

Animating Queer History
Using Motion Graphics to Teach LGBTQ+ History

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Abstract

Michael Gawlik: Animating Queer History: Using Motion Graphics to Teach LGBTQ+ History
(under the direction of Terence Oliver)

Queer history is seldom taught in American public schools, with only five states requiring social studies curriculums to include LGBTQ+ topics. But historians and educators agree that providing queer youth with information about LGBTQ+ history can significantly improve their sense of belonging, their self-image, and the degree to which they're accepted by straight peers. This project uses animations as a means of introducing queer youth to some of the most significant topics and themes in American LGBTQ+ history. Animations, which can provide large amounts of information in an approachable format, are an ideal medium for connecting with young people, especially those who are not interested in more traditional forms of historical learning. These animations are housed on a custom website that provides additional resources for further exploration. While this project is by no means a substitute for a comprehensive LGBTQ+ history course, it exposes queer youth to historical topics that they most likely would not encounter in a K-12 classroom.

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A Note About Language

Throughout this thesis, I rely primarily on two terms—“LGBTQ+” and “queer”—as descriptors for people and communities that are gender nonconforming, non-heterosexual, or both. The term “LGBTQ+” is an acronym for “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning,” with the “+” serving as an inclusive marker for people who do not use one of these specific labels but still identify with the community. While the word “queer” was long used as a pejorative, it has recently been reclaimed as an umbrella term for all sexual and gender minorities. In general, I use these terms interchangeably in this thesis, though I rely primarily on “queer” when describing histories that predate the creation of sexual categories in the late nineteenth century. I have only used the term “LGBTQ” (without the “+”) when it is part of a quote or title.

Introduction

In 2019, 50 years after the Stonewall Rebellion helped launch the gay liberation movement, four states passed legislation requiring public schools to teach LGBTQ+ history. The specifics of these laws—which were passed in Colorado, Illinois, New Jersey, and Oregon—vary from state to state, but they all require that schools restructure existing social studies curriculums in order to include the perspectives, experiences, and contributions of queer individuals throughout the past. When asked by *The Chicago Tribune* about the significance of Illinois’ new law, state senator Heather Steans replied, “One of the best ways to overcome intolerance is through education and exposure to different people and viewpoints... An inclusive curriculum will not only teach an accurate version of history but also promote acceptance of the LGBTQ community.”¹

But teaching LGBTQ+ history remains far from the norm in most American public schools. According to GLSEN (formerly the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network), five states explicitly prohibit “positive or affirming representation” of queer people in public schools.² 40 states have no curricular requirements regarding LGBTQ+ history, which education scholar Stephen J. Thornton has argued perpetuates heteronormativity and prevents students from understanding the roles sexuality has played in American social and political life.³ And challenges remain even in states that have passed LGBTQ+ inclusive laws. According to the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), education policy often fails to provide teachers with the resources and professional development opportunities they need in order to implement

¹ Javonte Anderson, “History Lessons on LGBTQ Contributions to Be Required in Public Schools Starting next Year,” *The Chicago Tribune*, August 12, 2019.

² “Policy Maps,” GLSEN, accessed December 31, 2020, <https://www.glsen.org/policy-maps>.

³ Stephen J. Thornton, “Silence on Gays and Lesbians In Social Studies Curriculum,” *Social Education* 67, no. 4 (2003), 226-230.

curricular changes.⁴ This is particularly challenging for LGBTQ+ history, a topic in which few teachers have received formal training and that has been almost entirely excluded from K-12 textbooks until very recently.⁵ In California, which passed the nation’s first LGBTQ+ education requirement in 2011, teachers continue to grapple with incorporating content related to gender and sexuality in their classrooms.⁶

None of this diminishes the work that historians, activists, and educators have done to mainstream LGBTQ+ history—but it does indicate that this work is not yet complete. Millions of students graduate from high school without ever encountering LGBTQ+ topics in their social studies coursework. While this is a disservice to all students, denying them the opportunity to engage fully with the past, it is particularly inimical for students who identify as queer or who are questioning their sexuality and/or gender identity. These students, who face a unique set of challenges that their straight peers do not, stand to benefit enormously from seeing figures like themselves represented in the past. Learning LGBTQ+ history shows them the artistic and intellectual achievements of queer individuals. It helps them understand how activists and political organizers carved out spaces for queer people in public life. It affirms their identities and teaches them that they are part of a long-standing, storied community that continues to struggle, fight, suffer, and flourish.

This project is not a panacea for the aforementioned challenges. It does, however, aim to play a small role in making LGBTQ+ history more accessible to young people. In a series of short animations, the project explores important moments and themes in LGBTQ+ history, from

⁴ National Council for the Social Studies, “Contextualizing LGBT+ History within the Social Studies Curriculum,” position statement, September 2019.

⁵ Tarah Fleming, Rob Darrow, Rick Oculito, “Teaching LGBT History: An Educator’s Guide,” Our Family Coalition, February 2019, 2.

⁶ Fleming, Darrow, Oculito, 7-9.

the creation of sexual categories in the late nineteenth century to the emergence of the modern gay rights movement. These animations are intersectional in their approach, considering the significance of race, class, and gender, among other social factors, in order to avoid whitewashing the past, as queer history often has. The project also includes an interactive, responsive website, where each animation lives alongside additional resources about the role of gender and sexuality in America's past.

The goal of this project is not to provide young people with all of the answers about LGBTQ+ history. Instead, it aims to introduce them to topics that they might otherwise never encounter and equip them with resources that will allow for further exploration. This, I hope, will be a small step towards giving young people a more inclusive view of the past.

Justification for Teaching LGBTQ+ History

This project is guided by the idea that teaching young people LGBTQ+ history will have tangible benefits in their everyday lives. While these benefits are most obvious for LGBTQ+ individuals, I argue that they also extend to non-LGBTQ+ audiences and to society as a whole.

As queer historian Mark Meinke has noted, history matters not only as a means of preserving the past, but also as a way of validating identities and experiences.⁷ When students learn history, they develop a tacit understanding that the people, places, and events they encounter are somehow significant; why else would they be studied and memorialized in books and museums? But this presents a problem for students who don't see people like themselves in the past. Do these people matter? If so, why have they been excluded from history lessons and

⁷ Mark Meinke, "Why LGBTQ Historic Sites Matter," in *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, ed. Megan E. Springate (Washington, D.C.: National Park Foundation, 2016), 7-8.

textbooks? Without seeing representation of people like them, students can internalize the idea that they are insignificant and somehow unworthy of recognition—that they are, as Meinke puts it, “hateful anomal[ies].”⁸

This is particularly troubling considering the daily challenges faced by contemporary LGBTQ+ young people. In December 2019, the Trevor Project, a non-profit focused on suicide prevention among queer youth, launched its second annual National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health. According to this study, 40% of LGBTQ+ youth have seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year. A third of LGBTQ+ youth have been physically threatened or harmed because of their sexuality or gender identity, and 29% have experienced homelessness, been kicked out, or have run away. In all of these categories, rates are even higher among transgender and nonbinary youth.⁹ Lack of queer visibility in social studies curriculums is by no means the sole reason for these multifaceted problems. It does, however, perpetuate marginalization by indicating to LGBTQ+ youth that they have no history or community to look to for support. Silencing queer people in the historical record silences them in the present, making their needs and experiences invisible to mainstream culture.

There are promising signs about the effect that learning LGBTQ+ history can have on queer youth. According to GLSEN’s 2019 National School Climate survey, less than one in five LGBTQ+ students reported being taught positive representations of queer people, history, or events in school. Those who had learned LGBTQ+-inclusive content, however, were less likely to feel unsafe at school, were less likely to hear negative comments about LGBTQ+ people, and

⁸ Meinke, 8.

⁹ The Trevor Project, *2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Mental Health* (New York: The Trevor Project, 2020), 2-3, 7-8.

experienced lower levels of victimization.¹⁰ This aligns with anecdotal reports from educators and students about how learning LGBTQ+ history can inspire young people to embrace their identity and come out.¹¹

Additionally, GLSEN's findings have implications as to why it is important for non-LGBTQ+ students to learn queer history. Historian Leila J. Rupp has argued that heterosexual students in LGBTQ+ history courses become more empathetic and attuned to the challenges that queer people face, in much the same way that research has shown a person's political attitudes are affected by knowing a LGBTQ+ person.¹² Similarly, Brian K. Marchman has found that students who were asked to think about practical steps they could take towards making schools safer for LGBTQ+ students improved their understanding of homophobia and personal biases.¹³ These changes in attitudes among heterosexual students are, perhaps, the reason that queer students reported feeling safer and more at home in schools that teach LGBTQ+ content. In addition to better understanding their own identities, these students are surrounded by peers who are more tolerant and likely to support them.

Finally, teaching LGBTQ+ history simply makes for better interpretations of the past that more effectively inform our understanding of the present. Queer people's visibility in public life and popular culture has greatly increased in recent decades; it is therefore crucial for rising generations to understand the context surrounding current discussions about the LGBTQ+

¹⁰ LGBTQ+ students who attended schools with inclusive curriculums also reported higher grade point averages, were more likely to plan for post-secondary education, and felt greater belonging at school. J. G. Kosciw, C. M. Clark, N.L. Truong., and A.D. Zongrone, *The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools* (New York: GLSEN, 2019), xxii-xxiii.

¹¹ Olive B. Waxman, "As More States Require Schools to Teach LGBTQ History, Resources for Teachers Expand," *TIME*, December 13, 2019; Leila J. Rupp, "Teaching LGBTQ History and Heritage," in *Preservation and Place: Historic Preservation by and of LGBTQ Communities in the United States*, ed. Katherine Crawford-Lackey and Megan E. Springate (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 193-195.

¹² Rupp, 194-195.

¹³ Brian K. Marchman, "Teaching About Homophobia in a High School Civics Course," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 30, no. 2 (2002), 304.

community.¹⁴ Moreover, learning queer history not only familiarizes students with noteworthy individuals and events, but it also improves their historical thinking skills. It helps them see how ideas about gender and sexuality have varied across time and place, allows them to better understand how the state perpetuates oppression towards marginalized people, and shows them the importance of considering multiple perspectives when examining the past.¹⁵ History does not exist in a vacuum; its use (and misuse) affects everything from an individual's sense of self to national policy decisions. It is therefore crucial that students develop the tools to recognize and combat discrimination—and teaching LGBTQ+ history is one way to do that.

Justification for Project Medium

In one of public history's foundational studies, historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen set out to understand how Americans prefer to learn about the past. The findings and implications of their work are many, but perhaps the most significant is this: People tend to value history when it is relevant to their lives.¹⁶ That principle, of course, guides this project's commitment to providing LGBTQ+ youth with meaningful information about queer people in the past. But it also influences this project's form.

Not every LGBTQ+ student is interested in history. While some might enjoy reading academic articles about lesbian pulp novels or sexual psychopath laws, it seems fair to say that most probably prefer learning about the past in less formal ways. That is why this project will use motion graphics as a means of discussing the past. Cartoons and animations saturate the daily experiences of young people, with everything from *Doc McStuffins* to *Bob's Burgers* readily

¹⁴ National Council for the Social Studies, 3-4.

¹⁵ Rupp, 195-196.

¹⁶ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

available on cable and streaming services. As teacher Janelle Vargo has argued, this makes students highly receptive to the use of cartoons for educational purposes, and animated series like *BrainPOP* are used in classrooms across the country to teach topics from biology to literature.¹⁷ Moreover, the accessibility of cartoons does not undercut their ability to discuss challenging material, with a rising wave of animated series dedicated to exploring mature themes. *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, for instance, tackles colonialism and genocide, while *Big Mouth* addresses puberty and sexuality. This suggests that animations are capable of simultaneously appealing to students' interests while also allowing them think critically about the material they see, making them an ideal tool for this project.

Additionally, animations are powerful multimodal tools that can provide large amounts of complex information in an approachable way. While the bulk of a video's content might be conveyed through its voiceover or narration, students can also learn a great deal through a video's setting, its characters' body language and facial expressions, and its use of maps, charts, and diagrams. In an analysis of the efficacy of historic graphic novels, William Boerman-Cornell noted that visuals allow authors simple, convenient ways to convey contextual information. For instance, authors can use an iconic image (like the Statue of Liberty) or a long shot of a single location to establish a sense of place. Similarly, they can use side-by-side images to compare two divergent accounts of the same event. Visuals are also particularly useful for showcasing change over time, as authors can duplicate and modify scenes to bring attention to new environments and people.¹⁸ While Boerman-Cornell wrote in reference to static art, all of these principles can be extended to motion graphics and indicate the medium's suitability for historical work.

¹⁷ Janelle Vargo, "10 Reasons to Use Animation in the Classroom," *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*, October 5, 2017.

¹⁸ William Boerman-Cornell, "Using Historical Graphic Novels in High School History Classes: Potential for Contextualization, Sourcing, and Corroborating," *The History Teacher* 48, no. 2, (February 2015), 215-219.

As mentioned above, my animation are available to the public on a website that I designed and coded. A digital presence is crucial to this project for a number of reasons. For one, showcasing the videos on a website helps unify them as a single, cohesive package. In addition to the storytelling benefits of this approach, it also serves the practical purpose of making these videos easier to disseminate as a unit. Creating a website is also crucial for providing additional opportunities for engagement. While each of these videos serves as a stand-alone piece, one guiding idea of this project is to provide resources to young people interested in learning more; a custom website provides much greater flexibility for doing this than YouTube or Vimeo do.

Lastly, in recent years, the Internet has become an important space for sharing marginalized histories. LaGarrett J. King has argued that social media and other digital spaces have expanded opportunities for members of the public to discuss Black history, bringing people into conversations about policing and civil rights that they might never encounter otherwise.¹⁹ Similarly, Susan Stryker has noted that online spaces are crucial to the development of transgender communities where people can share advice and emotional support.²⁰ Furthermore, the anonymity that the Internet affords is particularly important for this project, as many LGBTQ+ youth have not yet come out or live in unwelcoming home/community environments. This project's website gives these young people the chance to explore queer history on their own terms without fear of ridicule or harm.

¹⁹ LaGarrett J. King, "The Status of Black History in U.S. Schools and Society," *Social Education* 81, no. 1 (2017), 16.

²⁰ Susan Stryker, "Transgender History in the United States and the Places That Matter," in *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, ed. Megan E. Springate (Washington, D.C.: National Park Foundation, 2016), 35-36.

Literature Review

Since its emergence in the 1980s, queer history has grown from a niche, understudied discipline to a relatively mainstream field of scholarship. Early queer theorists were inspired by the tenets of social history, which was at its height during the 1960s and 1970s. Social historians looked beyond concerns of the state and instead prioritized the lives of everyday people, particularly those who had experienced oppression and were excluded from existing historical narratives like women, the working class, and people of color. Like other forms of social history, queer history has always been closely tied to activist politics and attempts to use history as a means of promoting equality.²¹ Today, despite its absence from K-12 curriculums, queer history is researched and taught at most major universities.

This literature review could not possibly encapsulate the enormous corpus of queer history that has emerged in the past forty years. Instead, it focuses on the elements of existing scholarship that are particularly important to the theoretical underpinnings and practical implementation of this project. It begins by examining scholarship on three foundational themes in queer history that this project explores: the creation and subjectivity of sexual categories, the relationship between visibility and oppression, and marginalization within the LGBTQ+ community. It then evaluates the challenges of conducting queer history in order to inform this project's methodology and narrative structure. Finally, it examines ongoing discussions about historical pedagogy to ensure that this project presents information in a way that is appropriate and effective.

²¹ Lauren Jae Gutterman, "OutHistory.org: An Experiment in LGBTQ Community History-Making," *The Public Historian* 32, no. 4 (Fall 2010), 97-99.

The Subjectivity of Sexuality

Since queer history's beginnings, scholars have argued that sexuality is not innate. Instead, it is a socially constructed categorization that has varied widely across time and place. This is not to say that there haven't always been individuals who engaged in same-sex behavior or who acted in gender nonconforming ways—but scholars argue that labelling these people as LGBTQ+ is anachronistic, as these categories did not exist until the end of the nineteenth century. For instance, Susan Stryker noted that court records from seventeenth century Virginia and Massachusetts indicate that cross-dressing individuals lived in both colonies. But because records don't reveal *why* these individuals cross-dressed, it is impossible to determine if their motives aligned with contemporary ideas of transgender identity.²² Similarly, Karen V. Hansen has argued that the Black community in 1860s Hartford did not necessarily see two local women's romantic relationship as noteworthy or antithetical to traditional marriage, instead viewing it as a temporary, transitional stage. It is therefore reductive to label this relationship as lesbian in the way we currently understand the term.²³

Scholars have cited a number of factors that gave rise to the creation of sexual categories. In one of the earliest works of queer history, John D'Emilio argued that capitalism in the nineteenth century created conditions that fundamentally changed the structure of white American families. As the wage economy spread and subsistence agriculture declined, families no longer had to rely on one another for generating the basic necessities of survival; instead, they looked to each other for emotional comfort and satisfaction.²⁴ Other scholars have noted that this

²² Stryker, 5-7.

²³ Karen V. Hansen, "'No Kisses Is Like Yours': An Erotic Friendship between Two African-American Women during the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Gender & History* 7, no. 2 (1995), 167-168.

²⁴ D'Emilio's essay was originally published in 1983. John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 468-470.

shift from thinking about the family as a productive unit to considering it an affective one fundamentally changed the way Americans approached sex. Jonathan Ned Katz, for instance, has argued that the growth of consumer culture and the declining need for children contributed to Americans increasingly seeing sex as a means of pleasure, rather than just procreation.²⁵ This encouraged the exploration of non-procreative sex, including that between people of the same gender. According to Bruce Dorsey, this exploration was facilitated by both the large number of single-gender boardinghouses in urban areas throughout the nineteenth century, where young people could fraternize away from parental supervision, and increased transiency among American men.²⁶ These changes also coincided with a publishing boom in the mid-nineteenth century, which scholars like Patricia Cline Cohen, Timothy J. Gilfoyle, and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz have extensively argued brought conversations about sexuality into public life.²⁷

While these factors created increased opportunities for Americans to explore sexuality, scholars agree that *labels* differentiating forms of sex emerged primarily because of the increased stature of science and medicine at the end of the nineteenth century. As Siobhan Somerville has noted, the public's embrace of medical discourse in this period created "a culture that sanctioned science to discover and tell the truth about bodies."²⁸ These scientists, Somerville contended, popularized the erroneous idea that differences in behavior could be traced to biological traits,

²⁵ Jonathan Ned Katz, "The Invention of Heterosexuality," in *Socialist Review* 20, no. 1 (1990) 11-14.

²⁶ Bruce Dorsey, "'Making Men What They Should Be': Male Same-Sex Intimacy and Evangelical Religion in Early Nineteenth-Century New England," in *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 24, no. 3 (2015), 365-366.

²⁷ Cohen, Gilfoyle, and Horowitz together explore this phenomenon in detail in their collaboration, *The Flash Press: Sporting Male Weeklies in 1840s New York*, but each has discussed it in their independent work as well. Patricia Cline Cohen, Timothy Gilfoyle, and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *The Flash Press: Sporting Male Weeklies in 1840s New York*, Historical Studies of Urban America Series (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: Norton, 1992), Chapter 7: A Gay Culture; Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999); Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 194-197.

²⁸ Somerville, 244.

implying that sexual preference was immutable and unshaped by social or environmental factors.²⁹ Katz has argued that this theory not only created a harsh delineation between sexual categories—with heterosexuals on one side of the divide and homosexuals on the other—but also that psychiatrist Richard von Kraft-Ebbing’s insistence on an innate inclination towards procreation established heterosexuality as normative and homosexuality as deviant.³⁰ As Estelle Freedman has noted, these classifications developed considerable influence in media and politics during the early twentieth century, promoting the idea that homosexuality was connected to violent crime and eventually leading to the creation of sexual psychopath laws.³¹

It is important to note that the scholarship described above focuses primarily on the way that sexuality has been understood temporally, and it generally prioritizes the experiences and perspectives of white Americans. In recent years, however, queer scholars have paid greater attention to how ideas of sexuality vary across social groups.

For instance, Will Roscoe has written about Native American two-spirits, individuals who “mix, cross, or combine the standard roles of men and women.”³² When European colonists initially encountered two-spirits in the sixteenth century, they lacked the language to describe these individuals who existed outside the Western gender binary; in many Native American cultures, however, gender systems are fluid and can accommodate three or more categories. Moreover, while Europeans regarded two-spirits with disdain, these individuals often held positions of spiritual and medical leadership within their communities.³³ Amy Sueyoshi has also

²⁹ Somerville, 249-254.

³⁰ Katz, 13-17.

³¹ Estelle B. Freedman, “‘Uncontrolled Desires’: The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960,” in *Journal of American History* 74, no. 1 (1987), 98.

³² Will Roscoe, “Sexual and Gender Diversity in Native America and the Pacific Islands,” in *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, ed. Megan E. Springate (Washington, D.C.: National Park Foundation, 2016), 5.

³³ Roscoe, 1-3, 7-8.

described how Western frameworks about sexuality fail to accommodate the lived experiences of non-white groups. During the nineteenth century, for instance, white Americans presumed that Chinese male immigrants were somehow deprived due to the absence of Chinese women with whom they could socialize; as Sueyoshi argued, however, communities in China were often highly homosocial, and these men probably did not regard their lives as lesser because of the gender imbalance among immigrants.³⁴ Views on gender and sexuality were shaped not only by race and ethnicity, but also by class. As Lisa Duggan has argued, media in the nineteenth century often portrayed working-class white women who passed for men as eccentric but benign, while regarding bourgeois women who displayed the same behavior as deviant and insane.³⁵ Together, these arguments indicate the contextual nature of sexuality and evidence how scholars are pushing beyond essentialist principles in their work.

Visibility and Oppression

Scholars have noted that the twentieth century was a crucial period in the formation of queer communities throughout the United States. John D’Emilio has argued that as scientists began categorizing people based on their sexuality at the turn of the century, those who engaged in same-sex relationships were carving out distinct spaces of their own where they could form a collective identity.³⁶ As Estelle B. Freedman has noted, however, these spaces remained underground until the 1930s, when the so called “pansy craze” brought attention to drag queens and other queer performers, and the 1940s, when gay bars and political organizations became

³⁴ Amy Sueyoshi, “Breathing Fire: Remembering Asian Pacific American Activism in Queer History,” in *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, ed. Megan E. Springate (Washington, D.C.: National Park Foundation, 2016), 6-7.

³⁵ Lisa Duggan, “The Trials of Alice Mitchell: Sensationalism, Sexology, and the Lesbian Subject in Turn-of-the-Century America,” in *Signs* 18, no. 4 (1993), 83-106.

³⁶ D’Emilio, 470-471.

increasingly noticeable to the general public.³⁷ While this increased visibility allowed for connections among queer people during and after World War II, it also brought increased surveillance from a homophobic society. This period was, as Joanne Meyerowitz has described, one of contradictions for the LGBTQ+ community.³⁸

Homosexuals had been viewed with distrust in the early decades of the twentieth century. But Freedman has argued that the Great Depression created the necessary conditions to turn this distrust into widespread oppression. A crisis of masculinity emerged in the 1930s due to men's eroding economic power and increasing detachment from traditional family units; the media and law enforcement reported sensationalized information about increases in sex crimes, which motivated politicians to pass a series of sexual psychopath laws that targeted all forms of non-normative sexuality.³⁹ Fears about homosexuals, in particular, were exacerbated by the onset of World War II, which, as D'Emilio describes, "created a new erotic situation conducive to homosexual expression" by placing young people in sex-segregated contexts.⁴⁰ Leisa D. Meyer has contended, however, that this increased opportunity for sexual exploration was closely policed by commanding officers through the war, and noted that lesbians consequently developed coded language and mannerisms to identify one another.⁴¹

Scholars have described how this tension between increased visibility and increased oppression played out in numerous arenas through the postwar decades. Media and popular culture, for instance, exhibited an attraction-repulsion complex with homosexuality and gender non-conformance. Meyerowitz has noted that 1950s press coverage of Christine Jorgensen's

³⁷ Freedman, 103.

³⁸ Joanne Meyerowitz, "Transforming Sex: Christine Jorgensen in the Postwar U.S.," *OAH Magazine of History* 20, no. 2 (2006), 20.

³⁹ Freedman, 89-93.

⁴⁰ D'Emilio, 471-471.

⁴¹ Leisa D. Meyer, "Creating G.I. Jane: The Regulation of Sexuality and Sexual Behavior in the Women's Army Corps during World War II," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 3 (1992), 593-594.

gender transition centered largely around the authenticity of her womanhood, with newspapers and magazines inviting their readers to judge whether or not her femininity was “convincing.”⁴² This tactic was reminiscent of P.T. Barnum’s nineteenth century concept of humbuggery, which Andie Tucher has argued allowed audiences to impose their own values on the people they read about and observed.⁴³ Yvonne Keller has noted a similar phenomenon in lesbian pulp novels of the 1950s and 1960s, which generally depicted lesbians in demeaning, sensationalist ways but were also one of the only means by which young, queer women could see representations of themselves.⁴⁴ Moreover, scholarship indicates that this tension between visibility and oppression existed in non-white forms of cultural expression as well, though it manifested in distinct ways. For instance, E. Patrick Johnson has argued that gospel music gave effeminate Black men the opportunity to perform and socialize despite the Black Church’s culture of pointed silence around homosexuality. So long as these men were sufficiently talented and remained closeted, they were permitted to perform.⁴⁵ This marked a shift from the 1920s and 1930s when, according to D’Emilio, urban Black communities tolerated overt references to homosexuality in music.⁴⁶

Scholars have discussed how the intersection of religion and politics was a frequent battleground for emerging queer communities and those who sought to suppress them. As Kevin J. Mumford has argued, religious leaders often played significant roles in opposing LGBTQ+ campaigns for anti-discrimination protections during the 1970s. This was particularly true of Black church leaders, who used their experience in the civil rights movement to contend that

⁴² Meyerowitz, 18.

⁴³ Andie Tucher, *Froth & Scum: Truth, Beauty, Goodness, and the Ax Murder in America’s First Mass Medium* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 55-57.

⁴⁴ Yvonne Keller, ““Was It Right to Love Her Brother’s Wife so Passionately?”: Lesbian Pulp Novels and U.S. Lesbian Identity, 1950-1965,” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (2005), 385, 404-405.

⁴⁵ E. Patrick Johnson, “Gays and Gospel: A Queer History of Sacred Music,” in *Out in Chicago: LGBT History at the Crossroads*, eds. Jill Austin and Jennifer Brier (Chicago: Chicago History Museum, 2011), 117.

⁴⁶ D’Emilio, 471.

homophobia was not a legitimate form of discrimination in the way that racism was; sexuality, they reasoned, could be hidden, but race could not be.⁴⁷ As Gillian Frank has noted, this argument was disingenuously embraced by the anti-LGBTQ+ political coalition Save Our Children in order to establish an interracial, interfaith alliance against homosexuality despite the group's history of racist, anti-bussing action.⁴⁸ Additionally, Neil J. Young's work on the role Mormon women played in defeating the Equal Rights Amendment illustrates the considerable influence that church leaders can hold over their congregations' political opinions. It is worth noting, however, that Young argues this influence may or may not be unique to Mormons, who regard their president as a prophet and are therefore less likely to transgress church political positions than people of other faiths.⁴⁹

Finally, scholars have argued that LGBTQ+ people's lack of access to healthcare, particularly during the AIDS crisis, was fundamentally shaped by state efforts to render them invisible. Jennifer Brier has noted that early activists argued AIDS became an epidemic not because of gay liberation's emphasis on sexual freedom, but rather because inherently homophobic systems silenced gay men and denied them access to medical treatment.⁵⁰ As Kwame Holmes has noted, this punitive approach to healthcare indirectly expanded the visibility of gay men, as organizations like ACT UP engaged in dramatic, conspicuous protests that made the LGBTQ+ community harder for mainstream society to ignore.⁵¹ Holmes contended that this

⁴⁷ Kevin J. Mumford, "The Trouble with Gay Rights: Race and the Politics of Sexual Orientation in Philadelphia, 1969-1982," *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 1 (2011), 59-61.

⁴⁸ Gillian Frank, "The Civil Rights of Parents': Race and Conservative Politics in Anita Bryant's Campaign against Gay Rights in 1970s Florida," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 22, no. 1 (2013), 146-148.

⁴⁹ Neil J. Young, "'The ERA Is a Moral Issue': The Mormon Church, LDS Women, and the Defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment," *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2007), 627-629.

⁵⁰ Jennifer Brier, "Locating Lesbian and Feminist Responses to AIDS, 1982-1984," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35, no.1/2 (2007), 234-237.

⁵¹ Kwame Holmes, "What's the Tea: Gossip and the Production of Gay Black Social History," *Radical History Review* issue 122 (2015), 60.

activism encouraged Black participation in queer politics in order to spread resources to underserved communities, a trend that Amy Sueyoshi has also noted among Asian and Pacific American queer people. As Sueyoshi has argued, however, queer people of color had to battle apathy and skepticism within their ethnic communities due to the perception that AIDS was a “white disease.”⁵² Additionally, Susan Stryker has argued that transgender women’s inadequate access to both healthcare and economic resources made them particularly vulnerable to HIV, as many had to share needles for hormone injections and relied on sex work as a means of economic survival.⁵³

Marginalization within the LGBTQ+ Community

While a great deal of queer scholarship has been devoted to studying state-sponsored oppression of LGBTQ+ people, an emerging wave has also considered tendencies towards marginalization within the queer community. In one of the foundational texts of intersectional feminism, Cathy J. Cohen has argued that a fundamental shortcoming of queer politics is its tendency to prioritize sexuality over other forms of oppression. As Cohen has noted, this reduces queer understandings of power to a binary—wherein all heterosexuals are dominant and all queers marginalized—that fails to account for the way that identities like race, gender, and class also influence an individual’s relationship to oppression.⁵⁴ Cohen’s approach suggested that shared queer identity does not necessarily imply shared political goals or strategies—an idea that queer historians have evidenced in recent scholarship.

For instance, Betty Luther Hillman has argued that conversations around drag in 1960s

⁵² Sueyoshi, 250-29.

⁵³ Stryker, 30-31.

⁵⁴ Cathy J. Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics,” *Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, no. 4 (1997), 440-441, 457-459.

and 1970s San Francisco crystallized ongoing debates about who had a place in the gay liberation movement. As Luther Hillman noted, drag was a common part of queer life in this era, but it was understood and used differently by distinct segments of the community. While upper class, white cisgender gay men saw drag primarily as a form of entertainment to be enjoyed in private, working-class, gender nonconforming people of color saw it as a means of self-expression that was practiced in public daily.⁵⁵ Luther Hillman argued that this difference was rooted in white gay men's desire to distance themselves from gender nonconformance, and it encouraged the exclusion of people of color, nonbinary folk, and the working class from San Francisco gay liberation groups.⁵⁶ On its face, this racist tendency seems at odds with Kevin J. Mumford's assertion that gay liberation was created in reference to the rhetoric and organizing strategies of the civil rights movement.⁵⁷ But as Cohen has argued, civil rights movements seek to assimilate to existing power structures, rather than overthrow them, indicating why gay liberation groups sought to position sexuality as the only axis on which they differed from the dominant culture.⁵⁸

Kwame Holmes has noted that white gay organizations in Washington D.C. occasionally allowed a small number of Black men to join in the 1970s and 1980s. But he argued that this placed a disproportionate burden on these individuals, whose perspectives and ideas were assumed to reflect attitudes of the entire Black community.⁵⁹ This assumption was, of course, fallacious, and scholars have written about the double bind that queer people of color faced because of their racial and sexual identities. Amy Sueyoshi has noted, for instance, that Asian

⁵⁵ Betty Luther Hillman, "The most profoundly revolutionary act a homosexual can engage in": Drag and the Politics of Gender Presentation in the San Francisco Gay Liberation Movement, 1964–1972," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 1 (2011), 158-159.

⁵⁶ Luther Hillman, 156.

⁵⁷ Mumford, 55-56.

⁵⁸ Cohen, 442-443.

⁵⁹ Holmes, 62-63.

American ethnic movements have promoted Marxist-Leninist-Maoist beliefs that homosexuality is a “product of bourgeois decadence,” but also that queer movements have not adequately recognized Asian American contributions to repealing Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell and to securing marriage equality.⁶⁰ Horacio N. Roque Ramírez has argued that in aligning with local Latinx activist communities, San Francisco’s Gay Latino Alliance sacrificed its relationship with other queer organizations so much so that straight Latinx allies could ignore or overlook the group’s queerness.⁶¹

Ramírez’s scholarship also highlighted forms of gender-based marginalization in the LGBTQ+ community. Unlike many other gay organizations, the Latino Gay Alliance was always open to women, but Ramírez contended that the group organized its political ideology and social spaces in a way that made both lesbians and bisexuals feel unwelcome.⁶² Ramírez noted that this exclusion was especially harmful because of the dearth of explicitly lesbian spaces available in urban areas throughout the 1970s and 1980s, an idea that A. Finn Enke has echoed when discussing lesbian feminist attempts to establish separatist spaces. Enke has argued that while these spaces gave lesbian women the opportunity to socialize away from men’s influence, they were not truly egalitarian, as they had been secured through white social networks and therefore seemed exclusionary to many women of color.⁶³

As Enke’s work specifically indicates, and as this corpus of scholarship suggests more generally, there is a domino effect to marginalization within the queer community. Groups often responded to their own oppression by creating spaces and communities that—intentionally or

⁶⁰ Sueyoshi, 1-3, 14-15.

⁶¹ Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, “‘That’s My Place!’: Negotiating Racial, Sexual, and Gender Politics in San Francisco’s Gay Latino Alliance, 1975-1983,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no. 2 (2003), 247-248.

⁶² Ramírez, 251-253.

⁶³ At the time this article was published, Enke used the first name Anne. Anne Enke, “Smuggling Sex through the Gates: Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of Space in Second Wave Feminism,” *American Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (2003), 635-636, 647.

not—oppressed those who lived even closer to the margins than they did. As Cohen has clarified, the push for intersectional analysis emerged from those who personally experienced life along multiple axes of oppression.⁶⁴ Following these scholars’ lead, Megan E. Springate has contended, will create a more accurate, pluralistic understanding of LGBTQ+ history that accounts for marginalization within the community.⁶⁵

The Challenges of Conducting Queer History

In the opening passage of a piece on religion and sexuality in antebellum New England, Bruce Dorsey advocated for the use of a “thick imagining” when examining same-sex intimacy in the past. This phrase, which Dorsey describes as a means of imagining what is historically possible, rather than what is verifiable, cuts to the core of the challenge scholars face when conducting queer history.⁶⁶ Historians have noted how archival silence on the lives of queer people makes it necessary to think in creative and unconventional ways—to listen to “hearsay evidence” and subvert the “unbending standards of historical methodology,” as Johnathan Howard has put it.⁶⁷ Dorsey has argued that historians who don’t engage in this practice, and instead adhere to traditional epistemological standards, sidestep worthwhile questions that would broaden our understandings of sexuality. But as Dorsey acknowledges, there is inherent uncertainty in using a “thick imagining” of the past, and queer scholars have discussed at length the specific issues that can manifest in their work.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Cohen, 441-442.

⁶⁵ Megan E. Springate, “A Note About Intersectionality,” in *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, ed. Megan E. Springate (Washington, D.C.: National Park Foundation, 2016), 1-2.

⁶⁶ Dorsey, 345-346.

⁶⁷ John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 5.

⁶⁸ Dorsey, 364.

When queer people do emerge in the historical record, they often appear in sources that are misleading, unreliable, or biased. Kwame Holmes has argued, for instance, that almost all information about queer people's lives before World War II comes from sources that are connected to state suppression and criminalization of homosexuality. Holmes has further noted that while white LGBTQ+ people had the economic and social resources to begin creating forms of self-representation in the postwar era, Black sexual minorities often did not, meaning their experiences continued to be filtered through the lens of crime and white observers who were "slumming" in urban Black communities.⁶⁹

Lisa Duggan has noted a similar phenomenon at the turn of the twentieth century, arguing that journalistic representations of same-sex female relationships perpetuated existing ideas about the "mannish lesbian." But Duggan also contended that lesbians held some agency in constructing these representations, as they provided journalists with information about their background and relationships.⁷⁰ As Duggan's analysis suggests, narratives about queer experiences are often constructed by both queer people themselves and the heterosexual individuals or institutions that document them in the historical record. This makes it challenging for historians to determine which sources to read and how to approach them, a problem that Yvonne Keller has discussed in her analysis of midcentury lesbian pulp novels. Historians long ignored these novels because of their homophobic characteristics, but Keller has argued that a close reading of them actually allows for improved understanding of the cultural environment in which many lesbians formed their sense of identity.⁷¹

Scholars have also observed that silences in the historical record are more obvious for

⁶⁹ Holmes, 56-59.

⁷⁰ Duggan, 792-793, 800.

⁷¹ Keller, 385, 404-405.

some groups in the queer community than others. John D’Emilio has noted, for instance, that women’s limited opportunities for engagement in public life have rendered them less visible than men in both queer and heterosexual society.⁷² Karen V. Hansen has extended this idea by arguing that nineteenth century standards of silence around sexuality make it difficult to find references to carnality in intimate letters exchanged between close female friends throughout this period.⁷³ Hansen has further suggested that it is particularly challenging to find records of relationships between working-class or Black women, who did not have access to education and leisure time in the same way wealthy white women did.⁷⁴ This argument is supported by Megan E. Springate’s assertion that restrictions on home ownership contributed to residential instability for women and people of color, making it more difficult for them to preserve documents that historians might later use.⁷⁵

Additionally, sexual categories—and particularly the idea of a sexual binary—have greatly obscured the presence of bisexual people in the historical record. As Loraine Hutchins has noted, the notion that sexual categories are discrete and immutable has caused both historic actors and historians themselves to categorize bisexual people as either homosexual or heterosexual, obscuring the unique experiences of those who are attracted to multiple genders.⁷⁶ The idea of a sexual binary was, in fact, so deeply ingrained in midcentury America that Alfred Kinsey observed many people who had both homosexual and heterosexual experiences identified themselves as only one or the other.⁷⁷ Hutchins has also contended that bi erasure remains a

⁷² D’Emilio, 471.

⁷³ Hansen, 173-174.

⁷⁴ Hansen, 153-159, 170-173.

⁷⁵ Springate, 3.

⁷⁶ Loraine Hutchins, “Making Bisexuals Visible,” in *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, ed. Megan E. Springate (Washington, D.C.: National Park Foundation, 2016), 7-8.

⁷⁷ Hutchins 5-6.

common occurrence in modern queer scholarship, noting that many fields of LGBTQ+ studies continue to pay only lip service to bisexual experiences.⁷⁸

Queer History Pedagogy

Both historians and educational scholars have noted that teaching queer history, particularly to children and teenagers, presents a unique set of challenges. Perhaps most significant of these is overcoming what Leila J. Rupp has described as the “Born This Way” mentality that permeates contemporary discussions around sexuality. As Rupp has implied, many of today’s K-12 students were raised in a culture where notable figures like Lady Gaga promoted the idea that queer people’s identities are innate.⁷⁹ The intentions of this idea are noble, for, as Gillian Frank has discussed, homophobic groups like Save Our Children have long used the idea of sexuality being a choice as justification for discrimination.⁸⁰ But as queer scholarship universally demonstrates, this idea is also ahistorical. John D’Emilio has argued that rather than attempt to convince society that sexual categories are innate, it is more useful for queer activists and educators to argue that homosexuality is not a lesser option compared to heterosexuality.⁸¹ Within the context of classrooms, Rupp has advocated for teachers showing students how sexuality has varied across time and place early in their history curriculum. This approach, she contended, can help students understand how sexuality is a socially constructed category and can prevent them from imposing modern sexual ideas on people in the past.⁸²

Scholars and experienced educators have offered a number of other pedagogical

⁷⁸ Hutchins, 8-9.

⁷⁹ Rupp, 6.

⁸⁰ Frank, 146-148.

⁸¹ D’Emilio, 474.

⁸² Rupp, 5-6.

suggestions for those teaching queer history. In an educator’s guide from Our Family Coalition, Tarah Fleming, Rob Darrow, and Rick Oculito argued that instructors should integrate queer history fully into existing social studies curriculums, rather than teaching it as a separate entity.⁸³ This ideology has been widely embraced for both practical and academic purposes. As middle school teacher Amer Randell has stated, framing sexuality in the context of familiar topics like the Constitution can neutralize accusations that teachers are discussing LGBTQ+ topics because of their own political leanings.⁸⁴ Rupp has argued that when queer history is taught only through the use of a few notable figures, it fails to show students how sexuality has influenced family, social, and political life throughout the past.⁸⁵ This argument echoed Cathy J. Cohen’s assertion that queer issues cannot be adequately understood when they are decoupled from broader discussions about race, gender, class, and other axes of power.⁸⁶

Stephen J. Thornton has implied that the near universal inclusion of the civil rights movement in K-12 social studies curriculums can serve as a model for introducing LGBTQ+ history in the classroom.⁸⁷ Kevin J. Mumford has noted, however, that while gay liberation developed in reference to civil rights, there was relatively little overlap between the two movements’ goals. Furthermore, gay liberation organizations were frequently racist, and civil rights organizations were often homophobic.⁸⁸ This indicates that teachers should exercise caution when situating queer history in the context of other marginalized histories to avoid whitewashing tensions that existed within the LGBTQ+ community.⁸⁹

⁸³ Fleming, Tarrow, and Oculito, 3-6.

⁸⁴ Waxman, “As More States Require Schools to Teach LGBTQ History, Resources for Teachers Expand.”

⁸⁵ Rupp, 7.

⁸⁶ Cohen, 440-441.

⁸⁷ Thornton, 229.

⁸⁸ Mumford, 50-52.

⁸⁹ For a more complete discussion of marginalization within the LGBTQ+ community, see 17-20 in this document.

Finally, educational organizations and scholars have both warned against perpetuating a progress narrative when teaching LGBTQ+ history. As the National Council for the Social Studies noted, advancement of time does not necessarily guarantee advancement of rights.⁹⁰ Rupp has similarly argued that it is misleading to imply LGBTQ+ rights have followed a clean trajectory, and she has suggested that teaching students about ongoing challenges prepares them to continue fighting for a better future.⁹¹

Resources and Methodology

As noted above, this project aims to create a resource for young people interested in learning about LGBTQ+ history. The project's animations provide concrete information about the history of sexuality, introduce noteworthy themes about queer life in the past, and draw connections to the present. Moreover, the website hosting these videos provides visitors with opportunities for further engagement. Consequently, this project required considerable historical research, deliberate writing appropriate for young audiences, and extensive illustration, animation, and design work.

Because of this project's scale and time limitations, I relied primarily on secondary historical sources when creating content for my animations and website. Fortunately, secondary sources on LGBTQ+ history are both extensive and easily accessible. To direct my research, I consulted the syllabus from Dr. Jennifer Jones' "Queer Histories of the United States, 1850 to the Present" class, which was taught in the University of Michigan's Departments of History, Women's Studies, and American Culture during the Winter 2020 semester.⁹² Dr. Jones has

⁹⁰ National Council for the Social Studies, 3.

⁹¹ Rupp, 20-21.

⁹² I can provide this syllabus upon request.

conducted extensive historical research on both LGBTQ+ history and Black history, and I deliberately selected her syllabus because of her commitment to intersectional teaching. While I could not find or access digital copies of some articles on this syllabus, I read all those I could and created extensive, searchable notes that I consulted as I begin producing scripts and illustrations. To fill in some gaps from this reading list, I also read several chapters from the National Park Service's 2016 LGBTQ Heritage Theme Study, which Dr. Anne Whisnant recommended to me as a resource. The NPS study proved particularly helpful for finding information about Asian Pacific American, Native American, transgender, and bisexual history, all of which remain relatively understudied parts of queer studies.

Using this research, I wrote four scripts that served as voiceovers in my animations. Each of these scripts was between 220 and 230 words, making for animations that are between 105 and 120 seconds in length. I do not believe that the brevity of these scripts made them uninformative. As Larry Borowsky has argued, museum labels are often no more than 100 words, and when written effectively, they can create dynamic narratives that audiences learn from and remember. Borowsky contended that effective museum labels generally include a narrative arc, thematic unity, and a provocative first sentence, all of which I aimed for in my scripts.⁹³ While writing, I also remained cognizant of my audience—children and teenagers—and adjusted my language and tone accordingly. After finalizing all four scripts, I submitted them to Voices.com and hired a voice actor for the project using funds authorized by Heidi Hennick-Kaminski, Senior Associate Dean for Graduate Studies at the Hussman School.

As I wrote my scripts, I also storyboarded ideas for each of my animations and began developing a cohesive art style for the project. When storyboarding, I aimed to create visuals that

⁹³ Larry Borowsky, "Telling a Story in 100 Words: Effective Label Copy," *History News* 62, no. 4 (2007).

simultaneously reflected and expanded the content discussed in each of my scripts. For instance, my first voiceover mentions that Native American two spirits engaged in both traditionally masculine and feminine tasks; rather than list these tasks in the script, I showed them visually. Once I completed writing and storyboarding (and received edits from Gregory Parker, a former colleague and public historian), I began creating approximately 80 assets in Adobe Illustrator. I made most of my assets before I began animating in Adobe After Effects, but I continued to modify and add new assets to suit my art style. After finalizing my animations, I exported each as an MP4 file and uploaded them to Vimeo. For accessibility purposes, I created closed captioning for each video using WebVTT files, which were included with each Vimeo upload.

Towards the end of my animation process, I began designing my project's website. On the website, I matched the art style of my animations with the goal of creating a cohesive visual identity for the entire project. I began by drafting prototypes on Adobe XD before coding the website with a combination of HTML, CSS, and JavaScript. To make the website responsive and accessible on all screen sizes (including mobile), I used Bootstrap throughout the site. To improve load times on the site, I embedded each of my animations using their Vimeo links, rather than incorporate their MP4 files directly into the site's code. I then added PNGs (prepared for web at minimal file size) to various parts of the website.

Finally, to avoid the “build it and they will come” mentality that permeates many public history projects, I created a plan for disseminating my project to its intended audience. As Lauren Jae Gutterman has noted, this idea—which presumes audiences will automatically flock to new projects regardless of how they are publicized—can seriously undercut the effectiveness of otherwise well-crafted projects by rendering them unknown to the public.⁹⁴ Accordingly, I

⁹⁴ Gutterman, 105.

proposed a strategy for reaching out to nonprofits, educational organizations, and social media accounts that engage with LGBTQ+ youth, along with mainstream media outlets. I will implement this plan after submitting the project to my committee.

Limitations

As with any public history project, a number of considerations limited the scope, scale, and effectiveness of my work. Some of these limitations were based on the time and resources available for completing this project, while others were related to my own role as a researcher and public historian.

Animating is a formidable and time-consuming process. Between writing, illustrating, and animating, each of these videos took approximately 250 hours of work to create, and designing and developing my website took approximately another 60 hours. Because of the short time period allowed for completion of this project—just under three months—I was often working at a rapid pace, not reflecting on my process and not sharing my work with colleagues who could have helped refine it. While I can't necessarily point to specific examples within my project that might have been improved if I were more reflective and collaborative, I believe that the general quality could have been strengthened from being more open about my work.

In addition to affecting the quality of this project, time also limited its scope. I believe that a number of topics—particularly queer art and medical discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community—were also worthy of inclusion in this project, but there simply wasn't enough time to create videos for them. To assuage my malaise about excluding these topics, I tried to include some mention of them throughout the project; blues singer Gladys Bentley is discussed in the second video, the AIDS crisis is discussed in the third, and both art and healthcare are mentioned

in the fourth. Still, if I were to expand this project, these are the next two videos I would create. Additionally, because of both time constraints and the difficulty of travelling to archives during the COVID-19 pandemic, a majority of my research for this project was secondary (though some parts, such as the yearly racial breakdown of new HIV cases compared to the US population, was primary). Ideally, if I were to continue working on this project, a greater share of the content would come from my own primary work.

The greatest limitations of this project emerged from my own inexperience as a public historian. Perhaps most significantly, I still have very little experience engaging with my audience, a task that was particularly challenging considering the target demographic of this project. Queer youth would be a difficult group for any public historian to gain access to; parental consent would be necessary, and many LGBTQ+ young people are not yet out to their families (sometimes because they're still questioning their sexuality, sometimes for their own safety). This obstacle—along with my own inexperience—led me to approaching this project through lenses that were personal and anecdotal; what would I have wanted to know about queer history when I was growing up, and what did my LGBTQ+ friends and colleagues say they would have wanted to know? While my experiences and those of my peers are valid in their own way, they don't necessarily match those of K-12 students today; many of these students are over a decade younger than we are and consequently might have had greater exposure to queer history through non-traditional channels (like social media) that we did.

This insularity compounds some of the issues created by my authorial voice throughout this project. I believe that activism in scholarship is valid and important; I accordingly didn't attempt to hide my own beliefs about discrimination towards (and within) the queer community, nor my belief that learning about LGBTQ+ history can help our community confront ongoing

challenges. These beliefs are rooted in historical research. That said, they also come from the perspective of a cisgender, white gay man who carries a great deal of privilege and does not speak for the queer community as a whole. I address this concern in my website's about page, where I detail my own experiences engaging (or, rather, not engaging) with queer history and note that my experiences are not representative of the entire LGBTQ+ community. Still, there is a good chance that some of my viewers won't see my website's about page and therefore might view my project as being authoritative, rather than told from a distinct perspective.

Deliverables and Outline

To ensure that this project is as accessible as possible, it is available to the public on a single website. This website includes standard conventions like a homepage and an about page to provide information about the project's goals and author.⁹⁵ The website also includes four content pages, each of which features a title, one animated video, a short written description of the topic at hand, a visual timeline of notable events, and a list of resources that allow for further exploration. Additionally, the site includes a glossary that lists terms related to sexuality, as many of these might be unfamiliar to young people.

As mentioned above, each of these videos is between 105 and 120 seconds. Research indicates that retention rates among viewers decrease as the length of a video increases. According to an analysis from motion graphics studio Breadnbeyond, explainer videos that last for over two minutes retain only 47% of viewers for their duration; Breadnbeyond recommends,

⁹⁵ I think it is important to provide visitors with an introduction to me, not only so they know my background as a designer and public historian but also so they can assess any personal biases that might have influenced or limit the project.

therefore, that explainer videos stay between one and two minutes in length.⁹⁶ While I initially planned for my videos to be between 75 and 90 seconds, I found that it was impossible to include all of the necessary information in that timeframe. I believe, however, that keeping each of my videos under 120 seconds in length allowed for a cohesive narrative that will (hopefully) keep my audiences interested.

The following outlines provide a general description of each animation's scope. Ibrahim Turan has argued that students retain historical knowledge and demonstrate historical thinking skills best when content is structured through both a chronological and thematic approach.⁹⁷ Accordingly, I decided to organize my videos temporally, so cause and effect is easy to follow, and thematically, so a single, cohesive narrative runs through each video. I used specific examples from my research in each video to ground and illustrate their themes.

The first animation highlights the creation of sexual categories in the late nineteenth century to familiarize audiences with the concept of sexuality as a social construct. The video begins by describing forms of sexual and gender expression from before the turn of the century that we might now understand as queer, focusing specifically on Native American two-spirits and Rebecca Primus and Addie Brown's 1860s romantic relationship. It then shifts to describing the creation of modern sexual categories, explaining how medical and political circumstances at the turn of the century allowed these labels to take root in American society.

The second animation explains how queer people balanced opportunities for socialization and community-building with increasing state surveillance during the first half of the twentieth century. The video focuses on how communities of queer people simultaneously came together

⁹⁶ Andre Oentoro, "CaseStudy: Finding Out the Optimal Explainer Video Length," Breadnbutter.com, October 13, 2020.

⁹⁷ Ibrahim Turan, "Thematic vs. Chronological History Teaching Debate: A Social Media Research," *Journal of Education and Learning* 9, no. 1 (2020), 214.

and were forced apart—how gay bars and lesbian literary societies in early decades created queer culture that was later severely oppressed during the Great Depression and World War II. The video makes mention of how several key factors, such as the creation of sexual psychopath laws and the emergence of early homophile organizations, helped set the stage for the emergence of a powerful gay rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s.

The third animation focuses on the successes and shortcomings of the gay liberation movement. Using arguably the most well-known moment in LGBTQ+ history, the Stonewall Rebellion, as a starting point, the video describes how gay liberation simultaneously advanced visibility and rights while neglecting the needs of many groups within the LGBTQ+ community. The video looks specifically at how activist groups often excluded those who were not white, male, cisgender, and wealthy, and it attempts to clarify how queer experiences are not monolithic.

Finally, the fourth animation demonstrates why LGBTQ+ history matters in modern queer life. It discusses both recent triumphs for the LGBTQ+ community—Supreme Court victories and increased visibility in media—and ongoing issues, such as the legality of conversion therapy and ongoing violence against transgender people (particularly transgender people of color). The video concludes by suggesting that the fight for equality is not yet over and contends that learning LGBTQ+ history can help us better understand modern issues, their precedents, and their possible solutions.

Links to my website and animations, along with my distribution plan, can all be viewed in this document's appendices.

Conclusion

Queer history matters.

It matters because it provides us with a more complete understanding of the past. It helps us see how ideas about gender and sexuality have influenced the lives of everyday people throughout time. It helps us understand how groups become ostracized by society and oppressed by power structures. It helps us listen to voices that have long been silenced and bear witness to their experiences.

But queer history also matters because queer people matter. Queer kids matter. And it's wrong for them to go through life thinking that they don't.

In the time since I began working on this project, a slew of anti-LGBTQ+ bills and legislation have been proposed or passed throughout the United States. Most of these bills and laws target transgender youth. In Arkansas, the so-called "Save Adolescents from Experimentation Act" prohibits transgender youth from receiving healthcare that affirms their gender identity—and cuts off treatment if they're currently receiving it. Over 30 states are considering bills that will not only ban transgender athletes from competing in school sports, but also subject them to bodily inspection. And in Texas, Senate Bill 1646 proposes that parents who support their transgender children be charged with child abuse despite evidence that supportive parents significantly improve transgender children's mental health and wellbeing.⁹⁸

Educating young people about LGBTQ+ history isn't going to singlehandedly solve these (or the many other) problems facing the queer community. But as historians and educators have demonstrated, learning about LGBTQ+ topics can improve queer people's self-image, sense of safety, and understanding of their position in the American past and present. Moreover, straight

⁹⁸ Human Rights Campaign, "Supporting & Caring for Transgender Children," American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians and American Academy of Pediatrics, September 2016.

students who learn LGBTQ+ history are more likely to treat their queer peers with tolerance and respect. So while learning history won't instantaneously heal the anti-LGBTQ+ poison that is seeping through American society, it might cultivate a generation that finally calls for an end to queer oppression—one that protests, puts pressure on their elected officials, and eventually build a society that is just and equitable.

The ideal way to teach young people LGBTQ+ history would be in schools. History teachers understand how to make content accessible to students better than anyone, and increasing the resources available to them could materially benefit millions of LGBTQ+ youth. But based on the way state legislatures are handling LGBTQ+ issues today, that solution might still be a distant possibility. Until then, it's incumbent on public historians, activists, and educators to find other ways of bringing queer history to young people. This project is an attempt to do just that—and if it can benefit even one young person, it will have been a success.

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Appendix 1: Website and Video Links

Animating Queer History website:

<http://mrgawlik.com/animatingqueerhistory/index.html>

Animating Queer History Vimeo showcase:

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/8335900>

“The Origins of Sexuality” link:

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/8335900/video/533970811>

“Visibility and Oppression” link:

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/8335900/video/531568596>

“Gay Liberation” link:

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/8335900/video/531485079>

“LGBTQ+ Life Today” link:

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/8335900/video/531575191>

Appendix 2: Distribution Plan

In order to ensure that this project reaches its target audience—young LGBTQ+ people—this plan outlines nonprofits, education networks, social media accounts, and media outlets that might help disseminate *Animating Queer History*. Many (but not all) of these organizations are based in Southeast Michigan due to my connections to the area, which I believe might make organizations more willing to work with me. In addition to outlining these sources, I’ve also created a rough pitch for the project, which is subject to change depending on the target organization.

Nonprofits and Education Networks

Name	Description	Contact
GLSEN	Organization created by teachers that provides educators with resources and evidence-based strategies for creating affirming learning environments for LGBTQ+ youth	info@glsen.org , annarbor@chapters.glsen.org (Ann Arbor, MI chapter)
Jim Toy Community Center	Community center in Ann Arbor, MI dedicated to providing information, education, social events, and advocacy for the queer community in Washtenaw County	Contact form ; 734-274-9551
The Neutral Zone	Teen-focused community center in Ann Arbor, MI that provides high schoolers from diverse backgrounds with educational and creative opportunities; not focused specifically on queer youth but has programs related to LGBTQ+ issues	info@neutral-zone.org ; 734-214-9995
Ruth Ellis Center	LGBTQ+ community center based in Metro Detroit with a focus on helping queer youth of color who have experienced homelessness or healthcare discrimination	info@ruthelliscenter.org , 313-252-1950

The Trevor Project	Organization dedicated to crisis intervention and suicide prevention among LGBTQ+ youth that provides counseling and support services to young people in need.	Facebook and Instagram accounts—difficult to pin down an email address but I’ll continue searching
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Social Media

Name	Description	Contact
@lesbianherstoryarchives	Instagram account with 42,000 followers dedicated to sharing information about the experiences of lesbians throughout time, along with resources for activism and education	@lesbianherstoryarchives
@lgbt_history	Instagram account with 680,000 followers that provides information about queer history since World War II; intersectional in its approach	@lgbt_history (Instagram)
@lgbtqcarrboro	Instagram account for the LGBTQ Center of Carrboro, has ~900 followers, shares resources and information for queer people in Orange County	@lgbtqcarrboro (Instagram)
@lgbtqnation	Instagram account with 33,000 followers that shares news and advocacy information related to the LGBTQ+ community	@lgbtqnation (Instagram)
@trevorproject	Instagram account for aforementioned nonprofit, has 453,000 followers, often shares user-created artwork on page	@trevorproject (Instagram)

Media

Name	Description	Contact
The Advocate	Bi-monthly LGBTQ+ magazine and website focused on news, politics, and the arts. The oldest and largest queer publication in the US	Laura Villela, Digital Media Manager (laura.villela@heremedia.com)
HuffPost	National online publication; includes	Kate Sheppard, Senior

	both “LGBTQ” and “Queer Voices” sections	Enterprise Editor (kateshep@email.unc.edu); I’ve previously published with HuffPost through Kate
National Geographic	National publication that includes historical materials (though, admittedly, doesn’t cover modern topics as often as ancient ones)	James B. Wellford, Senior Visual Editor (James.Wellford@natgeo.com)
Out Magazine	LGBTQ+ lifestyle magazine, has the highest circulation of any queer monthly publication in the US	Mikelle Street, Digital Director(me@mikellestreet.com)
Pride Source: Between the Lines	LGBTQ+ weekly print and online newspaper based in Southeast Michigan; includes both hard news and lifestyle guides	news@pridesource.com

Rough Pitch

Across the US, only five states require K-12 social studies curriculums to include LGBTQ+ topics. Another five states ban any positive mention of homosexuality in schools altogether. But historians and educational researchers agree that queer students who learn about LGBTQ+ history report improved self-image, greater belonging, and are more likely to pursue secondary education. As state legislatures across the country consider (and pass) new anti-LGBTQ+ bills, it seems unlikely that queer history will become a mandated part of social studies curriculums anytime soon—which make it incumbent on educators, public historians, and activists to find alternative ways of teaching the topic to young people.

My project, *Animating Queer History*, aims to do just that. This project uses a series of animations to introduce queer youth to some of the most significant topics and themes in American LGBTQ+ history—from the creation of sexual categories at the end of the nineteenth century to the gay liberation movement. These animations are housed on a website that provides additional information and resources for students. While this project is by no means a substitute

for a comprehensive LGBTQ+ history course, it exposes queer youth to topics they'd likely never encounter in the classroom.

The goal of this website is to make LGBTQ+ history widely accessible—and to that end, I'm hoping you can help. I would be immensely grateful if you took the time to look at the site and share it on your social media, websites, and on other channels of communication. I'm also happy to provide a written explanation or article that argues the necessity of projects like this, given the current state of education policy across the US, and share my research documents. I look forward to hearing from you.