Queer Nashville:

Institutions, Media, and Religious Organizations 1970-1999

Figure 1: March for LGBTQ+ rights, Nashville. Date unknown. OutCentral Collection, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

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History 6020: Historical Research Methods

Spring 2020

Introduction

Nashville, Tennessee is a city occupying two worlds. On the one hand, it occupies a space located squarely within the "Bible Belt" of Southern evangelical conservatism. At the same time, it is a major metropolitan city with opportunities and communities for people of any background to plug into. It is between these two worlds that queer people in Nashville find themselves pressed between. While many in the city disapprove of those who identify as LGBTQ+, many are ambivalent. Because this power balance was weighted to the advantage of those who would erase and vilify queer people in the late twentieth century, which this paper demonstrates, LGBTQ+ created space for themselves in something of a parallel "gay world." Between 1970 and 1999, queer people in Nashville created and patronized establishments and institutions, media outlets, and religious organizations specifically marketed to members of that community. These existed parallel to those systems of the dominant straight culture, and queer people were able to navigate both within and between the queer world and the dominant culture.

The first category, establishments and institutions, is important in its role of forming the physical spaces in which queer people gathered. These places were more than just money-making businesses, but also acted as safe places for gender and sexual nonconformity from a disapproving outside world. Whatever the establishment was– be it a well-known staple of queer night life like Juanita's or a bookstore- these physical places helped to cultivate a sense of community amongst queer Nashvillians. They were social hubs and safe havens. Friends gathered, couples met, and people made sense of their sexuality at these places that encouraged an atmosphere of acceptance and celebration.

Though physical places played a crucial role in the gay world that existed in Nashville from 1970-1999, media representations by and of queer people also played a major role in the

gay cultural landscape. Print and television media were both accessible for LGBTQ+ people, and this sort of representation was important in self-recognition of their sexual identities and holding them valid as they continued to develop. Specific kinds of entertainment also held special appeal to Nashville's queer denizens, such as drag, which celebrates breaking conventional gender roles and sexual systems.

The third lens through which this paper looks at Nashville's queer world in the late twentieth century is the religious institutions that marketed themselves to the LGBTQ+ community. While some mainline denominations such as the Episcopal Church and certain Methodist congregations were affirming or reconciling of queer identities and same-sex sexual activity, most were not. Some members of the queer community who felt hurt by the church started their own congregations in Nashville where members could gather in peace with others who believed one need disown their sexuality to keep their religion, including the Metropolitan Community Church and the Stonewall Mission Church.

Each of these three lenses for examining Nashville's queer world from 1970 to 1999 informs the other two, and each of these three lenses overlap. The establishments queer people congregated at such as Juanita's and the Jungle also hosted a number of events for queer people, and some who were there remember going to these bars and drag shows on the same night. The places this community gathered at is where they shaped one another and shaped Nashville's queer world. Each of these three lenses is also connected insofar as they were parallel systems. The dominant culture had its own establishments, media, and religious institutions, and queer people set up alternatives to each to build their own community. This paper is about the human need for community as much is anything else.

Defining Terms

Historians have used a number of terms to refer to the gender and sexual minorities. In writing his book *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, Marc Stein weighed the options and decided to use "gay and lesbian movement" rather than "queer" precisely because it would not have been how the historical actors defined themselves.[1] In this paper, I have chosen to use "queer" because of its inclusivity and present-day status as a reclaimed word, even though this was not the case during much of the time period I am examining and the subjects would not have thought of themselves using that word. For the purposes of this paper, "queer" simply means anyone who is not heterosexual and/or cisgender. "Queer" as a term became popular in the 1990s because it better reflected the diversity of gender and sexual minorities than "gay and lesbian", which popular culture typically conceived of as white.[2]

Another important term to define regarding religious institutions is "affirming" or "reconciling". In contemporary Christianity, LGBTQ+-affirming (or reconciling) people and congregations are typically referred to as being either "Side A" or "Side B." Side B affirming Christians say that being attracted to people of the same sex is not sinful, but having sex with them is. Side B Christians believe that if a gay man were to live a celibate life, he would not have committed any sin by simply identifying as gay. Side A Christians, on the other hand, believe that having sex with a committed, monogamous partner of the same sex is not sinful.[3] When this paper speaks of affirming or reconciling Christian congregations, it is referring to those that would today be considered Side A. These terms, however, did not exist in the twentieth century. Each of the congregations this paper mentions were fully reconciling of both same-sex sexual

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[1] Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 8.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Trent, Anthony. 2018. "Devotional Supplement: Love Undivided: A Side B Perspective." *Q Christian Fellowship*, December 27, 2018. https://www.qchristian.org/blog/preconference-devotional-supplement

practices and identities, which would make them examples of what is today called "Side A" affirming.

The 1970s and before

Many people think of the 1970s as a turning point in the struggle for gay rights. In June of 1969, rioting in response to a police raid at the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City, began the Gay Liberation Movement in earnest. Though a movement existed before Stonewall and groups such as the Mattachine Society, the Daughters of Bilitis, and the East Coast Homophile Organizations advocated for acceptance of queer people in larger society, the Stonewall Riots brought wider attention to the movement and gave it more momentum than it had ever seen. In 1969, for instance, merely fifty so-called "homophile organizations", or groups that advocated for gay rights, existed. By 1973, this had grown to 800.[4] In Nashville, similar growth is evident in the 1970s. By looking at the establishments and institutions, media, and religious institutions available to queer people in Nashville during this crucial decade in the gay rights struggle and before, one can see this national trend beginning to trickle into Nashville through the growth of its own queer world.

Perhaps the first "queer establishment" that comes to mind for many is the bar scene. The bar scene was already a well-established piece of queer American culture by 1970, but these watering holes were often segregated by both race and gender.[5] John Howard writes about gay bars from the 1950s through the 1980s in Jackson, Mississippi, in his book *Men Like That.* While Nashville was home to many more people in the twentieth century than Jackson, and people may have seen it as more of an urban center, each is the capital and largest city in their respective

[4] D'Emilio, John, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 238.
[5] John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 96.

Southern state. Both cities exist within a conservative, oftentimes still-segregated backdrop. Both cities also had flourishing underground queer subcultures.

Nashville, like Jackson and New York City, drew in men desiring men from the surrounding rural areas. One of the first places these men would often go was Juanita's, one of the most famous gay bars in Nashville.[6] Opened in the early 1950s by Juanita Brazier and located on Commerce Street near the Ryman Auditorium, Juanita's served Nashville's queer community until the owner's passing in 1995. Despite frequent harassment from law enforcement in the 1950s and 1960s, a reality faced by gay bars nationwide, Juanita's thrived. Former customers interviewed in an article with the *Nashville Scene* revealed that Nashville's gay bar culture was mostly anonymous even into the 1970s. Patrons, including the bar's regulars, called one another by pseudonyms such as "Fluffy" and "Happy".[7] Despite the inherent lack of safety in living as a sexual minority in the South or even in the United States more broadly, Juanita's provided a haven for its clientele. To help foster a sense of community among her patrons and, as one of the city's premier queer institutions, queer Nashvillians more broadly, Brazier (affectionately called "Miss Juanita" by her customers) held celebrations for holidays such as Christmas, Halloween, and her own birthday.[8] The environment Juanita's was able to cultivate even in a time before the Gay Liberation Movement demonstrates both the long history and the tenacity of Nashville's queer community.

Juanita's was not the only bar frequented by LGBTQ+ Nashvillians, but it was one of the earliest to open. Juanita's was located right next door to another gay bar called The Jungle,

[6] Ridley, Jim. 1995. "Last Call at Juanita's." *Nashville Scene*, October 19, 1995.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.

which had preceded it by a few years, opening in 1952.[9][10] Before Juanita's came along, The Jungle was Nashville's preeminent spot for queer people to imbibe. It did not seem to take a hit in popularity once Juanita's opened, as the two bars acted as a complement to one another. The Jungle also seemed to have a reputation mainstream society may have seen as more respectable, attracting straight people for lunch and dinner and only attracting queer people at nighttime.[11] The Jungle and Juanita's were integral institutions to Nashville's queer community in the late twentieth century, until both were demolished in 1983 to build a hotel.[12]

Until the Gay Liberation Movement began in the 1970s, Juanita's was one of the most well-known gay bars in Nashville. Throughout the 1970s, other establishments began to pop up and competition between Nashville's gay bars became heated for the first time.[13] Several of Juanita's' former customers gave interviews with the *Nashville Scene* in the 1990s and opined that a number of factors contributed to Juanita's downfall, including that increased competition, the AIDS epidemic claiming the lives of a number of its patrons, and its original customers aging out of the bar scene. While Juanita's did not remain the most popular gay bar in Nashville throughout the late twentieth century, it was certainly one of the first to gain nationwide fame, and both it and The Jungle helped foster a sense of queer community in Nashville long before many other institutions attempted to do the same.[14]

As queer adults in Nashville continued to establish a sense of community for themselves in the late twentieth century, young adults on some college campuses in Middle Tennessee

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[9] Bliss, Jessica. 2018. "A Place 'Where You Felt Safe': Nashville's First Gay Bars Remembered with Historical Marker." *The Tennessean,* December 6, 2018.
[10] Ridley, Jim. 1995. "Last Call at Juanita's." *Nashville Scene*, October 19, 1995.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Bliss, Jessica. 2018. "A Place 'Where You Felt Safe': Nashville's First Gay Bars Remembered with Historical Marker." *The Tennessean,* December 6, 2018
[13] Ridley, Jim. 1995. "Last Call at Juanita's." *Nashville Scene*, October 19, 1995.
[14] Ibid.

fought to make space for LGBTQ+ people in the same ways. The first queer student group to gain official recognition in any Tennessee university was The Student Coalition for Gay Rights at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, which challenged laws saying they did not have a right to exist as an organized group all the way to the Tennessee Supreme Court in 1979– one year after the student group was established.[15] A decade later in 1988, Lambda was founded at MTSU[16], and students at Vanderbilt University began organizing around the same period– even putting on an annual drag show since the mid-1990s.[17]

While I found no evidence of any queer-specific media presence in Nashville in the 1970s, the city was plugged into national trends and benefited from cultural dissemination to reproduce phenomena locally. Drag, for example, has been a popular type of performance enjoyed primarily by queer people for over a century. In *Gay New York*, George Chauncey demonstrated that drag balls were a staple in what could now be thought of as queer communities since 1869, when the annual Hamilton Lodge Ball in Harlem was first held.[18] Though it took different forms over the course of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, performances based on breaking traditional gender roles remained popular through years this paper specifically addresses. In 1973 drag queens in Nashville held the first "Miss Gay America Pageant", which became the largest drag event in the city.[19] This was certainly not the first time the drag scene came to Nashville, however. Interestingly, one of the earliest people to negotiate

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[15] Student Coalition, Etc. v. Austin Peay State U., 477 F. Supp. 1267 – Dist. Court, MD Tennessee 1979.
[16] Out & About Nashville. 2013. "MTSU Celebrates LGBT History Month with Lambda 25th Anniversary Exhibit." Accessed April 4, 2020. https://outandaboutnashville.com/mtsu-celebrates-lgbt-history-month-with-lambda-25th-anniversary-exhibit/
[17] Vanderbilt University. n.d. "Enchanted: Lambda's 25th Annual Drag Show." Accessed April 4, 2020. https://anchorlink.vanderbilt.edu/event/5018399
[18] George Chauncey, *Gay New York* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1994), 257.
[19] Out & About Nashville. 2012. "The Kings & Queens of Middle Tennessee." Accessed April 4, 2020. https://outandaboutnashville.com/the-kings-queens-of-middle-tennessee/

with police to prevent the arrest of men dressed as women was Juanita Brazier. Inside bars like hers and The Jungle, queer Nashvillians could express gender nonconformity in relative safety.[20]

The most popular drag venues in Nashville in the 1970s and the 1980s were Warehouse II in Berry Hill and The Cabaret on Hayes Street, just a few miles from Juanita's and The Jungle.[2122] Though neither establishment is still in operation, both were important fixtures in Nashville's queer world. John Bridges, who led the fight to get a historical marker placed where Juanita's and The Jungle were located before being demolished, remembers going to The Jungle with his boyfriend on many occasions before moving on to The Warehouse in Berry Hill in the 1970s.[23] All of these institutions were safe spaces for patrons to leave traditional gender roles at the door and be comfortable with their sexuality.

Nashville is located firmly within the so-called "Bible Belt", and many queer residents still demonstrated a desire to find spiritual fulfillment even as they were scorned by many mainstream Christian denominations. Because so many mainline and evangelical churches have historically acted to exclude and marginalize gender and sexual minorities, many queer people have simply established their own churches. The most well-known example is perhaps the Metropolitan Community Church denomination, the first of which was founded in Southern California in 1968.[24] Troy Perry, the founder of the first MCC, was formerly a Pentecostal minister who had lost his position within that church on the grounds of his being gay.[25] Because

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[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Out & About Nashville. 2013. "Miss Gay America Founder Jerry Peek on a Life in the Business of Drag." Accessed May 2, 2020. https://outandaboutnashville.com/miss-gay-america-founder-jerry-peek-on-a-life-in-the-business-of-drag/
[23] Bliss, Jessica. 2018. "A Place 'Where You Felt Safe': Nashville's First Gay Bars Remembered with Historical Marker." *The Tennessean,* December 6, 2018.
[24] Metropolitan Community Churches. n.d. "History of MCC." Accessed April 5, 2020. https://www.mccchurch.org/overview/history-of-mcc/
[25] Ibid.

this denomination started with the very issue of balancing faith and sexuality, they have continued to be seen as churches *for* queer people.

Any church established by sexual minorities that explicitly served the needs of the queer community inevitably drew the attention of people hostile to that community, however, and acts of violence were not uncommon– especially early on. In 1973, members of an MCC congregation in New Orleans were targeted as they met on a Sunday night at the UpStairs Lounge. An arsonist lit the building on fire, burning alive 32 people gathered inside.[26] While the general public seemed to understand that this was an act of violence targeted at queer people, the police in New Orleans did not put all available resources or effort into investigating the crime and it was left unsolved.[27]

Though it did not claim lives like what happened in New Orleans, earlier in 1973 an arsonist set an MCC in Nashville ablaze.[28][29] Significantly, even though this event has made it into a number of primary sources and is often mentioned in conjunction with the UpStairs Lounge massacre, primary sources on it have proven to be difficult to track down. Searching newspapers.com turned up merely one primary source mentioning it– a newspaper published in Long Beach, California.[30] That article gives no details on the Nashville MCC fire, however, and only mentions it in a listing off of MCCs that had recently been targeted by arsonists. Aside from Nashville and New Orleans, similar crimes occurred in Los Angeles and San Francisco.[31] Nashville's MCC arson was not unique in 1973, and the mainstream press in the South did not

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[26] Goss, Robert E. 2009. "Silencing Queers at the UpStairs Lounge: The Stonewall of New Orleans." *Southern Communication Journal* 74, no. 3 (July): 270. https://doi.org/10.1080/10417940903060948
[27] Ibid, 271.
[28] Ibid, 270.
[29] Dias, Elizabeth and Jim Downs. 2013. "The Horror Upstairs." *Time,* July 1, 2013. https://time.com/4365509/the-horror-upstairs/
[30] Zink, Linda. 1973. "Women More Closeted, More Acceptable." *Independent,* September 25, 1973.
[31] Ibid.

seem interested in covering it. Because no queer-specific media existed in the city at the time either, primary sources have proven elusive.

Though queer people had begun to organize in Nashville before 1970, meeting one another in establishments such as Juanita's and The Jungle, it was in the 1970s that the community truly began to flesh its subculture out. These bars continued to see customers and welcome them into the queer world, but other institutions rose up as well. National organizations such as PFLAG began to emerge, and chapters of those would establish themselves in Nashville in the coming years. While more religious groups specifically ministering to queer people would emerge in the following decades, the Metropolitan Community Church found its way to Nashville by the early 1970s as well. Though they were not as well-developed as they would be by the end of the millennium, institutions, establishments, media presence, and spiritual offerings for queer people each existed in some form through in 1970s.

The 1980s

For Nashville's queer residents, the 1980s was a decade marked by increasing visibility. In some ways this was brought on by the community itself, as some LGBTQ+ people organized events and some individuals decided to move into the view of the mainstream. That decade also proved to be an incredibly taxing period for queer people, as the onset of the AIDS epidemic and a lack of government response necessitated action from the queer community itself. This was a time that the LGBTQ+ community grew in numbers and visibility but faced widespread stigma and thus turned inward for community and to enact change.

In Nashville as well as the rest of the United States, the AIDS epidemic starting in the 1980s proved incredibly damaging to the emotional and physical well-being of LGBTQ+ people.

Queer people across the country were suddenly getting sick with a mysterious disease that automatically meant a death sentence, and doctors could not understand why. To make this problem worse, President Reagan did not even speak about AIDS in public until 1986.[32] By the end of that year, 28,712 AIDS cases had been reported, and 24,559 lives had been claimed by the disease.[33] As both medicine and their government failed them, queer people turned to one another to offer support as the epidemic spread throughout their community.

In 1985, before President Reagan gave any formal acknowledgement of what one journalist referred to as the "gay plague" at a 1982 White House press conference,[34] queer activists in Nashville formed a direct-action organization. Calling themselves the "Nashville Council on AIDS, Resources, Education, and Support", or "Nashville CARES", the group devoted itself entirely to the cause of AIDS activism.[35] It began as a meeting to talk about the disease affecting gay people in Nashville and grew to include parents and friends of people with AIDS as well.[36] The organization became a significant force in providing care to people with AIDS and continues to operate in the same capacity today.

One of the ways Nashville CARES provided both physical and emotional care to people with HIV/AIDS living in the city was by pairing affected individuals with volunteers in a buddy system. In 1986 until his passing in March of 1987, Randy Boswell was paired with a volunteer named Thom Carpenter, one of the founders of Nashville CARES.[3738] For a period of seven

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[32] Anthony M. Petro, *After the Wrath of God: AIDS, Sexuality, & American Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 7.
[33] American Foundation for AIDS Research. n.d. "Thirty Years of HIV/AIDS: Snapshots of an Epidemic." Accessed April 6, 2020. https://www.amfar.org/thirty-years-of-hiv/aids-snapshots-of-an-epidemic/
[34] Vanity Fair. "Reagan Administration's Chilling Response to the AIDS Crisis." YouTube video, 7:43. Posted [December 2015]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=69&v=yAzDn7tE1lU&feature=emb_logo
[35] Nashville CARES. n.d. "About Us." Accessed April 5, 2020. https://www.nashvillecares.org/about/
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid, "Steve Smith Society." Accessed May 2, 2020. https://www.nashvillecares.org/stevesmith/
[38] Milner, Laura. 1987. "'Buddies' Give Randy Gifts of Selves, Love." *The Tennessean,* March 30, 1987. https://search-proquest-

months, Carpenter slept in a closet in Boswell's Nashville-area apartment providing hospice care. During this same period, people with AIDS were so stigmatized that even some healthcare workers in Nashville refused to enter the same room without a mask on out of fear that the disease might spread through the air.[39] Because the stigma associated with people with AIDS and, by extension, the LGBTQ+ community was so intense, queer people looked to one another to get through the epidemic. Volunteers like Thom Carpenter did not receive monetary compensation for their services but were nonetheless compelled to act in solidarity with other members of the queer community when outsiders would not. There can be little doubt that the necessity for LGBTQ+ people to take care of their own during this epidemic led to a tighter feeling of community. Accordingly, as the rest of this paper will explore, a number of queer organizations sprung up during and after this period.

In the midst of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, queer residents of Nashville held the city's first Pride Festival to show that they were unashamed of their sexuality and deserved equal treatment. Perhaps no community event in the city gives queer people more visibility today than Pride, which attracted over 75,000 attendees in 2019.[40] The first year of its existence was vastly different, however, with only 125 attendees in 1988.[41] While the 2019 festival was held downtown and spanned several city blocks, in 1988 it met at a smaller Nashville park called Fannie Mae Dees Park and paraded around Vanderbilt University and Centennial Park.[42]

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com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/hnpnashvilletennesseanshell/pagelevelimagepdf/1908925387/pagelevelImagePDF/AC6A5E3103EA4F9DPQ/1?t:lb=t&accountid=4886

[39] Milner, Laura. 1988. "Couple with AIDS Finds Friendship." *The Tennessean,* February 22, 1988. https://search.proquest.com/hnpnashvilletennesseanshell/docview/1909006726/E2AA4FD2DBC74486PQ/81?accountid=33208

[40] WSMV. 2019. "Nashville Pride Festival Breaks Attendance Record with Over 75,000 Attending." Accessed April 3, 2020. https://www.wsmv.com/news/nashville-pride-festival-breaks-attendance-record-with-over-attending/article_3918da20-9902-11e9-aa56-53755fa74ebb.html

[41] Out & About Nashville. 2010. "Proud History." Accessed April 3, 2020. https://outandaboutnashville.com/proud-history/

[42] Ibid.

Queer people were not alone in their organizing and fighting for their civil rights in the 1980s. Allies existed as well, and some of the most visible were parents of LGBTQ+ people. Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, or "PFLAG", was a group founded in 1972 which offered an organized way for parents, friends, and allies of queer people to get involved in community with one another.[43] While PFLAG started in New York City in the 1970s, Nashville got its own chapter in the 1980s.[44] Maintaining an active role in queer rights demonstrations through the end of the millennium, photographs at the Albert Gore Research Center show that PFLAG participated in marches for change alongside LGBTQ+ people.[45]

As the LGBTQ+ population of Nashville grew in size and grew more vocal, a system of queer-specific media developed. This system existed both in print and on the television. Through it, LGBTQ+ people could find relatable characters in media and real-world social circles sympathetic to their community. Rather than existing as the only option available, however, LGBTQ+ people utilized this world of queer media in conjunction with the more mainstream channels of media in ways that were relevant to them.

Members of the queer community disseminated relevant in-group information in a number of ways. In 1988, Steward Biven and Jeff Ellis launched the first LGBTQ+ publication in Nashville. It was known as *Dare*, which was later renamed *Query*.[46] This came at a pivotal moment, as 1988 was the first year of Nashville Pride and the year of the Second March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights.[47] Demonstrating both sophisticated organization and a

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[43] PFLAG Nashville. n.d. "About PFLAG." Accessed April 7, 2020. http://pflagnashville.org/about-pflag/
[44] Ibid.
[45] OutCentral Collection, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.
[46] Out & About Nashville. 2010. "Proud History." Accessed April 3, 2020. https://outandaboutnashville.com/proud-history/
[47] Ibid.

strong sense of community, two busloads of LGBTQ+ people left from Nashville to go to that march.[48] Although the general population would have not known about the logistics of sending so many Nashvillians to Washington, DC, those who were part of the queer community had access to that information– presumably from their own media outlets and word of mouth.

In the *Nashville Scene*, a number of classified ads from the late 1980s through 1999 demonstrate that queer people used that mainstream medium to look for love. One from 1989 reads "GWF, 28, loves cats, movies, dining out. A lot of love to give. Friendships welcome. Also seeking eventual permanent relationship. Committable. Affectionate."[49] Included in that same issue is a guide to common abbreviations for classified ads, including "G–Gay" and "Bi–Bisexual".[50] While no abbreviation existed for trans people, some members of that community made postings in the classifieds as well, such as one trans man who wrote "looking for friends to help ease the loneliness as I progress towards surgery."[51] The *Nashville Scene* is one of the most widely circulated magazines in Nashville, so it is significant that the queer community was not being excluded from representation in that publication. This demonstrates not only that this community was present, but that some individuals used "mainstream" press outlets to contact other queer people. One did not have to exclusively consume one or the other. A queer person could be a regular reader of both *Query* and the *Nashville Scene,* and the latter would end up holding several pages of ads targeted at LGBTQ+ people in the 1980s and 1990s.

While print media continued to be a major method of disseminating information in the late twentieth century, the role of television increased exponentially. In 1982, the Gay Cable

[48] Ibid.
[49] "Classifieds." *The Nashville Scene,* December 21, 1989.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

Network was established in New York City.[52] The first cable network to market itself specifically to sexual minorities, the Gay Cable Network branched out into twenty cities– including Nashville by 1989.[5354] The Gay Cable Network specifically addressed issues concerning queer people that the mainstream media did not address, but it also acted against the heteronormativity of mainstream television programs. In March of 1990, the "Gay Cable Network Nashville GCN Guide", the print publication of Nashville branch of the organization, advertised a new soap opera coming to the network in the city called "Secret Passions."[55] Though it received some negative reviews,[56] Secret Passions is an example of a queer entertainment product that existed as a parallel to those revolving around straight love stories. With this sort of entertainment on a network specifically designed for their community, queer people were able to find characters they could more easily relate to and identify with.

As we saw with Secret Passions, the GCN Guide had information related to Gay Cable Network programming including new programs and what shows would be airing at what time, but it also contained useful information to the queer community that was wholly unrelated to television. In the July 1989 issue, the Vanderbilt AIDS Vaccine Evaluation Center placed an advertisement for their "SAVE" campaign, an acronym for "Support the AIDS Vaccine Effort."[57] This particular advertisement was seeking participants who held a low risk for contracting HIV (which the ad identifies as in a monogamous relationship or abstinent from sex,

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[52] Hevesi, Dennis. 2011. "Lou Maletta, Gay-Television Pioneer, Dies at 74." *The New York Times,* November 9, 2011. https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/10/business/media/lou-maletta-founder-of-gay-cable-network-dies-at-74.html

[53] Ibid.

[54] *Gay Cable Network Nashville GCN Guide, Volume II, no. 3*, Box 6, OutCentral Collection, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Herman, Jan. 1990. "TV Review: 'Secret Passions' Found Witless, Boring." *The Los Angeles Times,* February 2, 1990. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-02-02-ca-1428-story.html

[57] *Gay Cable Network Nashville GCN Guide*, *Volume I, no. 7, July 1989,* Box 6, OutCentral Collection, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

along with not abusing IV drugs) to participate in a clinical trial of potential AIDS vaccines, lasting from 12-14 months.[58]

While the particular sources I consulted for this project did not give much explicit information on HIV/AIDS in Nashville, the epidemic was clearly present in the minds of both the producers and readers of the *GCN Guide*. The purpose of the *GCN Guide* was to tell its readers, a presumably predominantly queer audience, what would be airing on the Gay Cable Network in the upcoming weeks. It existed to advertise a specific television channel, but it also contained advertisements not directly related to the Gay Cable Network. It was not printed to give information on the AIDS epidemic, but the inclusion of ads related to AIDS demonstrates that this was a subject that could not be avoided. HIV/AIDS became a fact of life for LGBTQ+ people in Nashville, with its mention finding its way into unrelated pieces of gay literature.

The GCN Guide also had two regular sections that were devoted to developing a sense of queer community in Nashville. In the same vein as the publication from the Lesbian and Gay Coalition for Justice, the GCN Guide included one page called the "Pink Page."[59] It served the same purpose as the more extensive Pink Pages publication mentioned later in this paper but restricted itself to one page. The subheading for this section of the GCN Guide read "If you are in need of a particular service or product, please consider the following businesses. THEY CARE ABOUT US. Spend your dollars wisely!"[60] The Pink Page in the July 1989 issue included phone numbers and addresses for institutions like Juanita's, The Jungle, The Warehouse, and Cabaret, but it also included coffee shops, realtors, and one glass company.[61] It is significant that these are present because it shows not only that queer media outlets and institutions worked in

[58] Ibid, page 7.
[59] Ibid, page 11.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.

conjunction with one another to establish a larger queer world that existed in parallel to the dominant straight culture, but also that any business could ally itself with the movement.

Right after the Pink Page in the GCN Guide came the "Community Calendar" page.[62] In the July 1989 issue, events included a support group for parents of queer people held at the Metropolitan Community Church, an outing hosted by Vanderbilt's Lambda group called "A Queer Thing is Happening at Opryland", and weekly AIDS support groups hosted by Nashville CARES.[63] In addition to giving readers a way to plug into the local queer community, the Community Calendar highlighted events happening in Nashville that were open and advertised to everybody in mainstream society, such as the Nashville Symphony performing in Centennial Park and the Fourth of July Celebration at Riverfront Park.[64]

One narrator I conducted an oral history interview with who lived in Nashville in the late 1970s, Doug Oliver, was unable to find relatable queer characters in entertainment. He also failed to find gay culture adequately discussed in print. The first exposure he had to anything related to queer identities was an academic journal called *The Journal of Homosexuality*, which he found in the library while enrolled in nursing school in Alabama the 1980s.[65] He remembers it being written in thoroughly academic language. Although this journal was not meant to be entertaining per se, having that model allowed him to begin to think of his feelings of attraction toward other men in more concrete ways. Having a label and reading about the experiences of other people helped him realize his own identity. One can assume, then, that it would be easier to wrestle with and understand one's own questions and feelings regarding sexuality with models

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[62] Ibid, page 12.
[63] Ibid.
[64] *Gay Cable Network Nashville GCN Guide*, *Volume I, no. 7, July 1989,* Box 6, OutCentral Collection, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.
[65] Doug Oliver, interview by John Broadwell, Birmingham, March 11, 2020.

produced by queer media outlets rather than academic journals. Though Doug's experience of finding this particular journal occurred in Alabama, it is one that applies universally in regards to finding useful information to help one think about their own sexuality.

The *Nashville Scene*, Query, and the GCN Guide demonstrate a number of important facts about Nashville's LGBTQ+ community in the late twentieth century. For one, it shows the sophisticated media structures that existed to give queer people representation as a parallel to the dominant, straight media outlets. Additionally, these sources show that queer people used both mainstream and community-specific publications to accomplish whatever their goals may have been. Third, as the Pink Page within the GCN Guide demonstrates, queer people often patronized businesses that were sympathetic to their cause. As the *Nashville Scene* shows, however, involvement in the queer world did not mean queer people were excluded from the events that were popular in mainstream Nashville culture.

Queer Nashvillians met the 1980s with a tighter sense of community than any decade before. The AIDS epidemic brought LGBTQ+ people closer together as they had to turn to one another when their government failed them. They started organizations to combat the epidemic and draw the community together, along with queer-specific media outlets. These new institutions and media outlets of the 1980s existed in conjunction with those that existed in the 1970s, demonstrating that the queer community was continuing to develop in spite of widespread adversity and stigma.

The 1990s

While 30 vendors came to Nashville Pride by the end of the 1990s[66], a number of institutions and businesses friendly to queer Nashvillians also made their position clear in print media. Like *The Negro Motorist Green Book* and the "Pink Page" section in the GCN Guide, a pamphlet titled "The Pink Pages: Nashville's Gay Friendly Businesses and Community Resources" was printed to inform a community which establishments would be unprejudicial when doing business with them. Information regarding what specific years this pamphlet was in circulation has proven impossible to find in the Albert Gore Research Center and online resources thus far. The one issue of this publication I had access to during this research project can most likely be dated to early 1990s.[67] Unlike *The Green* Book, the Pink Pages pamphlet gave readers information specific to Nashville. It divided itself into sections such as "Community Media", "Religious Organizations", and "Business Listings", the latter being further divided into categories like "Food & Beverages", and even "Furniture."[68] Essentially every service or business in Nashville that was openly friendly to queer people or owned by a queer individual could be included in the Pink Pages.

The Pink Pages was published by the Lesbian and Gay Coalition for Justice, an advocacy group for queer people based in Nashville that sprung up in the early 1990s.[69] Though it was not the first group to fill this role in the city, it was the most influential one at a very critical point in queer history.[70] According to the blurb the group put in the Pink Pages, its purpose was "to combat laws, policies, and attitudes that segregate, discriminate, or foster prejudice against

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[66] Ibid.
[67] *Pink Pages*, Box 6, OutCentral Collection, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Nashville Public Library. 2019. "Pride in Special Collections." Accessed April 3, 2020. https://library.nashville.org/blog/2019/06/pride-special-collections
[70] Ibid.

people based on sexual orientation."[71] According to the group, their two paths to achieving increased civil rights protections for queer people were advocacy and elections.[72] It is clear once again that Nashville's queer population moved, at least at times, in circles of their own creation and habitation.

Queer Nashvillians also established community centers to offer more formal support to those who needed it. In 1991, for instance, a group made a formal proposal to establish The Cultural Awareness Center for the Lesbian and Gay Experience.[73] In the proposal, the author writes that establishing such a community center would help queer people "enhance their positive self-awareness."[74] According to the proposal, the community center would serve three functions– to educate, to care for and support, and to build community among queer individuals in Nashville.[75] Although this particular community center was never established, it showed the desire queer Nashvillians had to build a greater cohesiveness amongst members of their community and that this sort of organizing was truly possible by the 1990s.

Through the 1990s, Nashville Pride Festival continued to be an important event for the queer community. By the end of the millennium, Pride had grown to a weeklong celebration that drew around 2,000 attendees.[76] In a period spanning just over a decade, Nashville Pride had increased significantly in both length and attendance. One can infer from this that an extensive

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[71] *Pink Pages*, Box 6, OutCentral Collection, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.
[72] Ibid.
[73] *The Cultural Awareness Center for the Lesbian and Gay Experience: A Brief Proposal for Nashville, Tennessee,* Box 3, OutCentral Collection, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Out & About Nashville. 2010. "Proud History." Accessed April 3, 2020. https://outandaboutnashville.com/proud-history/

queer community existed, and more people chose to come to Pride with each passing year. Over time, being openly queer seemed to become an option for more people.

By the mid-1990s, Nashville was also home to a bookstore established by and for queer people. Outloud! Bookstore on Church Street served the Nashville area from 1996 until closing in 2011.[77] Finding positive representations of queer people in literature can be difficult, so Ted Jensen and Kevin Medley founded Outloud! to combat exactly that problem. In an interview with *The Nashville Scene*, Jensen said "… the reason the store is here, is to provide a space open to everyone so people can find themselves."[78] The founders were initially discouraged by those who surrounded them from starting a gay bookstore because they assumed there were not enough queer people in Nashville to ever allow it to succeed. This in 1996, demonstrating that the queer world that was indeed already well established with its own special institutions, media outlets, and religious institutions, was not fully "out" to the rest of Nashville society. Outloud! was a bookstore but also functioned as yet another community center for queer Nashvillians.[79]

While this was not the case in 1970, queer representation had made its way into more mainstream publications by 1999 as well. In June of that year, the pages of *The Nashville Scene*'s dating section were filled with advertisements targeted at queer men and women.[80] Though queer-specific press outlets certainly existed, mainstream ones were being increasingly utilized to suit the needs of queer people as well. While the *Nashville Scene*'s classifieds section included the odd ads for men-seeking-men and women-seeking-women in the late 1980s, by the late 1990s entire pages of each publication were targeted at the queer community.

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[77] Moore, Tracy. 2011. "As Outloud! Closes its Doors, Nashville Loses an Anchor of the Gay Community." *Nashville Scene*, February 10, 2011. https://www.nashvillescene.com/arts-culture/article/13037254/as-outloud-closes-its-doors-nashville-loses-an-anchor-of-the-gay-community

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

[80] "Singles & Dating." *The Nashville Scene*, June 3, 1999.

In addition to seeking out long-term love and friendships, queer Nashvillians searched for casual encounters in the classifieds section of the Nashville Scene. One ad that ran in June of 1992 read "BIWM novice seeking attractive same for discovery."[81] Based on the aforementioned guide to common abbreviations, this advertisement was placed by a white male who identified as bisexual. He referred to himself as a "novice" and wanted to engage in sexual activity with another man. He did not place this ad in the queer press, however, but a mainstream outlet. Also important to note is the inherent anonymity offered by the classifieds section. This individual was able to engage in a discovery of his sexuality without necessarily even needing to be aware of the existence of queer media outlets.

While the Metropolitan Community Church had made its way to Nashville by the early 1970s, much more information exists on spiritual groups in the 1990s. Significantly, there are numerous photographs of some of these groups at LGBTQ+ pride marches. This demonstrates not only increasing visibility and demand for fair treatment, but also the important fact that some religious groups had begun to feel secure in vocally advocating on behalf of this community. While many mainline Christian denominations maintain even in 2020 that sexual activities with members of the same sex is inherently sinful, queer people in Nashville between 1970 and 1999 found spiritual homes for themselves within these traditions, in alternative churches specifically established for queer people, and outside of Christian traditions altogether. All three of these categories of religious or spiritual traditions made their presence known in queer media and marches, cultivating space for themselves within the larger gay world that existed in Nashville during this period.

[81] "Classifieds." *The Nashville Scene,* June 25, 1992.

Most Christian denominations dismissed the validity of same-sex sexual activity by connecting it with sodomy, which is identified as a sin in the Bible.[82] Even so, some denominations and individual Christians came to the opposite conclusion quite early on. In 1976, for instance, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church adopted a resolution stating "…homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church."[83] Taking the issue a step further, the Episcopal Church adopted a second statement saying "homosexual persons are entitled to equal protections under the laws with all other citizens, and calls upon our society to see that such protection is provided in actuality."[84] In the 1980s, the Episcopal Church provided aid to people with AIDS, and in 1994 the denomination began to allow queer people to be ordained.[85] While the Episcopal Church was quite literally formed to allow for a breaking of Christian marriage conventions, it has been more progressive than most other denominations when it comes to queer inclusion and affirmation. The Episcopal Church had a presence in Nashville during this entire period, making it a denomination through which queer Nashvillians could reconcile desire for Christian faith and their sexuality.

The United Methodist Church has historically had a complicated relationship with queer people, but certain congregations within that tradition have also been affirming queer identities and same-sex sexual practices. While the traditionalist vein of the denomination has never been an affirming space for queer people, many United Methodist congregations have specifically

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[82] Anthony M. Petro, *After the Wrath of God: AIDS, Sexuality, & American Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 29.
[83] General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of…The Episcopal Church, Minneapolis 1976* (New York: General Convention, 1977), p. C-109.
[84] Ibid.
[85] The Episcopal Church. n.d. "LGBTQ in the Church." Accessed April 5, 2020. https://episcopalchurch.org/lgbtq/history

reached out to the community. Photographs from the mid-1990s show members of Edgehill United Methodist Church in Nashville as they marched for gay rights and held a flag that read "Edgehill: A Reconciling Congregation."[86] The backdrop of that flag is the rainbow flag, a longtime symbol of gay pride. Also appearing on that flag are the logo of the United Methodist Church and a pink triangle, with an olive branch reaching between the two.[87] The imagery is powerful, showing the congregation's desire for peace between the church and the gay community represented by the pink triangle– a symbol sewn into the clothing of homosexual individuals murdered during the Holocaust.[88]

One Nashville church started by queer people that specifically focuses its outreach to members of that community is the Stonewall Mission Church, founded in East Nashville in 1993. Jim Hawk, the church's pastor and founder, began the church after being dismissed as a Methodist minister for being gay.[89] The Stonewall Mission Church is like the Metropolitan Community Church denomination insofar as it specifically ministers to queer people, but in 1995 it met at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center rather than a church building.[90] Whether queer people were looking for a more traditional "church" feel or something more familiar in a community center or similarly nontraditional setting, they had options in Nashville for spiritual development in an affirming environment.

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[86] March for LGBTQ+ rights, Nashville. Date unknown. OutCentral Collection, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives. n.d. "Pink Triangle." Accessed April 5, 2020. https://alga.org.au/2012/2293
[89] The Stonewall Mission Church. n.d. "About." Facebook, April 6, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/pg/StonewallMissionChurch/about/
[90] *A Guide to Religious and Spiritual Communities in the Nashville Metropolitan Area: Creating Sacred Spaces that are Inclusive of Gay and Lesbian People.* A Spiritual Celebration Committee of the Nashville Gay and Lesbian Pride Committee, 1995, Nashville.

Information on where to find affirming congregations was circulated in a number of ways. If a city had a Metropolitan Community Church, as was the case in Nashville, there was no question whether or not that congregation would affirm queer identities. That denomination did not try to hide its roots as a haven for sexual minorities cast out from the church, and if this had been a secret there would not have been a string of arsons committed against their buildings in the early 1970s.[91] The Stonewall Mission Church used the name of one of the most famous watershed events in the fight for queer rights right in its own name, and its members participated in marches for LGBTQ+ rights in the 1990s.[92] All of these methods created visibility for queer-affirming congregations.

Another method some churches used to spread the word about being an affirming congregation was print media. In 1995, for instance, The Spiritual Celebration Committee, part of the Nashville Gay and Lesbian Pride Committee, produced *A Guide to Religious and Spiritual Communities in the Nashville Metropolitan Area: Creating Sacred Spaces that are Inclusive of Gay and Lesbian People.* This particular pamphlet includes four pages of spiritual organizations, nearly twenty in total.[93] It includes several Christian churches including Methodist churches, the local Metropolitan Community Church, and Stonewall Mission Church. Interestingly, the pamphlet also lists a number of pagan groups, such as the Church of All Worlds, Druidry, Neo-Pagans, and Wicca.[94]

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[91] Zink, Linda. 1973. "Women More Closeted, More Acceptable." *Independent,* September 25, 1973.
[92] March for LGBTQ+ rights, Nashville. Date unknown. OutCentral Collection, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.
[93] *A Guide to Religious and Spiritual Communities in the Nashville Metropolitan Area: Creating Sacred Spaces that are Inclusive of Gay and Lesbian People.* A Spiritual Celebration Committee of the Nashville Gay and Lesbian Pride Committee, 1995, Nashville.
[94] Ibid.

We have already seen that while queer people in Nashville created and patronized their own parallel institutions and media outlets, they also made homes for themselves within non-affirming churches. Doug Oliver, a gay man in his 60s with whom I conducted an oral history interview, has been a lifelong member of the Church of Christ.[95] Though that denomination is not affirming, and one woman at Doug's local church continues to pray that he will never find a husband, he has made a space for himself there nonetheless. Doug is affirming of his own sexuality, and he considers it unimportant whether or not the rest of his congregation is.[96] Though he no longer lives in Nashville, he is another example of a queer person who has worked within a non-affirming religious institution and created a home for himself, using it for his own fulfillment even if it was not explicitly created for people like him.

By the end of the millennium, queer people living in Nashville could choose to patronize establishments and take part in institutions that had their community's best interests in mind. They could consume media that represented their sexuality in respectful ways. They had a number of LGBTQ+-affirming options for developing their spiritual selves. Though this entire queer world existed, LGBTQ+ people could and often did move between this world and more mainstream systems.

Conclusion

Because they were kept on the margins of society, queer people in Nashville simply established systems that worked for their community. If they felt unsafe or unwelcome in straight bars, they patronized gay bars. If they had information to disseminate to the queer community, they used alternative media outlets. If they wanted to foster spiritual growth in an environment

[95] Doug Oliver, interview by John Broadwell, Birmingham, March 11, 2020.
[96] Ibid.

that would affirm their sexuality at the same time, they established churches that filled that role. For all of these systems that were monopolized by the dominant culture and actively excluded or erased queer people, Nashville's queer community established its own parallel systems. While queer people in Nashville were often looked down on in the late twentieth century, they worked within both dominant and alternative systems to cultivate a sense of community and establish a thriving gay world. Queer people in Nashville between 1970 and 1999 made all of these positive strides despite consistent discrimination and adversity. Paradoxically, the very adversity that worked against LGBTQ+ people in the twentieth century also acted to shape their community and bring them closer together.

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