

primarily gay Metropolitan Community Church, held in their newly purchased building on North Highland Avenue just two miles from Piedmont Park. ALFA sponsored an open house and Gay 90s Carnival. The main festival was a Saturday picnic in Piedmont Park where festival goers were told to “bring a basket and share it” and to look forward to “softball and happenings.” Although the early celebrations varied in their scope and approach, they remained tied to the alternative Midtown neighborhood in Atlanta.

When Mayor Maynard Jackson won his office in 1973, it was celebrated in the local gay media. The *Atlanta Barb* saw him as a promise of the future – a positive future for gay citizens of Atlanta. They warned that they intended to hold him to his pre-election promise and Jackson would not disappoint. In 1976 three hundred people, with several lesbian groups including ALFA, Atlanta Women’s Union, and Dykes for the Second American Revolution, marched on Peachtree Street headed for Piedmont Park. According to the alternative paper *The Great Speckled Bird*, “the march was a couple of blocks long and included several cars (Atlanta’s version of floats) with people atop.”²⁷⁷ Marching on Peachtree was significant; it was the main drag (pardon the pun) of visibility.²⁷⁸ Mayor Maynard Jackson declared June 26, 1976 as Gay Pride Day in Atlanta—urging “citizens to recognize the rights of all people,”—by official proclamation—in an effort “to emphasize two things: solidarity among the gay community and the need for legislative change to eliminate discrimination, so that, as myths and stereotypes are shattered, change can come about.” “As this nation

²⁷⁷ Margo George, “Gay Pride vs. Citizens for Decent Atlanta: The March,” *Great Speckled Bird*, 1976, ALFA-DU.

²⁷⁸ Laura Douglas-Brown, “Atlanta Pride Celebrates 40 Years,” *GA Voice*, October 1, 2010, <http://www.thegavoice.com/index.php/community/pride/1228-atlanta-pride-celebrates-40-years> (accessed May 1, 2012). Just twenty years later this number would multiply by one thousand—to equal 300,000 in attendance for gay Pride in Atlanta.

approaches the celebration of its 200th birthday, it is appropriate that all people re-evaluate the phrase ‘human rights’ so that it may apply to all citizens in equal fashion.”

In response, a group known as Citizens for Decent Atlanta (CDA) ran ads in several newspapers, and suggested that while they would not deny the right to free expression, they took issue with Jackson’s right “to affix our city’s seal of approval to a sexual orientation which the majority of his fellow citizens believes to be against the moral law of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the institution of the home family unit.”²⁷⁹ Additional ads took aim at the “perverted sex” that Jackson’s proclamation seemed to ordain. The CDA consisted of seven individuals who initially refused to identify themselves for fear of retaliation, but *The Great Speckled Bird* was unwilling to ignore the potential of uncovering a racist plot against Jackson. Their investigation suggested that politicians and businessmen were at the core of the CDA funding. The paper named names—including a “Cathy Truitt, who could not be identified.” It is possible that this was evangelical businessman Truett Cathy, of Chik-fil-A fame. These seven mystery funders who paid for newspaper ads to the tune of over six-thousand dollars were working with several local ministers, one of whom, the Rev. Charles Stanley of First Baptist of Atlanta, publicly “attacked the proclamation from his pulpit.” The black newspaper, *Atlanta Daily World*, also carried advertising funded by the CDA. Some in the black community were angry at Jackson over the proclamation, but only one black pastor publicly opposed the proclamation. The fundamental problem was not that gay people existed, but that they would take pride in that existence—that they would “flaunt” it. And, there was an underlying fear that Atlanta would become like San Francisco—“a

²⁷⁹ Margo George and David Massey, “Gay Pride vs. Citizens for Decent Atlanta: The Controversy,” *Great Speckled Bird*, August, 1976, ALFA-DU.

city of real nuts.”²⁸⁰ The *Great Speckled Bird* saw the CDA as a white moneyed attempt to oust Jackson—they could not get away with “hollering ‘nigger’” but it would be acceptable to yell “‘pervert’ and queer.” It was a way to attack Atlanta’s “new black city power structure.”²⁸¹

It would be a decade before Charlotte’s queer activists enjoyed even short-lived mayoral support. Some lesbians and gay men in Charlotte would find new hope in Mayor Harvey Gantt, elected in 1983. Like Jackson, Gantt brought a similar excitement to activists in Charlotte. While campaigning before a gay social group supported by the local and short-lived Lambda Political Caucus, Gantt said that he would support anti-discrimination legislation that would protect lesbians and gays from housing or job discrimination, and he would appoint a recommended leader from the lesbian and gay community to his Community Relations Council.²⁸² The meeting in question was held by “Acceptance,” a gay social group consisting mostly of white gay men who met at the relatively tolerant Park Road Baptist church in Charlotte. The group was supported by the umbrella organization Queen City Quordinators, also led by gay white men. The Quordinators were effectively *the* activist and visible gay “community” in 1980s Charlotte. They worked with the bars and the politicians to gain a place at the Queen City’s table.

Gantt faced a city that was not ready for vocal mayoral support of lesbian and gay concerns. This was partly due to Charlotte’s influential religious community that was openly critical of gay people, and did not fear repercussions as the CDA in Atlanta did.

²⁸⁰ For more on the fear of San Francisco as a “city of nuts,” see chapter 5.

²⁸¹ George and Massey, “Gay Pride.”

²⁸² “Candidates Gantt, Soukup Make Promises to Gays,” *Q-Notes*, October 1983, Front Page Records, 1999-0421, Box 51, DU (hereafter cited as FP-DU).

They were buoyed by their powerful status, and willing to vocally equate homosexuality with what they deemed to be pornographic material, and saw both as both equally harmful to Charlotte. Their campaign led by the group, Concerned Charlotteans, was made up of religious leaders – some with political aspirations—who placed extreme pressure on Gantt to take action against the sale of sexually explicit material. Of significant concern was the material sold in the Charlotte Douglas Airport. Pastor Ed Adams of Charlotte’s Word of Faith Church was one of many religious leaders who wrote to Gantt and rebuked him for his supposed lack of action on the issue. In response to Gantt’s answers when recently questioned by Concerned Charlotteans, Adams wrote, “I hate to think that the Mayor of our city thinks that *Playboy* and *Penthouse* aren’t pornographic. Also your answer to, ‘do you believe homosexual acts should be legalized’ concerns me. Surely you know what homosexual acts are.” Adams pleaded with Gantt to “use the position that God has entrusted to you” so that “the city of Charlotte will know that its major is a man of integrity indeed.”²⁸³

The founding member of Concerned Charlotteans, Reverend Joseph Chambers, was profiled by *The Charlotte Observer* in a 1986 examination of Chambers and his organization’s expansion of their focus to include homosexuality, abortion, and prayer in schools. The piece opened with Chambers examining a *Rolling Stone* magazine that featured an article on his activism:

The Rev. Joseph Chambers flips through a September issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine until a picture catches his eye. “Do you think this promotes lesbian sex?” he asks, pointing to a Bloomingdale’s department store ad. Two pages later, there’s a color photograph of Chambers, standing with a Bible in front of a glowing cross and a U.S. flag. The article, about North Carolina’s one-year-

²⁸³ Ed Adams to Mayor Harvey Gantt, October 22, 1987, Harvey B. Gantt Papers, Box 4, Folder 1, UNCC (hereafter cited as HG-UNCC).

old obscenity law, mentions Chambers and his anti-pornography group, Concerned Charlotteans.”²⁸⁴

Charlotte’s anti-gay activism made national news that year, but because of arch-conservative Jesse Helms, the state as a whole would also gain notoriety in this arena. Just three years after the *Rolling Stone* interview and the national television news show *20/20* threw the national spotlight on Charlotte’s religious conservative movement, Vice President Dan Quayle attended the fifth annual Concerned Charlotteans conference at Helms’s behest. Reverend Chambers touted the visit as an indicator of North Carolina’s “‘conservative renaissance’ in the battle against pornography and other problems.”²⁸⁵

In 1992, thanks to Senator Helms, North Carolina struck some as the most “queer hating state.” Southern lesbian feminist activist, and original member of the 1970s *Feminary* collective, Mab Segrest analyzed the state of the state for gay people in an attempt to mobilize activists across rural/urban borders in North Carolina against homophobic violence perpetuated by the reign of Helms. Segrest worked as a consultant to the local state organization, NC Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (NCCGLE), to focus on bringing statewide campaigns together against homophobic violence. This was the only statewide effort of its kind at the time. She brought in a celebrated speaker at the 1986 Atlanta Pride event, Kevin Berrill of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, to support her efforts toward an alliance. Segrest recognized the challenges of their endeavor, noting that “countering these unifying efforts is a tendency towards turf issues and fragmentation into many smaller organizations. This problem is exacerbated because gay activists receive recognition in these smaller organizations that we are denied in

²⁸⁴ Jeri Fischer, “A Hard-Core Crusade Against Porn—Preacher Now Tackling Other Issues,” *Charlotte Observer*, October 11, 1986.

²⁸⁵ Bill Arthur, “Quayle Visiting Charlotte—Stops Include Banquet, School,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 17, 1989.

heterosexual society.” The front page of the national publication, *Resist: A Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority* featured Segrest’s efforts, and a photo of two men at a 1992 North Carolina state gay Pride festival held in Asheville, decked out in camouflage and holding protest signs including one that read, “Fagits [sic] Get Out of Ashville [sic].”²⁸⁶ NCCGLE promoted the kind of action that the Queen City Quordinators used with Gantt – recommending participants for the Mayor’s human relation commission, and working as advocates for anti-violence campaigns and worker protections. As a result of angry and hate-laced speech promoted by protesting church-leaders at the state Pride gatherings, Segrest pointed to the need to engage churches whose congregations were willing to reach out in a more loving way to gay people. The North Carolina Council of Churches had in 1991 “passed a strong resolution condemning anti-gay violence and calling for churches to examine the ways they have contributed to the suffering of lesbians and gay men.” According to Segrest, this type of church leadership on lesbian and gay issues would go a long way in a state like North Carolina especially in rural areas and smaller towns. Because of the significant representations of churches, including the sizable southern Baptist contingent, church repudiation of anti-gay violence was crucial.²⁸⁷

While North Carolina made national headlines for its anti-gay political and religious leadership and anti-gay violence, visible mayoral cooperation was still the byword in Atlanta. Although lesbian and gay activists were often frustrated with Jackson, he continued to express open support for Pride festivals in Atlanta. In a 1991 proclamation celebrating the upcoming June Lesbian and Gay Pride Human Rights Days,

²⁸⁶ Mab Segrest, “Fueled by Fury – Fighting Homophobia in North Carolina,” *Resist: A Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority*, July/August, 1992, 1, Geographic Files, Lesbians in North Carolina, LHA (hereafter cited as LNC-LHA).

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

Jackson announced that he would actively seek a lesbian or gay person to serve in his administration, noting the importance of the community's contributions to Atlanta: "One of the things that bothers me is some people who want to condemn the lesbian and gay community on the one hand and on the other hand accept the help of the lesbian and gay community in all the things the city does. That is sheer hypocrisy and I'm sick and tired of it."²⁸⁸

Nowhere was this type of hypocrisy more evident than in the North Carolina state Pride festival hosted in Charlotte in 1994. The event was the largest state Pride ever with an estimated attendance of 3,800. Charlotte had an opportunity. Businessmen and leaders in the city that loved to make money (look no further than Charlotte's 1970s Chamber of Commerce slogan, "Charlotte—A Good Place to Make Money,") were happy to take gay dollars but not to embrace those who spent them. The slogan was shameless in its celebration of the city's economic obsession, and it has defined Charlotte in subsequent decades. But in 1994, Charlotte politicians alienated gay consumers by suggesting that their brand of economic boosterism did not extend to the gay community in the 1990s.²⁸⁹

Charlotte was the only city to submit a bid to host the event, and even though the state Pride committee, North Carolina Lesbian and Gay Pride, Inc., viewed Charlotte as a more conservative city than other previous hosts such as Chapel Hill, Durham, and Raleigh, they approved the Charlotte bid because it would focus attention on lesbians and gay people who were local to Charlotte. Pride in Charlotte would serve as a vehicle to force the city's opposition and the community as a whole to see their lesbian and gay

²⁸⁸ Holly Morris, "Gay Pride Days Hailed by Jackson," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, June 13, 1991.

²⁸⁹ On Charlotte's Chamber of Commerce slogan, see Applebome, *Dixie Rising*, 154.

citizens marching and gathering in the streets. Event co-chairs, Dan Kirsch and Sue Henry led the campaign to bring the state Pride event to Charlotte for its one and only appearance in the Queen City. They specifically requested the June 3-5 dates so as not to compete with Atlanta Pride on June 12, South Carolina Pride, or the Pride celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Stonewall riots in New York City. Kirsch and Henry recognized the importance of Charlotte as a leader in the southern financial landscape, and hoped to avoid competition with other Pride events that might drive down attendance numbers and revenue. They also recognized the “economic clout” of the Pride march, and hoped to use that as a tool to woo Charlotte’s economic leaders. They were eager to “show off,” and “to use the opportunity to demonstrate to Charlotte’s mainstream community the power and political strength” of lesbians and gay men in Charlotte.

The social and political climate for North Carolina Pride in Charlotte was abysmal. Unlike other host cities, Charlotte did not have any legislative protection for lesbian and gay people, and in fact had rejected such an ordinance in 1992, just a year before the city was awarded the state Pride march.²⁹⁰ The Mayor, Richard Vinroot, refused to be involved in the event, stating, “I happened to watch on C-SPAN about two months ago what looked like a gay-Pride march. I was embarrassed by the language and the references and the public exposition of sex. It was very offensive. If that’s what this is, I want no part of it.”²⁹¹ In his 1995 response to one of his constituents, Vinroot was equally candid and consistent on his opinion of gay people and their visible presence in Charlotte. “Three years ago, I spoke out strongly against a proposed “Gay Rights”

²⁹⁰ Jean Marie Brown, “Anti-Bias Amendment Rejected Mayor: Measure Just A Symbol,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 24, 1992.

²⁹¹ Ricki Morell, “Charlotte to Host N.C. Gay-Rights March,” *Charlotte Observer*, Tuesday, August 11, 1993, Dan Kirsch Papers, 1987-2004, 2005-0037, Box 21, DU (hereafter cited as DK-DU).

ordinance then under consideration; last year I stated publicly (when asked) that I wished that the “Gay Pride” parade which occurred in June would not take place here; and this week I essentially responded the same way (when asked) about the “Out Charlotte” event which prompted your letter. I’ve no idea what the “Christian Coalition” thinks about all these things, but my position has been consistent and quite public for most of my term as Mayor.”²⁹² Charlotte’s lesbians and gay men heard Vinroot’s message loud and clear, and they knew that their visible presence was not “desirable.”²⁹³

For Sonya Lewis, a native Charlottean, the event was a personal triumph – the ability to march visibly in Uptown Charlotte with her parents and siblings in the Pride parade. One of the highlights of the weekend’s activities was landing the nationally known lesbian comedian, Lea DeLaria, with the proud headline, “Bull Dyke in a Queen City.” In 1993 DeLaria became the first openly gay comic to appear on national television, and her arrival in the Queen City was clearly a coup. Kirsch and Henry were eager to attract national entertainers like DeLaria for the event, but they were unsuccessful in securing participation from important political leaders, like Harvey Gantt. Marshall Park was the site of the parade organization and the celebratory rally—a site that just a few years later would be too visible and highly problematic for the city of Charlotte.²⁹⁴ Scorpio was the only bar to be named as an official Pride celebration spot, while the main festival dance was held Uptown at Founder’s Hall in the artsy and swanky Spirit Square, a venue that epitomized the Chamber of Commerce’s obsession with pretense.

²⁹² Richard Vinroot to Charles Friar, October 16, 1995, Richard Vinroot Papers, UNCC (hereafter cited as RV-UNCC).

²⁹³ Vinroot to Robert Barret, December 4, 1995, RV-UNCC.

²⁹⁴ For more on Charlotte and its troubled efforts to host Pride events in Marshall Park, see chapter 5.

One of the reasons for Atlanta's successful gay Pride festivals is the growth of gay business districts and neighborhoods; something Charlotte lacked. Even though many gay-friendly businesses eventually faded away in Atlanta due to typical small businesses struggles and the perceived integration of lesbian and gay people in mainstream and normative business environments, the importance of separate business spaces that catered to a queer audience cannot be overestimated. The Atlanta Business and Professional Guild, one of many active lesbian and gay groups in 1980s Atlanta, worked to beautify Peachtree Street in Midtown Atlanta by adopting and claiming its burgeoning gay business district. A neighborhood that defined its own distinct identity through a neighborhood alliance formed in 1978, it was also significantly defined by gay businesses and those seeking an identifiable "gayborhood" in Atlanta.²⁹⁵ In 1982 the national gay magazine, *The Advocate*, celebrated Atlanta's "blossoming" gay community by noting the importance of businesses with doors that brazenly faced Peachtree Street – recognizing the remarkable move toward gay business visibility in Atlanta. Gone were the days, it seemed, of dimly lit back entrances to shrouded gay bars. Atlanta's Peachtree Street was visible to street traffic, had on-street entrances, and welcomed lesbian and gay patrons with accessible shopping. One such area known as "Peachtree 800" featured a whole block of gay businesses, including a florist, gift shop, gym, clothing store, bars, and a video arcade.²⁹⁶

Just two miles from the Peachtree Street district was Ansley Mall, a shopping center known for its gay-friendly atmosphere and gay businesses. Ansley anchored the

²⁹⁵ "Midtown Alliance: Share the Vision," The Midtown Alliance, <http://www.midtownalliance.org/> (accessed March 26, 2012); "Midtown Local Historic District," Midtown Neighbors' Association, Historic Preservation Committee, <http://preservemidtownatlanta.org/AboutUs.html> (accessed March 26, 2012).

²⁹⁶ Ken Bond, "Southern Exposure: Atlanta and Its Blossoming Gay Community," *The Advocate*, December 9, 1982, Geographic Files, Lesbians in Georgia, LHA (hereafter cited as LGA-LHA).

vibrant Midtown gayborhood and it maintained this important position, currently known as Atlanta's "virtual gay courtyard".²⁹⁷ These businesses created a certain comfort level for lesbian and gay people, and subsequently for the spectacle of the Atlanta Pride Parade that took place on Peachtree Street in the same midtown neighborhood. When a retailer was accused of making anti-gay comments to shoppers in 1993, the owner of the Mall property, Selig Enterprises, confronted the store owners—even offering to buy out the lease so that they would leave. When these attempts were unsuccessful, Selig compensated by offering free space for a year to the fledgling Lambda Community Center.²⁹⁸ As predicted by *The Advocate*, "the gay and multinational renovation of Atlanta's midtown may have a profound effect on the future of the city's tourist and convention business. At one time Midtown was seen as a natural northern extension of the central business district. Now it appears to have taken on the role of arts and entertainment center. With the demise of underground Atlanta, Midtown is at the forefront of attractions. It is becoming the city's heart and soul."²⁹⁹

A visible gay district and a successful Pride celebration in Atlanta should not be read as an indicator of a united gay community in the city—or even in the midtown neighborhood. Divisions among gay people continued to seethe below the surface, and this welcoming Midtown environment could be deceiving. Lesbians worked together with gay men to organize Pride celebrations and they moved in the same circles as they shopped in the visibly gay Peachtree Street midtown district, but everyday socializing and relationship building often took place in separate spaces. These interactions were

²⁹⁷ "Ansley Square Mall/Cheshire Bridge," Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau, http://www.gay-atlanta.com/ansley_cheshire.aspx (accessed April 11, 2012).

²⁹⁸ Don Johnston, "Lambda May Have a Home," *Etc.*, November 26, 1993, Ed W. Stansell Papers, MSS 1065, Box 3, EU (hereafter cited as ES-EU).

²⁹⁹ Bond, "Southern Exposure."

also constrained by race. Just as the larger heterosexual socializations that took place in Atlanta often occurred in socially segregated neighborhoods and establishments, lesbians and gay men typically socialized in spaces that were defined by race. For instance, a 1987 issue of *Phoenix*, a publication of the Atlanta Business and Professional Guild, featured a story that considered racist behavior among gay people. Inspired by the recent overt racism featured on an episode of *Oprah*, the writer tried to explain why Forsyth County—a Georgia county made famous for its virulent hatred of black people—was really not that different from midtown Atlanta. In retelling the story of a party hosted by elite gay male Atlantans, where the word *nigger* was bandied about as entertainment, the presumably white writer struggled with his own quiet complicity in the incident:

The real danger of Forsyth County is not the hatred and the blind prejudice that unquestionably exists there. It is that those of us in luppie/guppie households in Midtown and Virginia Highlands and Buckhead and Grant Park and Ansley Park and all points in between may, because such hatred is visible OUT THERE, come tacitly to believe that it is not present, alive and well, in our neighborhoods, in our friendships, and in ourselves.³⁰⁰

Social spaces segregated by race were still the norm in Atlanta—whether gay or straight.

Outside of Midtown Atlanta’s Fulton County, other Atlanta counties struggled to come to terms with the visibly burgeoning gay community. Cobb County’s 1993 anti-gay resolution made national headlines by condemning “‘the gay life style’ as incompatible with community standards.” The hostile response to the resolution was significant. In one of the largest reactions, an organization called “Olympics Out of Cobb” would successfully see Olympic volleyball moved from the county due to their

³⁰⁰ “Thoughts on Forsyth and Other Counties: ‘Nigger Go Home?’” *Phoenix Flyer*, March 1987, ALFA-DU.

virulent protests.³⁰¹ Mayor Mike Mears of Decatur encouraged embattled gay Cobb County residents to come to his city, noting that the seat of DeKalb County welcomed all residents and took a “180-degree opposite view of that in Cobb.”³⁰² Along with the city of Atlanta, DeKalb County led the way in securing rights for gay people in public employment and in offering protections through local law enforcement. Mears and DeKalb promoted their county as a welcoming and accepting community while also advertising the importance of their business district in providing a welcoming environment for the arts. As in many places, including Charlotte, funding for the arts in Atlanta’s DeKalb County was often conflated with the community’s hospitality toward lesbian and gay people. Decatur’s mayor hoped to land Marietta’s Theatre in the Square—the theater that sparked the Cobb County resolution because of its production featuring a gay theme—to his business district. The campaign to bring the theater in focused on promoting the acceptance of both the arts and gay people. As one writer wryly observed, “should the relocation take place, an appropriate first performance might be a stage adaptation of ‘The Wizard of Oz’ with a slight rewrite of one of Dorothy’s most famous lines: ‘Gee. Toto. Thank goodness we’re not in Cobb anymore.’”³⁰³

While Atlanta’s leaders worked to build gay community and neighborhoods, Charlotte’s did not have the tolerance for such visibility. Just a few years after the highly contested 1994 North Carolina state Pride event in Charlotte, the festival returned to Asheville in 1998. Although the state Pride event was met with angry picketing in Asheville just six years earlier, the city now welcomed the event with increased

³⁰¹ Peter Applebome, “A Suburban Eden Where the Right Rules,” *The New York Times*, August 1, 1994; “Olympic Protest in anti-gay suburb,” *Worker’s World*, June 2, 1994, LGA-LHA.

³⁰² “A Haven for Cobb County Outcasts,” Editorial, *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, September 6, 1993.

³⁰³ Ibid.

excitement and a growing acceptance for lesbian and gay people. The festival still met with some opposition, but there was a visible and organized response from festival attendees. This was directly related to the growth of a noticeably gay-friendly business district. North Carolina Pride was largely supported by lesbians, a thriving business district, and the larger heterosexual community in Asheville. Although a significantly smaller city, whose 1990 population stood at 64,625 as compared to Charlotte's 395, 934, Asheville, like Atlanta, had the necessary attributes for lesbian and gay visibility that Charlotte lacked.³⁰⁴ As early as 1971, one small business owner in Charlotte lamented the lack of support and an appropriate business district for his Uptown head shop, "Asterisk." He felt that his location was perfect for complementary businesses, such as a leather store, coffee shop, bookstore, or a theater, and he craved this camaraderie since he knew that "soon even Kmart will sell roach clips." This shop owner craved an independent shopping district—a "strip like most big towns."³⁰⁵ The lack of artsy shopping districts would plague Charlotte's lesbian and gay community in its effort to locate identifiable queer urban space—a gayborhood.

Asheville had a large lesbian population—believed to possibly outnumber gay men in the city. And, when compared to Charlotte in the late 1990s, Asheville was able to boast its vibrant and eclectic downtown including Malaprop's bookstore, often a

³⁰⁴ "Population—Regional Reports," Asheville, NC Chamber of Commerce, <http://www.ashevillechamber.org/economic-development/research-and-reports/population-regional-reports>; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1980 and 1990 Census Counts for Cities With 1990 Population Greater Than 100,000: Sorted by 1990 Population Size*, Population Distribution Branch, October 10, 1995, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/files/c1008090.txt> (accessed June 22, 2012). In this 1996 census report, Charlotte is ranked 35—ahead of Atlanta's 36th place, with a population of 394,017.

³⁰⁵ *Carolina Plain Dealer*, Number 10, Summer Solstice Issue, JS-DU.

lesbian haven.³⁰⁶ Charlotte had a similar store when Sue Henry, the local gay activist and North Carolina state Pride organizer, opened Rising Moon Books, but Malaprop's catered to the broad and eclectic touristy Asheville market and as a result it attracted a diverse clientele. Henry's store, located in the Dilworth neighborhood just a five minute walk from the Charlotte Women's Center, was viewed as a niche business strictly for lesbian and gay people. It was a haven for lesbians and gay men seeking gay-friendly reading, greeting cards, information, and sex videos, but it lacked the reinforcement of a likeminded and unconventional business district. Although Henry's store was "gay Charlotte's unofficial headquarters," it closed in December of 1997 due to inconsistent and insufficient sales.³⁰⁷ According to Henry, the "demise was due to the lack of support from the majority of the gay and lesbian community." In an interview with *The Charlotte Observer* on the store's closing, she aptly observed that, "in pin-striped Charlotte, gays and lesbians are often as conservative as their heterosexual counterparts."³⁰⁸ Lesbian and gay Charlotteans were also *Charlotteans*. They were residents of a city known for its commitment to banking, religion, and making money—a city known for its shiny veneer of appropriateness and always operating with an eye toward attracting business. Charlotte was not a place to ruffle feathers. Sue Henry's business ruffled feathers, and it was not the kind of business that most Charlotteans, gay or straight, were willing to support.

³⁰⁶ Timothy Roberts, "'A Vigil, A March and A Marriage'—Gay North Carolinians Congregate as Fundamentalists Fulminate," *Creative Loafing*, June 10, 1998, <http://www.ncpride.org/pride/library/articles/1998-Timothy-Roberts.pdf> (accessed March 8, 2012).

³⁰⁷ "Southern Discomfort," *Advocate*, March 17, 1998.

³⁰⁸ Timothy Roberts, "Activist to Close Gay Gathering Place," *The Charlotte Observer*, December 14, 1997.

Several downtown businesses in Asheville, like Malaprop's, were lesbian—or gay—owned. Just as businesses in Atlanta's Peachtree district established a queer-friendly district, Asheville's lesbian and gay business owners created an energized and revitalized downtown. When Malaprop's opened downtown in Asheville in 1982, the district was all but abandoned, but Charlotte's local *Creative Loafing* newspaper observed that Asheville's independent businesses maintained original building structures, including the original "art deco edifices," and the city itself exhibited "all the idiosyncrasies of a truly metropolitan life—including homosexuality." According to *Creative Loafing*, it was "no wonder" that Charlotte destroyed "every fine piece of old architecture," noting that suburbanization was clearly a "right-wing conspiracy."³⁰⁹

Asheville and Atlanta offered the kind of business districts necessary to maintain a clear lesbian and gay community in the 1980s and 1990s. Pride festivals were visible manifestations and celebrations of a thriving lesbian and gay population and this was directly related to a gay friendly business climate and mayoral support. Charlotte's inability to mount a Pride festival in the 1970s, maintain lesbian feminist activism, or to sustain funky gay business districts directly reflected the troubled climate for lesbian and gay people.³¹⁰ The foundation for Pride and a cohesive gay neighborhood did not exist.

In many ways Charlotte's move to greater tolerance lagged at least a decade behind Atlanta's. It was a full ten years after Maynard Jackson's election that Harvey Gantt would take office as Charlotte's first black mayor and became the first mayor to acknowledge gay activists in a marginally positive way. This decade of separation was

³⁰⁹ Roberts, "'A Vigil, A March.'"

³¹⁰ On the history of Malaprop's Bookstore, see Eموke B'Racz, "A History of Malaprop's Bookstore/Cafe," Malaprop's Bookstore/Café, Inc., <http://www.malaprops.com/about-us> (accessed April 17, 2012).

also true for Pride. Ten years after Atlanta's first politically motivated march, a gay Pride celebration finally came to Charlotte in 1981, but as of 2012, a visible and politically based march has yet to be held in conjunction with a local Charlotte Pride celebration. The first event in Charlotte created great excitement and anticipation. *The Front Page*, a regional gay newspaper based in Raleigh, reported that during this week Charlotte would be "the gay/lesbian capital of the Mid Atlantic."³¹¹ Local activist Don King, seemingly the one and only person behind all visible gay organizing in 1980s Charlotte, was eager for this first event to put Charlotte on the southeastern gay map. As early as 1975, King worked in Charlotte to organize a gay Charlotte community while recognizing that in Charlotte such organizing might be seen as a threat to gay bar owners. The bars and the drag performers that supported them were powerful in the Queen City. Any organization that hoped to survive would have to work with that community since many lesbian and gay people preferred the anonymity of the bars and had little interest in visible activism.³¹² By 1981 King was "tired of people having to run off to Atlanta, Washington and other places to hear nationally known speakers and to get that ecstatic feeling of togetherness."³¹³ He saw this first Charlotte Pride week as an opportunity to address these concerns.

Many of the events, and even housing options for out of town visitors, took place at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, located an inconvenient eleven miles from one of the main Pride host bars, The Scorpio, and ten miles from Uptown. The University was the site for a film festival, an outdoor disco, softball tournament, and workshops, including the keynote speech by Barbara Gittings, a nationally recognized

³¹¹ "Gay Pride Covers Carolina," *Front Page*, June 1981, Box 130, JS-DU.

³¹² Sears, 351n15.

³¹³ "Gay Pride Covers Carolina."

activist, former editor of the first lesbian journal, *The Ladder*, and founder of New York's first lesbian organization in the 1950s, a Daughters of Bilitis chapter.³¹⁴ The Scorpio sponsored a softball team for the tournament, The Stinging Scorpions, again highlighting the problematic distance from the bar to the main events of the festival. In fact, events that year took place at venues scattered in different parts of the city, and in the coming years Pride in Charlotte would continue to move the entire festival to varying venues with little consistency.

Queen City Quordinators (QCQ), a group formed by Don King and responsible for Charlotte's first Pride, hoped to coordinate programming and organize funding to be shared between several lesbian and gay advocacy groups, including the Gay/Lesbian Switchboard of Charlotte, the Metropolitan Community Church, the Gay/Lesbian Caucus of Charlotte and the North Carolina Human Rights Fund. All of these organizations desperately needed money and hoped to work together with the bars to provide entertainment while raising funds. The groups shared members, but there were not enough bodies to populate the various activist efforts. The Gay/Lesbian Caucus struggled in particular to survive since its membership overlapped significantly with the QCQ leadership. Many who participated in the Caucus regularly participated in QCQ, and energies and ideas were already wearing thin after the first year of work. In addition to a frustrating lack of community support for their efforts, the highly anticipated Pride celebration of 1981 did not live up to the *Front Page* hype or the QCQ's financial expectations. The only financial failure for the Quordinators in 1981 was the Gay Pride Week celebration in Charlotte. Having supported the first weeklong local Pride event in

³¹⁴ For more on Gittings and the Daughters of Bilitis, see Marcia Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2006,) 40-43.

the Carolinas, the financial loss was devastating for the QCQ. Pride in Charlotte was troubled from the beginning, and it would remain troubled throughout its tumultuous incarnations.³¹⁵

Pride was a marginally profitable venture in 1983, earning over two hundred dollars for the QCQ, but it lagged behind all other events sponsored by the organization that year and it was their least profitable event. Their greatest point of success was that year's quarter page advertisement in the *Charlotte Observer*. At a cost of almost six-hundred dollars, the ad promoted Pride and explained the importance of the celebration's history to the wide readership of the local paper. That same year the QCQ also celebrated some positive television news coverage³¹⁶ Due to the launch of *Q-Notes*, the Quordinators newsletter, and a general belief that "Charlotte's gay men and lesbians" were "acting like a community," 1983 was seen as a banner year. Yet the Quordinators also noted that while local "nongays" knew that Charlotte's population included lesbians and gay men, "they think of it as a united, self-supporting segment of the city. It is therefore, highly ironic that so very many gay men and lesbians still think that a sense of community is something reserved only for activists or elite partiers."³¹⁷ The divisions among lesbians and gay men were evident to the QCQ leadership, but seemingly without any recognition that the predominantly white male leadership probably served to alienate those who did not fit that limited demographic. Their frustration reeked of an inability to acknowledge the inherent cost of visible activism that many feared in an oppressive Charlotte.

³¹⁵ Don King, "Seriously Speaking," *Our South*, no. 3, Box 51, FP-DU; "N.C. Celebrates Gay Pride 1981!" *Front Page*, July 1981, Box 130, JS-DU.

³¹⁶ "QCQ Helps Community Flex Muscles During '83," *Q-Notes*, December 1983, Box 51, FP-DU.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

In a clear effort to address the separate needs of lesbians, the QCQ worked with Oleen's, a drag bar that catered to gay men, to host a "wimmin's winter carnival & celebration." The event was so successful that Oleen's planned to hold regular Tuesday women's nights going forward – although it is unclear how long this commitment lasted.³¹⁸ Since there was no bar in Charlotte solely devoted to lesbians, Oleen's "wimmin's nights" were probably a welcome opportunity in 1981. The desire for separate lesbian socializing was strong, and lacking the substantial presence of a group like ALFA, a few Charlotte lesbians hoped to provide space for socialization outside of the bar.³¹⁹ According to *Q-Notes*, some lesbians felt that "the future of lesbianism in Charlotte appeared bleak" due to the lack of lesbian bars. "Others said that while bars may be one place to have a good time, they are hardly conducive to conversation or to establishing relationships."³²⁰ As noted in the last chapter, when lesbian bars did exist, they came and went quickly in the Queen City.

Two groups, one sponsored by the National Organization for Women and one named New Vida worked to provide alternatives to the bar scene and to the active gay men's organization, Acceptance —the QCQ group that was open to women, but attended primarily by men. It is unclear how many lesbians participated in the Charlotte Women's Center that still operated on Lyndhurst Avenue in 1985, but the newly formed, and probably short-lived, lesbian social group, New Vida, met there for a time. Just a year later, a woman identified only as "Linda" tried again to form a new social group for lesbians. This effort stemmed directly from her work at the Gay/Lesbian Switchboard in Charlotte, a group originally supported by the QCQ. Linda took calls at the Switchboard

³¹⁸ King, *Our South*, no. 5, Box 51, FP-DU.

³¹⁹ "Two New Lesbian Groups Thriving," *Q-Notes*, March 1984, Box 51, FP-DU.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

from women looking to meet other lesbians outside of the bars or the MCC church. The new group, Queen City Friends, planned to hold meetings at a barbecue restaurant, The Hickory House. The restaurant was desirable because it was owned by a male “member of the community” and it had a private back room. The scheduled meetings coincided with The Scorpio’s Thursday women’s nights in case anyone wanted to “continue the evening.”³²¹ No matter how desperate some lesbians were for social interactions, they could not sustain an organized social group and they were forced to rely on men’s establishments like The Hickory House, Oleen’s, or The Scorpio. These establishments were willing to concede a poorly attended weeknight for women’s patronage. Although *Q-Notes* regularly covered women’s events and beleaguered efforts to organize, women were not visible in the leadership of the QCQ. As a result, no organized group of lesbians regularly chronicled their stories and struggles in the way that Don King did for a primarily gay male Charlotte audience.

Some southern lesbians did continue to create very separate social events and spaces in the 1980s. For example, the Southern Women’s Music and Comedy Festival, possibly an answer to the better-known Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, was held just 80 miles north of Atlanta in the northeast Georgia mountains. The event was primarily aimed at and attended by white women, featuring a variety of comedians, musicians, and political speakers. Perhaps the festival functioned as an alternative to Pride for some women. Like the Michigan festival, participants could sign up for work exchange and select alcohol-free “clean and sober” cabin space. The festival ran for several years, advertising in Charlotte’s *Q-Notes* and other regional papers boasting dancing every night and national level speakers such as Rita Mae Brown, leaders from the National

³²¹ *Q-Notes*, October, 1986. Private Collection.

Organization for Women and the American Civil Liberties Union, Olivia recording artists, Meg Christian, Cris Williamson, and Holly Near, and the Atlanta Feminist Women's Chorus. Regional women's events probably held more interest and excitement for lesbians in Charlotte than the nascent Pride events.

In June, 1984, a banner splashed across the corner of *Q-Notes* promoted the "Gay Pride Issue." This time the event was held in Park Road Park, a central location in comparison to the 1981 event at UNCC, but Pride was now located in the predominantly white and very elite neighborhood of Myers Park. The festival featured a pot luck luncheon held under an isolated park shelter in a remote area of the park to ensure invisibility, and a softball game. During the week of Pride, events included a private QCQ meeting with local clergy to clarify commonly misunderstood issues about lesbian and gay people. In spite of some progress for Charlotte's Pride celebration, the excitement was tempered by Don King's decision to close his Friends of Dorothy Bookshop. After two and a half years in business, King closed his lesbian and gay boutique during the same year that he would be the sole Charlottean to make "The Advocate 400," a list of four hundred gay rights leaders published by the national gay magazine, *The Advocate*. King was the face of gay Charlotte, but he was helpless to maintain the Bookshop while working a full-time job. This decision exposed the limits of his capabilities to juggle so many responsibilities but also his inability, like Sue Henry, to find a community to adequately support the only gay shopping outlet in the city.³²²

During the same month the Odyssey bar and Lambda Political Caucus, a group of only five members, also failed. Organizations, often more than bars, struggled mightily

³²² *Q-Notes*, 1984, Box 51, FP-DU

to survive in the Queen City.³²³ In Charlotte, an organizational name and local media coverage might suggest an active and engaged community, but these groups came and went quickly. They rarely boasted a sizeable membership, often with numbers under twenty, and they should not be understood as representative of a substantial community that they purportedly represented. The ostensible flurry of activity that *Q-Notes* promoted represented only a small slice of gay Charlotte. QCQ was responsible for most of the visible queer Charlotte of the 1980s, while many lesbians and gay men only showed up in force at the bars, and to a lesser extent at Pride gatherings. In 1984, QCQ consulted with John D’Emilio, a pioneering gay scholar and activist at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, to help them refocus. Their fundraising umbrella concept was no longer working, and they committed to change gears with a focus on social activities and outreach for the whole community.

While Charlotte’s lesbian and gay organizers continued to struggle, the 1984 Atlanta Pride celebration was diverse and represented tremendous visible growth. “Once More . . . With Feeling” was the theme with events that stretched from June 21 to July 3. Featuring plays, voter registration drives, church services, an ALFA open house, an AID-Atlanta Health Fair, a Dyke Tour of Homes, a Wet Jockey Contest, a candidates forum for upcoming congressional races, and the International Association of Black and White Men Together conference held during this time, the event was diverse and highly visible. Organizers corralled members of the Atlanta, Fulton, and DeKalb county police departments to meet at All Saints Church for a discussion on crimes against lesbians and gay people.³²⁴ Also, a Pride softball tournament featured the Tower Tornadoes, of the

³²³ *Q-Notes*, July 1984, Box 51, FP-DU.

³²⁴ 1984 Atlanta Pride Flyer, LGA-LHA.

long running Tower Lounge, the Sports Page Sports, from the popular lesbian bar, the Meshugenehs, and the Amazons, capped off by an All Star Game featuring men from the Hotlanta League. Once again marchers paraded up Peachtree Street and rallied between the area blocked off at tenth and eleventh streets in Midtown Atlanta, just two blocks from Piedmont Park where the first leaflets on gay rights were distributed fourteen years earlier. Those who were concerned about being identified in the march were encouraged to wear masks or a costume to conceal their identity, because the goal was a large and visible presence. Atlanta's consistency in its Pride location and the participants' insistence on visibility was vitally important to creating the Pride spectacles that would help the city earn *The Advocate's* coveted "Gayest City in America" title in 2010.³²⁵

Atlanta Pride 1986 supported the prominent national speaker Kevin Berrill, the Anti-Violence Project Coordinator from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force who would meet with Mab Segrest in North Carolina several years later. That year's Pride Guide boasted fifty-four gay organizations in the greater Atlanta area. Pride was Atlanta's Bastille Day, according to the local activist Maria Helena Dolan. She pleaded for attendees to "please, celebrate and nurture that spirit during Pride week—and all year."³²⁶ Participants once again marched on Peachtree Street headed toward the state Capitol, and they rallied at Washington Street in downtown Atlanta. Central Presbyterian Church provided the restrooms for the event, a significant accommodation given the

³²⁵ Mike Albo, "Gayest Cities in America" *The Advocate*, February 2010, http://www.advocate.com/Print_Issue/Travel/Gayest_Cities_in_America/ (accessed August 20, 2010).

³²⁶ Maria Helena Dolan, "Before Stonewall/After Stonewall," *Pride Guide*, 1986, Box 53, FP-DU.

recent panic over AIDS, and the general friction between southern churches and lesbian and gay people.³²⁷

Like Charlotte, Atlanta's activist groups fought to maintain a base of involvement— people who were willing to volunteer in addition to functioning as willing partiers for events. Of the many activist and social support groups for lesbian and gay people, their newsletters were constantly calling for money and volunteers. Don Weston of the all-male steering committee for the 1986 Atlanta Pride, aimed a subtle jab aimed at those who were visibly involved, but socially problematic in that year's Pride Guide. He recognized the importance of political and economic clout in protecting gay rights, and called for wide attendance and visibility at Pride, especially by those who would be more palatable to powerful straight leaders in Atlanta.

The vast majority of gays in metropolitan Atlanta are taking advantage of the limited features of the gay community here and are doing nothing to protect or advance those features. This has left the “battle” to a small number of dedicated individuals who have been carrying the whole load. Many of those individuals are in the forefront because of a much greater personal stake in being openly gay—drag queens, leather lovers, etc. Thank God they have been there. They represent the diversity and strength of the gay community. But they are also some of the most controversial, easy-to-criticize members of our community. It is unfair and ineffective for the rest of the Atlanta Gay community to rely on these few brave souls for representation to the media, to the politicians, and to our own community.³²⁸

In a 1984 edition of Atlanta's *Pulse* magazine for lesbians and gay men, a male writer lamented the fact that the Atlanta Gay Pride parade featured people who flaunted their sexuality and crowded out those who arrived to march. “We have places (bars, parties, etc.) that we can run around in drag and leather. Hell, I love to slip on some pumps and

³²⁷ The relationship between churches and lesbian and gay populations will be discussed further in chapter 5.

³²⁸ Don Weston, “Power in Pride,” *Pride Guide*, 1986, Box 53, FP-DU.

purple taffeta and paint the town pink! But there is a time and a place for everything, and it sure would help if some of us learned where these times and places were.”³²⁹

Statements like these suggest that the overworked activists failed to understand that Pride and visibility were not always a priority for lesbian and gay people, and the price of visibility meant different things to different people. As much as Pride organizers and attendees longed for a united queer front and an appropriate face for lesbian and gay people, such a diverse group of people could not assume this singular identity. Gay activists had faced these difficulties since the earliest days of claiming gay visibility, and in the 1950s, it came at the expense of marginalizing those who did not present a palatable and heterosexually-agreeable persona. Drag queens, butch lesbians, black homosexuals, and working-class queers were all viewed as problematic in the accommodationist politics of early lesbian and gay activism. As historian Marcia Gallo noted, “the lengths to which a lesbian would go for societal acceptance was a contested issue from the beginning,” and in the 1950s, the Daughters of Bilitis “championed outward conformity to achieve integration, primarily through the provision in its Statement of Purpose that required members to adopt a ‘mode of dress and behavior acceptable to society.’”³³⁰ Decades earlier in Atlanta, historian Tera W. Hunter found that the “black bourgeoisie lamented the shame and disgrace that befell the entire race” when black domestic workers danced in public halls located on the seedy Decatur Street.³³¹ Just as a middle-class black elite “sought to impose its own values and standards on the masses” and “asserted its paternalism through the language of morality”

³²⁹ Guest Editorial, *Pulse*, 1984, ALFA-DU.

³³⁰ Gallo, 24.

³³¹ Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 179.

directed at working-class African Americans in the first decades of the twentieth century, so too did a homosexual elite try to assert a similar authority directed at the masses at Pride.³³²

Sixty years later in 1980s Atlanta and undoubtedly in Charlotte as well, this mindset could still be found among some gay and lesbian factions. Pride was not necessarily a celebration of the variety of ways that queer could be expressed but instead it was a chance to represent a unified and strictly defined identity to the straight community. It was “Morning in America,” according to Ronald Reagan’s campaign, and with Georgians and North Carolinians giving Reagan more than 60 percent of their votes in his landslide 1984 victory, 1950s-style conformity made good sense for the politics of Pride in the South.³³³

³³² Hunter, 186.

³³³ House, *Statistics of the Presidential and Congressional Election of November 6, 1984*, Thomas E. Ladd, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1985), http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo/1984election.pdf (accessed April 20, 2012).

CHAPTER 5

INSTITUTIONS

The transition from the politically activist pride festivals of the 1970s and 1980s to the mega-corporate spectacles of the twenty-first century was an economically driven process. As Alex T. Urquhart and Susan Craddock have observed, “sponsoring Pride festivals provides an opportunity to brand a vanguard of young attractive gay men and high-end fashionable lesbians. Pride celebrations are filled with the edgy sexuality and even sex that corporate America often pays unbelievable amounts of money to an ad agency to produce.”³³⁴ The temporary tattoos, bottle openers, plastic cups, highlighters, and other branded giveaways are wise and cost-effective investments when compared to a national, or even regional, advertising campaign.³³⁵ Corporate sponsors of Pride do not have to risk a widely visible alliance with the local queer community given Pride’s limited and targeted advertising venue. This opportunity to quietly support Pride was especially important for regional sponsors in the South. North Carolina-based Food Lion grocery stores sponsored Pride in Charlotte in the 2000s, but since Pride sponsorship becomes evident largely in defined gay media outlets and through visible merchandising at the festival itself, most people who do not attend are never aware of this affiliation. In

³³⁴ Alex T. Urquhart and Susan Craddock, “Private Cures for a Public Epidemic: Target(ing) HIV and AIDS Medications in the Twin Cities,” in Twin Cities GLBT Oral History Project, *Queer Twin Cities*, ed. Kevin P. Murphy, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Larry Knopp (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) 279.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

the case of Food Lion, the support is nowhere to be found on their Web site or in broad-based advertising campaigns.³³⁶

Corporate financing of Pride brought significant visibility to the festivals, but historian Kevin P. Murphy warns that the historical course of “annual Pride festivals as at first organic and politically meaningful only to become co-opted by superficial and commercial interests in later years,” is one to be examined with caution.³³⁷ The long history of gay visibility is tied to the marketplace and to capitalism in many ways, as the cases of lesbian and gay bars and bookstores in Atlanta and Charlotte demonstrate. As in many cities, gay visibility in Charlotte and especially in Atlanta did not occur without significant ties to the marketplace, but corporate backing in both cities would be crucial to Pride’s continued success in the 1990s and 2000s. These corporate sponsors also played a significant role in the urban development of each city, perhaps none more so than Bank of America in Charlotte.³³⁸

The 1998 merger of Charlotte’s NationsBank and San Francisco’s BankAmerica was transformative for the Queen City. Surprisingly, it would also hold significant weight for Charlotte’s lesbian and gay population. In 1991, Concerned Charlotteans were still shepherded by Reverend Joseph Chambers, who led the anti-pornography fight just a few years earlier, and they now gathered to protest a meeting of the International Federation of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays hosted at Charlotte’s uptown Omni Hotel. More than two decades earlier the Citizens for Decent Atlanta feared that

³³⁶ “Sponsorships,” Delhaize America, Inc., dba Food Lion, <http://www.foodlion.com/CommunityOutreach/Sponsorships> (accessed April 28, 2012).

³³⁷ Kevin P. Murphy, “Gay Was Good: Progress, Homonormativity, and Oral History,” in Murphy, Pierce, and Knopp, 313.

³³⁸ *Ibid.* Murphy offers a useful discussion on the corporate growth of Pride and the direct link between an emerging visible gay culture and capitalism. In addition to Murphy’s analysis, see D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 11-13; D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 226-29.

visible gay people would result in “a city of real nuts,” like San Francisco; now Charlotte’s Chambers articulated a similar fear to *The Charlotte Observer*, by declaring that he did not want Charlotte to become like San Francisco, “a homosexual mecca.”³³⁹ But with the arrival of San Francisco’s BankAmerica, the lesbians and gay men witnessed the symbolic merger of a “homosexual mecca” with a veritable queer dessert. The media coverage in San Francisco was brutal. Journalists on the West Coast seemed to enjoy spouting perfunctory ridicule of Charlotte as too southern and therefore uncultured. As historian David Goldfield observed, “it was as if Dog Patch had conquered the Emerald City.”³⁴⁰ Florida’s *St. Petersburg Times* newspaper had a field day. The marriage of the two cities was excellent fodder, especially since Florida’s Barnett Banks were recent casualties in NationsBank’s meteoric rise to power. The *Times* noted that San Francisco, “never anticipated becoming a distant banking colony to some Southern-twangin’ town whose streets roll up at dark and where the Billy Graham Parkway is the main route into town from the airport.”³⁴¹ The comparisons of the two cities were rampant, and Charlotte’s backward and redneck identity was often linked to its unwelcoming environment for gay people.

The question of how the merger would affect lesbians and gay men who were accustomed to the visibility of queer San Francisco and corporate benefits for same sex couples at BankAmerica, came quickly. Hugh McColl of NationsBank in Charlotte was surprisingly blunt in his support for employees who depended on BankAmerica’s

³³⁹ Ted Mellnik, “Hotel Pressured to Block Meeting of Parents of Gays,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 2, 1991. See chapter 4 for more on the Citizens for Decent Atlanta.

³⁴⁰ David Goldfield, *Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 8.

³⁴¹ Robert Trigaux, “A Tale of Two Cities: Style vs. Down Home,” *St. Petersburg Times*, April 26, 1998.

domestic partnership benefits.³⁴² As the *St. Petersburg Times* noted, his was a one word answer, “yes,” that would have a resounding impact. “And the thought of NationsBank, headquartered deep in the Bible Belt, offering such liberal benefits” indicated “a merger of cultures as well as assets between the Charlotte, N.C.-based NationsBank and the San Francisco-based BankAmerica.”³⁴³ McColl’s declaration was particularly notable, given that major corporations such as General Electric, Eli Lilly, and Atlanta’s United Parcel Service would not offer these benefits until 2004.³⁴⁴

Charlotte is a business town and McColl, a South Carolinian armed with a banking degree from Chapel Hill, represented the core of the city’s longstanding Chamber of Commerce slogan that it was a “good place to make money.”³⁴⁵ A fourth-generation banker, McColl began his career in the Queen City and often epitomized the Chamber’s commitment to growth at all cost – even when a new skyscraper for uptown, satirized as the “Taj McColl,” would raze important landmarks on the uptown landscape.³⁴⁶ McColl aspired to make Charlotte a “great city,” without forsaking his love of big business.³⁴⁷ His commitment was typical of city promoters who throughout the twentieth century prioritized a strong business climate.

When the Civil Rights Movement crippled many southern cities, Charlotte leaders had seized on a good opportunity to boost its business climate. Appearance has always been of the utmost concern in the Queen City, and city boosters wanted to avoid the volatile upheaval that brought notoriety to Little Rock and Birmingham. According to

³⁴² Ross Yockey, *McColl: The Man With America’s Money* (Atlanta: Longstreet, 1999) 576.

³⁴³ Teresa Burney, “NationsBank Offers Benefits to Wider Family,” *St. Petersburg Times*, April 17, 1998.

³⁴⁴ Ashlea Ebeling, “Married or Not, Gays Gain Partner Coverage,” *Forbes*, April 4, 2004, http://www.forbes.com/2004/04/07/cz_ae_0407beltway.html (accessed May 1, 2012).

³⁴⁵ Applebome, *Dixie Rising*, 154.

³⁴⁶ Yockey, 6.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 159-61, 165, 169.

historian James C. Cobb, “businessmen and development leaders became the agents of peaceful desegregation” in Charlotte as they had in Atlanta.³⁴⁸ Even before the 1964 Civil Rights Act passed, white civic leaders in Charlotte made a visible statement by going out for lunch with their black counterparts as an act of desegregation. As David Goldfield has observed, “lunching rather than lynching characterized Charlotte’s approach to race relations.”³⁴⁹ But when it came to a business-first approach with regard to recognition or tolerance for its lesbian and gay citizens, city politicians were not willing to acquiesce.

The Concerned Charlotteans’ group would ultimately bring the most fame and notoriety to Charlotte’s relationship with its lesbian and gay citizens when they participated in a community protest of epic proportions. The brouhaha over the 1996 Charlotte Repertory Theater performance of Tony Kushner’s controversial play *Angels in America* would place Charlotte on the national map—as a city where being gay was a liability. The debate over the gay themes and nudity in the play garnered national media attention, engaged the local religious community, inspired local gay activism, and ultimately led Charlotte’s county commissioners to cut all arts funding for the following budget cycle.³⁵⁰ Some of the strongest business community opposition to this move came from Hugh McColl. McColl was committed to claiming Charlotte’s new place as a financial leader, and this was not the image of Charlotte that he wanted to put forward.

³⁴⁸ James C. Cobb, *Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877-1984* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 112.

³⁴⁹ David Goldfield, “A Place to Come To,” in Graves and Smith, 15. Atlanta also took a business-first approach to desegregation prior to the Civil Rights Act. See, for example, David Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940 to the Present* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 133.

³⁵⁰ See, for example, Rah Bickley, “Southern Discomfort: Gays in Charlotte, N.C., Strive for Community Cohesion As They Struggle To Get Back on Track After A Virulent 1997,” *The Advocate*, 17 March 1998; Willa J. Conrad and Jim Morrill, “One Option: Zero Public Money for Arts,” *The Charlotte Observer*, April 3, 1997.

As the *Philadelphia Inquirer* noted, Charlotte was typically a city that would rather “make money than headlines.”³⁵¹ The brutal critique of Charlotte that arose during the NationsBank and BankAmerica merger was an assault based in part on the actions of Charlotte’s now infamous “Gang of Five,” the nickname bestowed upon the very conservative Christian county commissioners who led the reaction against the arts and gay community in Charlotte. To some, it seemed that the county commissioners did their very best to help the city reinforce the stereotypes that were hurled at them by the national press.

In their furor, commissioners repeatedly identified San Francisco as a den of iniquity. Commissioner Hoyle Martin, a Democrat, was determined to keep Charlotte from becoming “the Sodom and Gomorrah capital of the East Coast, as is San Francisco on the West Coast.”³⁵² It is ironic that the prospect of becoming more like San Francisco would be realized later that year at the hand of Hugh McColl. *The Washington Post* summed up the damage of the anti-gay arts funding flap in an almost prophetic statement written just two months prior to the announcement of Charlotte’s banking merger.

Whatever happens next, some damage has been done. A new virulence has been introduced into the city's once genteel public discourse; the arts community has been cowed; a segment of the population feels stigmatized; business leaders worry that the controversy is a step away from the city's progressive tradition. And Charlotteans, who want so desperately to be denizens of a world class city, have been forced to confront an embarrassing narrowness that has left them looking less like Atlanta and more like Cobb County, Ga., which lost its piece of the 1996 Olympics because of similar anti-gay sentiment.³⁵³

³⁵¹ Jeff Gammage, “Furor Grips Charlotte as Five Commissioners Target Gay Life,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 June, 1997.

³⁵² Randall Bloomquist, “A 'Most Livable' City”—as Long as Your Art Passes Muster,” *The Washington Post*, February 15, 1998.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

This picture of Charlotte as anti-progressive and more like Cobb County than Atlanta proper was exactly the kind of scenario that McColl surely wanted to avoid. While virulent gay hatred was apparent in Atlanta’s suburban Cobb County, Charlotte’s embarrassment was centered in the city’s local government – smack dab in the middle of “uptown,” the progressive nickname for Charlotte’s downtown district. As he planned one of the largest corporate mergers in history with one of the queerest cities in the United States, McColl’s own city was making the wrong kind of headlines with comments such as, “If it were up to me, we’d shove these people [gays] off the face of the earth,” which was offered by Hoyle Martin and quoted in *The Washington Post*.³⁵⁴

Prior to the 1990s the lesbian and gay community in Charlotte could not sustain the visible activism and organization necessary to garner the support of the business community, but McColl’s support was significant. Bank of America would become one of the largest employers in Charlotte and would be a top tier sponsor of Pride, as its leaders recognized the significant growth of lesbian and gay buying power.³⁵⁵ The importance of this corporate backing cannot be underestimated. In 2000, *The New York Times* called McColl a, “champion of gay rights,” citing both his same-sex partner benefits package at Bank of America and his efforts to bankroll campaigns to replace the “Gang of Five” with Democrats who would then restore arts funding in Charlotte.³⁵⁶

McColl was a major player in the epic Charlotte arrival of the National Football League in the form of the Carolina Panthers. As writer Peter Applebome noted, the headline in the *Charlotte Observer* was “stripped across the top in Christ-returns-to-

³⁵⁴ Bloomquist, “A ‘Most Livable’ City.”

³⁵⁵ “Charlotte Area Largest Employers,” Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, http://charlottechamber.com/clientuploads/Economic_pdfs/LargestEmployers.pdf (accessed April 30, 2012).

³⁵⁶ Dean Smith, “A Powerful Banker’s Other Hat,” *The New York Times*, May 21, 2000.

earth-size type” and it was celebrated by McColl and other Charlotte leaders in similar fashion.³⁵⁷ Perhaps of equal importance to some lesbians in Charlotte and surrounding areas was the 1997 arrival of one of the original WNBA franchises, the Charlotte Sting. The Sting’s games provided a site of new community formation for many lesbians, as these events were often mythically referred to as lesbian church. As sociologist Susannah Dolance explains, women’s professional basketball games are significant “because they happen in a unique space that is different from most gatherings of lesbian and bisexual women.” As one lesbian fan shared, “it’s a place, another outlet that’s not a bar, you know, that’s not just a once a year pride march or whatever, you know. And if you don’t get out that often, it’s nice to have an event that brings lesbians together.”³⁵⁸

The Sting remained in Charlotte for ten years, and the games offered a distinctive lesbian social space that could not be recreated. When the Sting folded in 2007, it was due in large part to POOR attendance. In 2006, they ranked thirteenth in attendance out of the fourteen teams in the Women’s National Basketball Association. In the same way that the Charlotte Women’s Center struggled to maintain community involvement, Sue Henry and Dan Kirsch worked to support their gay bookstores, and the Queen City Quordinators failed to identify a core of committed activists to sustain their organization, the Charlotte Sting’s loyal lesbian audience was not enough to support the team financially.³⁵⁹ Once again, Atlanta bested Charlotte when in the fall of the Sting’s failing year it secured an expansion WNBA team, the Dream. The WNBA’s presence changed

³⁵⁷ Applebome, *Dixie Rising*, 151.

³⁵⁸ Susannah Dolance, “‘A Whole Stadium Full’: Lesbian Community at Women’s National Basketball Association Games,” *Journal of Sex Research* 42 (February 2005): 81.

³⁵⁹ Mike Cranston, “WNBA Franchise Charlotte Sting Folds,” *Washington Post*, January 3, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/03/AR2007010301203.html> (accessed May 1, 2012).

social opportunities for lesbians in Charlotte and Atlanta, and the story of women's professional basketball is representative of differences in the two cities generally.

Charlotte has a long and troubled past related to its professional sports teams, particularly in the realm of providing desirable arenas and sufficient attendance. The Sting was simply another casualty in the war. Men's professional basketball faced similar difficulties in Charlotte. When the Charlotte Hornets joined the National Basketball Association (NBA) for the 1988-89 season, some feared the city was too small to support the team. Miami and Orlando, Florida, and Minnesota also gained professional teams in the same year, but at 988,000 metro Charlotte's population trailed that of its nearest competitor, Orlando, Florida, by roughly 200,000.³⁶⁰ According to the NBA, "many doubted the Charlotte community's ability and willingness to support a professional basketball team." Beyond being small for an NBA market, Charlotte was in North Carolina, which was college basketball country, "where the fans' ardor for the amateur game had never translated into a similar affection for the NBA."³⁶¹ The difficulties of Charlotte's boosters in trying to define their city also played a part in its difficulties in maintaining a loyal audience for professional sports teams. Aside from hockey, major professional sports in Atlanta have enjoyed a long and colorful history that is intimately tied to the city and its identity. Even professional teams that relocated to Atlanta in the 1960s, like Major League Baseball's Braves and the NBA's Hawks, have

³⁶⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Florida Quick Links*, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/120001k.html> (accessed July 1, 2012); Chris Baker, "A Look at Expansion in the NBA: \$32.5-Million Price Tag Doesn't Scare Off Prospective Buyers," *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1987, http://articles.latimes.com/1987-04-19/sports/sp-2064_1_expansion-team (accessed May 1, 2012).

³⁶¹ "Hornets History," National Basketball Association, http://www.nba.com/hornets/history/history_hornets.html (accessed May 1, 2012). On the history of the NBA in Charlotte, and a recent resurgence of interest in the now defunct Charlotte Hornets name and merchandise, see Andrew Dunn, "Charlotte Hornets Gear is Back," *Charlotte Observer*, April 24, 2012, <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2012/04/24/3192963/charlotte-hornets-gear-is-back.html> accessed (May 1, 2012).

established deep ties and strong attendance records.³⁶² But, rather than a defining presence, in Charlotte, professional sports often serve largely as a façade. These teams were another in a long list of efforts constituting what historian Matthew Lassiter has called Charlotte's "perennial search for respect."³⁶³

While Charlotte searched for respect, Atlanta's population surged past 3,000,000 and it continued to embellish its economic credentials. Having fostered and attracted Fortune 500 companies like Coca-Cola and Lockheed Martin—both of which had appeared on the revered *Fortune* list since its 1955 debut—at the dawn of the last decade of the twentieth century Atlanta's major corporations continued to affirm the city's rightful place on the global stage. In 1991, a formative year for Atlanta's economy, Coca-Cola opened the World of Coke Museum, United Parcel Service moved its headquarters to Atlanta, Delta Airlines gained a new global-carrier identity with the purchase of Pan Am, and CNN earned viability as a legitimate news network through its coverage of the first Persian Gulf War, all of which helped forge international connections for the city. Atlanta was named *Fortune* magazine's number one city for business that year, but a national corporate real estate magazine ranked Charlotte ahead of Atlanta as the second best site for "corporate facility destination" in 1991. The Queen City was sandwiched between Dallas, Texas, at number one and Atlanta at number three, and the article recognized all three cities as "top-notch" business environments.³⁶⁴ The ultimate nod in global recognition, however, went to Atlanta for attracting the 1996

³⁶² Atlanta has not been able to keep a professional hockey team, having lost both the Flames and most recently the Thrashers.

³⁶³ Matthew D. Lassiter, "Searching for Respect: From 'New South' to 'World Class' at the Crossroads of the Carolinas," in Graves and Smith, 24.

³⁶⁴ Tim Venable, "Hottest Metro Areas for Facility Investments in 1991: Dallas, Charlotte, and Atlanta," *Site Selection*, February 1992, <http://www.developmentalliance.com/docu/pdf/41500.pdf>, (accessed June 18, 2012); "Atlanta," Columbia Fun Maps, LGA-LHA.

Olympic Games. Atlanta's globalization is integral to understanding what it meant to be a lesbian there in the 1990s.

Just a few months after the Centennial Olympic Park bombing in Atlanta, a lesbian nightclub, The Otherside, was targeted by the same perpetrator. Eric Rudolph believed homosexuality to be an "assault upon the integrity of American society," and in his confession, he stated that, "the attack itself was meant to send a powerful message in protest of Washington's continued tolerance and support for the homosexual political agenda."³⁶⁵ The Otherside was located in Midtown's gay bar district, and its 1997 bombing sent a message to the surrounding gay businesses and gay residents that that this might be the first in a string of hate-motivated attacks. National gay activist groups such as the Human Rights Campaign and the New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence project stepped in, drawing attention to the bombing as anti-gay and hate motivated.³⁶⁶ The most severely injured victim, Memrie Creswell, was doubly victimized in the attack, "essentially outed by news media accounts of the incident." She lost her job as a result, "but with no laws prohibiting discrimination against gay men and lesbians in Georgia," she had little recourse.³⁶⁷ The bomb purposely targeted a gay gathering place, and the event motivated efforts led by Georgia legislator Vince Fort toward hate crimes legislation. After his successful legislation was declared unconstitutional in 2004, Fort used the tenth anniversary of The Otherside bombing as an opportunity to reintroduce a new bill and refocus the spotlight on crimes motivated by hatred of gay people.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁵ "Full Text of Eric Rudolph's Confession," National Public Radio, posted April 14, 2005, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4600480>, (accessed June 18, 2012).

³⁶⁶ "Another Atlanta Bomb Raises Fear of Terrorist," *St. Petersburg Times*, February 23, 1997.

³⁶⁷ Andrew Jacobs, "For Bomb Victims, a Sense of Relief After Years of Anxiety," *The New York Times*, June 1, 2003.

³⁶⁸ Max Pizarro, "New Hate-Crimes Bill Introduced," *Creative Loafing*, Atlanta, February 28, 2007, <http://clatl.com/atlanta/new-hate-crimes-bill-introduced/Content?oid=1266073> (accessed May 3, 2012).

Creswell had no protection against workplace discrimination on the basis of her sexual orientation, and as of 2012 this protection is still unavailable in the majority of southern states or at the federal level. Based on this historic lack of legislative security gay activists in the 1980s focused their efforts on individual corporations to gain support for such protections. The long term results of their endeavors would be slow in coming, but remarkable, nonetheless. Working closely with the National Gay Task Force (NGTF) in 1985, The Atlanta Business and Professional Guild hoped to influence corporations to improve their protections for lesbian and gay employees. They targeted top-ranking public companies in Georgia, including Delta Airlines, Georgia Pacific, and Coca-Cola, and under the guidance of the Task Force, they proceeded gingerly. The Guild made it very clear in their contact letters that the goal of their outreach was “not to castigate, criticize or publicize a corporation’s failures to maintain formal policies with regard to sexual orientation.”

Georgia Pacific officials “‘cordially’ declined to participate” in the program, stating that they assessed their employees solely on merit, but at Coca-Cola and Delta this outreach was eventually more effective.³⁶⁹ By 2002, both companies offered same-sex partner benefits, and in the last decade they, along with UPS, have consistently been ranked by the Human Rights Campaign as top-tier companies for queer employees. Although Hugh McColl led the way in the South by offering same sex benefits to Bank of America employees in 1998, by the mid-2000s Atlanta’s gay-friendly corporations bypassed the Queen City. Currently Bank of America is ranked higher than Delta and UPS in the Human Rights Campaign’s LGBT consumer guide of best companies, but Bank of America’s policies have been no match for the conservative politics and

³⁶⁹ Patrick McCrary to Don Mixon, March 31, 1985, Box 3, ES-EU.

religious attitudes in Charlotte. A cutting edge corporate policy toward LGBT employees dovetails nicely with the various structural supports for lesbian and gay people in Atlanta, but in Charlotte these supports are generally and severely lacking. As we have seen, there is undoubtedly a noticeable advantage for corporations who offer same-sex benefits and participate in Pride through visible and economically substantial sponsorships. At the festivals they have a targeted and receptive audience, most of whom are young, white, middle-class consumers who delight in the corporate branding often perceived as support of their imagined queer community.³⁷⁰ Like Bank of America in Charlotte, Delta, Coca-Cola, and other Atlanta heavyweights such as Home Depot, have been visible corporate sponsors of Atlanta Pride. In fact, LGBT employees from The Home Depot and Delta often march in the Midtown parade.³⁷¹

Major corporate support came to Atlanta's Pride festival and to its lesbian and gay employees because of activist organizing rooted in the 1970s. The powers at the top – especially corporations—eventually responded to queer wrangling at the bottom. While corporate and societal support were still largely lacking in the 1980s, especially in the face of the emerging AIDS crisis, some Atlantans continued efforts to provide their own support mechanisms through varied organizations, including the frequently-troubled Atlanta Gay Center (AGC). The Center was founded in 1976, and in the mid-1980s it

³⁷⁰ This concept of an “imagined community” is drawn from Benedict Anderson’s definition suggesting that, “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev.ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

³⁷¹ “Atlanta Companies Falter in Ranking of LGBT Love,” Project Q Atlanta, entry posted December 8, 2011, http://projectqatlanta.com/news_articles/view/atlanta_companies_falter_in_ranking_of_their_lgbt_love?gid=9781 (accessed May 1, 2012); “More Companies Offering Same-Sex-Partner Benefits,” *New York Times*, September 26, 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/09/26/business/more-companies-offering-same-sex-partner-benefits.html> (accessed May 1, 2012).

claimed to be the oldest and largest lesbian and gay organization in the city. Its primary functions included managing a telephone helpline, a gay sexually transmitted diseases health clinic, and publishing a newsletter run primarily by white gay men and therefore overwhelmingly aimed at their needs. Jim Lovell, the AGC's new executive director in 1983 was like many lesbian and gay Charlotteans. He made the decision to go to Atlanta to be "out." According to Lovell, he moved to Atlanta not just for his career but so that he could be truly open about his homosexuality. Charlotte was not a place where Lovell felt that he could afford such openness. His job there required that he be "cloaked in the mantle of corporate respectability."³⁷² Lovell's transition to Atlanta highlights the fundamental difference between Charlotte and Atlanta for some gay people.

Respectability, defined more conservatively than in Atlanta, and virtual invisibility were often required of gay people in Charlotte. In spite of their sexuality, this expectation was a reality for many who worked in the straight-laced business districts of Charlotte. Even in the tumultuous and conservative 1980s, Atlanta offered an alternative—a place to be "out" for many.

The AGC provided space for several political, self-help, and religious gay organizations. Like Charlotte's Queen City Quordinators, the Center struggled to combat divisiveness and financial woes. Both of these organizations sought community cohesion under one big queer umbrella, but this was not realized. Although gay Atlantans certainly had more bodies and groups, their struggles for community participation were occasionally quite similar to those in Charlotte.³⁷³ In 1985, a Charlotte activist predicted that there would eventually be a full time gay community center there, but what he could

³⁷² "Profile Jim Lovell: New Directions for the Atlanta Gay Center," *CruiseNews*, November 1983, Box 1, ES-EU.

³⁷³ "The Health of Our Community," *Etcetera*, Box 1, ES-EU.

not have predicted was the contentious battle some two decades later surrounding the creation and tenuous survival of that center.³⁷⁴

While Charlotte's gay citizens waited for a community center, the Atlanta Gay Center faced a challenge in the evolving Lambda Community Center, an organization devoted to a more recreational focus. In a debate over the purpose of the two Atlanta centers, a board member for the AGC noted that no organization could "claim to speak for the entire community . . . we're far too diverse for that."³⁷⁵ The Lambda Community Center did hope, however, to bring a varied group of gay Atlantans together and to provide a "central space for the community" that the Board of Trustees felt "was lacking in the city."³⁷⁶ In 1994, Lambda inched toward this goal by hosting a Community Expo featuring 128 gay Atlanta organizations. The Expo showcased myriad opportunities for queer support, and highlighted the exceptional growth and visibility of queer activist Atlanta.³⁷⁷ Eventually the two centers merged and joined physical spaces on the gay-friendly Ralph McGill Boulevard, but by 2003 the newly named Gay & Lesbian Center had folded, just when a few of Charlotte's gay activists were organizing to sustain their newly opened venue.³⁷⁸

Meanwhile, in the mid-1980s, the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance continued to serve not only as a community resource for interested lesbians, but also as a liaison for the gay community. For example, in 1985 when the AGC added two women and two

³⁷⁴ "Connection Profiles: Samuel A. Jackson, Jr.," *Lambda Connection*, October 1985, Box 51, FP-DU.

³⁷⁵ "Group Plans Gay/Lesbian Meeting Room Space; Says it Competes with the Atlanta Gay Center," *The News*, March 1992, Box 3, ES-EU.

³⁷⁶ KC Wildmoon, "Atlanta Lambda Community Center Plans Well Underway," *Southern Voice*, October 8, 1993, Box 3, ES-EU.

³⁷⁷ "'To Have Our Own': Lambda Lesbian and Gay Community," *Fourth Tuesday Forum*, February 1994, ALFA-DU.

³⁷⁸ Dyana Bagby, "Should Atlanta Spend Millions on an LGBT Community Center?" *GA Voice*, April 30, 2010, <http://www.thegavoice.com/news/atlanta-news/262-should-atlanta-spend-millions-on-an-lgbt-community-center> (accessed May 1, 2012).

African Americans to their board, ALFA celebrated the move in their newsletter, *Atalanta*, noting it as a step toward “representativeness.”³⁷⁹ The group continued to be involved in many levels of activism, but with a broader agenda than its lesbian separatist goals of the 1970s. In a 1985 *Atalanta* reader survey, members showed interest in areas ranging from coffeehouses to a police advisory committee, and racial and social discrimination to social events like movies and concerts, but interestingly the survey included nothing on Pride. During the days surrounding the festival, ALFA continued to offer workshops and events that were focused on lesbians, but in the 1980s it also focused on community oriented goals that often crossed the rigid borders between lesbians and gay men. When gay men were harassed by Atlanta police, ALFA participated in a 1985 community meeting organized by the Lesbian and Gay Police Advisory Committee. Details of the meeting were provided in a thorough report taking up three full pages of the *Atalanta*. Ten members of the committee met, including two women. All who attended were white, although the committee did include two black members. Seven police officials met with the group, including Chief of Police, Morris Redding, and Eldrin Bell, who would be appointed as Chief in 1990. ALFA’s newsletter regularly covered the advocacy of the Police Advisory Committee, and even though there were only two lesbians at the meeting, their support for the privacy concerns of their male colleagues shows that they were clearly invested in gay men’s rights. Of particular concern was the perceived “solicitation” in gay men’s bars, where police would arrest gay men who actively sought sex. The problem was that the officers were in a gay bar, and the committee argued that these bars not only had a right to exist but that a gay bar should be a safe and legitimate space to seek sex. The committee worked with the police leadership

³⁷⁹ *Atalanta*, March 1985, LGA-LHA.

by submitting the names of currently operating bars at the meeting and noted those, including the popular lesbian hangout Toolulahs, that were not in compliance with the posting requirements for liquor licenses.³⁸⁰

Meetings such as these were due to the direct orders of George Napper, chief of police in 1981. Napper encouraged leaders of the gay community, specifically the gay activist and clergyman, Reverend Mike Piazza, to work with his department to assure that officers were “aware of and sensitized to the fact that there is a sizable gay community in the City of Atlanta with lifestyles and concerns that on occasion differ from other groups in Atlanta.”³⁸¹ In a 1981 memo to his deputy chief, Napper asked for additional meetings with Reverend Piazza to ensure “meaningful interaction and dialogue” that would adequately address officers’ concerns and questions with regard to gay people and their safety in Atlanta. Additionally, he requested a commitment toward continued “in-service training” for the police department moving forward. The following year, Reverend Piazza was outspoken in media coverage of the politically focused Atlanta Pride event. He recognized that gay people in Atlanta enjoyed a substantial level of acceptance for a southern city, and that the 1982 Pride was successful with “a few street preachers” along the parade route, but no substantial incidents.³⁸² Police advocacy for gay concerns continued to grow in Atlanta. As of 2012, the department employed LGBT community liaisons, continued to have an active LGBT Advisory Board, and lesbian and gay officers

³⁸⁰ *Atlanta*, LGA-LHA; “AIDS and Politics—1980 to 1989,” under “Photograph, Tower Lounge staff,” OutHistory, http://outhistory.org/wiki/AIDS_and_Politics_-_1980_to_1989 (accessed May 10, 2012).

³⁸¹ Chief George Napper to Deputy Chief J. Hill, October 20, 1981, Box 1, ES-EU. Reverend Piazza remains active in the Atlanta religious and gay communities. At the time of these events, Reverend Piazza was past of the Metropolitan Community Church in Atlanta. Currently he pastors the Virginia Highland Church in Atlanta: <http://www.vhchurch.org/> (accessed April 30, 2012).

³⁸² Napper to Hill, Box 1, ES-EU.

have even marched in Pride parades³⁸³. Although there are certainly many lesbian and gay police officers in Charlotte, according to Christina Cougill, an “out” lesbian on the force, there is no community liaison or an organization for lesbian or gay officers as of 2012.³⁸⁴ The well-publicized 2010 resignation of six volunteer chaplains who refused to work with an invited lesbian chaplain indicated that the department’s posture toward LGBT issues was occasionally contentious.³⁸⁵

ALFA’s involvement with the police advisory committee was in accordance with their revised 1985 mission statement that incorporated “the entire spectrum of lesbian feminist issues” including “the liberation of women; eliminating discrimination based on sexual orientation; ending racial, anti-Semitic, and economic oppression; eliminating nuclear weapons and reducing the threat of war;” and other social justice causes.³⁸⁶ By 1991, however, some leaders of ALFA recognized that while the organization once served as “the nucleus for everything from a softball team to political groups,” with so many new lesbian and gay opportunities in Atlanta it was time for them to refocus.³⁸⁷ They remained committed to their political goals, noting that without ALFA in Atlanta, the city lacked “an explicitly political group that tackles lesbian, feminist, and other rights issues at the same time.” The group was concerned with issues that affected “lesbians not only as lesbians, but as women,” and “a host of other ‘isms’ that

³⁸³ “Atlanta Police March in Pride Parade,” Project Q Atlanta, entry posted October 14, 2011, http://projectqatlanta.com/news_articles/view/atlanta_police_march_in_pride_parade_photos?gid=9397 (accessed May 1, 2012).

³⁸⁴ Christina Cougill, personal Facebook message to author, May 15, 2012.

³⁸⁵ Franco Ordoñez, “Six Volunteer CMPD Police Chaplains Resign Their Posts,” WCNC-TV, entry posted November 6, 2010, <http://www.wcnc.com/home/Six-volunteer-CMPD-police-chaplains-resign-their-posts-106819578.html>; “Charlotte Chaplains Resign Over Gay Clergy Member,” *Advocate*, November 7, 2010, <http://www.advocate.com/news/daily-news/2010/11/07/charlotte-chaplains-resign-over-gay-clergy-member> (both accessed April 30, 2012).

³⁸⁶ “ALFA: Where We’ve Been, Where We’re Going,” Box 1, 94-040, Administrative, ALFA/A-DU.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

marginalize and oppress many in our society.”³⁸⁸ ALFA remained decidedly political in its focus, but for some lesbians in Atlanta the social arena was much more important.

The group “Fourth Tuesday” had emerged in 1986 as one of the new lesbian alternatives to ALFA. Members hoped to “sponsor and encourage communication and networking between professional and entrepreneurial women, and to provide a social atmosphere to encourage mutual support,” but by 1988 they were already focusing on structural changes prompted by a membership survey. The results of the survey suggested that the organization was an elite group of educated women primarily in their thirties. Over 70 percent of the respondents had a college degree, with 41 percent holding graduate degrees, and 25 percent reporting an income over fifty-thousand dollars a year. The most important aspect of the organization was providing the opportunity to meet other women through social opportunities. The *Fourth Tuesday Forum* newsletter regularly promoted dinners, cocktail hours, book clubs, events at local bars including The Otherside, regional events like the Southern Women’s Music and Comedy Festival, and even featured a Queen City Valentine’s dance held at a private club and hosted by their “sisters in Charlotte.”³⁸⁹ By 1990 the group had virtually doubled, boasting almost four-hundred members.³⁹⁰ Fourth Tuesday did have a political arm, and they joined ALFA, the Women of Color Caucus, and other groups in bringing the 1991 National Lesbian Agenda Conference to Atlanta. The conference drew approximately three-thousand women who were repeatedly warned about how to avoid news photographers, so that

³⁸⁸ “ALFA: Where We’ve Been,” ALFA/A-DU.

³⁸⁹ *Fourth Tuesday Forum*, ALFA-DU.

³⁹⁰ Jan Suchomski, “Membership Survey Results,” *Fourth Tuesday Forum*, February 1989, ALFA-DU. The survey was mailed to approximately two hundred members, and this information is based on fifty-one responses.

those who did not want to be photographed in association with the conference for fear of losing their jobs or being outed could plan their clandestine exit strategies.³⁹¹

Similar to the feminist newsletters of the 1970s, but shorn of the separatist rhetoric, the *Forum* included summaries of lesbian-focused caucuses on topics including “Old Lesbian Expectations,” and “Racism 101 for White Women,” designed to address the power of white privilege and feelings of white guilt.³⁹² Unlike lesbian feminist newsletters, however, the *Forum* accepted advertising. In 1990 it carried a promotion for the first all-lesbian Bahamas cruise hosted by Olivia Records, an event marketed to an elite audience seeking a private social escape for lesbian-only travel. Fourth Tuesday and Olivia Records served as examples of tenacious lesbian organizations and institutions that changed with the social landscape by reinventing themselves, and as a result both organizations remain active today. No longer a record label, “Olivia Travel” is now completely devoted to exclusive all-lesbian vacations that feature lesbian entertainers, and Fourth Tuesday serves as the LGBTQ Health Initiative’s “social network for women” offering regular happy hours and other lesbian community events.³⁹³

The *Forum* occasionally featured a column on black lesbians contributed by Dr. Shirlene Holmes, a lesbian playwright and professor at Georgia State University. In her first column Holmes introduced the group, Hospitality Atlanta. Members of this African American lesbian social networking organization considered it a sister group to Fourth Tuesday and sought collaboration, although it is hard to say how much interaction

³⁹¹ Ronald Smothers, “3,000 Lesbians Meet in Atlanta to Set Own Agenda,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1991, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/04/28/us/3000-lesbians-meet-in-atlanta-to-set-own-agenda.html> (accessed May 3, 2012).

³⁹² “Caucus Reports,” *Fourth Tuesday Forum*, March 1989, ALFA-DU.

³⁹³ *Forum*, ALFA-DU; “Fourth Tuesday/The Health Initiative,” <http://thehealthinitiative.org/programs-resources/programming/fourth-tuesday/> (accessed May 5, 2012). For more on the beginnings of Olivia Records, see chapter 3.

actually occurred. Based on its one-thousand name mailing list, Hospitality garnered a substantial level of interest after only three years of existence, and like Fourth Tuesday the group had some members who eagerly pushed the group beyond a social focus to engage in political organizing.

Holmes's involvement with Fourth Tuesday and Hospitality Atlanta was indicative of the importance of university connections to gay communities. As chapter three shows, the roots of the 1970s lesbian and New Left activism in Atlanta can be directly traced to the surrounding and supportive college community in Atlanta's Little Five Points neighborhood. The two closest universities, Emory and Georgia State, sustained queer visibility in the neighborhood for the coming decades. This was especially true of Emory University where gay student activism dates to 1972, and operated at the cutting edge of gay Atlanta in the 1980s.³⁹⁴

The Emory Lesbian and Gay Organization (ELGO), active throughout the 1980s, was presented to other southern universities as a model of lesbian and gay student inclusion on campus. In January of 1990, ELGO worked closely with the Assistant Dean of Campus Life, Ed Stansell, and other campus leaders to establish an office for lesbian and gay student needs. ELGO was one of nine lesbian, gay, and bisexual student groups on campus by 1991, and their activist efforts connected the university to the larger queer Atlanta community. ELGO's Vice President for Political Action, David Lowe, was a prominent figure in Atlanta's Aids Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and was arrested while protesting Georgia's sodomy laws with the organization at the state capitol. He also protested at the Centers for Disease Control, and aggressively disrupted

³⁹⁴ Laura Douglas-Brown, "Emory University Celebrates 20 Years of LGBT Activism, Inclusion," *GA Voice*, March 3, 2012, <http://www.thegavoice.com/news/atlanta-news/4271-emory-university-celebrates-20-years-of-lgbt-activism-inclusion> (accessed May 5, 2012).

a CNN news studio as part of ACT UP.³⁹⁵ Lesbians at Emory occasionally worked separately from ELGO to discuss their role within the group and to identify likeminded organizations in Atlanta. They hoped to foster community for lesbians on campus and off. The structure of most organizations, including gay ones, either did not include women or marginalized their roles. Lesbians in ELGO had to work outside the main organization to address lesbian-specific concerns.

By 1992, Emory sought a full time director for their Office of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Life. The office was believed to be the first of its kind in the South, and it would provide a full time salary of \$28,000 a year to “an educator for the university and advocate for non-heterosexual life.”³⁹⁶ By creating the position, the University administration hoped to send a “clear signal of support” following the campus uproar surrounding the harassment of two male students who showed physical affection in a freshman dorm.³⁹⁷ According to Kevin Berrill of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the 1990s would be a decade of transition defined in part by the campus activism of lesbian and gay students. Emory would join an elite group of universities that were actively seeking better representation on campus, protection against violence, and even university funding for queer student groups.³⁹⁸

At nearby Georgia State University, the oldest gay-straight association in the state, the Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity, formed in 1982.³⁹⁹ When gay marchers were accepted less than twenty-four hours prior to the 1986 Martin Luther

³⁹⁵ “Aids Protestors Disrupt Studio,” *Lawrence Journal-World*, July 27, 1991.

³⁹⁶ “Emory Seeks Director for Gay-Life Office,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, August 3, 1992, Box 3, ES-EU.

³⁹⁷ “Gay Students Demanding Equality on College Campuses,” *U. The National College Newspaper*, April 1990, Box 3, ES-EU.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁹ Laura Apperson, “A Night of Fierce Drag,” *Signal*, March 20, 2012, <http://www.gsusignal.com/a-night-of-fierce-drag-1.2717584#.T56mQtnCaSo> (accessed April 30, 2012).

King, Jr. celebration parade, the student Alliance met with two other groups carrying a banner that read, “We oppose racism, sexism, and anti-Gay bigotry. Repeal all sodomy laws.” The gay marchers featured an all white contingent, claiming that the invitation to march came too late for them to gather a “diverse” representation of participants.⁴⁰⁰ By 1989, the Metropolitan Atlanta Council of Lesbian and Gay Organizations, also secured a permit for the parade and encouraged a variety of groups to march, including Crossroads, Atlanta’s African American Lesbian and Gay Alliance. Crossroads worked to facilitate communication between black lesbians and black gay men. They were actively involved in Atlanta Pride festivals, sought representation of women to achieve balance on their governing board, and focused on an appreciation of black culture.⁴⁰¹ Student activists were among the first to pave the way for groups like Crossroads and an improved, more diverse gay visibility at the King celebration. It is significant that even in this venue whiteness afforded them that initial privilege. Lesbian and gay students provided some legitimacy for gay interests in Atlanta. They tied queer visibility to an academic environment and they offered an outlet outside of the bars for social organization and interaction. This affiliation created an improved local climate for lesbians and gay men.

Similar affiliations did not materialize in Charlotte because it lacked such large, established universities and an identifiable gayborhood. David Lowe and ELGO are examples of sustained queer activism in Atlanta that, in spite of some promising efforts, has yet to materialize in Charlotte. North Carolina student activism began in the 1970s at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, and Duke University in Durham. When the third annual Southeastern Gay Conference was planned in 1977, it was designed

⁴⁰⁰ “Lesbian/Gay Groups Cheered, Jeered at MLK Parade,” *Etcetera*, Box 1, ES-EU.

⁴⁰¹ *Crossroads*, January 1989, ALFA-DU.

without the Queen City in mind. The Carolina Gay Association, a student group at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, noted the importance of moving the conference from Chapel Hill to Atlanta – a location that could provide “big city polish and scale.” As suggested in the conference planning materials, ““outside of places like Atlanta or Miami, gays in the Southeast are more or less isolated.””⁴⁰² Like the 1970s Southeastern Gay Conferences, North Carolina’s state Pride festival originated in the 1980s out of the same activist student organizations, including the Carolina Gay Association and the Duke Gay Alliance in the Research Triangle. These were organizations resembling ELGO, with roots in the activism of the New Left and the university structures necessary to sustain them in the future. Charlotte did not figure into an activist student vision of the southeast, a vision that went straight to Atlanta and bypassed Charlotte completely.

Although gay students tried to form an organization at UNC Charlotte in the 1980s, there is no traceable history of continued lesbian and gay student activism there. A queer student organization has languished in a struggle for viability since the inception of the Multicultural Resource Center at the university in 1996. At Johnson C. Smith, a Historically Black College and University in Charlotte, visible gay student activism did not appear until 2002, under the leadership of the outspoken AIDS and student activist, Jonathan Perry. Although Perry started the first lesbian and gay student organization there, ten years later it was no longer active. At present there is a gay student organization at Queens University in Charlotte (founded in 1857), and students from the historically female college participated in events and found lovers at the Charlotte

⁴⁰² *Lambda*, The Newsletter of the Carolina Gay Association, November 1977, and March-April 1977, Lee Mullis Papers, Box 42, FP-DU.

Women's Center, but the origins of queer student engagement at this venerable university remain hidden.⁴⁰³

Charlotte lacked an activist hotbed, and the geographic separation of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte from any other queer-friendly neighborhood meant that there was often a significant divide between the activism of groups like the Charlotte Women's Center and queer student engagement at that university. As we have seen, efforts to bridge this gap, like the 1970s alternative student-run newspaper, *The Road*, failed. Although the paper featured content of interest to women, it was contributed and written by the women at the Center. Evidence of queer student organizing was nonexistent.⁴⁰⁴ Meanwhile, Atlanta's lesbian separatists in ALFA drew from students at Georgia State University and Emory University. They even maintained connections with students at the University of Georgia almost seventy miles away in Athens, Georgia. These universities had a sense of place with longstanding connections to Atlanta and Athens, and even though Georgia State University was a newer institution, founded in 1913, it had long since developed a unique identity by the 1950s.⁴⁰⁵ The University of North Carolina at Charlotte began as a metropolitan college built to meet the needs of returning World War II veterans in 1946. When the college finally gained its own campus in 1961, it was located ten miles from the center of uptown Charlotte. As noted in the last chapter, this separation would prove problematic during Charlotte's first

⁴⁰³ Concetta Hinceman, conversation with author, June 12, 2012.

⁴⁰⁴ For more on the relationship between the Charlotte Women's Center and *The Road*, see chapter 3.

⁴⁰⁵ "Georgia State University History," Georgia State University Library, <http://www.library.gsu.edu/spcoll/pages/pages.asp?ldID=105&guideID=549&ID=3670> (accessed April 28, 2012).

Pride celebration held on campus in 1981—ten miles away from one of the host bars.⁴⁰⁶

Both the lack of an established identity at the new campus location, and the logistics proved divisive. UNC Charlotte’s lack of identity served as an example of what historian Matthew D. Lassiter has labeled “Charlotte’s identity crisis.”⁴⁰⁷

When public policy professor and urban consultant Richard Florida spoke at University of North Carolina at Charlotte’s Urban Institute in 2003, he suggested that Charlotte needed to attract what he termed a “creative class.” Recognizing Austin, Texas as a successful magnet for this group, Florida cited “a high concentration of gay people” as an “important draw...because it indicates that a place has a high level of acceptance for those who live outside the norm.” Florida ranked cities in a variety of categories assessing their ability to attract and sustain a creative class. In the category of “tolerance,” Florida ranked Charlotte in sixty-ninth place out of 331 regions examined.⁴⁰⁸ Florida’s assessment confirmed the challenges Charlotte’s lesbians and gay men continued to face. In his analysis of Florida’s research, historian James C. Cobb rightly acknowledged that a “growing recognition of gay economic clout” often produced “greater tolerance” for lesbians and gay men, and that “the four southern metro areas, Atlanta, Austin, Dallas and Houston, that ranked within the top fifteen nationally in concentrations of high-tech industry also ranked in the top twenty-one in gay representation in the population.”⁴⁰⁹ Charlotte might have held solid ground between Dallas and Atlanta when it received its 1991 recognition as a “top-notch” business

⁴⁰⁶ On the history of UNC Charlotte, see “University History,” Office of Public Relations, UNCC, <http://publicrelations.uncc.edu/information-media-kit/university-history> (accessed April 28, 2012); and Ken Sanford, *Charlotte and UNC Charlotte: Growing up Together* (Charlotte: UNC Charlotte Press, 1996).

⁴⁰⁷ Lassiter, *Searching for Respect*, 39.

⁴⁰⁸ “Make Charlotte Weird: Richard Florida Takes Message to the Masses,” *Creative Loafing*, April 30 – May 6, 2003.

⁴⁰⁹ James C. Cobb, *The South and America Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 370-71.

environment for corporate site location, but it lacked the “tolerance” that Florida deemed necessary to attract and maintain high-tech industry.⁴¹⁰ In a city known for its obsession with a New South identity (Charlotte *is* home to the Museum of the New South), and its proud-as-punch success in wooing the NASCAR Hall of Fame, it seemed that Charlotte’s city leaders often desired to mimic and even bypass Atlanta. But this desire for growth and prestige did not generate sufficient pressures for more than a marginally tolerant embrace for its gay citizens. Lesbians and gay men were not a part of these visions for growth.

With the 2003 relocation of Reverend Flip Benham’s anti-abortion and anti-gay organization, Operation Save America (OSA), from Dallas to Charlotte, the Queen City continued to earn a reputation as unwelcoming to gay people. Benham’s organization harangued the 2005 Charlotte Pride festival and worked to completely shut down the celebration. Wearing bright red shirts, OSA protesters blared loud religious music alternated with preaching and infiltrated the crowds in Uptown’s centrally-located Marshall Park. Many festival attendees were disheartened after the event, and later that year, due in part to organizational burnout and frustration, the future of a Charlotte Pride festival was in question. In the face of this burnout, OSA publicly claimed “victory over Charlotte Pride.”⁴¹¹ In the same year, Atlanta’s gay pride festival scored record crowds with lesbian icons, Indigo Girls, as the music headliner of a successful three day weekend event in the sprawling Piedmont Park. Mayor Shirley Franklin of Atlanta welcomed Atlanta’s festival goers, while Mayor Pat McCrory of Charlotte openly expressed

⁴¹⁰ “Technology and Tolerance: The Importance of Diversity to High-Technology Growth,” June 2001, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2001/06/technology-florida> (accessed July 1, 2012).

⁴¹¹ “News Reports From the Christians on the Streets of Charlotte,” Operation Save America, <http://www.operationsaveamerica.org/streets/nc/index-charlotte.htm.html> (accessed June 20, 2012).

disapproval for Charlotte's Pride and its public park venue, telling one supporter that he was "insulted" by the "visual and verbal vulgarity displays" at the festival.⁴¹²

Pastors from Forest Hills Church, Hickory Grove Baptist, and Central Church of God wrote to McCrory in support of his disdain for the visibility of a Pride celebration in Charlotte, and his refusal to formally welcome the gay civil rights organization, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), and their statewide dinner, held in Charlotte in 2006. McCrory told the ministers that he appreciated their prayers and attached copies of letters that he had received "(over 750 total)" in support of the HRC event, hoping to share with them what he was "experiencing." The tone of his letters suggested that McCrory believed he was under attack, and was relying on the prayers of the ministers and their congregations to sustain him. Meanwhile some ministers in Charlotte worked to combat what they viewed as an ominous new tide of religious consensus. At Myers Park Baptist, the Reverend Steve Shoemaker took a vocal stand against the twenty-first century resegregation process occurring in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg public school system, and a stand *for* tolerance of gay people.⁴¹³ James Howell, the new minister at Myers Park United Methodist in 2005, lamented the loss of "virtue" in "disagreement," and expressed frustration at the push toward sameness in Charlotte's churches—noting that churchgoers would rather find agreement with their pastor's message than to be challenged to think beyond the comfort of their pew: "Twenty-five years ago... the highest compliment for

⁴¹² Pat McCrory to Sandra Shoemaker, February 25, 2005, Gay Pride folder, Box 13, Pat McCrory Papers, UNCC.

⁴¹³ Frye Gaillard, *With Music and Justice for All: Some Southerners and Their Passions* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008) 97.

a minister at the end of a sermon was, ‘You stepped on my toes. You really made me think.’ Today, the highest compliment is, ‘I agree with you.’ Some axis has shifted.”⁴¹⁴

The development of Charlotte and Atlanta as bastions of the southern Sun Belt ideal rested on economic and political decisions that were heavily informed by religious influences and a national rise in conservatism. Religious conservatives held sizeable power in both cities, and often challenged economic or political commitments to seemingly immoral causes. Historian Ted Ownby found in 2005 that in North Carolina and Georgia, as in most of the South, “white Baptists and African-American Protestants” represented the bulk of religious affiliation—with evangelicals representing a majority among Protestants: “Mainline Protestants make up 26.2 percent of all Protestants in Georgia . . . and 35.3 percent in North Carolina—the highest proportion in the South outside Virginia and West Virginia.”⁴¹⁵ In Ownby’s study, Atlanta stood out as a “burgeoning archipelago of religious diversity.” At 8.5 percent, for example, Jews in Atlanta’s Fulton County were in one of thirteen southern counties where they represented “more than 3 percent of adherents.”⁴¹⁶ According to a 2010 Association of Religious Data Archives report, Atlanta’s metro region was indeed diverse with four different Hindu religious bodies claiming over 20,000 adherents, while in the Queen City’s metro area there were three Hindu affiliations with approximately 1,200 congregants. The same report showed that approximately 485,000 of metro Charlotte’s 1.7 million residents were evangelicals, as compared to 1.3 million evangelicals in Atlanta—approximately 25 percent of its metro population of 5.2 million. In both regions, Southern Baptists

⁴¹⁴ Gaillard, 97-98.

⁴¹⁵ Ted Ownby, “Evangelical but Differentiated: Religion by the Numbers,” in *Religion & Public Life in the South: In the Evangelical Mode*, eds. Charles Reagan Wilson and Mark Silk (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), 44.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 46, 60.

represented the top affiliation.⁴¹⁷ “Whether or not they belong to them, like them, or understand them,” according to Ownby “everyone in the South has to deal with evangelical Protestants.”⁴¹⁸ While this was certainly true in North Carolina and Georgia, Atlanta’s metropolitan region was an anomaly of religious diversity, which perhaps contributed to a more tolerant environment for queer visibility.

Surprisingly, the city of Atlanta is one of three cities nationally where the number of gay couples declined in the years 2000-2006, as more couples, gay and straight, left the city to move to the suburbs—where their numbers increased. Although relying on census data to understand lesbian and gay populations can be problematic, the growing number of same-sex couples that were willing to report their status resulted in some useable data. For example, at 3,481, Fulton County had the most reported same-sex couples in the state, as did Charlotte’s Mecklenburg County at 1,777. Neither county had the highest percentage of gay couples in the state, but Fulton ranked at number two (behind suburban DeKalb), while Mecklenburg County lagged behind Durham in the Research Triangle, Buncombe, home to Asheville, and Greene, part of the metropolitan statistical area that is home to East Carolina University.⁴¹⁹ Although this data is limited,

⁴¹⁷ “Metro-Area Membership Report: Religious Traditions, 2010,” The Association of Religious Data Archives, http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/r/m/12060/rcms2010_12060_metro_family_2010.asp, and http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/r/m/16740/rcms2010_16740_metro_family_2010.asp (accessed July 1, 2012).

⁴¹⁸ Ownby, 60.

⁴¹⁹ Gary J. Gates, “Geographic Trends Among Same-Sex Couples in the U.S. Census and the American Community Survey,” Williams Institute, November 2007, <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Gates-Geographic-Trends-ACS-Brief-Nov-2007.pdf>; Gary J. Gates et al., “Census Snapshot: Georgia,” Williams Institute, January 2008, <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/GeorgiaCensus2000Snapshot.pdf>, and “Census Snapshot: North Carolina,” Williams Institute, June 2008, <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/NorthCarolinaCensus2000Snapshot.pdf> (all accessed July 1, 2012). In Fulton county, same-sex couples represented 1.08 percent of county households, while Mecklenburg county gay couples represented only 0.65 percent of county households.

it does seem to support the importance of established educational institutions that often serve as anchors for a visible queer community in North Carolina.⁴²⁰

As lesbians faced the twenty-first century, corporate interactions with lesbian and gay employees and corporate sponsorship of gay initiatives permanently changed the queer urban social landscape. Although it is difficult to say how individual lesbians fared economically in Charlotte and Atlanta, it is worth considering the economic status of women generally in each state. These comparisons, when combined with the political, educational, corporate, and religious climates for lesbians and gay men as detailed in this chapter, serve as a marker of economic potential and personal satisfaction for lesbians. In 2004, North Carolina received a “D” in a national examination of women’s employment and earnings. North Carolina’s ratio of women’s to men’s earnings overall stood at 73.7 percent, but these numbers were significantly less for women of color, with only 62.9 percent for African American women as compared to white men, and only 47.1 percent for Hispanic women.⁴²¹ By 2006 North Carolina was upgraded to a “C-” in comparison to Georgia’s “B-.”⁴²² Georgia ranked nationally at thirteen, with an overall ratio of women’s earnings to men’s at 83 percent. Again these numbers were dismal when separated by race, however, with black women in Georgia earning 60.8 percent and Hispanic women earning 49.1 percent in comparison to white men’s earnings.⁴²³ Women

⁴²⁰ In comparison to Charlotte’s UNC branch campus established in 1946, East Carolina University was founded in 1907.

⁴²¹ Amy Caiazza and April Shaw, “The Status of Women in North Carolina, 2004: Highlights,” Institute for Women’s Policy Research, R325, November 2004, <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/the-status-of-women-in-north-carolina-2004-highlights> (accessed July 1, 2012).

⁴²² Heidi Hartmann et al., “The Best and Worst State Economies for Women,” Institute for Women’s Policy Research, R334, November 2006, <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/the-best-and-worst-state-economies-for-women-1> (accessed June 20, 2012).

⁴²³ Amy Caiazza and April Shaw, “The Status of Women in Georgia, 2004: Highlights,” Institute for Women’s Policy Research, R311, November 2004, <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/the-status-of-women-in-georgia-2004-highlights> (accessed July 1, 2012).

who owned businesses also fared better in Georgia, with the state ranked in the top third of the country, while North Carolina ranked in the middle, at twenty-fifth place in comparison to Georgia's twelfth-place slot.⁴²⁴ Women in Georgia led their North Carolina counterparts in median annual earnings: \$31,700 in comparison to the Tarheel state's \$29,800.⁴²⁵ With Georgia consistently outpacing North Carolina in a variety of economic arenas for women, lesbians in the twenty-first century would often succeed in Atlanta more so than in Charlotte.

In a comparison of metro area wage statistics, average salaries are occasionally competitive in the two regions. The amount of workers in metro Atlanta, however, is almost three times that of Charlotte, which not only suggests an increased amount of job availability but is representative of its sizeable population lead over Charlotte's metro area, and certainly indicates that lesbians as a group have greater buying power in Atlanta than in Charlotte—especially in higher-paying positions. In the financial sector, for example, the average salary is \$68,630 in Charlotte, and \$73,280 in Atlanta, and in educational occupations, a key field of employment for women, Charlotte workers earn \$44,160 in comparison to those in Atlanta at \$45,550. In the lower-paying food services industry, workers in Charlotte earn an average salary of \$21,190 in comparison to Atlanta's workers at \$20,760. In all three of these fields, the number of workers is almost tripled in the Atlanta region. Those in the protective services field, which includes law enforcement and security officers, earn an average salary of \$36,140 in Charlotte, just slightly higher than Atlanta's protective service employees at \$35,290, and unlike many other employment fields the number of people working in this area is slightly closer in

⁴²⁴ Hartmann et al., "Best and Worst State Economies."

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

the two cities, with approximately 24,370 workers in the Charlotte area as compared to Atlanta's 53,400.⁴²⁶ These numbers suggest that while lesbians might enjoy slightly higher salaries in one city or another, the likelihood that they will enjoy a greater economic impact in Atlanta is strong—especially when we consider the supportive institutions that are available. While a lesbian police officer in Charlotte, like Christina Cougill, might enjoy a slightly higher salary, that she would work with a greater number of officers under the structures for lesbian and gay inclusion that exist in Atlanta's police department, and the city as a whole, perhaps suggests that she would enjoy a greater level of visibility and comfort in her daily life.⁴²⁷ Although many people do not have the option to relocate, these numbers do imply that lesbians who have the opportunity to seek a region where they will be both financially successful and personally fulfilled might find Atlanta's economic infrastructure more appealing.

Both Atlanta and Charlotte gained national attention in the 1990s that would spotlight lesbian lives in the New South. The recent history of lesbians in Charlotte and Atlanta is an urban history formed by the power of business, religion, universities, and metropolitan identity. The composition of these institutions in each city defined opportunities for gay people. It is hard to say how these institutions affected particular individuals, but what is clear is that when seeking a place to be out, as with Jim Lovell at the Atlanta Gay Center, Atlanta's gay infrastructure attracted queer people and

⁴²⁶ "May 2011 Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, GA," Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Statistics, Atlanta, http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_12060.htm#33-0000, and Charlotte, http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_16740.htm#33-0000 (accessed July 1, 2012).

⁴²⁷ Ibid. According to this report, patrol officers in metro Charlotte earn an average salary of \$46,760 in comparison to their counterparts in Atlanta at \$44,450.

Charlotte's invisible and at best embryonic queer community afforded considerably less allure.

EPILOGUE

In May 2012, North Carolinians approved an amendment to the state constitution mandating that only marriages between one man and one woman would be legally recognized. The wording of the amendment also excluded domestic partnerships and civil unions from legal recognition. Georgia voters approved a similar amendment in 2004, but North Carolina was the last southern state to approve such an amendment even though same-sex marriage was already illegal in both states. Charlotte's iconic evangelist Billy Graham had taken out a full-page advertisement in fourteen newspapers and recorded a televised video in the final hours before the election, to urge voters to vote for the amendment and what he saw as God's definition of marriage.⁴²⁸ Needless to say, the vote on the amendment brought national attention to the state, especially the day after the May 8 vote when President Obama declared his personal support on national television for legal same-sex marriage.

One of the most interesting pieces of analysis following the vote was a breakdown of voting patterns based on the location of universities in the state. Seven of the eight counties that voted against the amendment also boasted major universities, meaning that these counties included heavy concentrations of young and educated voters. Charlotte's Mecklenburg County was among the eight, with 54 percent voting against the

⁴²⁸ Campbell Robertson, "In North Carolina, Beliefs Clash on Marriage Law," *New York Times*, May 11, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/12/us/in-north-carolina-gay-rights-not-a-simple-issue.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed July 1, 2012).

amendment, and in Orange County (home to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) a whopping 79 percent voted to reject the amendment.⁴²⁹

In addition to this evidence of a generation gap on the gay marriage issue, perhaps the most notable event during the amendment campaign was the combined effort by former Charlotte mayors Richard Vinroot and Harvey Gantt to encourage North Carolinians to “Vote Against.” During their terms, both men faced challenges dealing with the politics of sexuality, with Vinroot memorably refusing to welcome or participate in the 1994 state Pride festival in Charlotte. But in 2012, they appeared together on a widely-shared Internet video (unlike Graham’s, the Vinroot/Gantt video did not appear on television) and described the amendment as “unnecessary,” arguing that it would “write discrimination” into the state constitution, and might discourage businesses from relocating to North Carolina.⁴³⁰ The *Charlotte Observer* printed an opinion piece several months before this video and the May 2012 vote, questioning the apathy of big businesses in North Carolina—many of whom remained silent on the issue. The article accused Republican legislators who authored the amendment of “a transparent attempt to rile up the state's most socially conservative voters for the 2012 election.”⁴³¹

⁴²⁹ Mecklenburg County Board of Elections, “Official Results, Primary Election, May 8, 2012,” <http://results.enr.clarityelections.com/NC/Mecklenburg/36656/85644/en/vts.html?cid=0141>; Juana Summers, “Amendment One: North Carolina Gay Marriage Ban Passes,” Politico, http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0512/76081_Page2.html; “Interactive Results Map,” WRAL, Capitol Broadcasting Company, Inc., <http://www.wral.com/news/political/page/10991843/>; Lynne Bonner and Jay Price, “N.C. to Add Marriage Amendment to Its Constitution,” *News & Observer*, May 9, 2012, <http://www.newsobserver.com/2012/05/08/2052643/marriage-amendment-latest-results.html> (all accessed July 1, 2012).

⁴³⁰ “Video: Gantt, Vinroot Speak Out Against Amendment One,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 10, 2012, <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2012/04/10/3163482/video-gantt-vinroot-speak-out.html> (accessed April 10, 2012).

⁴³¹ “Our View: The Missing Voice in Gay Marriage Debate,” *Charlotte Observer*, September 10, 2011, <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2011/09/10/2593892/the-missing-voice-in-gay-marriage.html> (accessed September 15, 2011).

North Carolina has often been conspicuous for both its relative moderation in race relations and its virulently anti-gay political and religious arenas. There are signs of change, however. The city of Charlotte faced an interesting public relations challenge as the Amendment One fight raged in the face of the impending Democratic National Convention (DNC), scheduled for September 2012. For the first time ever in the city's history, lesbians and gay men found substantial and vocal support in the mayor's office as Mayor Anthony Foxx, who made public appearances at the LGBT Community Center and the uptown Pride festival, took a public stand against Amendment One at the 2012 Human Rights Campaign Gala because it would deter business relocation and harm job growth.⁴³² A few months earlier, in a truly intriguing inconsistency, LaWana Mayfield, a black lesbian, became the first openly gay person to be elected to Charlotte's city council. Mayfield represents a predominately black district in which, just a few months after electing her, many of her constituents, despite majority opposition in the county at large, voted to approve the anti-gay marriage amendment, with at least one precinct supporting the amendment by a two to one margin.⁴³³ The pastor of a large black congregation in Mayfield's district celebrated the statewide approval of Amendment One by noting that,

⁴³² "Mayor Anthony Foxx Speaks Out Against Amendment One," CBS Charlotte, April 25, 2012, <http://charlotte.cbslocal.com/2012/04/25/mayor-anthony-foxx-speaks-out-against-amendment-one/> (accessed July 1, 2012). Foxx's declaration at the HRC Gala was significant given Mayor Pat McCrory's refusal to acknowledge or formally welcome the event in previous years.

⁴³³ Xenotype [pseud.], "The Hornet's Nest Stirs Against Amendment 1: LGBT Rights in Charlotte, the Site of the 2012 DNC," Daily Kos, entry posted May 10, 2012, <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/05/10/1090184/-The-Hornet-s-Nest-Stirs-Against-Amendment-1-LGBT-Rights-at-the-site-of-the-2012-DNC> (accessed July 1, 2012); Michael Gordon, "Amendment One: NC Voters Approve Measure to Block Same-Sex Marriage," *Charlotte Observer*, May 9, 2012, <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2012/05/08/3227863/amendment-one-nc-voters-approve.html> (accessed July 1, 2012).

“The voters of North Carolina have chosen to protect the soul of the state and the nation; that is marriage and family.”⁴³⁴

Such sentiments notwithstanding, some of the political and religious reactions surrounding the campaign in Charlotte seemed to bode well for lesbians and gay men. The North Carolina NAACP waged a campaign to defeat Amendment One, and the national leadership of the organization announced its support for gay marriage just a few days after President Obama’s announcement of the change in his views on the matter. As an increasing number of African American ministers take a stand in 2012 for gay rights as indistinguishable from civil rights, the large number of African American churches in Charlotte, and especially Atlanta, may well play a critical role in making their cities more hospitable for queer citizens. As one suburban black minister in a district of conservative black churches noted in 2004, when Georgians faced their own gay marriage amendment battle, “‘I’m a pastor and I don’t support gay marriage, but I resent people playing political football with our religious beliefs.’”⁴³⁵

The recent growth of hip churches, such as “Elevation” in Charlotte, harkens back to the days of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker whose notorious Praise the Lord (PTL) ministries were based in Fort Mill, South Carolina—just a few miles from uptown Charlotte. Jay Bakker, their tattooed and pierced son, led a movement of edgy churches in the mid-1990s that was a forerunner of popular and trendy non-denominational churches across the country. While Bakker’s church, “Revolution” found a successful home in Atlanta and later in New York City, his efforts to sustain a branch of the church

⁴³⁴ Gordon, “Amendment One.”

⁴³⁵ Andrew Jacobs, “Black Legislators Stall Marriage Amendment in Georgia,” *New York Times*, March 3, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/03/us/black-legislators-stall-marriage-amendment-in-georgia.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm> (accessed July 1, 2012).

in Charlotte were less successful. But metro Charlotte's Elevation Church is one of the fastest growing Protestant churches in the country, boasting almost 10,000 worshippers in its six-year existence.⁴³⁶ It is hard to say how much youth-oriented churches like Elevation will matter to lesbians and gay men who are seeking a church affiliation in Charlotte or Atlanta. Elevation Church is not overtly gay friendly, in fact, its leader pronounced homosexuality a sin in 2009, while awkwardly attempting to assert his church's love for the sinner, so as not to alienate his queer followers. On the issue of Amendment One, however, Elevation and Charlotte's other non-denominational mega churches were largely silent.⁴³⁷ Meanwhile, Bakker's Revolution Church primarily operates in Brooklyn and on the Internet with little reference to the branch congregations in Atlanta and Charlotte, although it celebrated gay Pride with a special message posted on the church's Facebook page in 2012.

For many less politically involved lesbians and gay men in Charlotte and Atlanta the twenty-first century "identity crisis" in the gay bar scene might have a greater impact on their daily lives than any church, or vote on gay marriage. With the arrival of the Internet generation, and the survival and significance of gay bar spaces in doubt, *Entrepreneur* magazine confirmed what many feared by adding the gay bar to its 2007 list of endangered businesses.⁴³⁸ In spite of its rumored and looming demise, however, a

⁴³⁶ Elevation Church, "History: Where We've Been, Where We're Going," <http://www.elevationchurch.org/history> (accessed July 1, 2012); "Top 5 Largest and Fastest-Growing Churches in America," *ChurchLeaders.com*, <http://www.churchleaders.com/outreach-missions/outreach-missions-articles/154431-top-5-largest-and-fastest-growing-churches-in-america.html> (accessed July 1, 2012).

⁴³⁷ Scott Graf and Mark Rumsey, "Gay Marriage Amendment Focus of Forum," WFAE Radio, March 29, 2012, http://www.wfae.org/wfae/19_100_0.cfm?action=display&id=8480; Matt Comer, "Disgraced Pastor Ted Haggard and Wife Speak at Popular Charlotte Church," *Q-Notes*, May 2, 2009, <http://goqnotes.com/2333/ted-haggard-to-speak-at-charlotte-church/> (both accessed July 1, 2012).

⁴³⁸ See, for example, Scott Stiffler, "Gay Nightlife's Identity Crisis," *Edge on the Net*, April 6, 2009, <http://www.edgeonthenet.com/index.php?ch=entertainment&sc=culture&sc3=&id=89298&pg=1>; and

distinctive and thriving gay bar scene survives in Charlotte, including the popular lesbian-owned bar “Hartigan’s,” which has been in business for over a decade. Standing in the shadow of Bank of America stadium, home to the National Football League’s Carolina Panthers, Hartigan’s Irish Pub is unique in its diversity as a restaurant and nightclub that is mixed across many traditional barriers including class, race, and gender. It regularly features country line-dancing lessons, Latin dance nights for women, and fundraisers for the fledgling gay community center, and the pub is often the restaurant of choice for Sunday drag brunches—including a 2012 DNC kick-off brunch: “Pledge your Drag Allegiance”—and weekday business lunches. It was voted the best tailgating location for football game days by *Charlotte* magazine, and because of its famous pudding wrestling, it was named by ESPN’s magazine as one of the top sports bars in the country.⁴³⁹ In 2012 the bar owners hosted a results party on the night of the Amendment One vote, and the next day when President Obama made his May 9 declaration in support of gay marriage, Hartigan’s was one of a handful of gay bars featured on the front page of the *New York Times*.

Although its 2011 metro population reached 5.3 million, in comparison to metro Charlotte’s 1.8 million, lesbians in Atlanta continued to face a relatively slender selection of lesbian bars. In an article titled, “Why Can’t Atlanta Sustain Lesbian Bars?” a writer for the queer paper, *Ga Voice* lamented the disparity in the number of lesbian bars in comparison to gay men’s establishments:

Steve Weinstein, “Gay Bars, Gay History,” *Edge on the Net*, June 25, 2010, <http://www.edgeonthenet.com/index.php?ch=nightlife&sc=&sc2=&sc3=&id=107320> (both accessed May 10, 2012).

Geoff Williams, “Ten Businesses Facing Extinction in 10 Years,” *Entrepreneur*, September 19, 2007, <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/184288> (accessed July 1, 2012).

⁴³⁹ “2008 Best of the Best,” *Charlotte*, May 2008, <http://www.charlottemagazine.com/Charlotte-Magazine/May-2008/Sports-Bars/> (accessed July 1, 2012).

The Census doesn't count lesbians and gay men, although same-sex couples can be counted (by looking at the sex of the partners who mark that they live with a "spouse" or "unmarried" partner). The 2010 Census counted 15,271 female couples and 14,573 male couples in Georgia. Nationally, 332,887 female couples and 313,587 male couples were tallied. Even if you assume that lesbians may be more likely to be in couples than gay men, meaning there are more single gay men to add to the totals than single lesbians, it's unlikely that gay men outnumber lesbians by the same ratio that gay bars currently outnumber lesbian bars in Atlanta, which is roughly 24 to 1.⁴⁴⁰

Some suggest that a generally higher level of comfort for both gays and lesbians in Atlanta and other large metro areas may have reduced their need for separate spaces. At any rate, as of 2012, Atlanta has only one primarily lesbian bar, "My Sister's Room." Its fifteen-year history includes several moves, and its latest iteration is in the diverse and gay-friendly East Atlanta Village neighborhood just a mile from Little Five Points, which continues to play host to Charis Books. In a 2010 list of six notable gayborhoods in the South, Atlanta's East Lake neighborhood, just outside of gay-friendly Decatur made the cut, along with Houston, Memphis, and Carrboro, North Carolina, only a mile away from the equally gay-friendly Chapel Hill where Amendment One was handily defeated.⁴⁴¹ As we have seen, gay-friendly neighborhoods provided (and continue to provide) support for queer people in the South, offering additional social outlets beyond the bar.

Gay activists in Atlanta worked in 2010 to revive one such social outlet: a gay community center. But as one organizer noted, the bulk of the financial support aimed at defeating the constitutional amendment banning gay marriage in Georgia came from the straight community, and as a result she was concerned about the necessary queer

⁴⁴⁰ Laura Douglas-Brown, "Why Can't Atlanta Sustain Lesbian Bars?" *GA Voice*, January 12, 2012, <http://www.thegavoice.com/blog/culture/4014-why-cant-atlanta-sustain-lesbian-bars> (accessed May 10, 2012).

⁴⁴¹ Geoff Williams, "Gay and Lesbian Friendly Neighborhoods in the South," *Front Door*, November 3, 2010, <http://www.frontdoor.com/buy/gay-and-lesbian-friendly-neighborhoods-in-the-south/56062/p6> (accessed July 1, 2012).

financial commitment to a community center. In addition, the all-white activists at the organizational meeting recognized the need to attract a racially and socioeconomically diverse group of queer Atlantans, and grappled with how to bring about such a collaborative effort. Some saw the community center as vital because it was Atlanta's obligation to lead the queer South.⁴⁴² In fact, Atlanta's gay leaders often identified their role as representatives of the entire South, while as we have seen, Charlotte's gay activists absorbed the mindset of city boosters in their hope to build up a queer scene equal to Atlanta's.

In a June 2012 *Forbes* magazine list of the best cities for business and careers, Charlotte bested Atlanta's twenty-first position by coming in at number eighteen, but the Queen City was itself bested by neighboring Asheville at seventeen, Durham at fourteen, and Raleigh at number two.⁴⁴³ Asheville, Raleigh, and Durham have rich lesbian histories, as we have seen, and continue to boast vibrant lesbian communities. These rankings might hold some weight for lesbians who enjoy the opportunity to choose a gay-friendly city in which to pursue their careers in the Tarheel State. But most people land in a particular city for a variety of complicated reasons that may have little to do with personal preference. Some lesbians in Charlotte and Atlanta, then, will care less than others about the institutions or politics that define queer life in their home cities. It is likely, in fact, that not all gay people even voted on Amendment One. Such a reality may be disturbing to some, but, as we have seen from the outset, the goals, aims and priorities

⁴⁴² Dyana Bagby, "Should Atlanta Spend Million on an LGBT Community Center?" *GA Voice*, April 30, 2010, <http://www.thegavoice.com/index.php/news/atlanta-news/262-should-atlanta-spend-millions-on-an-lgbt-community-center?showall=1> (accessed May 10, 2012).

⁴⁴³ Kurt Badenhausen, "The Best Places for Business and Careers," *Forbes*, June 27, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kurtbadenhausen/2012/06/27/the-best-places-for-business/> (accessed July 1, 2012).

of the lesbian populations of both cities have been marked by considerable diversity, and in many cases the primary consideration for individuals has been less one of gaining political leverage and recognition at the group level, than finding comfortable and satisfying environments in which to establish personal and private relationships with other lesbians. The fact that lesbians in Atlanta appeared to have made considerably more headway politically than their sisters in Charlotte in the years after World War II should not obscure recent indications that lesbian activists are finally gaining a more significant voice in the latter city. Both historical and contemporary evidence surely suggests that while some work to establish or advance political or interest group identities, others in search of places to find personal fulfillment consistent with their individual lesbian identities will continue to change and challenge the urban landscape in the South. The 2012 development of LatinLez Entertainment group in Charlotte and the arrival of the lesbian-friendly Blue Bar, which is located in Charlotte's eclectic and diverse Eastside neighborhood and attracts a mixed crowd including Latin and Asian queer women, is a direct outgrowth of the massive immigrant population surge in Charlotte in the last two decades. The Latino population in Mecklenburg County has skyrocketed since 1990 when Latinos were 1.3 percent (6,693) of the county's population, but by 2005 represented 9.2 percent (71,904) of that population.⁴⁴⁴ Like Hartigan's Pub, Blue Bar is also an example of the spaces that lesbians, like Ginny Boyd,

⁴⁴⁴ Gregory B. Weeks, John R. Weeks, and Amy J. Weeks, "Latino Immigration in the U.S. South: 'Carolatinos' and Public Policy in Charlotte, North Carolina," *Latino(a) Research Review* 6, no. 1-2 (2006-07): 51; Tom Hanchett, "Salad-bowl Suburbs: A History of Charlotte's East Side and South Boulevard Immigrant Corridors," in Graves and Smith, 255. According to Hanchett, a Brookings Institution report ranked Charlotte as the second fastest growing Latino city in the United States during 2000-2005. Hanchett also notes that Mexicans were the largest immigrant group, and Vietnamese second.

Scotti Hooper, Barbara Vogel, Sarrah Kelley, and the women of ALFA and the Drastic Dykes both sought out and constructed in their home cities.

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