

# Preface

Katherine Crawford-Lackey

*Communities and Place: A Thematic Approach to the Histories of LGBTQ Communities in the United States* explores the physical and symbolic spaces of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) Americans, providing an overview of the concept of “place” and its role in informing identity formation and community building. This book and the other volumes in this series are part of a previous publication, *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, edited by Megan E. Springate for the National Park Foundation and the National Park Service (2016). This volume contains several revised and updated chapters from the theme study, as well as interactive project prompts that provide opportunities to practically apply topics and theories discussed in the chapters. As part of a series of three, this volume uses place-based methodologies to examine the sociopolitical implications of group identity in a historical and contemporary context. The process of “place-making,” a critical yet underexplored aspect of historical inquiry, influences the way citizens navigate public and private spheres and facilitates the formation of shared identities and networks of support. Emphasizing the intersectionality of queer communities, the chapters in this book offer insight into the role private residences, social gathering spaces, medical facilities, and digital platforms play in shaping LGBTQ experiences.

Scholars such as George Chauncey, Ester Newton, John Howard, and Genny Beemyn have contributed to the geographic study of LGBTQ history, an approach that, according to Beemyn, highlights “the distinctions between the lives of gay people in different regions, cities, and neighborhoods and the unique circumstances surrounding the development of gay communities across the country.”<sup>12</sup> A focus on the places where LGBTQ people constituted communities allows for a deeper analysis of distinct queer cultures, enhancing the scholarship of American history more broadly. Professionals such as Jack (Judith) Halberstam and Shaka McGlotten continue to expand the scope of the field by

looking beyond the brick-and-mortar establishments of LGBTQ places in urban centers. Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* details how LGBTQ Americans create autonomous spaces outside of heterosexual society. Halberstam uses the life and tragic death of Brandon Teena, a white transgender man from rural Nebraska who was raped and murdered, to delve into the construction of queer countercultures in rural settings.<sup>3</sup> Locating queer communities outside of urban meccas such as New York and San Francisco is critical in fostering a more nuanced understanding of queer culture and its implications in American history. Similar lines of inquiry are needed to better conceptualize how the virtual world shapes LGBTQ interactions, a topic Shaka McGlotten addresses in *Virtual Intimacies: Media, Affect, and Queer Sociality*. His overview of the role of social media plays in determining expressions of intimacy is part of a growing conversation about the dominance of cyberspace in influencing queer community formation. As access to digital spaces is often informed by categories of difference such as race and class, McGlotten's work underscores the importance of considering intersectional communities when studying nontraditional spaces.<sup>4</sup>

Historically, the communal gathering places of LGBTQ Americans was (and in some cases, continues to be) defined based on exclusion from heterosexual society, particularly for people of color. Sexually variant and gender nonconforming Americans have historically been ostracized from heterosexual social circles, prompting them to create spaces where they could embrace their full identities. Gay cruising areas, for example, served as temporary spaces to meet and engage in intimacy. Many of these areas were heavily policed, exposing queer people to discovery and legal punishment. Other more permanent places, such as bars, taverns, and community centers, served as important gathering spaces that have increasingly closed their doors with the rise of the digital age. Today, many LGBTQ Americans form relationships on the internet, complicating traditional notions of "place." These tangible and ephemeral spaces affect how LGBTQ Americans express intimacy, establish communal support, and resist discrimination and oppression.<sup>5</sup>

To more fully address the range of sites significant to the vitality of queer communities in the United States, *Communities and Place* offers a broader framework for understanding the concept of "place," and it highlights the unique aspects of communities throughout the United States. Together, the following chapters demonstrate the power that symbolic and tangible places have in influencing the ability to find camaraderie, establish relationships, and lead fulfilling lives. Authors as-

sess “place” thematically in both literal and abstract terms. Focusing on the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion along lines of race, gender, and class, Christina B. Hanhardt studies the places where LGBTQ Americans formed symbolic and material forms of community. Jen Jack Giesecking provides an overview of the process of place-making and the fluidity of queer spaces by analyzing how LGBTQ Americans formed communities specific to their geographies. Tara Burk, Marc Stein, and Katie Batza examine the ways by which LGBTQ Americans created and used spaces to facilitate artistic expression, to demand greater protection under the law, and to resist and seek medical care. Looking at the queer spaces in the cities of Miami, Reno, and Chicago, Julio Capó Jr., John Jeffrey Auer IV, and Jessica Herczeg-Konecny provide important case studies that underscore the diversity of LGBTQ communities across the country. While the cities of New York and San Francisco are often cited for their association with queer history, recognizing that communities are not relegated to the east and west coasts is an essential part of creating a more inclusive discourse. For more information about the effort to preserve LGBTQ affiliated sites in New York and San Francisco, see the first volume in this series, *Preservation and Place: Historic Preservation by and of LGBTQ Communities in the United States*.

Context of the language used by and about LGBTQ communities is important when reading through the following chapters. Sexually variant and gender nonconforming people are typically included in LGBTQ communities. Lesbian and gay Americans are defined by an attraction to the same gender. While “lesbian” refers to women, the term “gay” often refers to men, but can be used when speaking of multiple genders. American society has a tendency to categorize people in binary terms (as either heterosexual or homosexual), yet bisexuals have “the capacity to be attracted to and love more than one gender.”<sup>6</sup> The term “transgender” refers to “the ways people can live lives that depart from the conventional patterns according to which all bodies are assigned a sex at birth (male or female) and enrolled in a social gender (girl or boy).”<sup>7</sup>

“Queer” is one of the more controversial terms used in this series. Scholars have debated the use of the term “queer” when referring to nonheteronormative people and behavior. Originally used as a derogatory term beginning in the late nineteenth century, the word has recently been reclaimed by a younger generation of Americans. This term is now used to refer to those who do not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender but who are also not exclusively heterosexual. The use of the term today recognizes that there are many identities within lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities. In the spirit

of inclusivity, this book series uses “queer” when referring broadly to nonheteronormative Americans in the past and present.<sup>8</sup>

The authors of this series frequently reference places listed on the National Register of Historic Places and emphasize the need to have LGBTQ historic sites federally designated as National Historic Landmarks. While the programs are similar, National Register listings have local and regional significance, while National Historic Landmark properties are nationally significant. The two programs are managed by the National Park Service (NPS), and as this book series originally began as an online publication for the NPS, there is a notable emphasis on using the National Register and National Historic Landmark programs to recognize and preserve queer spaces.

Federal designation programs bring greater attention to historic sites and structures; however, preservation has many forms, and there are numerous ways to recognize a site’s historical significance outside these programs. The requirements for listing on the National Register and designation as a National Historic Landmark can also be limiting and exclusionary and have in the past favored the histories of white, heterosexual men of privilege.<sup>9</sup> In recent years, the National Park Service has made an effort to address the lack of diversity in its parks and programs. To address the underrepresentation of certain communities, the NPS produced critical studies on historic sites affiliated with Latinos/Latinas, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, women, and LGBTQ communities.<sup>10</sup> *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, released by the National Park Foundation and the National Park Service in 2016, is one example of the scholarship produced to better identify and preserve the places of all Americans. Over twelve hundred pages in length and with contributions from dozens of authors, the study is intended to guide professionals and members of the public in identifying potential properties for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places and as National Historic Landmarks. The subsequent listings, designations, and amendments to existing listings resulting from the LGBTQ theme study further demonstrate the significance of LGBTQ sites to the overall American story.<sup>11</sup>

I became acquainted with *LGBTQ America* (the impetus for this book series) when I began a professional residency with the National Park Service’s Cultural Resources Office of Interpretation and Education (the leading force behind the study’s publication). Editor Megan E. Springate and I were invited by Berghahn Books to compose a book containing several chapters of *LGBTQ America*. As editor of the theme study, Megan’s familiarity with the topic material and working relation-

ship with the authors facilitated the conceptualization and execution of the series. To make the material more accessible to young professionals, community leaders, and members of the public, we created a series of activities for the practical application of topics and theories discussed in the chapters. As a public history Ph.D. candidate with a background in civic engagement and public interpretation, I took on the challenge of creating activities to complement the content, with the target audience being college undergraduate and graduate students in fields relating to LGBTQ history, public history, and historic preservation. This project was meaningful not only as a way to guide people in the field; I was also grappling with how to identify myself as someone attracted to multiple genders. Accordingly, the project took on a special significance to me, and I was excited to have the opportunity to make the content accessible to a broader readership in a way that was deeply personal.

Megan and I were also eager to make the chapters of the LGBTQ theme study available in print (as the original is only accessible online) and to disseminate this information widely to a new generation of scholars. As we attempted to identify sections of the theme study to include in the book, we began to recognize the importance of all the chapters in depicting the LGBTQ experience in America. In *LGBTQ America*, the contributing authors addressed unique facets of queer communities, demonstrating that affiliated historic sites are interconnected with the larger historical narrative. As a result, our book proposal to Berghahn Books was expanded to include a series of three volumes encompassing the themes of identity, community, and historic preservation.

The resulting series grounds LGBTQ history and culture in the physical geography of both urban and rural America. As historians, geographers, public historians, archaeologists, and community leaders, the authors bring an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the relationship between political and social structures and individual and group identity. The series is also unique in offering an interactive element designed to engage undergraduate and graduate students. Each volume includes activities crafted to guide developing professionals to critically engage in practical learning while offering flexibility to educators interested in tailoring the projects to their course curriculum. Intended to be read as a series or individually, the books put “place” at the center of LGBTQ history by emphasizing the importance of space in understanding the complexity of LGBTQ identities and communities.

**Dr. Katherine Crawford-Lackey** is a graduate of the public history program at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

## Notes

1. Genny Beemyn, *A Queer Capital: A History of Gay Life in Washington, D.C.* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 4.
2. George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Esther Newton, *Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty Years in America's First Gay and Lesbian Town* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999); Beemyn, *A Queer Capital*.
3. Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Reina Lewis, "Review of *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* by Judith Halberstam; *In Your Face: 9 Sexual Studies* by Mandy Merck; *Lesbian Rule: Cultural Criticism and the Value of Desire* by Amy Villarejo," *Signs* 31, no. 3 (Spring 2006).
4. E. Patrick Johnson, "Introduction," in *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).
5. Don Mitchell's *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* provides a theoretical framework on how public space is appropriated, with case studies exploring how access to urban space is an ongoing negotiation between stakeholders and those in power. Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: Guilford Press, 2003). Genny Beemyn provides specific examples of gay cruising areas in Washington, DC, and the interactions between police and men suspected of engaging in same-sex relations. She explains that Black and white men sought spaces outside of racially segregated neighborhoods to partake in same-sex intimacy, and men often met in public parks, including in Lafayette Square (across from the White House) and on the Smithsonian grounds (on the National Mall. Beemyn, *A Queer Capital* 15–23.
6. Loraine Hutchins, "Making Bisexual Visible," in *Identities and Place: Changing Labels and Intersectional Communities of LGBTQ and Two-Spirit People in the United States*, ed. Katherine Crawford-Lackey and Megan E. Springate (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019).
7. Susan Stryker, "Transgender History in the United States and the Places That Matter," in Crawford-Lackey and Springate, *Identities and Place*.
8. It should be noted that some gay individuals and communities still associate the term "queer" with very negative connotations due to the word's charged history. Authors in this study use this term to be more inclusive of identities that do not fit within lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender communities. Popular LGBT media outlets such as the *Advocate* and *Go Magazine* have published articles about the benefits and potential detriments of

using this word given its historical context. Mark Segal, "The Problem with the Word 'Queer,'" *Advocate*, 11 February 2016, accessed 31 August 2018, <https://www.advocate.com/commentary/2016/2/11/problem-word-queer>; Dayna Troisi, "I'm A Lesbian and I'm Not Offended by the Word Queer," *Go Magazine*, 17 January 2018, accessed 31 August 2018, <http://gomag.com/article/im-a-lesbian-and-im-not-offended-by-the-word-queer/>.

9. In the past, the National Register and National Historic Landmarks programs focused predominantly on architecturally significant structures, and resulting nominations often ignored the human stories of those who lived and worked in these buildings. Additional challenges in nominating LGBTQ-affiliated properties arise when considering physical integrity. National Park Service bureau historian John H. Sprinkle Jr. gives an overview of requirements for listing properties to these programs in his book *Crafting Historic Preservation: The National Register of Historic Places and American Historic Preservation*, and he acknowledges that properties often lose integrity over time, especially those in urban areas. The National Register's "50 Year Rule" further complicates LGBTQ-affiliated nominations as the period of significance for many of the properties associated with queer history is relatively recent. John H. Sprinkle Jr., *Crafting Preservation Criteria: The National Register of Historic Places and American Historic Preservation* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
10. Anne Mitchell Whisnant, Marla R. Miller, Gary B. Nash, and David Thelen, *Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the National Park Service* (Bloomington: Organization of American Historians, 2011).
11. The Pauli Murray Family Home (Durham, NC) and Earl Hall (located on the campus of Columbia University) are examples of National Register listings and National Historic Landmark designations that have been recognized since the publication of the LGBTQ theme study. LGBTQ America has also led to the amendment of existing listings, including Whiskey Row, located in Louisville, KY. View the nominations: Pauli Murray Family Home, <https://www.nps.gov/nhl/news/LC/fall2016/PauliMurrayFamilyHome.pdf>; Earl Hall, [http://www.nyclgbtsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/NY\\_NewYork-County\\_EarlHall.pdf](http://www.nyclgbtsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/NY_NewYork-County_EarlHall.pdf); and Kentucky's Whiskey Row, [https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/pdfs/AD89000385\\_03\\_13\\_2017.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/pdfs/AD89000385_03_13_2017.pdf).

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- National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Earl Hall (New York, NY), [http://www.nyclgbtsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/NY\\_NewYorkCounty\\_EarlHall.pdf](http://www.nyclgbtsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/NY_NewYorkCounty_EarlHall.pdf).
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