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THE CAROLINA GAY ASSOCIATION, THE SOUTHEASTERN GAY CONFERENCES,
AND GAY LIBERATION IN THE 1970s SOUTH

A Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts

in the Department of Southern Studies

The University of Mississippi

By

Hooper Schultz

May 2019

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ABSTRACT

This project explores how the successes and failures of local organizing networks in the South shaped national conversations on the rights of queer Americans. Its starting point is 1970 with the Triangle Gay Alliance's formation in Raleigh, and it ends in 1978 with the third annual Southeastern Gay Conference and repeal of Miami-Dade County's nondiscrimination ordinance. Paying close attention to the founding of the Carolina Gay Association in 1975 and the subsequent Southeastern Gay Conferences (SEGCs), the thesis connects the attendance at conferences to locally-organized activist groups from North Carolina to Florida to show that rather than being "lonely hunters" without political or social goals, queer Southerners were in fact developing tactics to extend their rights and stake their claim to their homes in the Southeast. Finally, the project looks to the various political actions, literary organizations, and other community groups that formed as direct results of the Southeastern Gay Conferences, pointing to their centrality in an increasingly active and aware queer South. The first chapter provides the backdrop of national gay liberation and the political climate that led to the formation of various queer groups as well as opposition to their formation, especially the Carolina Gay Association at UNC Chapel Hill. The middle chapter focuses on the Southeastern Gay Conferences of 1976, 1977 and 1978, and on the events that occurred during them specifically, as well as the issues that emerged from them. The final chapter begins to examine the outcomes of the organizing that coalesced at the SEGCs, specifically the Miami-Dade nondiscrimination ordinance, Womonwrites Conferences, and lesbian literary ventures such as *Sinister Wisdom* and *Feminary*.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my great-uncle, Charles McCarter Hooper.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my advisor, Dr. Jessica Wilkerson and my committee members, Drs. Darren Grem and Jaime Harker. I could not have financed my studies without the assistantship provided by the Sarah Isom Center for Women and Gender Studies. I would also like to thank the Center for The Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi and the Southern Oral History Program at the Center for the Study of the American South at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In addition, I thank all of the activists whose work in Chapel Hill and at the Southeastern Gay Conferences have made my life and work possible, especially those who assisted in this project with their interviews, encouragement, and fellowship.

Lastly, I acknowledge the friendship and support from my fellow graduate students, especially Sarah, Tom, and Frankie. You made this chapter of my life enjoyable and enriching.

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INTRODUCTION

Minnie Bruce Pratt and the women who would become the lesbian-feminist collective that published the first lesbian journal for the South, *Feminary*, sat in the back of a semi-circle at a park in downtown Atlanta. They were at an outdoor workshop, part of the Southeastern Conference of Lesbians and Gay Men, on a spring morning in April of 1978. “We were all at the conference together, but we hadn’t necessarily gotten there as a unit,”¹ Pratt stated. Pratt and her lover Cris South arrived in Atlanta separately for a three-day celebration and organizing extravaganza. A woman they knew from Durham lesbian-feminist circles, Mab Segrest, also showed up to the conference workshop that day. Lesbian writers Catherine Nicholson and Harriet Desmoines (Ellenberger), who were leading the workshop, had just announced that their lesbian-focused feminist journal, *Sinister Wisdom*, was leaving Charlotte for Nebraska. This was a huge surprise to the women at the workshop, who were proud to have a journal coming out of the South, and the women were justifiably proud to have one of the first lesbian feminist journals in the country there, publishing lesbian literature.

A ripple went through the crowd as the women gathered reacted to the shock that the premier lesbian journal in the country was leaving their region. Whispers broke out amongst different women. Segrest leaned over to South and Pratt and said, “we should take *Sinister Wisdom*’s place.”² At the time, Segrest’s publication *Feminary* was not lesbian-focused, and was a simple mimeographed feminist newsletter. But as Minnie Bruce Pratt later recalled, “here the

¹ Pratt, Minnie Bruce. Interview with Hooper Schultz. March 9, 2019.

² Ibid.

three of us are. And they're [Nicholson and Des Moines] leaving. So, boom."³ From this conversation, *Feminary* grew to be one of the most storied lesbian literary journals in queer history and influenced many lesbian-feminist writers in the Southeast and across the nation. "Who knows how many moments like that there were at these conferences," said Pratt, "where people who sort of knew each other or wanted to know each other, got an idea."⁴ Moments like the formation of *Feminary*, seemingly serendipitous, were in fact the result of years of planning, connecting, and organizing around queer cultural creation and political organizing in the South. The women remembered that they were, in fact, just "one of the bunches that did that."⁵

In the 1970s, gay liberation took hold in the minds of many young lesbians, gay men, and other queer people across the United States. Part of a broader movement for the rights of people of color, women, and other marginalized groups, gay liberation pushed the boundaries of American society and changed the fabric of public life and family concepts in the U.S. in the late twentieth century. In the American South, the Southeastern Gay Conferences (SEGCs), later the Southeastern Conferences of Lesbians and Gay Men (SECLGM), were one such apparatus that organized gay men and women culturally, politically, and socially in this moment of heightened optimism about the queer future of America. Begun by the students of the Carolina Gay Association in 1976, the Conferences changed the Southeast by organizing among the first public and open spaces for out gay men and lesbians to congregate, overtaking state-owned spaces like the Porter Graham Student Union at UNC-Chapel Hill. They also laid the groundwork for a multitude of cultural groups and Pride organizations. Ultimately, the conversations and political organizing led to a number of ordinance pushes in towns and cities across the Southeast, mirrored by similar legal appeals nationwide. Their organizing faced immediate and concerted

³ Pratt, Minnie Bruce. Interview with Hooper Schultz. March 9, 2019.

⁴ Pratt, Minnie Bruce. Interview with Hooper Schultz. March 9, 2019.

backlash. For instance, the gay activists of Miami and Dade County, Florida, emboldened by their workshops and conversations at the SEGCS, passed an ordinance to which Anita Bryant's "Save Our Children" (SOC) campaign responded. Save Our Children contributed greatly to the anti-gay family rights rhetoric of the Religious Right in the late twentieth century. It also served as what David Haltiwanger referred to as a "shot in the arm for the gay community,"⁶ uniting gay men and lesbians across the country against homophobia. The Florida Citrus Commission publicly announced its support for what had been Bryant's personal project, the Save Our Children campaign, in late 1977. Local groups who had National Gay Task Force (NGTF) connections then organized a national boycott of Florida orange juice. The national networks that had been formed by gay liberation organizing at the Southeastern Gay Conferences as well as media connections held by southern gay newspapers made the concerted effort against Bryant and Save Our Children possible.

This thesis offers a new analysis of southern queer movements and subsequently American LGBTQ history by telling the story of lesbian and gay activists connected to the Southeastern Gay Conferences in three areas of the South—Atlanta, Georgia, the Triangle of North Carolina, and Miami, Florida—in the 1970s. Its starting point is 1970 with the Triangle Gay Alliance's formation in Raleigh, and it ends in 1978 with the third annual Southeastern Gay Conference in Atlanta and a preliminary discussion of the wide array of political and cultural outcomes of the conferences, via organizations that germinated at the conference and actions taken by attendees.⁷ Paying close attention to the founding of the Carolina Gay Association in 1975 and the subsequent Southeastern Gay Conferences (SEGCS), I explore an alternative to the

⁶ Haltiwanger, David. Interview with Hooper Schultz. December 12, 2018.

⁷ Other than one article published by the Oral History Review, (T. Evan Faulkenbury, Aaron Hayworth; The Carolina Gay Association, Oral History, and Coming Out at the University of North Carolina, *The Oral History Review*, Volume 43, Issue 1, 1 April 2016, Pages 115–137, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ohr/ohv073>) these organizations and events have not been studied or written about.

metro-centric understanding of queer activism in the 1970s and 80s. I connect the attendance at conferences to the Triangle Gay Association, Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance, and other locally-organized activist groups from North Carolina to Florida to show that rather than being “lonely hunters” without political or social goals, queer southerners were in fact developing tactics to extend their rights and stake their claim to their homes in the Southeast.⁸ Finally, I look to the various political actions, literary organizations, and other community groups that formed as direct results of the Southeastern Gay Conferences, pointing to their centrality in an increasingly active and aware queer South. Here, I pause longest on the Save Our Children campaign headed by Anita Bryant and parse out how the SEGC attendees and presenters contributed the largest movement around gay rights in American history at the time. Gay liberationists in the South used the cross-country networks that they had built to boycott the Florida Orange Growers and Bryant, as they pushed for support of a Dade County anti-discrimination ordinance that mirrored one passed by SEGC activists in Chapel Hill.

Scholarship on LGBTQ activism in the South, let alone queer lives, remains limited. While some oral histories have been collected, less is understood about the connectivity of the movement between various groups across the region, and the shared resources that made living as queer folks in the South possible. Recent works by historians have begun to recognize the historiographical bias of queer history towards the bicoastal metropolises of San Francisco and New York City, but continue to view early queer activism as a distinctly urban phenomenon.⁹ I hope to expand this new trend of queer history critique by focusing on the actions of queer activists in a region largely thought of as backwards, conservative, and devoid of discernible queer communities in the twentieth century. This research examines cross-state coalitions built

⁸ James T. Sears, *Lonely Hunters: An Oral History of Lesbian and Gay Southern Life, 1948-1968*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997.

⁹ Timothy Stewart-Winter. *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

by student organizers and other activists, focusing specifically on the Carolina Gay Association and its predecessors and contemporaries in the Triangle area of central North Carolina. It then examines how the Southeastern Gay Conferences created by these groups functioned to spread ideas and community foundations throughout the region. Some of these local actions resulted in national attention.¹⁰ Finally, the study examines the aftermath of the conferences—how the groups engaged with other issues including the Equal Rights Amendment and spread local organizing through workshops and yearly meetings. By investigating queer southern activism, I hope to uncover a broader picture of how local organizing efforts, bolstered by national communication networks, led to positive change for queer Americans in the South, and as a result, the nation.

A Queer Southern Historiography

Writing about queer life in the South has been sparse in the historiographic sense. Two of the most influential books of queer Southern history, John Howard's *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* and James T. Sears's *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South*, were published in 1999 and 2001, respectively.¹¹ Prior to John Howard's seminal history *Men Like That*, almost nothing was written about the history of queer life in the South. Howard does far more analysis than Sears in his oral histories, using them to support the claims he makes about queer life in Mississippi, framing them around larger narratives built from archival documents and newspapers. As such, Howard's monograph has had more impact in the long term on historiography. Howard moves away from understandings of World War II as the central moment for the formation of queer identity, and pays attention to what he calls "silences"

¹⁰ Bob Kunst, a Miami gay liberation activist, attended SEGC workshops on non-discrimination ordinances, which ultimately led to the passing and subsequent repeal of the Miami-Dade non-discrimination ordinance, which rose to national attention through Anita Bryant's "Save The Children" campaign. I will explore this further through oral histories collected with several activists.

¹¹James T. Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

in the historical record, framing queerness in rural space as one characterized by movement and mutually understood codes of conduct. Howard also connects increased punitive surveillance of queer sexuality to the Black civil rights movement, a connection that I will make more apparent in my research. However, Howard does not find strong evidence of gay liberation activists in Mississippi. To the extent that Howard connects gay rights to civil rights, he shows that massive resistance to the efforts of civil rights activists in the state led to targeted attacks on activists who were perceived as gay, which had an outsized negative effect on the lives and relative freedoms of gay (white) Mississippians. I assert that instead, the two movements—as well as the women’s movement—were inextricably linked.

These two texts altered the historiographical landscape and opened the South as a place wherein queer life and activism was examined. Sears’s history continues the tradition begun by Allan Bérubé in queer oral history, which has been called integral to queer/feminist methodology.¹² However, Sears does not do a great deal of analytic work, preferring instead to let the stories speak for themselves, and not connecting the various pieces of his Southern queer histories beyond superficial acquaintance between the activists he interviews. Even so, Sears’s interviews provide for a great deal of information about the various activist groups working in the South towards gay liberation in the 1970s, placing organizations such as ALFA and events such as the SEGC into the historical record for the first time.

In *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space and Feminist Activism* (2007) Finn/Anne Enke examines queer community through a feminist lens, shifting focus to the Midwest.¹³ Enke incorporates feminist community-building as queer community-building, and vice-versa. Enke also touches on how movement—through cities along highways and back

¹² Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horatio Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

¹³ Finn Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

roads—and the temporary overtaking of space constituted queer place-building. In the South, this was true as well. As Minnie Bruce Pratt remarked, “there was all this coming and going. Driving. For sex!”¹⁴ My research builds upon Enke’s work, seeking to re-incorporate feminist, specifically lesbian-feminist, actions into the historiography of the broader gay liberation movement in the South. I explore how women saw lesbian-feminism and gay liberation in tension, but also as inextricable parts of their struggles for power over their own lives.

Kevin Mumford’s *Not Straight, Not White: Black Gay Men from the March on Washington to the AIDS Crisis* (2016) begins to fill in some of the gaps in queer historiography by examining Black queer men’s experiences. It is the first such monograph and shows the ways that race and sexuality have been mutually formative to one another. Mumford uses critical race theory to show how intersectional understanding must come into our historical conversations, and how race, gender, class and sexuality have shaped multiple movements and conservative opposition. Mumford considers how queerness alienated Black men within the civil rights movement and shows how multiple layerings of oppression effected them. However, Mumford’s examination of Black queerness focuses primarily on the Northeast, heavily on New York City, DC, and Philadelphia. He also does not include a major consideration outside of men beyond Lorraine Hansberry. In my own research, I consider how Black queer people grappled with the combinations of racial, sexual, and gendered oppression, and whether they were active in their own or multiracial organizations that considered queerness as an identity necessitating the fight for rights. Although the CGA was a primarily white organization, Black men and lesbians made their voices heard at the SEGCS and exerted their own force in their communities and spaces.

Julio Capó’s monograph *Welcome to Fairyland: Queer Miami Before 1940* expands the historiography again, using the locality of Miami to consider a multiracial, transnational South

¹⁴ Pratt, Minnie Bruce. Interview with Hooper Schultz. March 9, 2018.

with a queer community that was well-established prior to World War II.¹⁵ Capó's major intervention is that there are many Souths, and many Floridas, touched by queerness. Examining working class neighborhoods of Caribbean immigrants, Capó shows that queer action and identity were not solely the domain of white middle-class activists, and that queering history must, like Mumford's text asserts, be intersectional. Although Capó's work focuses on a time period prior to that which I am researching, the foundation of Miami's queer community is of utmost importance in relation to my work on Miami-Dade's later nondiscrimination ordinance and Anita Bryant's subsequent backlash.

Jaime Harker's recent text *The Lesbian South* is especially important to this work, as she examines the lesbian history specific to the South and how print-culture and its associated networks functioned to record, uplift, and inspire lesbians. She shows how lesbian-feminists in the South, part of the broader gay liberation culture, had heated conversations about race, class, and even sex itself. "Those skirmishes over 'right' and 'wrong' ways to have sex were," Harker says, not only a major shift from earlier conversations about women's sexuality as a liberatory force, but "they made clear an important distinction between southern lesbian feminists and the wider lesbian feminist movement."¹⁶ Harker posits that southern lesbian feminists, and perhaps all southerners involved in gay liberation, were some of the most enthusiastic about sexuality in the movement. This sexual subversiveness, Harker argues, and I agree, produced a commitment to exploring and celebrating transgressive sexuality within gay liberation.

Frameworks and Methodology

Throughout the thesis, I consider how queer suburban sensibilities, as queer studies scholar Karen Tongson has explored, influenced a sense of action and willingness to take up

¹⁵ Julio Capó, *Welcome to Fairyland: Queer Miami Before 1940*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

¹⁶ Jaime Harker, *The Lesbian South: Southern Feminists, the Women in Print Movement, and the Queer Literary Canon*. Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2018. p. 111.

space for young student activists in the South and lesbian-feminists in Atlanta.¹⁷ I take up how the realities of living outside of major coastal urban industrial centers exerted influence on the development of queer networks in the South, making use of the work of Scott Herring and Doreen Massey, amongst others.¹⁸ As Jaime Harker says, “‘Sense of place’ has often been a traditional way of understanding the distinctiveness of the South, but feminist and queer geographers have shown that space is anything but natural; the organization and imagination of space is deeply implicated in existing power structures and ideologies.”¹⁹ Oral history interviews have provided me with one route to understanding activists approaches to organizing, and how they understood themselves as both members of local communities as well as individuals in a far larger national moment.²⁰

Oral history interviews helped me to understand activists’ memories, experiences, and stories as part of a broader historical context. I conducted six interviews with activists and organizers for various groups in the Triangle (Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill, NC) as well as in Atlanta and Florida. Some of these activists grew up in the region, while others moved to the region for higher education or to tap into activist communities. I focus on the area of Atlanta, the Triangle, and Miami within the South because they were the locations of a range of queer organizations that were tied directly to the SEGCs, as well as nationally publicized political actions concerning LGBTQ rights. I used resources and information available through the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s Southern Oral History Project (SOHP) and Student Activities Archives to contact potential interviewees, and then followed their direction to find

¹⁷ Karen Tongson, *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries*. New York City: NYU Press, 2011.

¹⁸ See Doreen Massey, *For Space*. London: Sage Publications, 2005. and Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.

¹⁹ Jaime Harker, *The Lesbian South: Southern Feminists, the Women in Print Movement, and the Queer Literary Canon*. Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2018.

²⁰ Alessandro Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different?” *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York, 1991), 45-58.

others. I would be remiss to not thank Chris McGinnis, a student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the 1990s, for his extensive work recording the oral histories of gay men in the Triangle. I have relied heavily on the insights of now-gone gay rights activists featured in his interviews, which are housed at the SOHP.

I also use archival sources including newsletters, conference programs, pamphlets, organizational foundation documents, and records compiled at Wilson Library at UNC-Chapel Hill, along with personal papers and more information about the CGA and SEGC from interviewees personal collections, which I am collecting to donate to the Southern Historical Collection at Wilson Library. Local gay newspapers such as Triangle-based *The Front Page* and the Charlotte *Free Press*, magazines such as *Lambda*, and others provide more regional details about how actions were being perceived by the broader queer community. They also point to how gay men and lesbians in the region were interconnected, imagining themselves as part of not only local and regional communities that cared about one another and had similar goals, but party of a national movement that pushed simultaneously for wins at the federal level and gains at the municipal level. Major regional newspapers such as the *News and Observer* and the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* provide context outside of queer organizing. The *Daily Tar Heel*, UNC-Chapel Hill's student newspaper, provided a wealth of coverage about the early days of the CGA, "gay issues" of the time in general, and the formation and straight reception towards the SEGCs on UNC's campus in 1976 and '77.

Chapter Outline

This thesis traces the founding of the Carolina Gay Association (CGA) At the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, its coalescing with other gay liberation and lesbian-feminist activist groups in the Southeast at the Southeastern Gay Conferences, and outcomes of the first three great convergences of queer Southern activists. The narrative is organized chronologically,

with exceptions in the middle chapter wherein thematic importance trumps the chronological progression. The first chapter provides the backdrop of national gay liberation and the political climate that led to the formation of various queer groups as well as opposition to their formation, either by student government, the North Carolina General Assembly, or related institutions. It then lays out how the CGA activists pushed hard for recognition and protection in their community, and how they decided to put on the first SEGC. The middle chapter focuses on the Southeastern Gay Conferences of 1976, 1977 and 1978, and on the events that occurred during them specifically, as well as the issues that emerged from them. The final chapter examines the outcomes of the organizing that coalesced at the SEGCs, specifically *Womonwrites Conferences*, lesbian literary ventures such as *Sinister Wisdom* and *Feminary*, and the *Front Page*. It also examines the anti-discrimination ordinances in Miami-Dade County, to which Anita Bryant's "Save Our Children" traveling homophobic campaign responded. Through this chronicling of a major organizing conference for gay liberation throughout the Southeast, I hope to show how local and regional organizing gives us context for understanding how gay men and lesbians in the South understood themselves as part of a national movement and also a distinct local movement with site-specific goals. I also shed light on how individual gay liberationists and lesbian-feminists were imagining themselves and their region in the face of conservative rhetoric that fronted the South as the bastion of "family-values." I lift up the southerners who dared to dream queer futures in the South, and in doing so, altered the course of American society. "It was a huge moment," said Minnie Bruce Pratt. "It was a huge moment for us, anyway."²¹

²¹ Pratt, Minnie Bruce. Interview with Hooper Schultz. March 8, 2019.

CHAPTER I
THE CAROLINA GAY ASSOCIATION

On November 7, 1971, a motley crew of activists gathered in the living room of a house in the Boylan Heights neighborhood of Raleigh. A Black cab driver, a Black drag queen named Jimmi Dee, a white lesbian couple, and a few other white gay men and women numbering less than a dozen in total were there. This group held the first meeting of the Triangle Gay Alliance (TGA), a gay liberation outfit aiming to make a space for gay men and women in North Carolina. In a house on the aptly named Kinsey Street,²² Bob Bland a self-proclaimed “country boy from rural eastern North Carolina,” hosted the first official meeting of gay liberationists in North Carolina history.²³ Bland, a native North Carolinian, had recently moved back to the area after a year in New York City. There, he had been active in the Gay Liberation Front, lived in a commune known as the 17th Street Collective, and had worked on its publication, *Gay Flames*. But Bland had been active in the gay community and leftist activism in North Carolina before he ever moved to New York. In the Triangle prior to 1970, he associated with a radical “affinity group” that also helped to publish the leftist newspaper *Carolinas’ Plain Dealer*.²⁴ He had decided to move back home in 1971 to be closer to his family in Goldsboro, and brought his experiences working for gay liberation with him, founding the TGA.²⁵

²² 412 Kinsey St. still stands, and has been on the National Park Service shortlist for recognition, but has not been selected. Currently, there is no marker at the house.

²³ James T. Sears. *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

²⁴ James T. Sears. *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

²⁵ James T. Sears. *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

The TGA's lofty goal at its outset was to "promote the gay community's social and political position, educate society as to the talents and contributions of gay people, provide services for all people in the gay community, and break down barriers which separate gay people from one another," according to a spokesman.²⁶ Gay liberationists with the TGA fought for sexual rights, which were classified as a felony under North Carolina's crimes against nature statute.²⁷ Their activism did not stop there, however. They also called for better access to more information about homosexuality for gay people in the state, such as theories on the psychological health and well-being of gay men and lesbians as well as more information about health matters. They hoped to educate others on this range of topics, planning a Speakers Bureau from the outset, and planned to dialog with religious communities. The TGA was broad-minded in its hopes for a better world, being conscientious of verbalizing that the group was open to all men and women, while recognizing that there were other barriers oppressing gay people at that time, "especially those of race and class."²⁸ Bland later remarked, the Raleigh collective "brought in a lot of people who would never have participated in the gay movement in New York City."²⁹ From its outset, North Carolina gay liberation sought to build coalitions across categories of race and gender.

Gay men and women were fed up with being treated like second-class citizens. They were ready to fight for their rights, not just in urban centers, but in their home states as well. As an unnamed spokesperson told North Carolina State University's *Technician*, life for gay Americans needed improvement. "It's hell all over."³⁰ Across the state, organizations such as the

²⁶ *Technician*, Vol. 52 No. 43, January 12, 1972

²⁷ N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-177: "If any person shall commit the crime against nature, with mankind or beast, he shall be punished as a Class I felon."

²⁸ *Technician*, Vol. 52 No. 43, January 12, 1972

²⁹ James T. Sears. *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

³⁰ *Technician*, Vol. 52 No. 43, January 12, 1972

Charlotte Gay Liberation Front and newspapers such as *Asterisk** and the *Carolinas' Plan Dealer* rose and fell in the early 1970s as their politically-minded founders moved on to Atlanta or San Francisco. Unfortunately, the TGA was short-lived as well, folding in 1973. But the political landscape in the Research Triangle area of North Carolina—the area in the central part of the state anchored by the college-filled trio of cities Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill—had been fundamentally changed. The new gay liberation ethos growing out of leftist organizing across the nation, especially the Deep South's civil rights movement as well as older homophile political organizing by D.C. gay rights activists Frank Kameny and Barbara Gittings along the east coast, had spread a heightened sense of momentum through the bars and informal social networks of gay men and women in the 1960s and early '70s. Gay people in North Carolina were prepared to act for change.

Less than 300 miles to the north in Washington, D.C., Frank Kameny and the homophile organization the Mattachine Society had been actively protecting for gay rights since the early 1960s. In collaboration with Barbara Gittings and the lesbian homophile groups the Daughters of Bilitis, they had also organized The Annual Reminder, a yearly picket of the White House, Pentagon, Philadelphia's Independence Hall, and the United Nations, since 1965.³¹ About a dozen activists coalesced from all over the mid-Atlantic for these small and relatively tame pickets. Gittings and Kameny, who led two of the most influential of these early organizations, would become major inspirations to the later actions of the Carolina Gay Association and speakers at their first conference in 1976. A full eight years before the Stonewall Riots, Kameny wrote to then-President John F. Kennedy: "The homosexuals in this country are increasingly less willing to tolerate the abuse, repression, and discrimination directed at them, both officially and unofficially, and they are beginning to stand up for their rights and freedoms as citizens no less

³¹ "Homosexuals Stage Protest In Capital." *New York Times* (1923-Current file); May 30, 1965; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* with Index; pg. 42.

deserving than other citizens of those rights and freedoms. They are no longer willing to accept their present status as second-class citizens and as second-class human beings; they are neither.”³²

In the integration-resistant South, many white conservatives also connected homosexuality to miscegenation, or race-mixing, as well as communism and pedophilia. This concern with amorphous ‘family values’ had its origins in segregationist ideology but morphed easily to cover non-marrying gay men and women as well as gender-nonconformity. As Robert Self explains, “opposition to desegregation evolved into opposition to alleged moral subversion of all sorts.”³³ To be gay or lesbian in the 1960s meant simply that one was not a full citizen. Gay people were regarded as ‘unproductive,’ the antithesis of the post-war ideal of the married heterosexual couple with children and a two-car garage. These frustrating conditions—suppression, harassment, denigration—led to the organizing of the first gay rights groups across the nation.

In the dominant narratives of the gay rights movement, the Stonewall Riots in New York City mark the beginning. Yet the Stonewall Riots did not occur in a vacuum. Activists at the time and now understood that Stonewall was in fact the final culmination of night after night of raids on New York City gay bars, where patrons would be shown on the nightly news and dragged away in paddy wagons. As activist Tom Carr, who grew up in a New York suburb, said: “The riots didn't just happen, you know, one night. Over the course of many months leading up to the riots there were raids on all these bars and as a teenager you know, night after night, I would see

³² Frank Kameny, Letter to John F. Kennedy, May 15, 1961. Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. White House Central Name File. Kameny, Franklin E. JFKWHCNF-1418-002. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum

³³ Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s*. First ed. New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012

on the evening news coverage of people being busted in bars and dragged away in paddy wagons.”³⁴

In the university towns of the Triangle area, gay men and especially lesbians found a place to establish their communities and engage in an arts community bolstered by the liberal-leaning academic environs and state government jobs. They were among numerous gay and lesbian communities that thrived in the South, especially in its working-class cities such as Birmingham, its port cities such as Charleston, and the many college towns dotting the southern states. In Jill Johnston’s 1973 autobiographical *Lesbian Nation*, she casually brings up the South as a hotbed of lesbian community and organizing, “go[ing] into the deep South with a lesbian nation bus,” and goes on to talk candidly about her time in North Carolina with other southern lesbians. The major players in the national conversation on lesbian feminism acknowledged the deep South as a key space from which Lesbian Nation was being born. Johnston romanticized the culture as productive for lesbians, in typical tongue-in-cheek fashion. “I never saw so many dykes collected in one place before,” Johnston quipped. “I thought the Carolinas must be rank with sick family life.”³⁵

Queer sexuality was homegrown, asserting itself within the South in the civil rights movements of the 1960s, and being acknowledged, though not condoned, even earlier.³⁶ Historian Donna Jo Smith summarizes this mythologizing of southern traditionalism well in her essay “Queering the South,” writing: “Mythic conception of southern identity assumes that southerners have greater attachments to home, family, place, religion and traditional gender roles, as interpreted within a conservative discourse that defines family as exclusively

³⁴ Tom Carr. Interview with Hooper Schultz. August 9, 2018.

³⁵ Jill Johnston. *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution*, Simon and Schuster, 1973. p. 47.

³⁶ John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999,) p. 150.

heterosexual, same-sex desire as evil, and gender roles as essential.”³⁷ Through this absorption of southern identity, many twentieth-century North Carolinians accepted that they were ‘naturally’ traditionalists.³⁸ Gay men and women were intentionally erased from the picture. However, the existence of several gay organizations across the state shows that this erasure was not total and did not reflect the truth of gay North Carolinians. Organizations such as the Guilford Gay Alliance, Eastern Gay Alliance, Charlotte Gay Liberation Front, and Triangle Gay Alliance show that the move towards gay organizing was statewide. In Chapel Hill, Carolina Gay Association (CGA) activists saw overcoming the silence surrounding homosexuality as fundamental to their struggle for rights. “Probably the biggest problem that we face is the invisibility of being gay,” said CGA chairperson Don Chauncey in a 1975 interview with the *Daily Tar Heel*, UNC-Chapel Hill’s student newspaper.³⁹

Gay men and women organizing in opposition to the late 1960s’ repressive climate founded the Duke Gay Alliance (DGA) in 1972 and its Lesbian Rap Group, which split off to become Triangle Area Lesbian Feminists or TALF in 1973.⁴⁰ The DGA announced its intent to form as a result of similar Gay Liberation Front groups organizing at schools such as Columbia and Michigan.⁴¹ The DGA was not able to self-sustain—it folded after its first groups of students left and restarted a number of years later. TALF, however, continued for many years. In February of 1974, the Carolina Gay Association (CGA) formed at the University of North

³⁷ Donna Jo Smith, “Queering the South,” *Carryin’ On In The Gay and Lesbian South*, edited by John Howard. p. 379. NYU Press: New York. 1997

³⁸ According to the Chicago School of Media Theory, “Interpellation is the constitutive process where individuals acknowledge and respond to ideologies, thereby recognizing themselves as subjects.” <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/interpellation/>

³⁹ Dave Duckett, “Homosexuality: The controversy of the shadowy sex might not be over yet.” *Carolina*, October 23, 1975. Box 1, Clippings, Carolina Gay Association Records #40491 Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁴⁰ “Notes Toward a History,” *Feminary* 9, 1 (1978): 26-28, 56, as cited by James T. Sears in *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 346.

⁴¹ “Duke Gay Alliance,” *Student Organizations of Duke University [1972-1973]*, pg. 25, News Service Subject Files, 1930-[ongoing]., Duke University’s University Archives, 1st 9: D Box 118, Durham, NC.

Carolina at Chapel Hill—the oldest still-functioning student group of its kind in North Carolina and one of the oldest in the nation.

Birthered early in the spring semester of 1974, the CGA had its roots in a gay awareness rap group. Rap groups were loosely organized student-led groups that focused on mutual support, peer counseling, and working on the shared problems of a group of individuals. One of many such consciousness-raising groups popularized by the women’s movement of the time, it was officially recognized by Dean of Student Affairs Donald Boulton on Friday, September 6, 1974. The group wasted no time in getting things started, holding a “Grand Opening” party ten days later in the basement of the graduate dormitory, Craige Hall.⁴² Students also distributed posters around campus that, in a coy nod to Greek Life, featured three of the Greek letter lambda, λ. “RUSH to the Carolina Gay Association OPEN HOUSE,” said the poster, another play on Greek fraternity and sorority rush processes. The next line encouraged readers to “come out” to Craige Green Room, another double entendre imploring gay students to be proud of their identities. Speakers were advertised and refreshments were promised.⁴³

The CGA’s founders included a number of graduate students. Tom Carr was a first-year graduate student in botany at the time, beginning his first semester in the fall of 1974. Carr saw one of these first flyers, a yellow eight-by-eleven sheet of paper stuck to his dormitory wall. “I think it was for the gay awareness consciousness raising [group] which Dan Leonard was instrumental in. It may have been for Carolina Gay Association.” Carr was newly out of the closet and eager to make new friends after moving to North Carolina from New Jersey. He immediately got involved with the new organization. “At any rate it was for something, so you

⁴² “Gays recognized by Dean Boulton” *The Daily Tar Heel*, September 10, 1974.

⁴³ CGA poster reprinted in *The Daily Tar Heel*, Vol. 83, No. 12. September 13, 1974. p. 1.

know I went to the first meeting which was very conveniently located in the graduate dorm.... Same place I lived.”⁴⁴

CGA members recognized the group’s unique historical and political position. Two of the members of the CGA had gone to Rutgers University in New Jersey where the Rutgers University Homophile League (RUHL) had been active since at least 1970. “There were some graduate students from New Jersey – who they knew exactly what they were doing,” remembered one local politician who was sympathetic to the CGA and impressed with their effectiveness.⁴⁵ Emboldened by the victory and quick mythology of the Stonewall Riots, activists encouraged by youth movements began to found groups across the country. The DGA’s newsletter, the *Gay Morning Star*, expressed this sense of optimism best, evincing “The changes since the 1969 Stonewall Riot are epochal; with Harvard, Princeton, MIT, etc., etc., in the van on campus gay liberation, could Duke be far behind?”⁴⁶

Later, historians would see the gay liberation and homophile movements as distinct and often opposing threads of gay rights activism. However, the CGA’s student activists involved themselves with and borrowed from both, oftentimes seeing them as one continuous movement. Framing themselves in the liberation model popularized by Black Power and Civil Rights organizers as well as the women’s movement, the CGA’s application for recognition stated about gay students: “This sizable – but often unseen – minority can benefit from University recognition in the same ways as the Association of Women Students and the Black Student Movement benefit women and Blacks [sic] respectively.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Tom Carr. Interview with Hooper Schultz. 9 August 2018.

⁴⁵ Interview with Joseph A. Herzenberg by Joseph Mosnier, 27 July 1995. A-0381 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁴⁶ “Duke Gay Alliance,” Student Organizations of Duke University [1972-1973], pg. 4, News Service Subject Files, 1930-[ongoing]., Duke University’s University Archives, 1st 9: D Box 118, Durham, NC.

⁴⁷ Application for Recognition, July 29, 1974. Carolina Gay Association Records. Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The CGA's founders recognized that the men in their rap group at the Campus Lutheran Center craved recognition as a group worth their salt. "Such a group needs the dignity and legitimacy which comes with formal University recognition as a valid organizational entity," they wrote in their application to the Dean of Student Affairs. They saw themselves as filling an explicit need for fellowship, camaraderie, and mutual support at UNC. According to the numbers, they were right. The CGA grew quickly, from 25 rap group members in the spring of 1974 to between 75 and 100 CGA members in its first year.⁴⁸ Despite early resistance, the CGA remained an integral part of student life on campus, despite name changes and the inevitable turnover of student activists every four years. In the mid-1990s, a local gay politician asserted that the CGA remained "the most important gay organization in the state."⁴⁹

Yet the CGA did not grow to be the institution it became without a fight. Before funding had even been allotted to the group, other entities on campus questioned whether they should be allowed to receive funds from student government. Less than a week after the CGA's admittance as a campus organization, Student Body President Marcus Williams told the *Daily Tar Heel*, UNC's student newspaper, "an organization composed of anonymous members requesting SG [Student Government] funds 'might be sorely disappointed,'" referring to the CGA's practice of respecting the privacy of members who may not be out to all friends, coworkers, and family by not providing the university with official membership lists.⁵⁰ "[UNC-CH] Student Government's funding of the CGA was investigated this summer by the North Carolina Attorney General's office," reported the *Daily Tar Heel* (DTH) in September of 1975. Steve Griffin, the second president of the CGA, told the student paper that a complainant had raised the question as to

⁴⁸ "Gay Society Triples Growth" by Tim Pittman. *Daily Tar Heel*, September 3, 1975.

⁴⁹ Interview with Joseph A. Herzenberg by Joseph Mosnier, 27 July 1995. A-0381 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁵⁰ "Gay association faces problems getting funds," by CB Gaines, *Daily Tar Heel*, September 13, 1975.

whether using \$675 in student fees to fund the CGA broke the North Carolina General Statute 14-177, which at the time deemed homosexuality as a crime against nature and a felony. Luckily for the CGA, Deputy Attorney General Andrew A. Vanore, Jr. assured them that their club broke no state laws.⁵¹ Even so, Vanore was no great champion of gay rights. Asked in another interview for *Summer Life*, a summer term publication of UNC's student government, if the law was unconstitutional, Vanore simply responded: "the North Carolina Supreme Court has held the law as constitutional."⁵²

Dean Boulton and University President Bill Friday also received a litany of complaints and concerns from alumni and North Carolinians following the group's official recognition and subsequent writeup in the *DTH*. Boulton did not alert CGA student members to this barrage, according to activist memory, but various responses in his papers at the university archives show his calm and measured responses. "I believe in the right and freedom of this group and any other group to organize in our society and to stand for those things in which they believe," Boulton wrote back to one concerned donor. "I do not ask that they agree with me, only that they have the responsibility to state their beliefs openly and respect the rights of others." Boulton's words use the same individual rights rhetoric sweeping the country at the time, used by Civil Rights organizers and the Women's Movements, as well as the CGA itself.

Funding from the Campus Governing Council (CGC) continued to be a yearly problem. The student government repeatedly questioned the necessity of CGA receiving student funds at the yearly budget meeting until at least 1979. These institutional pressures caused the CGA to assert its purpose as an educational and support outlet early and often.⁵³ "We knew that we were

⁵¹ Barry Smith with Tom O'Neal. "N.C. Attny. General Probes Gay Funding," *Summer Life: A Publication Of UNC Student Government*, July 28, 1975. Carolina Gay Association Records #40491

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ "CGA funds – financing a lifestyle or educating students?" by the CGA, *The Daily Tar Heel*, November 22, 1976.

very controversial,” said Tom Carr. “There was always carping about what tiny little funding we got.”⁵⁴

Within, the CGA continued to struggle with issues of racial diversity and gender inclusion. White women became more substantial participants by the organization’s third year, including a president, Karen Peterson.⁵⁵ In its early years, there were no Black student leaders in the CGA. As time wore on, this whitening of the organization, coupled with the history of segregation in the South, led few if any Black UNC students to join the ranks of the CGA. Black gay students at UNC describe “pressure to make a choice,”⁵⁶ to identify as either Black *or* gay. Many chose the Black Student Movement and its male choir, known as a haven for Black gay students, instead of the CGA.⁵⁷ Although not specifically named as a white organization, queer spaces and organizations are oftentimes marked as such in other ways. As other scholars have noted, many homophile and gay liberation spaces were white and difficult to access for queers of color. “Gay rights” organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign today continue to be named and created in ways that are coded as white and middle-class.⁵⁸ Despite its relative racial homogeneity, the CGA continued to support Black students on campus, and dialogued at various conferences about the need its members saw within the group for racial diversity. However, the CGA’s well-intentioned efforts did not always garner results.

The CGA faced a number of obstacles as it grew and asserted itself within its first year as an official student group. Before the fall semester began in 1975, it grappled with the position of

⁵⁴ Tom Carr. Interview with Hooper Schultz. August 9, 2018.

⁵⁵ *Lambda: The Newsletter of the Carolina Gay Association*, Vol. 2, No. 3. May 1977. in the Carolina Gay Association Records #40491, University Archives, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁵⁶ Randall Kenan, interview by Turner Henderson, February 20, 2014, N-0032, in SOHP Collection #4007, SHC.

⁵⁷ Evan T. Faulkenbury, Aaron Hayworth; The Carolina Gay Association, Oral History, and Coming Out at the University of North Carolina, *The Oral History Review*, Volume 43, Issue 1, 1 April 2016, Pages 115–137, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ohr/ohv073>

⁵⁸ Anne Balay. *Semi Queer: Inside the World of Gay, Trans, and Black Truck Drivers*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018

gay women within its organization, critiqued male-centric leadership, struggled with funding and other institutional hurdles, and saw little to no coverage of its meetings or events by any news source other than the *Daily Tar Heel* and other campus affiliates. The activists worked hard to rectify these problems, many of the graduate students neglecting their studies to pour themselves into the fledgling group. But not all of these problems came from outside the group or UNC-CH gay community.

Women's issues were a major sticking-point for the early organization of the CGA, whose founders were mostly white males. However, lesbian-feminists organized to make their concerns known, and the CGA responded openly. On a Monday in February of 1975, about 10 student members of TALF, the Triangle Area Lesbian Feminists, arrived at a CGA meeting. Their party composed a substantial number for a meeting of forty in total. The TALF members were there to protest perceived exclusion.⁵⁹ We can imagine that the women accused the political and social wings of the CGA of misogyny, and of focusing solely on the needs of gay men to the detriment of women students. Such conversations happened often over the course of the 1970s in southern gay liberation circles, Susan Johnston and Minnie Bruce Pratt remembered.⁶⁰ By the end of the meeting, the all-male, all-white organization of the CGA had capitulated to the concerns of the lesbian-feminists. Nonetheless, the TALF members rejected their offer for inclusion, instead saying that they would continue to work separately as they still felt oppressed by the men of CGA.⁶¹

Political actions by lesbian-feminists such as the one taken at the CGA meeting were common for the time, when lesbian women were being left out of both the mainstream women's movement organizations such as National Organization for Women as well as increasingly male-

⁵⁹ Tim Pittman, "CGA notes some progress," *The Daily Tar Heel*, February 5, 1975.

⁶⁰ Johnston, Susan. Interview with Hooper Schultz. August 9, 2018. and Pratt, Minnie Bruce. Interview with Hooper Schultz. March 9, 2019.

⁶¹ Ibid.

centric mainstream gay liberation movement. The Stonewall Riot, often considered in popular memory to be the spark in the powder keg of gay liberation, was led by working-class Puerto Ricans, Black men and women, butch lesbians and transgender women. Yet their involvement in the uprising was quickly erased by white male activist, who were considered more palatable to the American public.

Despite moves towards respectability and palatable public faces, by no means were the openly gay groups considered newsworthy—aside from shock value— or a part of mainstream life to their broader communities. The CGA and other newly-formed gay associations like it, such as the Eastern Gay Alliance (EGA) in Greenville, North Carolina, were oftentimes overlooked or not considered newsworthy by their campus papers and other mainstream news organizations. Getting any positive press coverage, or even getting a paper to run an advertisement for meeting, was a struggle. However, by 1974 the *Charlotte Free Press*, a gay newspaper, was publishing in the state. The *Free Press* ran ads for the CGA, covering their events and speakers as well as publishing letters written by CGA members and other gay people in the Carolinas. *The Barb*, an Atlanta gay newspaper, also published ads and articles about the CGA and its activities. The organizations were not shy about calling attention to perceived slights from their local papers. A letter to the *Fountainhead*, the student paper at East Carolina University where the Eastern Gay Alliance was based, was signed by seven students, including EGA co-founder Judi Willis.

The gay student groups in North Carolina shared a willingness to interact directly with oppositional forces, as well as to demand equal coverage of their events and statements as other student groups did. Groups such as the CGA and EGA saw media and publicity as a force that they could use to spread their message and help others learn about their existence. They sent in strong and confrontational pieces, signed with their names, that signaled their willingness to be

combative to get recognition. For instance, Judi Willis and the EGA sent a letter to the *Fountainhead* after a reporter stated that the East Carolina University newspaper had reached their “gay quota” —content relating to gay people—for the year.⁶² “We also protest the highly unprofessional manner in which staff member Pat Coyle related the news of the refusal,” they wrote. The staffer had apparently stated that the *Fountainhead* were in danger of becoming “‘The Gay Newsletter,’ and “there were no gays on campus until we did those articles, then 99 percent of the campus came out.” In response the EGA mockingly wrote: “Sure, Pat.”⁶³ CGA member Tom Carr voiced complaints that the media erased the presence of his group, blasting the Chapel Hill and Raleigh papers for ignoring CGA events and advertisement requests. “Only WDBS (the Duke University FM radio station) and the *Tar Heel* will carry our meeting announcements,” Tom Carr, CGA publicity director, said.”⁶⁴

The *Daily Tar Heel* would prove invaluable to the CGA in its early years. The *DTH* regularly reported on the CGA and advertised its events. This was also important because the *DTH* functioned as the de facto newspaper for much of the town of Chapel Hill as well. The newspaper to this day still has a ‘city desk’ that concerns itself not with the university but with the on-goings around town. So many non-students reading the paper in 1974 would have been able to see the advertised meetings, which were open to everyone. Other student newspapers did cover the organization, but when they did, it was often in a special “homosexuality” issue. Other times they would present an article by a gay activist and then side it next to a vitriolic homophobic attack for so-called balance.

⁶² Jay Silva, Lynn Addleman, Paul Tyndall, Perry Purvis, Edith Webber, C.R. Knight, T.L. Leggette, C.R. Williams Jr., Jodie McDowell, Robbin McDowell, and Judi Willis. “Gay Alliance Hits Lack of Coverage,” *Fountainhead*, April 29, 1976.

⁶³ “Gay Alliance Hits Lack of Coverage.”

⁶⁴ Tim Pittman, “CGA notes some progress,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, February 5, 1975.

Despite all these hurdles, the CGA managed to bring major speakers—such as Barbara Gittings—to campus in their first year as an official organization. Gittings arrived in April of 1975, requesting a fee of \$150 to speak at the Student Union. The *Daily Tar Heel* covered the speech, titling its article on its main takeaway. “Gittings: gays should be candid.”⁶⁵ Gittings speech on campus was not only important in the sense that Gittings was a behemoth of the early gay rights movement, but also because it points to how the gay liberation activists on UNC’s campus thought of themselves. The article explains that the gay rights movement started not with Stonewall, but with the foundation of Mattachine Society in San Francisco in 1950.⁶⁶ The CGA also established a library on homosexuality and gay-themed topics that first operated out of graduate student Don Chauncey’s office in Manning Hall. The library quickly outgrew the space and moved to the Student Union, and then moved to various buildings for a number of years until it finally became what is now the permanent LGBTQ Center on UNC’s campus.

The CGA tackled political and educational issues. It also developed a strong social wing that aimed to reach out to newly out gay men and women, headed by Dan Leonard. The CGA hosted monthly coffeehouses as well as dances, oftentimes in the Craige Hall basement “green room.” The coffeehouses were an opportunity for underage students and non-drinkers to experience a gay social space. These intentional spaces offered a chance for gay students, and often locals as well, to mix and mingle away from the bars on Franklin Street in downtown Chapel Hill.⁶⁷ “They [the bars] weren't especially nice or welcoming,” said Tom Carr, “and so the dances that we did provide a nice alternative.”⁶⁸ By the end of 1976, the CGA was cosponsoring their so-called “tea dances” with national groups such as the National Gay Task

⁶⁵ Vernon Loeb. “Gittings: Gays Should Be Candid.” *Daily Tar Heel*. April 4, 1975.

⁶⁶ Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. White House Central Name File. Kameny, Franklin E. JFKWHCNF-1418-002. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum

⁶⁷ Dan Leonard, Interview with Hooper Schultz. July 28, 2018.

⁶⁸ Tom Carr. Interview with Hooper Schultz. 9 August 2018.

Force. According to one tea dance ad from the *Daily Tar Heel*, dances cost \$2 for entry, and the funds went towards conferences and political efforts.⁶⁹ This particular dance was held at Raleigh's Capital Corral, which went on to become one of the state's most beloved and long-lived gay bars.

At the end of its first year, CGA helped to pass one of the first non-discrimination ordinances in the country. Despite the historic nature of the event, their efforts received no press at the time, and seemed even in the minds of activists remembering their days at the CGA to be a blip. Yet in September of 1975, Chapel Hill's town council passed an employment non-discrimination ordinance that protected gay men and women explicitly in public employment. Several CGA students simply showed up to the town council meeting, sitting in the audience, and when the time came for commentary on the proposed improvements to the current ordinance, which did not include sexual orientation, asked that "sexual and affectational preference" be added to the list of protected identities. There was no major pushback, and the council members were amenable. Joseph Herzenberg, who was on the Chapel Hill Town Council from 1979-81 and again from 1987-93, remembered the moment: "A bunch of students – mainly graduate students – five or six of them from what was then the Carolina Gay Association – which was pretty new, was less than a year old – went to a work session of the Board of Aldermen where they were discussing a new personnel ordinance and asked if they would add and they used the term which is pretty unique, "affectational preference," as a protected class in the town's personnel ordinance."⁷⁰ At the time, only three municipalities in the nation—East Lansing and Ann Arbor in Michigan, and Washington, D.C.—had passed any protections for LGBTQ people.

⁶⁹ Ad, *The Daily Tar Heel*, December 3, 1976. p. 2.

⁷⁰ Interview with Joseph A. Herzenberg by Joseph Mosnier, 27 July 1995. A-0381 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The administration of the Town of Chapel Hill did not see the protection as especially newsworthy or shocking. On September 8, the minutes of the Town of Chapel Hill Board of Aldermen meeting noted: “A representative of the Carolina Gay Association presented a petition requesting that the phrase ‘sexual or affectional preference, marital status, or the lack thereof,’ be inserted in the Personnel Ordinance in the appropriate sections dealing with lack of discrimination against person in Town policy of hiring and promoting... Said motion was unanimously carried.”⁷¹ The Personnel Ordinance was then adopted during a meeting one week later. Once again, the motion to protect the rights of gay government workers was unanimous.⁷² “No controversy at all.”⁷³ The no-fuss acceptance of the Town Council had a positive effect on the lives and attitudes gay men and women who lived near Chapel Hill, despite not seeming like a major moment for student activists who were ready for a fight.

Students would face a more dramatic, if not as publicly successful, activist moment as they faced off with a popular local business. In late September of 1975 the manager of He’s Not Here, himself a gay undergraduate according to CGA members, threatened to unplug the jukebox and shut down the bar unless two gay men stopped dancing together. The two men, Tom Carr and a friend, objected, saying that if they were straight they would not have been asked to stop. The manager did not back down, and so the two and the group of gay people they were with left. The CGA, of which Carr was the Publicity Chair at the time, immediately went to work with public action and press. By October, the CGA was distributing leaflets urging a complete boycott of the bar by all gay people and their straight supporters. A CGA chairperson also told reporters

⁷¹ Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Mayor and the Board of Aldermen of the Town of Chapel Hill, September 8, 1975. https://townhall.townofchapelhill.org/records/Minutes/1975/750908_BM.PDF

⁷² Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Mayor and the Board of Alderman of the Town of Chapel Hill, September 15, 1975. https://townhall.townofchapelhill.org/records/Minutes/1975/750915_BM.PDF

⁷³ Interview with Joseph A. Herzenberg by Joseph Mosnier, 27 July 1995. A-0381 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

that the group was pursuing more legislation that would prevent discrimination at public establishments. “We see the incident as an invasion of our rights,” Don Chauncey told the *Daily Tar Heel*, once again using civil rights and discrimination language popularized by Black civil rights activists. “Whether or not it is tied to the management’s concept of the social norm, we are being denied something another individual is allowed to do just because we are gay.”⁷⁴

The CGA’s boycott of He’s Not Here bar seems to be one political action which did not have the desired public impact of some of their other causes and projects. The management and others interviewed seemed confident that they had the law, and “social norms,” on their side. In the newspaper, there was never a resolution reported on, and interviews with Carr and others are inconclusive about the impact of the leafletting. One activist remembered that ultimately backchannel pressures, a phone call to the owner, resulted in a quiet reprimanding of the manager and a change in policy. This development, though positive for gay rights in Chapel Hill, accompanied no announcement and no claim of victory by the CGA.

The Southeastern Gay Conferences were the largest and most ambitious of all of the myriad actions that the CGA and other affiliated gay liberation student and community groups worked towards in the early years of North Carolina’s gay rights movement. One of the most far-reaching in terms of size and geographic reach, it started quite humbly in the Quaker Friends Meeting House in Chapel Hill with a group of graduate students. A Human Sexuality Information Counseling and Services (HSICS) rap group’s 12-week-long cycle was ending. At the final meeting, Tom Carr proposed a new event to bring their discussions public— the Southeastern Gay Conferences. This series of conferences began in the spring of 1976, but they had their impetus earlier. A series of consciousness-raising, or CR groups, had begun to form as a corollary to the CGA and its affiliated peer-counseling program, HSICS. One of these CR

⁷⁴ Tim Pittman, “CGA distributes leaflets to urge boycott,” *Daily Tar Heel*. October 29, 1975.

groups, led by graduate student David Haltiwanger, featured a couple of weekly meetings in which the participants voiced their hope that the CR group would continue in one form or the other. However, Haltiwanger felt that it was very important for newly out individuals to not remain in insular pods, but to take what they had learned out of the CR group and into the world. He made it very clear that there would be an end date. Tom Carr, one of the individuals who had hoped there would be a way for the group to continue their readings, discussions, and panels, spoke up. He had an idea.

Carr, a white CGA member and botany graduate student from New York, had been at Rutgers as an underclassman when the Rutgers University Student Homophile League had organized a series of conferences for gay students and other gay people in the Tri-State area. The first of these conferences was called the “Conference on Gay Liberation.”⁷⁵ Carr carried the formatting for his new conference directly from what he remembered in New Brunswick. “Same basic layout of a weekend conference with Friday night registration and various social events either, you know, dance, cabaret, that kind of thing,” he said. “Meetings, workshops, speeches, symposiums, displays all day Saturday, and on Sunday more recreational things like barbecues and picnics, what have you.”⁷⁶ The rest of the CR group, including Dan Leonard, Susan Johnston, and other activists, agreed to the idea, and shortly thereafter, planning began, with Carr as Conference Coordinator.

Following a planning meeting in early January 1976, the CGA organized an elaborate first conference with help from gay newspapers across the Southeast, such as *The Barb* in Atlanta and the *Charlotte Free Press*. Groups such as the Eastern Gay Alliance and the Duke Gay Alliance attended the first planning meeting, and lent speakers, ideas, and space in their

⁷⁵ Tactics For Change: Results of a Conference on Gay Liberation (April 30 – May 2, 1971), 1972. Rutgers Student Homophile League. MssCol 18814; b.6 in International Gay Information Center Collection. Publications and typescripts, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

⁷⁶ Tom Carr. Interview with Hooper Schultz. August 9 2018.

homes to the conference. TALF and other area gay men and women not connected to universities contributed resources and time to ensure that the conference was advertised to and accommodating of gay people across the Southeast.

The Southeastern Gay Conferences (SEGCs) would come to be one of the most influential of the CGA's myriad actions, projects, and political moves, continuing throughout the 1980s into the 1990s in one form or the other, traveling to cities and college campuses throughout the Southeast, and involving gay activists from across the country. In the space of the conference radicals, progressives, and more conservative gay people would convene and interact to form a multitude of other political organizations, social clubs, gay cultural forces, and individual connections that fed gay life in the South in the late twentieth century.

CHAPTER II
THE SOUTHEASTERN GAY CONFERENCES, 1976 TO 1978

*“We lived off of those three days for the rest of the year.
So many of us worked in relative isolation.”*⁷⁷ — Jim Baxter

In the fall of 1975, at the last meeting of his consciousness-raising group, Tom Carr proposed a new conference event for the Carolina Gay Association. The CGA members present would emulate a similar conference put on by the Rutgers University Student Homophile League since 1970.⁷⁸ Although at least one member expressed concern—weren’t things difficult for them as it stood?—the remainder of the group approved and in Carr’s words, “insanity prevailed.”⁷⁹ Immediately, the members began to reach out to gay activists and organizers across the Southeast, from Gainesville, Florida to Memphis, Tennessee. Members of the Eastern Gay Alliance, who had been exchanging letters with CGA members, piled in a van and drove the three hours from Greenville, North Carolina to Chapel Hill for the first meeting in early January 1976. Activists from Greensboro in the west, including Jim Baxter of the Guilford Gay Alliance, also arrived for that first planning meeting. The CGA hoped to put on the conference in less than three months’ time. The group set a date for the first weekend in April 1976. Organizing and hosting an openly gay public event was an admirable goal and astonishing triumph for the CGA

⁷⁷ Interview number K-0840 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) at The Southern Historical Collection, The Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC-Chapel Hill.

⁷⁸ Tom Carr. Interview with Hooper Schultz. 9 August 2018.

⁷⁹ “Program of the Third Annual Southeastern Conference of Lesbian and Gay Men,” *Rainbow History Project Digital Collections*, accessed February 12, 2019, <https://archives.rainbowhistory.org/items/show/1348>.

less than two years into their controversial existence as a student group. “We were excited to do it,” remembered Susan Johnston. “We thought it was cool and it appealed to our contrariness.”⁸⁰ The Southeastern Gay Conferences (SEGCs) would prove to be one of the most powerful organizing spaces for the gay liberation movement in the Southeast in the 1970s, and their capacity to create synergistic new cultural and political formations represent a unique moment in pre-AIDS gay rights activism.

The groups organizing the conferences recognized the need for broad-ranging tactics in order to attract a large group of gay men and lesbians to the conferences, and they used a variety of social and literary networks to reach their target audiences. Registration was advertised in multiple gay periodicals across the Southeast, including the *Atlanta Barb* and the *Charlotte Free Press*.⁸¹ The Duke Gay Alliance and TALF also worked to encourage members and broader Triangle community to register, also fielding speakers for the event. Carr and other CGA committee members set to work soliciting speakers for the conference. They aimed high, considering multiple individuals at the forefront of the gay liberation’s national conversation.

SEGC 1: Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1976

The CGA organizers saw speakers as their most important draw for the first conference. The speakers represented a cross-section of well-known public gay figures in the early 1970s. The most famous was speaker Dr. Frank Kameny, the homophile activist whose Mattachine Society protests in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. had been such major focal points of 1960s gay rights activism. Tom Carr described Kameny as “the closest we’d ever get to gay royalty in

⁸⁰ Johnston, Susan. Interview with Hooper Schultz. July 28, 2018.

⁸¹ “Carolina Gay Association Hosts S.E. Gay Conference,” *The Atlanta Barb*. March, 1976, in the Carolina Gay Association Records #40491, University Archives, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.40491

those days.”⁸² Other featured activists were more celebrities and popular culture figures. Speaker David Kopay was a former running back for the Washington Redskins who had come out of the closet in December of 1975 after retiring. Joining him was Dean Perry Young, who was writing a book on homosexuality jointly with Kopay. Finally, Jewish lesbian activist Loretta Lottman of the Nation Gay Task Force, the recently renamed liberal offshoot of the GLF called the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), rounded out the speakers’ schedule for the weekend.

The conference was a social event as well as a political action. David Haltiwanger, a white CGA organizer and graduate student from Jacksonville, remembered that his brother showed up in a truck from Gainesville, Florida, for one of the conferences. David and his brother were not out to each other at the time, and his brother worked at a diner in Florida. Yet, somehow, he had heard of the conference and made the long trip up, without thinking that David would be there. Dan Leonard called David over and pointed out the similar last name, which David realized was his younger brother. The Haltiwangers reunited, and David remembered that although his younger brother wasn’t an activist, he had a great time that weekend, and even wound up going home with a friend of David’s much to his older brother’s chagrin.⁸³ The younger Haltiwanger brother’s experience was typical. Many gay people from around the Southeast came to the conferences not for political organizing specifically, but to meet other gay people, hoping for connection, romance, or fun.

The conferences elevated issues of diversity as a major concern for organizing, and the group hoped to reflect what attendees themselves wanted to talk about, rather than just the interests of organizers or speakers. “Dear Friend,” began the pre-conference registration form, evoking the sense of community that the CGA activists hoped to convey through the hosting of

⁸² Tom Carr. Interview with Hooper Schultz. 9 August 2018.

⁸³ David Haltiwanger. Interview with Hooper Schultz. 12 December 2018.

the conference.⁸⁴ These were sent through the mail in an informal mailing list that has since been lost.⁸⁵ The preliminary schedule included myriad events reflect the wide diversity of representatives who would be present at the conference. “Gays who are parents,” “bisexuality,” “lesbian separatism,” and “gays and religion” were just a few of the 27 proposed topics on the mailer.⁸⁶ The pamphlet asked recipients to circle the five that they were most likely to attend.

Lesbian-feminism as a cultural force in the South, mirroring the rest of the nation in the 1970s, was a major influence on the early conferences. Importantly, thriving cultural life centered around women was able to flourish in the North Carolina Piedmont. “The emergence of feminist publishing can thus be seen as a continuation of the traditional sharing of information between women which has always existed,” writes scholar Jennifer Gilbert, “as well as a new departure into a more public and more purposeful expression of a particular feminist view of the world.”⁸⁷ These publications were important avenues for sharing political information and emerging ideas. Importantly, they also connected women with personal ads, musings on life and love, and ways to communicate with far-flung friends without paying long-distance phone bills.⁸⁸ Print culture and the publications associated with cultural feminism were a vast web and lifeline spreading across the country. Assisting in the organizational efforts of individual women and groups, the publishing collectives and printers saw themselves as creating a new culture.

Print circulation was of major importance not only to the lesbian print culture in the South, but to the broader gay liberation movement and homophile movement before it as a way to connect and a means of seeing oneself in the lives and stories of other queer people. The

⁸⁴ 1976 Southeastern Gay Conference pre-registration mailing introduction by Bill O’Neal, in the Carolina Gay Association Records #40491, University Archives, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
⁸⁵ Dan Leonard. Interview with Hooper Schultz. July 26, 2018.

⁸⁶ Southeastern Gay Conference program, 1976, in the Carolina Gay Association Records #40491, University Archives, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁸⁷ Jennifer Gilbert, ““Feminary” Of Durham-Chapel Hill: Building Community Through A Feminist Press,” Master’s Thesis, Duke University, 1993.

<https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/3743/Gilbert%20Master's%20Thesis.pdf?sequence=1>

⁸⁸ Gilbert, p. 9.

welcome pamphlet sent to pre-registrants of the inaugural SEGC asks how the recipient heard about the conference, reflecting an awareness and interest in the variety of informal networks utilized by gay men and lesbians in the 1970s for the sharing of information. Listed as possibilities to check are gay organization, newspaper, radio/TV, nightclub, or other. This list demonstrates how most gay people were keeping in touch with broader gay happenings. Although the nightclub or bar remained a major social and informational hub, the spread of gay newspapers, organizations, and radio stations at this time was palpable. A “literature and information exchange” was planned for the Friday evening of the conference, and it was stressed that group should bring their own pamphlets and flyers to photocopy and hand out. Print culture was seen as vital to the spread of gay liberation. Presses such as Whole Women Press and Night Heron in Durham, NC and Lollipop Power and Carolina Wren Press in Chapel Hill show that the Triangle area of North Carolina was the center of a specific and dedicated women’s publishing community.⁸⁹ Gay papers such as *The Front Page*, *QNotes*, *The Barb*, and *Charlotte Free Press* catered to the men’s community in the state, but also included writing by women. The second conference continued the practice of passing out an evaluation pamphlet, hoping for a post-conference booklet to be published in early June.⁹⁰

Whether through sheer force of will or by the cooperation of the gay men and other groups at the SEGC, room was made specifically for lesbian-feminists to discuss their own issues separately from the rest of the activists gathered. The Triangle Area Lesbian Feminists (TALF) were allotted their own meeting time and potluck dinner in the schedule, reflecting a willingness of conference organizers to consider separatism as a viable and politically efficacious position for lesbians in the late 1970s. In the 1970s as the women’s movement grew, radical

⁸⁹ Julie Enszer, “Night Heron Press and Lesbian Print Culture in North Carolina, 1976-1983,” *Southern Cultures*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. Summer 2015. pp. 43-56.

⁹⁰ Southeastern Gay Conference program, April 1-4, 1977.

lesbian feminists began to separate from mainstream feminist groups, forming their own political organizations. Radical feminists within the women's movement had already begun to move towards a politics of separatism through cultural feminism. This ideology called for a complete separation from men, who radical cultural feminists saw as essentially oppressive and destructive. They called for the creation of inherently productive and revolutionary women's communities based on the presumably shared essential qualities of women. The SEGC pamphlet implies the identity-centric and separate point of this caucus, parenthetically stating "(all lesbians welcome)."⁹¹ A session on Saturday's breakout schedule was more explicit. "Lesbianism and Feminism/Lesbian Separatism," led by Kathy Tomyris of TALF, advertised as "LESBIANS ONLY."⁹²

As Dana Shugar has shown, this political ideology gained traction before the schism wherein lesbians within the women's movement expressed their disillusionment with reformist and heterosexual feminist groups.⁹³ This split of radical cultural lesbian feminism from mainstream feminist organizations was in part due to animosity and homophobia within those feminist circles, including the National Organization for Women (NOW)'s "lavender menace" controversy, in which many suspected lesbians were forcibly expelled from the organization. Many women also saw lesbian-feminism as the rational outcome of feminism, an embrace of the sexual and romantic possibilities of women-with-women, and the abandonment of men. As feminist scholar Kathy Rudy says about the connection between essentialism and cultural feminism, "a movement had emerged which relied heavily on the idea that women constituted a unique identity, that we had special moral attributes, and that being or becoming a 'woman-

⁹¹ Southeastern Gay Conference Program, 1976.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Dana Shugar. *Sep-a-ra-tism and Women's Community*, University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

identified-woman' was the best and most effective way to express feminist politics."⁹⁴ This thought process held great sway over women and their male allies at the SEGC, especially ALFA and TALF's explicitly lesbian-feminist contingencies.

Recognizing and celebrating religious diversity was also important to the activists at the SEGC, showing up not only in the verbiage of the conference panels, but in varied religious services themselves. Pastors and individuals from several local church groups discussed their individual Christian denominations' inclusion and position on gay people. On the last day of the conference, the CGA hosted a Sunday morning church service featuring Episcopalians, Catholics, and Humanist elements. Afterwards, the conference attendees gathered together in the wooded area of the Forest Theatre in Chapel Hill's Battle Park for a picnic. Someone had taken computer paper and written "Southeastern Gay Conference" across it. The group posed for a picture, smiling in the sun. Susan Johnston remembered sitting with her friends, eating food. As groups left, new friends and lovers exchanged phone numbers and addresses. They promised to keep in touch throughout the year, to come visit, and to keep fighting for more acceptance.

It took a large amount of organizational effort and attention to detail to put on the conference.. The small group of graduate students involved in the CGA managed to gain a great deal of traction for the conference through advertisements, mailings, and networking. The importance of media in gay liberation and culture also was reflected in the choice of speakers. Loretta Lottman, former Media Director of the National Gay Task Force, was the first advertised speaker listed in the pre-conference pamphlet. The other speakers, former-NFL player David Kopay and Dr. Kameny, were two other gay figures who were out in the public heterosexual mainstream and featured on TV and in other news sources. The keynote speakers not only spoke on the first evening to welcome attendees but organized specialized time slots during the

⁹⁴ Kathy Rudy. "Radical Feminism, Lesbian Separatism, and Queer Theory." *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001): 191-222. doi:10.2307/3178457.

breakout sessions on Saturday to speak to smaller groups about issues that they saw as important in broader gay culture. The planning of the first SEGC conference heavily reflects the attention given to diversity for gay rights activists during this time, though the conferences do not appear to have been that diverse outright. The majority of attendees were white.

The organizers' attention to detail extended beyond the execution of the conference weekend. On each program, the CGA included an "Evaluation of Conference" form to be filled out upon the attendees' return home and mailed back to Chapel Hill. This form asked questions such as: "How did you learn about the conference?" and asked attendees to list other organizations and bars that they felt should be involved in the coming years. Finally, the pamphlet promised that the SEGC would send a conference retrospective, containing Dr. Kameny's keynote, as well as other pamphlets and summaries of the workshops and panels of the weekend. This and other print materials show how the conference saw itself as an information creator and political action influencer.⁹⁵

The first Southeastern Gay Conference in 1976 was a success, with at least 300 attendees, according to the CGA and other groups.⁹⁶ The *Daily Tar Heel* reported on the conference, erroneously stating that the total attendance was only 20 persons. They corrected the numbers at the back of the next day's issue. The CGA newsletter *Lambda*, which was a result of the first conference, mentions the excitement of the conference planning committee in its October 1976 issue. Spirits were high as the activists headed home to their towns with encouragement, new friends, and new organizations to work with. The planners expected bigger crowds and better programming at the second annual Southeastern Gay Conference.

⁹⁵ Southeastern Gay Conference Program 1976.

⁹⁶ Nancy Mattox, "SE Gay Conference: Gays Discover Identity in Society," *The Daily Tar Heel*, April 5, 1976.

SEGC 2: Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1977

As the interest around the second iteration conference grew, the complexity of the organizational endeavor increased greatly, and with it so too did the level of intricacy concerning the welcome program, housing needs, registration and check-in, and panel setup. The nuts and bolts of putting on a conference were a major load of work that CGA members had to do in addition to their schoolwork as UNC students.⁹⁷ On the welcome statement was also a color-coded key for nametags delineating attendees, organizers, facilitators, major speakers, and local residents. The welcome page of the conference program reflected the increased involvement beyond Chapel Hill, and with it, the increased diversity of attendees. Increased advertising within the pages of the program indicate that businesses also recognized the potential power of the gay liberationists, in their case in dollars.⁹⁸

Riding high off of the excitement of conference one and their successes in Chapel Hill, the CGA and their new conference planning partners began to organize for conference two in earnest. They had a semester leg up on the year before, giving themselves more time to advertise, fundraise, and consider programming. The second conference was also advertised as a “people’s conference,” rather than a CGA conference, reflecting the egalitarian ideals of the gay liberationists in North Carolina and the rest of the region.⁹⁹ About 20 activists, including groups from Athens, GA, the home of the University of Georgia, as well as Richmond, VA attended the first planning meeting on October 23, 1976. The CGA had reserved the entirety of the Student Union at UNC for the April Weekend by November, reflecting the expected size of the

⁹⁷ Southeastern Gay Conference program, April 1-4, 1977.

⁹⁸ Ibid..

⁹⁹ Ibid.

conference, as well as their commitment to its planning. “Our goal is to fill the Great Hall for the opening session!” they quipped in November’s *Lambda*.¹⁰⁰

The CGA and other activists assisting in SEGC planning had once again paid close attendance to issues such as religious diversity and made distinct considerations for differing religious views. The second conference occurred during the beginning of Passover, a major religious holiday for Jewish people. Two separate Pesach Seder dinner and worship events for gay Jews were advertised, prioritizing religious services within the program, one at the campus Hillel, and one at Durham’s Beth El Synagogue, with rides arranged accordingly.¹⁰¹ The attention to Judaism reflected the large amount of radical Jewish activist who had moved from various New Left and Civil Rights movements to the gay liberation movement. Many of the older activists and speakers at the first conferences, including Loretta Lottman, Allen Young, Faygele Ben Miriam, Bob Basker, and others, were red-diaper baby children of Jewish leftists who had worked in left-wing politics in the United States since the Second World War. Young was a fulltime anti-Vietnam War activist and member of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Like North Carolinian and TGA founder Bob Bland, he had lived at the Gay Liberation Front’s 17th Street Collective in Manhattan and worked on *Gay Flames*. Karla Jay was also the child of secular Jewish parents and had joined the Gay Liberation Front directly after Stonewall. The influence of these Jewish radicals on gay liberation was palpable not only in the attention to the religious diversity of the southern gay liberationists, but in the panels on labor politics and grand jury harassment of activists that were features of the conferences as well. Through their

¹⁰⁰ *Lambda: The Newsletter of the Carolina Gay Association*, Vol. 2, No. 3. November 1977. Carolina Gay Association Records #40491

¹⁰¹ Southeastern Gay Conference program, April 1-4, 1977, Box 34, Folder “Carolina Gay and Lesbian Association, 1974-1985,” Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40124, University Archives, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

involvement, the picture of civil rights movements and leftist politics as one larger movement becomes clearer.

Similar backgrounds of some of the conference speakers show the broadening sensibilities of the conference and the fact that the organizers and activists themselves recognized their place within the history of civil rights organizing in the United States. At the SEGC Two in 1977, the speakers who came to Chapel Hill included national fixtures in gay liberation and leftism such as Bob Basker, Barbara Gittings, Jean O’Leary, and Karla Jay with Allen Young. Basker, Jay, and Young were the children of Jewish leftists who were involved in broader civil rights and progressive activism rather than just gay liberation activism. Bob Basker, who was intensely involved in Civil Rights for Black Americans prior to the 1960s, was exemplary of this presence in the movement. However, it is glaring that none of the major speakers of the first three conferences were Black Americans. This problem is not unique to the gay liberation movement, but also appears in the New Left and the women’s movement, where activists would pay their respects to Black civil rights activism but not successfully integrate their organizing.

Basker also gave a speech on the state of the Dade County Gay Rights ordinance in Miami, which had recently passed after the previous year’s conference. In the program, Basker is named the executive director of the Dade County Coalition for Humanistic Rights of Gays (DCCHRG) and the founder of the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA) in Miami, Florida. The program also lists the fact that Basker had three children, tellingly pointing out what many of the activists in the Southeast had in common — they were parents. Susan Johnston, who was a TALF and CGA member, grabbed a Dykes and Tykes pamphlet about defense funds for lesbian mothers

fighting child custody battles from one of the SEGC sessions discussing gay and lesbian parents' issues.¹⁰²

Lesbian-Feminism remained a major organizing and topical force during the second SEGC in 1977, reflecting the cultural importance of women's consciousness to gay women. As Dan Leonard said, "Lesbian potlucks were the best organizing events by far."¹⁰³ Susan Johnston, a member of TALF and the CGA, agreed. "We had a lot of laughs." After the conference's themselves, the main fundraising that the CGA was able to do were TALF's spaghetti dinners, which went on to raise money for AIDS sufferers in later years.¹⁰⁴ Lesbian literary luminaries Parke Bowman, June Arnold, and Bertha Harris of Daughters Inc. attended the second SEGC, and gave a panel discussion on lesbianism, the literary arts, and the difficulties of publishing as a women's press. Many of these women had not yet published any of their later famous writing. The conference is one of the first few times that many of these lesbian print culture women, who would later make up much of the expat southern lesbian literary circle, shared a common space. The conferences served as a space where budding activists, intellectuals, and political players cut their teeth, talked with others about politics and philosophies, and in general learned from other gay southerners who sought to improve the region.

The second conference dove explicitly into radical societal concerns, providing in-depth descriptions and eye-catching titles for each session, with topics such as the relationship between more militant activists and "non-activist gays," and how each could learn from the other. There was also a film screening, the documentary *Some of Your Best Friends*, about the gay liberation movement. Throughout the weekend, the conference screened six films ranging from documentary to short concerning gay and lesbian topics. Health concerns were also at the

¹⁰² Susan Johnston. Interview with Hooper Schultz. July 28, 2018.

¹⁰³ Southeastern Gay Conference program, April 1-4, 1977.

¹⁰⁴ Susan Johnston.

forefront of the conference, with drug use in the gay community becoming a topic of discussion. Tom Carr led a workshop on the making of “poppers,” or amyl and butyl nitrites, which were popular both as a club drug and used as a sex-enhancer by gay men. Rather than taking a side as to their use, the session acknowledged that there were both detractors and enthusiasts. Medical professionals were brought in to discuss venereal disease and psychological issues including internalized homophobia.¹⁰⁵ Beyond the fifty-plus workshops that the conference had in 1977, the October 1976 *Lambda* advertised that the “scope of social events [had] been greatly expanded,” including a gay cabaret and a performance of Loretta Lottman’s satirical play, *The Lesbian Follies*.¹⁰⁶ The activists would take time for dancing and for laughs in between their work to make the world a better place for themselves and others.

The Southeastern Conference of Lesbians and Gay Men: Atlanta, 1978

At the end of the second Southeastern Gay Conference, the Atlanta contingent, led by the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (ALFA), offered to host the next year’s conference in their home city. The ALFA women had experience planning conference through their 1975 Great Southeastern Lesbian Conference, themed “Building a Lesbian Community.”¹⁰⁷ The Atlantans started by establishing a non-profit corporation to assist in fundraising and divest the conference process from its beginnings as an offshoot of the CGA. With the creation of a corporation called SEGC, Inc., the conference would officially and legally become “the people’s conference.” The non-profit also enlisted the support of a number of gay Atlanta lawyers for any legal troubles. By the time of the third conference in 1978, however, cracks were beginning to show in the façade

¹⁰⁵ Southeastern Gay Conference program, April 1-4, 1977.

¹⁰⁶ *Lambda*, October 1976. Box 34, Folder “Carolina Gay and Lesbian Association, 1974-1985,” Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40124, University Archives, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁰⁷ Minnie Bruce Pratt. Interview with Hooper Schultz. March 8, 2019.

of unity between the lesbian-feminists, radical faeries, and other gay people involved in conference planning, particularly the religious gay and lesbian groups like the Catholic gay organization Dignity. One such issue was the growing strength of separatism within lesbian women's circles. Lesbian-feminists began to assert their individual identity and did not want to be subsumed under gay men. They did not want to be called gay women any longer, instead choosing to be called lesbians in order to express their separate power away from gay men.¹⁰⁸ The planning committee changed the title of the conference to the Southeastern Conference of Lesbians and Gay Men to reflect this ideological and lexical shift.

One of the main points of division was the question of women's-only spaces and workshops during the conferences. Many of the Dignity and Episcopalian Integrity members, more conservative than others, did not think that separatism should be a feature of any part of the conference. Six months out from the conference, after a number of highly tensioned meetings, the religious contingency abruptly left, never to return to Southeastern Conference of Lesbians and Gay Men meetings. Dignity and Integrity, the Catholic and Episcopalian groups, took their considerable organizational and financial resources with them. This was not a small blow to the Atlanta conference, but the group moved on with their planning.¹⁰⁹

The third conference, with the organizational power of ALFA behind it, had a production quality benefit from their connections to advertisers, publishers, and other businesses in the city of Atlanta and beyond. The program for the 3rd Annual Conference, March 31 through April 2, 1978, featured advertisements from all over Atlanta as well as major gay bars in a number of other southern towns. The advertisements illustrate the wide variety of businesses owned by and catering to gay clientele in the region. The Buckhead House of Travel offered a "Gay

¹⁰⁸ Tom Carr.

¹⁰⁹ Maria Helena Dolan. Interview with Hooper Schultz. October 16, 2018.

Windjammer Adventure” to cruise the British Virgin Islands.¹¹⁰ Advertisements such as this for a travel agent show the economic power of some gay southerners, who apparently had expendable income for leisure and vacations. The Cinema Gallery on Peachtree Road announced that they were “proud to have [conference-goers] in our city,” and gave times of several movies, including *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Here, we can see that gay people recognized their common culture and lynchpins of such culture like *Rocky Horror*.

Businesses, activists and other individuals in Atlanta recognized the value of the queer dollar and made use of the clear existence of dedicated queer spaces in the metropolitan area prior to the conference. Advertisements for used furniture shared space with a kink and custom leatherwear store. More mainstream political organizations such as the First Tuesday Democratic Association also advertised, as well as at least six local restaurants, and a drag queen revue at The Sweet Gum Head, a bar and lounge. Even Charis Bookstore, the famous lesbian-feminist bookstore located in Atlanta and now one of the oldest such bookstores in the country, advertised. Businesses that catered to specific groups saw the conference as a way to expand their clientele and show their support for the community. A detailed map that is featured in the program showed the location of most of these businesses in relation to the conference, which was held at the Georgian Terrace and Fox Theatre in Atlanta’s Midtown. Midtown was at that time the center of Gay Atlanta, a part of the city in which housing prices and proximity to white-collar jobs made it an acceptable place for gays and lesbians to congregate in relative safety.¹¹¹ The organizers of the SEGC recognized queer space within the city and sought to situate themselves and the gay liberation movement they were organizing within that space explicitly.

A Jewish radical gay liberation activist named Faygele Ben Miriam, born John Singer, had recently moved to the North Carolina town of Efland to be closer to his parents. Faygele,

¹¹⁰ Program of the Third Annual Southeastern Conference of Lesbian and Gay Men.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

whose adopted name means “Faggot son of Miriam” in Yiddish, was most famous for his efforts to apply for a gay marriage license in Seattle, Washington. He also gained notoriety for his suit against the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, from which he was fired, ostensibly for his flamboyance and penchant for wearing women’s clothing. He successfully sued for his job back and was awarded four years back pay.¹¹² Ben Miriam wound up in Mebane and joined the activist community in the North Carolina Piedmont. For the Southeastern Conference of Lesbians and Gay Men in 1978, Ben Miriam organized a panel that reflected his sensibilities on the interconnectedness of oppressions in America, titled “Classism, Sexism, and Racism and the Gay Community.”¹¹³

Black Lesbian activist Faye Johnson, from Knoxville, Tennessee, Carolyn Mosley of the Atlanta MCC, and other activists including Michael Bardin from Dade County, Florida were on the panel. The panelists emphasized their commitment to coming up with new role models for the movement, beyond the white middle-class gay men of the homophile movement who insisted on wearing dresses and suits for respectability. The activists on the panel were not concerned with middle-class respectability. They talked about radicalism within the gay liberation movements and the importance of “a commitment of gay people in general to relate their own oppression to that of other peoples, and specifically for gay men to deal with issues of their own sexism.”¹¹⁴ He also paid close attention to issues of class and access to the conference for working-class and poor gay people.

¹¹² Carole Beers, “Faygele benMiriam Crusaded for Gay Rights.” *The Seattle Times*. June 7, 2000. <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=20000607&slug=4025290>

¹¹³ Faygele Ben Miriam, “Ben Miriam Reflects on Gay Movement at Third Annual SEGC.” *Lambda* Vol 3 No 2, April 1978.

¹¹⁴ *Lambda* Vol 3 No 3. Box 34, Folder “Carolina Gay and Lesbian Association, 1974-1985,” Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40124, University Archives, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Marxism and radical anti-prison politics influence Ben Miriam heavily. He organized the “Poor Peoples’ Meals” at the conferences, which typically consisted of rice, beans, and other cheap proteins such as peanut butter. The meals were pay-what-you-can.¹¹⁵ This was not the only anti-racist panel that was organized. Salome, a student at Emory Law School, was advertised as leading, “Pros and Cons of Integrated Gay Organizations.”¹¹⁶ “Racism, Classism, and Sexism” were reprised in a second session on Saturday, with Salome and an L. Rouzon leading an open forum-style discussion. Tom Carr and Susan Johnston remembered attending this session, and discussing the various tensions of the event, with two white lesbian-feminists expressing some discomfort with the Black activists who were pushing back against separatism. The white women ultimately left the discussion circle before the panel had ended.¹¹⁷ These types of interactions show how differing concerns and positionalities created tensions within the conference. Nonetheless they were deemed necessary conversations for the construction of the group’s fluid but collective political identity.

Activists later recalled how the conferences were not only necessary because of their political timing and efficaciousness — the fact that students and other activists in the Southeast saw themselves as a contemporaneous part of the rising tide of gay liberation, but because they afforded a new and equally radical social opportunity. They let gay men and lesbians from across the region meet others like themselves, forge new relationships, and for many, experience sexual encounters. Jim Baxter of the *Front Page* recounted how he remembered Dan Leonard, an early organizer, describing the feelings of togetherness that were fostered at the early SEGCS. “No matter what your organization's ostensible purpose, no matter how political, no matter whatever, the need for social contact,” Baxter recalled Dan saying, “the need for socializing in the gay and

¹¹⁵ *Lambda* Vol. 3 No. 2. February 1978.

¹¹⁶ Program of the Third Annual Southeastern Conference of Lesbian and Gay Men.

¹¹⁷ Susan Johnston. Interview with Hooper Schultz. July 28, 2018.

lesbian community is so strong, that that is always going to a subtext to everything you do no matter what else you are doing.”¹¹⁸ Quite simply, Baxter and many others felt, people were going to do what they could to meet other people like them. It was at the SEGCs that they were able to do just that.

“Where We’re Going”

The conferences have been described by some attendees as being important for the formation and coalescing of the nascent gay and lesbian community of the Southeast — a place where young gay men and lesbians met for the first time, learned about each other, and recognized their common political and social goals. Other key players in southern gay political activism, such as Bob Kunst of Miami, Florida, presented workshops.¹¹⁹ Over the years, the conferences evolved greatly. All three conferences were political in nature and sought to organize queer southerners under the group banner of gay liberation activism, yet their relationship to gay politics as a cohesive group changed over the years. As different queer and political identities coalesced and grew as a result of the conference’s capacity to connect individuals, those groups began to organize themselves and did not always see the value of working together. However, the conference organizers continued to seek to accommodate all of their wide range of attendees. Considerations towards diversity were made concerning class (Homosexuality and the Blue Collar Worker, in the Frank Porter Graham Student Union Lounge), kink (The Leather Scene, in room 213), and recovery (Gays and Alcoholism, in room 207), while the topic of race was conspicuously absent on the first conference’s finalized

¹¹⁸ Interview number K-0840 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) at The Southern Historical Collection, The Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC-Chapel Hill.

¹¹⁹ Southeastern Gay Conference program, April 1-4, 1977, Box 34, Folder “Carolina Gay and Lesbian Association, 1974-1985,” Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40124, University Archives, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

schedule.¹²⁰ This definite lack of racial consciousness reflects the makeup of the Carolina Gay Association for many years, a predominantly white organization. However, by the second year of the conference, groups such as ALFA had increased the racial diversity of the organizing efforts of the SEGC, and the attention to race in the conference planning clearly shows this change in inclusion and outlook. For the conference's first three years, there were no major schisms over race as the activists of color either felt that their needs were met or felt as though their numbers were not large enough within gay liberationist circles in the South to voice their concerns in a way that was heard.¹²¹

Political organizing, however, factored heavily into the slots of the breakout scheduling. According to *The Barb*, an Atlanta paper that advertised itself as “the news monthly for southern gays,” political organizing and the fact that 1976 was an election year was not lost on the SEGC's planners. “It's time we make our politicians realize that the issue of gay rights is a very real one in the Southeast,” Tom Carr told *The Barb*.¹²² Similar articles advertising the SEGC in other gay newspapers across the Southeast. Perry Dean Young, as a much older journalist from North Carolina who had covered David Kopay's public coming out, showed the depth of the conference and its reach to older and more established gay southerners who were not necessarily part of the liberation movement.

The organizers made sure to assuage the fears of non-activist gay men and lesbians that they would be putting themselves at unnecessary risk of being outed to their employers and families at the conference, but they also promoted a very pro-self-image vision of gay people. A reminder sent out from the conference organizers stressed that the list of registrants was kept

¹²⁰ Southeastern Gay Conference program, April 1-4, 1977, Box 34, Folder “Carolina Gay and Lesbian Association, 1974-1985,” Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40124, University Archives, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹²¹ Dan Leonard. Interview with Hooper Schultz. July 26, 2018.

¹²² “Carolina Gay Association Hosts S.E. Gay Conference,” *The Atlanta Barb*. March, 1976.

strictly confidential reflects the continuing worry by lesbian and gay people at the time that they would be outed and subsequently lose their jobs or homes. The purpose of the conference had become clearer by the second conference, which billed itself “a celebration of the gay lifestyle,” a very dated phraseology from the standpoint of today.¹²³ Language about homosexuality, queer identity, and “lifestyle choice,” has evolved from a question of whether homosexuality is a socio-sexual choice to one wherein queerness is more often regarded as an immutable biological or in-born trait.

The conference grew, and with its growth came an assertion amongst the CGA and other Triangle activists that the SEGC should not become a fixed local conference. A month out from the second conference, Karen Peterson, conference coordinator and later President of CGA, announced that over double the number of registrants had signed up for the event than had the year before. However, there was concern that many more would show up to register at the door. “There’s strength in numbers,” said Karen Peterson, “Outside of places like Atlanta or Miami, gays in the Southeast are more or less isolated. The size of the conference may be a revelation.”¹²⁴ The second conference was even larger than anticipated, and the organizers were extremely pleased with the geographic reach. However, from the outset of year two, they insisted that the conference not become tied to Chapel Hill, North Carolina. “Ideally,” wrote Karen Peterson in the Welcome statement, “it should move around the southeastern region to participate in the [sic] to organize the conference.”¹²⁵ The organizational load of the conference itself had increased. The student activists knew that the conference was too large an undertaking for the CGA to organize on their own, and that it should not stay in Chapel Hill year after year.

¹²³ Southeastern Gay Conference program, April 1-4, 1977.

¹²⁴ *Lambda* Vol. 2 No. 2 March-April 1977, Folder “Lambda newsletter, 1976-1983 (bulk 1976-1980)” Carolina Gay Association Records, 1974-1983, #40491, University Archives, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹²⁵ Southeastern Gay Conference program, April 1-4, 1977.

Lastly on the welcome, the organizers thanked a plethora of businesses, groups, and newspapers that had helped to organize and donated to the second SEGC. These groups reflected how much broader the reach of gay organizing in the Southeast had become, with bars from Norfolk and Richmond, a bathhouse and club from Jacksonville, Florida, as well as *The Barb* out of Atlanta, and the Southeastern Disco DJ's Association. The financial and organizational contributions that these entities made to the conference are palpable in the physical quality of the programs as well as the size of the second conference in terms of attendance. The program went from mimeographed pages to a folded and stapled program with artwork and ads. Many advertisers got involved because they stood to gain from increased audience for their business. Some activists and planners remembered also that there were many attendees who got involved, not because they were dedicated gay rights activists, but because it was an opportunity to meet many other gay people from around the Southeast.

The plethora of advertisements and welcomes from the businesses of Atlanta may have made it seem like a welcoming place in comparison to the smaller towns and cities that many conference attendees were arriving from, and the programs from the previous two conferences certainly do not feature as many gregarious write-ups from local businesses. However, included alongside these ads was a half-page labeled BEWARE. The article, "Violence Against Gays In Atlanta—And What to Do About It," describes what the conference organizers recognized as an American, and claimed as particularly southern, phenomenon: "queerbeating."¹²⁶ Although the group was trying to organize police protect, the authors also gave a few handy tips for avoiding violence, including traveling in groups and reporting any unpleasant interactions to police. This article in the program shows how southern activists were responding to continued threats of violence and were not naïve in their pursuit of an openly queer weekend. The SEGC already had

¹²⁶ Program of the Third Annual Southeastern Conference of Lesbian and Gay Men.

experienced that with increased visibility came increased prejudice. At SEGC Two's Saturday night disco in Chapel Hill, a bigoted student threw firecrackers on the attendees, almost hitting a lesbian in a wheelchair in her lap. Afterwards, there was a string of increased instances of homophobia on campus, referred to as a *virtual epidemic*.¹²⁷ These instances led some, such as Tom Carr, to wonder: "Was it really worth it?"¹²⁸ Increased visibility led to increased harassment, but it also helped gay men and women still struggling to come out to realize that there was a community for them to join.

Ultimately, the southeastern activists involved in the conferences decided that it was worth it, as they organized the conference with more panels than ever before. The radical and intersectional intent of the workshops offered continued to grow and variegate. The Georgia-based steering committee announced that they were invested in working to represent a broader spectrum of the community than ever before, including "Blacks, Hispanics, younger gays, older gays, and the handicapped."¹²⁹ Workshops on Academic Groups, Gays in Business, Media, the National Organization for Women, Publishing, and other career-oriented sessions announced the expansion of what gay liberationists saw as important topics for gay people gaining limited acceptance and confidence to bring their sexuality into the workplace. Radical workshops covered topics such as armed struggle and violence for liberation, "looksism" or fat-phobia, alternative lifestyles, government take-over, "wimmin's spirituality," and "Third World women," to name a few.¹³⁰ Some controversial topics show the wide-ranging conversations that were occurring in gay liberationist circles at the time, such as anarcho-feminism, resisting grand jury subpoena, government takeover, and one session vaguely mentioning "boy love," a possible reference to pedophilia. Health remained a major part of lesbian and gay activist's mindset, and

¹²⁷ Program of the Third Annual Southeastern Conference of Lesbian and Gay Men.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ *Lambda* Vol. 3 No. 2, February 1978.

¹³⁰ Program of the Third Annual Southeastern Conference of Lesbian and Gay Men.

alcoholism, mental health, spirituality, and other health issues such as sexually transmitted diseases each got their own workshop.¹³¹

The conference organizers recognized their place in history, mentioning the historic nature of their part in Chapel Hill's gay anti-discrimination ordinance, as well as mentioning repeatedly the "citrus holocaust," referring to Anita Bryant's Save Our Children campaign, which was born of the non-discrimination ordinance passed in Dade County, Florida.¹³²

Conference attendees and speakers Bob Kunst, Bob Basker, and Irving Weinsoff were explicitly part of the group of gay activists responsible for getting the ordinance passed, and as it was repealed due to Bryant's efforts, they shored up support from the Southeastern Gay Conference networks as well as nationwide.¹³³ Groups such as the North Carolina Gay Union organized car-pool systems and in some cases rented buses to make the trip to Atlanta.

The Southeastern Conference of Lesbians and Gay Men (SCLGM) also joined a boycott of states that had not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment, which passed in Congress in 1972. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) would guarantee women equal pay to men, among numerous other provisions designed to level the playing field for women workers. The organizers at the SCLGM called on attendees and their networks back home to join the National Organization for Women (NOW) boycott of unratified ERA states. They hoped to entice the states to ratify the amendment through the threat of lost tourist dollars as well as industry boycotts. The activists connected the importance of this ratification to Miami's gay non-discrimination ordinance battle and other political civil rights movements, saying, "Ratification of the Amendment has been held up by the concentrated political work of the anti-ERA forces, the same right-wing folks who brought you Dade County and other anti-lesbian/gay activities,

¹³¹ Program of the Third Annual Southeastern Conference of Lesbian and Gay Men.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

anti-abortion legislation, and moves against affirmative action for women, Blacks, and other minorities.” Gay liberationists and lesbian-feminists positioned themselves in coalition with other oppressed minorities, offering workshops on this issue at the conference and stating their belief that they were all working together in the welcome. Over and over throughout the literature of the conferences, the organizers and participants point to their alliances with other marginalized groups and their growing consciousness of what we would now call intersectionality.

The conference in Atlanta ended in much the same way as the two conferences before it, with a feedback session on Sunday followed by a group picnic in Piedmont Park. Despite the rift with Dignity and Integrity, a church service was held from 11am to noon by the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) on Highland Avenue.¹³⁴ The MCC, a gay church started in the early 1970s in California, had spread to many towns in the southeast. MCC churches were relatively more radical than the Episcopal and Catholic churches to which the Dignity and Integrity groups were loosely affiliated. Competing with the church service timeslot, lesbian-feminists held a speech by Vicki Gabriner about the ERA boycott and the importance of building a southern lesbian and gay movement.

The group mailed out an after-conference review from Atlanta and gave a one-page overview on how the organizers and attendees felt the weekend had gone. More than 650 gay men and lesbians had made the trip to the Atlanta conference, slightly less than the previous year. This decrease in total attendance numbers may have also been an outcome of the divisions that had rocked the coalition of gay groups. The report also reflected on a “heated Sunday morning feedback session” where issues such as getting men and women to work together, sexism, and non-activist gay inclusion were all discussed. Gay men’s sexism and their refusal or

¹³⁴ Program of the Third Annual Southeastern Conference of Lesbian and Gay Men.

inability to accept feminism ideals remained the most contentious issue of the conferences, as it had been for the two previous conferences.¹³⁵ By the end of the session, the lesbians and gay men in Chapel Hill and Durham, NC had again assumed responsibility for the conference. However, they were committed to finding a location in a state that had ratified the ERA, which excluded their own home state. Tennessee and Texas looked to be the possible locations.¹³⁶ The Southeastern Gay Conference, later the Southeastern Conferences of Lesbians and Gay Men, would continue to be a regional force into the 1990s, drawing individuals from all over the country and holding vast networking and political power.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Program of the Third Annual Southeastern Conference of Lesbian and Gay Men.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ The Southeastern Conference of Lesbians and Gay Men eventually transformed into the Southeastern Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual College Conference, which reentered the national news spotlight in 1996, when then Alabama Attorney General sought to stop the activists from meeting at the University of Alabama under a state law passed in 1992 that made it illegal for public universities to fund in any way a group that promotes "actions prohibited by the sodomy and sexual misconduct laws." <https://www.cnn.com/2016/12/01/politics/kfile-jeff-sessions-lgbt-conference/index.html>

CHAPTER III
BUILDING A QUEER NATION — THE OUTCOMES OF THE SOUTHEASTERN GAY
CONFERENCES, 1976 TO 1978

“Most important, it made me feel human.”— Steve Stone

The program of the second Southeastern Gay Conference in April of 1977 began with a concise and strongly-worded attack on a demure former Oklahoma beauty queen. “Anita Bryant’s crusade,” said the program, “has lent strong support and guidance to the rise of right-wing attacks on gay people and gay-baiting in the 1970’s,” referring to Bryant’s growing anti-gay movement called the Save Our Children (SOC) campaign. Motivated by sustained efforts by gay liberationists in the South and across the nation to pass protective ordinances in their local cities and counties, SOC and the nascent Christian Right were shifting focus from the anti-bussing anti-integration movement of white conservatives.¹³⁸ Their new target was the growing gay liberation movement, which itself was growing out of and intertwined with the civil rights organizing of the New Left. The SEGC recognized its important place as an organization in the South fighting not only for the rights of gay men and lesbians, but also for southern women, the poor, and people of color. The gay men and women of the SEGC were self-conscious that what

¹³⁸ 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): 126-160. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed April 15, 2019).

they were doing, and the moments being born of their organizing, were fundamentally changing American political discourse surrounding sexual rights.

The Southeastern Conferences of Lesbians and Gay Men created space and synergy that led to the formation of many local gay liberation organizations across the Southeast, as well as direct political actions that sought to pressure municipalities into protecting queer southerners through “sexual and affectional preference” clauses on antidiscrimination ordinances. The diverse efforts and organizations that stem from the conference focus groups reflected the diversity in affinities, identities, and goals of the people who made up the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community of the Southeastern United States in the late 1970s. Each of these communities created sub-movements within the gay liberation movement that joined together incompletely and sporadically. In turn, gay liberation organizing like the SEGC was a sub-movement, part of a broader “movement of movements” that includes the women’s movement and the multiracial civil rights movement of the 60s, political standpoints that were simultaneously influencing gay liberation through the cross-group affiliations of gay men and lesbians. This broader movement of movements, historian Van Gosse has argued, “requires investigating a constant efflorescence of sub-movements, temporary coalitions, breakaway factions, and organizational proliferation over several decades.”¹³⁹

Characterized by cultural, racial, political, and gender diversity, the conferences maintained a coalitional rather than homogenous makeup within the context of a historical moment wherein the New Left’s movement spanned a myriad of positions on the political and action spectrum. “The political types were meeting the non-political types, the gay men were meeting the lesbians... the radical faeries were meeting the sort of conservative types,” said Jim

¹³⁹ Van Gosse, “A Movement of Movements: The Definition and Periodization of the New Left,” in Roy Rosenzweig and Jean-Christophe Agnew, eds., *A Companion to Post-1945 America* (Blackwell, 2002).

Baxter, describing the productive blending that occurred at the gatherings.¹⁴⁰ Lesbians and gay men who were previously uninitiated in liberation activism began to recognize the power of organizing, forming groups based on shared career fields, interest in literature, and geographic area. Beyond activists, the SEGCs also served as a meeting ground for regular “non-political” gay men and lesbians. However, their gathering should not be viewed as separate from “political” activists. Their choice to join together, to retake public spaces such as the Student Union at UNC or the hotel in Atlanta show an active resistance, and a willingness to imagine an open gay culture, revealed and connected. Ultimately, the SEGCs and the organizations and actions born from them fundamentally altered the course of the gay liberation movement and stood at the ready as conservatives framed campaigns around sexuality, gender norms, and so-called family values.

Synergy and Creation: The Conferences as Fertile Ground for Action

Individuals left the conferences feeling inspired, and oftentimes with the connections to others in their area with financial resources to make new and exciting ventures into reality. “In fairness, I think, the experience of the Southeastern Conferences was one of the things that made me want to do the paper [*The Front Page*]. It made me realize there was a little flame to be fed,” said Jim Baxter, the founder and editor of *The Front Page* gay newspaper of Raleigh, NC.¹⁴¹ The paper went on to serve the community of central North Carolina for 26 years. The work that the organizers and attendees of the conference were doing was not only in reactionary political movements or instigations. They were also recognizing the need for media outlets, cultural venues, and literature that expressed the views and experiences of lesbians and gay people. Local

¹⁴⁰ Jim Baxter. Interviewed by Chris McGinnis. Interview number K-0840 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) at The Southern Historical Collection, The Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC-Chapel Hill.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

papers like *The Front Page* were the direct result of informational shares, literature exchanges, and question-and-answer sessions as gay liberation activists learned from each other and set out to build their movement.

The paper was distinctly not a radical paper, instead focusing on a wide range of political topics, from book reviews, to comics, to health surveys, that aimed to appeal to centrist and non-political gay men in North Carolina.¹⁴² Classifieds offered up jobs and featured calls for roommates, as well as personals for men and women. Full-page advertisements featured muscular men who look damp, as if they've just exited a pool. Baxter noted in an interview that the paper also did not aim to attract bisexual, transgender, or lesbian readership. He felt that those goals were too lofty and that a broader view may wind up diluting the paper. For better or for worse, many of the institutions which came out of the SEGC did not have the coalitional and radical spirit that the conferences themselves did.¹⁴³ Activists in places such as Birmingham, Alabama, came home from the conferences with designs for organizing and the encouragement to begin their own papers.

The SEGC also led to the formation of at least one gay student newspaper. Following the first conference at Chapel Hill in 1976, the CGA sent out a retrospective to attendees across the Southeast, compiling what had been learned and shared at the conference, along with plans for upcoming political moves, national current events and upcoming gay-focused events in the region. Response to the mailing appears to have been popular, and the CGA group had become adept at publishing mailers. In this moment of excitement *Lambda: The Newsletter of the Carolina Gay Association* was born. The Duke Gay Alliance's *Morning Star News* and the Eastern Gay Alliance out of Greenville NC's *Newsletter* may have also served as inspirations for *Lambda*, although both papers had short runs as their parent organizations struggled in the late

¹⁴² *The Front Page*. June 28, 1983.

¹⁴³ Jim Baxter. Interview with Chris McGinnis.

1970s to attract steady membership. *Lambda* is now the oldest and longest-running gay student newspaper in the country.

Lambda worked to spread the word about what student activists were doing on UNC-Chapel Hill's campus. It also served as a university-funded, and therefore stable, source of information for the gay and lesbian—and later bisexual, queer, and transgender—communities of the Southeast that had ties to UNC and North Carolina. Its readership included alumni across the nation, who were able to write in and update others of their activism, experiences, or other pertinent information. By 1977, *Lambda* counted the CGA's total outreach efforts as reaching more than 3500 people. The group published six issues, which certainly counted for some of the outreach.¹⁴⁴ As Evan Faulkenbury and Aaron Hayworth have written, "*Lambda* was at once a newsletter, an activist publication, and a place for students to share art and poetry."¹⁴⁵ It spanned the interests of gay and lesbians students politically and socially, announcing outreach organizing from the speakers bureau while also advertising the latest dance on Franklin Street and the newest gay-themed movie or book.¹⁴⁶

One of the early *Lambda* issues shows how the newsletter connected national organizational actions with local communities and issues. The National Gay Task Force (NGTF), an organization based in New York City, helped North Carolina activists by funding a campaign to change the state's sodomy laws, which classified all same-sex sexual activity as a felony "crime against nature."¹⁴⁷ *Lambda* also told its readers that the NGTF was helping to confront businesses practicing employment discrimination, and running pro-gay public relations

¹⁴⁴ *Lambda* Vol. 2 No. 3 May 1977 Special Conference Edition. Box 1, Folder "Lambda newsletter, 1976-1983 (bulk 1976-1980)" Carolina Gay Association Records, 1974-1983, #40491, University Archives, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁴⁵ T. Evan Faulkenbury, Aaron Hayworth; The Carolina Gay Association, Oral History, and Coming Out at the University of North Carolina, *The Oral History Review*, Volume 43, Issue 1, 1 April 2016, Pages 115–137, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ohr/ohv073>

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Lambda* Vol. 2 No. 3 May 1977. Special Conference Edition.

campaigns in the region. In turn, the CGA would host “Tea Dances,” parties held at gay bars in North Carolina, specifically Blueberry Hill bar in Durham. The newsletter advertised spaces for volunteers and explained how national and federal court efforts translated to the chance for improved quality of life for gay North Carolinians.¹⁴⁸

Lambda also served its original purpose as a retrospective of the conference. It helped to advertise subsequent conferences, spread information about travel plans, and recruit new groups to the conference as it moved around the Southeast. In May 1977, after the second conference, a “Special Conference Edition” was published. The first section was titled “How We Did Straight Media Publicity for The Southeastern Gay Conference.” This focus shows how activists thought of themselves as separate from straight culture, and yet invested in paying attention to it. The newsletter delineated a sophisticated media strategy planned by the SEGC coordinating committee that de-emphasized individual “stars” within the organization, outlawed press conference, and encouraged attendees to volunteer for one-on-one interviews with the press rather than allowing certain people to monopolize the narrative coming out of the conference. The retrospective reported that 15 different news sources attended the conference, and that the system had run smoothly. However, the retrospective only describes satisfaction at an “adequate, if not overwhelming” coverage of the conference.¹⁴⁹

Within this issue, letters from outside groups and students from other organizations show how *Lambda*, the SEGC, and the CGA were changing the climate in North Carolina through their public existence. A letter from a Steve Stone in Virginia Beach, Virginia, gives insight into how non-political gay people’s lives were changed by the conference. Stone had boarded a bus for Chapel Hill, worried at the time about whether or not he was ready for getting “some idea of

¹⁴⁸ *Lambda* Vol. 2 No. 3 May 1977. Special Conference Edition.

¹⁴⁹ Allan Brown. “How We Did Straight Media Publicity For The Southeastern Gay Conference.” *Lambda* Vol. 2 No. 3 May 1977. Special Conference Edition.

how to be an activist.”¹⁵⁰ Before the conference, Stone had not been out, only expressing himself as gay in the privacy of his own home or in gay bars. However, the experience of being around many out gay people in Chapel Hill, walking openly in campus and in town, changed Stone forever. “I saw what I had told myself for so long,” Stone wrote in an impassioned letter to *Lambda*, “that I was not alone in being willing to actually work for gay rights.”¹⁵¹ This letter expresses well what many conference-goers experienced and how the conferences were so radical in and of themselves. The conferences, and the hundreds of out gay people taking up visible public space outside of bars and baths, allowed southern gay men and women to imagine new futures for themselves, ones of pride and protection from persecution. For Stone and hundreds like him, the conference, for the first time “made [him] feel human.”¹⁵²

Other *Lambda* issues reinforce the sense that the CGA was well-connected to national organizing, perhaps on account of the SEGC’s wide pull. A “NGGTF Action Report” urged locals to “Save a Good Gay Paper.” This paper was the Gay Community News (GCN)—in Boston, Massachusetts. This to action in *Lambda* serves as a case study for the global awareness, local action mentality that the SEGC and gay liberationists nationwide espoused. The GCN’s “impact on the movement has reached far beyond its own locale and relatively small, though far-flung, group of subscribers.”¹⁵³ *Lambda*’s community position was similar. Gay men and women advertised housing needs and vacancies, attempted to organize collective living, and spiritual groups through the newsletter long after they had graduate from UNC, or even if they had never

¹⁵⁰ Steve Stone. “Letter to Howard Fradkin (*Lambda*),” *Lambda* Vol. 2 No. 3 May 1977. Special Conference Edition.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ *Lambda*, June 1978. Box 1, Folder “Lambda newsletter, 1976-1983 (bulk 1976-1980)” Carolina Gay Association Records, 1974-1983, #40491, University Archives, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

been a student.¹⁵⁴ Statewide church-affiliated groups such as Dignity/Charlotte and the Metropolitan Community Church in Greensboro advertised their dinner groups and service times in *Lambda* alongside calls to protest actions, Radical Faerie gatherings, and other less-than-mainstream offerings of the broader queer community. The newsletter reached far beyond the confines of campus and was sent in unmarked envelopes to other universities, to prisons where the CGA Speakers Bureau had presented, and to other gay groups that signed up for the mailing list.¹⁵⁵

At one of the conference-hosted group conversations on lesbian-feminist publishing in 1977, June Arnold, Parke Bowman, and Bertha Harris of Daughters, Inc. encouraged women in North Carolina to focus on southern lesbian-feminist literary publications. At the next conference, in Atlanta, Catherine Nicholson and Harriet Desmoines Ellenberger announced that they were moving their lesbian-feminist journal *Sinister Wisdom* from Charlotte, North Carolina, to Lincoln, Nebraska. During this women's only panel on Lesbian-Feminist Publishing and its joys and hardships, some of the greatest lesbian writers of the second half of the twentieth century met, likely for the first time. During the discussion, Arnold and Bowman encouraged younger women such as Mab Segrest of Durham and Minnie Bruce Pratt of Fayetteville, N.C., to begin to think about a collective lesbian-feminist journal specifically for women in the South. "That moment, that's what I remember about the conference," said Pratt. The women decided to take the *Feminary* newsletter in Durham and fashion it into a specifically lesbian-feminist literary journal, to replace *Sinister Wisdom*.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ *Lambda* Vol 3 No 2, April 1978. Box 1, Folder "Lambda newsletter, 1976-1983 (bulk 1976-1980)" Carolina Gay Association Records, 1974-1983, #40491, University Archives, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁵⁵ T. Evan Faulkenbury, Aaron Hayworth; The Carolina Gay Association, Oral History, and Coming Out at the University of North Carolina.

¹⁵⁶ Minnie Bruce Pratt. Interview with Hooper Schultz. March 9, 2019.

Out of this call to action, as *Sinister Wisdom* left the Southeast, Durham's *Feminary* collective was born. *Feminary's* collective was a constantly revolving group of women included Segrest and Pratt through the majority of its existence, as well as Cris South, author of *Clenched Fists, Burning Crosses*, Deborah Giddens, and Elizabeth Knowlton. *Feminary* evolved out of a feminist newsletter that had been printed in Durham and Chapel Hill since 1974, but the meeting at the Southeastern Conference of Lesbians and Gay Men in Atlanta in 1978 generated the momentum for the journal declare itself "a lesbian-feminist literary journal for the South."¹⁵⁷ The third conference, in Atlanta, proved to be a pathbreaking moment for the journal, as it generated a foundational collective that was able to keep *Feminary* running for many years. The newsletter was thrust, writes literary scholar Jaime Cantrell, "into a sexually specific standpoint with a literary slant, but also, tellingly, a regional one."¹⁵⁸ With this new sense of purpose and new direction enhanced by the gay liberation conference, began to publish specifically lesbian art, poetry, news, and literature.

Another lesbian-feminist cultural organization, Womonwrites, was also born of the community-building that the Southeastern Conference of Lesbians and Gay men fostered in Atlanta in 1978. The biannual writing collective and conference for women began in a workshop at the conference. Planning meetings for the first conference were then held at a house in Columbia, South Carolina, where two lesbians lived, because it was a midway point between the homes of several of the early organizers.¹⁵⁹ Womonwrites meetings continue today, an annual meeting in Alabama of writers and lesbian activists. Herstory project interviews from Womonwrites are one example of cultural and archival formation that was made possible due to

¹⁵⁷ "Notes Toward a History," *Feminary* 9, 1 (1978): 26-28, 56.

¹⁵⁸ Jaime Cantrell, "SUBSCRIBE to *Feminary!* Producing Community, Region, and Archive," *Out of the Closets, Into the Archives: Researching Sexual Histories*. ed. Jaime Cantrell and Amy L Stone. SUNY Series in Queer Politics and Cultures. Albany: SUNY Press.

¹⁵⁹ Minnie Bruce Pratt. Interview with Hooper Schultz. March 9, 2019.

organizing outcomes of the SEGC's progeny. Many of the lesbian-feminists who were involved in other groups in the Southeast, such as ALFA and TALF, attended the retreats regularly. The retreats have continued semi-annually for over forty years as an offshoot of the SEGCs, they function to create a space for creative production for lesbian-feminists, giving them their own separate space away from political organizing and away from gay men. Activists began to realize that separate spaces were equally as important as coalition. However, there was also tension in this realization. How would activists hold both needs at equal weight? At first activists "were not really taking into account the real sort of demographic differences," said Jim Baxter about the tensions between coalitions and more divided identity-based groups.¹⁶⁰ The separate affinity groups continued to proliferate.

At the conferences, when a group met in a panel or workshop, they would often exchange contact information in order to continue scheduling to meet after the conference had ended. The Triangle Area Gay Scientists (TAGS), started by Dan Leonard and others living in the Triangle, was one such affinity group. TAGS began as a result of a breakout group for gay scientists facilitated by Leonard at the first conference in 1977. Leonard envisioned the session as a way for gay men and lesbians working in the sciences to make sense of their position as homosexuals, which had just been taken off of the American Psychiatric Association's list of mental disorders. Leonard remembered that having a support group for individuals with similar career interests felt very important at the time, when the sciences were a field that was oftentimes considered outside of the realm of possibilities for gay men. "Being a scientist, I thought that we should have a breakout group for gay scientists," said Leonard. "So, we did.... So, what sprang out of that was within a few months, Mike Young and Larry White founded the Triangle Area Gay Scientists, which still exists."¹⁶¹ The group began as a monthly potluck dinner where the

¹⁶⁰ Jim Baxter.. Interviewed by Chris McGinnis.

¹⁶¹ Dan Leonard. Interview with Hooper Schultz. July 26, 2018.

members would talk about personal and career issues. Through word of mouth, the small group slowly grew and began to incorporate many “non-political” men and women, as well as the activists who had begun it. TAGS released a monthly newsletter from 1977 until 2011, and still holds regular meetups. TAGS is the oldest LGBTQ scientists networking organization in the United States and was the inspiration for the formation of the nationwide group, the National Organization of Gay and Lesbian Scientists and Technical Professionals.

Political action groups with specific media relationship focuses also were founded during meetings at the SEGCS. The North Carolina Gay Union (NCGU) was one such group that formed at the first conference to fill a need for coordinated and swift responses to issues from the several gay groups that had formed in North Carolina by 1976. A statewide group focused on promoting a positive view of gay people and the “elimination of social and legal discrimination,” the union rotated location between cities in the state. The NCGU was relatively short lived when compared to other gay organizations that trace their roots to the SEGC. However, its purpose, and its position as the first state-wide gay liberation organizing unit in North Carolina’s history, are important measures of the goals of the SEGC and North Carolinian activists. Approximately 18 people “from all three major geographic regions of the state” attended the organizing meeting, according to a news blotter from the *Newsletter of the Eastern [N.C.] Gay Alliance* published in the *Maine Gay Task Force Newsletter*.¹⁶² These inclusions in far-flung publications again reinforces how the SEGC and its progeny were fixtures in a much wider gay liberation web in the United States.

Activist Faygele Ben Miriam’s conference retrospective after the Southeastern Conference of Lesbians and Gay Men in Atlanta in 1978 also parrots this. In his discussion of the

¹⁶² Tom Hurley, Wendy Ashley, Stephen Leo, Stan Fortuna, Deborah Johnsen, Susan Breeding, and Tim Bouffard. "Maine Gay Task Force Newsletter, Vol.3, No.06 (June 1976)" (1976). Maine Gay Task Force Newsletter. 15. <http://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/megtff/15>

disparate groups coming to the conference, Ben Miriam mentions the *RFD*. The *RFD*, or *Rural Faggot Digest*, which later became *Radical Faerie Digest*, moved with Ben Miriam from the Pacific Northwest to publish in Efland, North Carolina after undergoing financial and staffing problems in rural Oregon. Although not explicitly a part or product of the SEGC, the *RFD*'s close ties with the SEGC show how seemingly disparate and removed parts of gay culture in the 1970s were actually closely in contact with one another. Ben Miriam also argued that SEGC attendees should learn from and support the Native American Solidarity Committee (NASC) and admire El Centro, a Chicano center. This cross-issue identity-based understanding of marginalized groups as a coalition was central to many SEGC attendees' self-concept and efforts towards the future. "Primary to these efforts at coalition," said Ben Miriam, "has been a commitment of gay people in general to relate their own oppression to that of other peoples, and specifically for gay men to deal with issues of (their own) sexism and how it relates to feminist issues."¹⁶³

The SEGCs were one node in a broader activist network that involved individuals from throughout the United States with multiple focuses that directly addressed antigay policies and discrimination. The efforts of Bob Basker, one of the speakers at the second conference, and Bob Kunst, who attended the first conference and gave a number of panels there, resulted in one of the most powerful legacies of the Southeastern Gay Conferences. Activist Bob Basker, born Solomon Basker in 1918, was raised in an Orthodox Jewish household in New York City. Basker was first involved in left-wing activism in the 1930s student movement. He changed his name to Bob while overseas fighting in World War II. Later on, Basker became involved in the New Left and fought for abortion rights, prisoners' rights, and other leftist causes in the 1950s and 60s. He also co-founded the early homophile organization Mattachine Midwest. In Chicago he

¹⁶³ Faygele Ben Miriam, "Ben Miriam Reflects on Gay Movement at Third Annual SEGC." *Lambda* Vol 3 No 2, April 1978.

successfully challenged a number of arrests of gay men through his new homophile group. Basker then moved to Miami to be closer to his ex-wife and children, who had moved to Cuba with her new husband. “Dade County’s chief salesman for gay rights,” Basker’s political activism in Miami and Dade County can be viewed as part of the larger continuum of political organizing going on at the SEGCs, of which he and Kunst were active attendees.¹⁶⁴

The overlapping affiliations, activisms, and social connections of Campbell, Basker, and Kunst as well as other gay liberationists show how the SEGC was the regional hub and one leader of a national network of gay liberation activist conferences and groups. Chapel Hill’s success perhaps influenced Basker and Kunst, who were closely involved with the SEGCs and doubtless knew the student activists who had pushed for the town council’s passage. They led panels at the conference in 1976, conversing with different gay liberationists from across the region and country, and heard what had worked and what hadn’t in the push for protection from discrimination. Then, the Dade County Coalition activists returned to Miami with similar intentions. They understood themselves as being part of a larger movement and kept each other abreast of their current projects and positions based on a dedicated and developed media and publishing web.

One outcome of the coordinated efforts of this web, spearheaded by South-based activists who annually attended the SEGCs, was the Miami-Dade gay anti-discrimination ordinance of 1977. Miami had a long and storied history of queer culture prior to World War II, but as the post-war period wore on, Cold War mentality restricted the outward expression of queer identity, according to historian Julio Capó Jr’s in *Welcome to Fairyland*.¹⁶⁵ Richard Inman’s 1964 Athenaeum Society turned Mattachine Florida proved a short-lived blip that was dead before

¹⁶⁴ Vern L. Bullough. (2002). *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context*. Psychology Press. pp. 193–202.

¹⁶⁵ Julio Capó, *Welcome to Fairyland: Queer Miami Before 1940*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

Stonewall, abolished in 1967. However, the existence of the organization in the, at-the-time, small Southern outskirt city showed that queer organizing was possible. Over a decade later, members of Miami's gay community, Basker and Kunst worked with gay Club Baths founder Jack Campbell and a local politician, Commissioner Ruth Shack on their own ordinance, one similar to the protections passed that year in Chapel Hill. Jack Campbell, on the board of the National Gay Task Force with the likes of SEGC speakers Frank Kameny and Loretta Lottman, would have been acutely aware of the success in Chapel Hill given the National Gay Task Force's close relationship with the CGA. Similarly, Basker and Kunst were in the same social and political circles as SEGC organizers. In December of 1976 they proposed an ordinance protecting gay people from discrimination in housing, employment, labor unions, and private education to the Dade County Commission. Like Basker, Bob Kunst was born to a Jewish family. Growing up in Miami Beach in the 1940s, was a powerful force in the South Florida gay liberation scene by the 1970s.

Bob Kunst was also a major figure at the early Southeastern Gay Conferences. Kunst was devoted to gay liberation and drove all the way from Dade County to the first conference in Chapel Hill in 1976, Dan Leonard remembered.¹⁶⁶ He was a polarizing person, one that Tom Carr had remembered as rather abrasive, always wanting to be the expert on subjects, even when he was not necessarily the expert. While Kunst gained notoriety late in life for his right-wing views, in the 1970s, he held a more radically soft viewpoint. Kunst led panels on "Humanistic Outlooks of Gay Experience" and also talks on gay political organizing.¹⁶⁷ These political aspirations point to the beginnings of the national political consciousness of gay liberationists and its direct correlation to the development of the gay rights ordinance in Miami. Kunst wrote the ordinance with Dr. Alan Rockway and spoke before the Dade County Commission in 1976.

¹⁶⁶ Dan Leonard. Interview with Hooper Schultz. July 28, 2018.

¹⁶⁷ Southeastern Gay Conference program, April 1-4, 1977.

The ordinance, which protected people based on “sexual and affectional preference” in the employment, housing, and public accommodations. The unique verbiage including “sexual and affectional preference” is identical to the wording used by activists in the Chapel Hill ordinance.

By mid-January 1977, the non-discrimination ordinance protecting gays and lesbians from employment and housing discrimination had passed unanimously. Basker, Kunst, and local bathhouse owner Jack Campbell’s gay lobbying organization, the Dade County Coalition for the Humanistic Rights of Gays (Dade County Coalition), was less than a year old. However, in Miami, unlike in Chapel Hill, even before the ordinance passed there was already mounting conservative opposition to the law. Anita Bryant, an Oklahoma beauty queen and former pop singer, challenged the ordinance. “It is a peril to the nation,” said the born-again Christian. Bryant harped closely on debunked scientific mythology that called homosexuals psychologically damaged and linked them to child molesters. “Homosexuals cannot reproduce,” she said, ignoring the fact that Basker himself was the father of three children, “so they must recruit. And to freshen their ranks, they must recruit the youth of America.”¹⁶⁸

Although 34 other municipalities across the United States including Chapel Hill had passed similar ordinances, only Dade County experienced the media firestorm brought by the star power of Anita Bryant’s opposition. Bryant was known nationwide as a singer who had several Top 40 hits, as well as being a beauty pageant winner in her home state of Oklahoma. Bryant was also well-known in the 1970s as having been the spokeswoman for the Florida Citrus Commission (FCC) since 1969. *Good Housekeeping* magazine’s voters had named Bryant the most admired woman in America three years in a row. She was also the face of Save Our Children, the anti-gay, heterosexual family and child-focused conservative organization, focused heavily on the “biblical family” and fears over the sexual protection of children that had first

¹⁶⁸ “Gay Law Foes to Plan Vote Drive,” *Miami Herald*, 26 January 1977, 3-B

been stoked in the South over school integration and race-mixing. As Daniel Winunwe-Rivers has said, “these reactions to lesbian and gay individuals and communities,” most notably in their pushes for legal protection, “share fundamental fears about the proximity of children to same-sex sexual orientation.”¹⁶⁹ Even before the anti-discrimination ordinance had passed Bryant and SOC were mobilizing conservative whites, as well as religious Black and Latinx communities in opposition of ‘supporting the gay lifestyle.’¹⁷⁰

Despite the commission’s unanimous vote, *The New York Times* described it as “controversial,” perhaps showing the national bias against protecting homosexuals.¹⁷¹ While anti-gay activists were coopting the language of Black civil rights activists to create a rhetoric of parental rights over children, gay activists used the civil rights model as a minority to frame themselves as under attack—a strategy that did not appeal to conservative Christian Black communities or inspire cross-group coalitions. As Gillian Frank has written, the activism of SOC “invoked racial conflicts, its appeal was not simply confined to white communities or to a single religious denomination. Antigay activism also crossed racial lines to African American and Latino communities, allowing for the formation of multiracial and multifaith conservative coalitions around narrowly defined issues of sexual morality.”¹⁷² Despite attempts to frame themselves as a likewise persecuted minority in American society, gay liberation activists from the Dade County Coalition was unable to garner the support of other Dade County minority groups. The rhetorical and public climate that Bryant and the SOC fomented against gay liberationists in Dade county, along with help from conservative Christian leader Jerry Falwell,

¹⁶⁹ Daniel Winunwe-Rivers. *Radical Relations: Lesbian Mothers, Gay Fathers, and their Children in the United States since World War II*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2013.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ "Bias Against Homosexuals is Outlawed in Miami." *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Jan 19, 1977. <http://umiss.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.umiss.idm.oclc.org/docview/123285727?accountid=14588>.

¹⁷² 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): 126-160. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed April 15, 2019).

helped to solidify “family values” as one of the tenants of the conservative Religious Right for the rest of the 20th century.

At the early April Southeastern Gay Conference of 1977 in Chapel Hill Basker himself led a workshop educating other activists about Dade County gay rights. Basker explained to the men and women who came to his presentation about how Anita Bryant was already gathering forces of conservatism to repeal the young ordinance. He hoped to enlist conference-goers to go home to their local communities and raise money for publicity and political organizing to defend the ordinance. The Humanistic Rights Coalition out of Miami, led by the Dade County Coalition, was appealing directly to the SEGC community for advice, support, and action. The CGA and other organizations worked based on the DCCHRG’s entreaty, raising awareness against Save Our Children in the *Daily Tar Heel*. The SEGC passed a resolution arguing that protection of the ordinance “may very well be the most significant advance for Gay Liberation for each community as well as nationally,” and endorsing the Dade County Coalition. The resolution also promised to raise funds “to undertake a full educational and political campaign, with all its expenses and ramifications.”¹⁷³

“Although gays are supposed to have the same constitutional rights as everyone else (i.e. life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness), Anita Bryant and people like her are seeking to legislate their prejudices to deny lesbians and gays men their most basic freedom in this country,” wrote Susan Johnston in a letter to the editor from the Media Board of the NC Gay Union.¹⁷⁴ Johnston was also a member of CGA at the time, but apparently thought using the cross-state power of the NCGU would have more effect in the letter. Either through a barrage of letters to the editor or due to the CGA’s work in opening the *Daily Tar Heel* up to conversations on gay rights, the student paper published a number of letters and articles about Save Our

¹⁷³ Lambda Vol. 2 No. 3 May 1977 Special Conference Edition. p.6.

¹⁷⁴ Susan Johnston, ‘Gay rights are civil rights are human rights,’ *The Daily Tar Heel*, 28 July 1977.

Children in the summer of 1977. Whatever the reason, coverage of the issue was so heavy that the *Daily Tar Heel* felt the need to address its close attention, in effect trying to promise its neutrality in an editorial note. The *Daily Tar Heel*'s coverage points to how the issue had come to occupy the forefront of national conversation, even outside of religious conservative and gay liberationist circles.

“If Anita Bryant wishes to save our children, she should campaign against all child molesters and abusers,” wrote a community member, probably CGA member and TALF activist Susan Johnston to the *Daily Tar Heel* in the summer of 1977. “If she did so, she would find strong support in the gay community, especially from the thousands of gays who are themselves parents.”¹⁷⁵ The rhetoric of ‘family values’ that moved from anti-busing segregation arguments to anti-ERA and anti-gay arguments in conservative circles failed to account for the large numbers of gay men and lesbians during the 1960s and 70s who had either left heterosexual marriages after having children or who were seeking alternative ways of child-bearing and rearing as part of their efforts to create alternative non-heterosexual family structures. “Rhetoric declaring sexual minorities to be an urgent threat to children and families was at the heart of” the Save Our Children (SOC) campaign in Dade County and similar homophobic campaigns run by SOC throughout the country in the late 1970s.¹⁷⁶

According to historian Gillian Frank, Save Our Children capitalized on the heightened anxieties of whites who were worried about their children’s interactions with Black and brown children in school due to integration. SOC “was successful in Dade County and nationwide because it drew energy, ideas, and activists from contemporaneous conflicts over school

¹⁷⁵ Susan Johnston, ‘Gay rights are civil rights are human rights,’ *The Daily Tar Heel*, 28 July 1977.

¹⁷⁶ Daniel Winunwe-Rivers. *Radical Relations: Lesbian Mothers, Gay Fathers, and their Children in the United States since World War II*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2013.

integration and the ERA that rocked Florida and the nation in 1977.”¹⁷⁷ SOC turned out to be a stunningly effective rhetorical machine, forcing a referendum and overwhelmingly overturning the ordinance in a special election by June of 1977.

In November 1977, the Florida Citrus Commission publicly announced its support for what had been Bryant’s personal project, the Save Our Children campaign, prompting the Dade County Coalition to organize a national boycott of Florida orange juice. This was possible through the national networks that had been formed by gay liberation organizing at the Southeastern Gay Conferences as well as media connections held by gay newspapers such as *The Barb*. Through Southeastern activists personal and political connections, undoubtedly throughout the national mainstream media’s attention on Bryant’s efforts herself, gay organizations and celebrities across the nation threw their support behind the DCCHRG’s boycott. Under the direction of Harvey Milk, the San Francisco Tavern Guild and the Alameda County Democratic Central Committee announced supports of the boycott. Gay bars began to serve screwdrivers with apple juice instead of orange juice, calling them “Anita Bryants.”¹⁷⁸

The attendance at San Francisco’s Pride parade, three weeks after the repeal of the Dade County ordinance, more than doubled its previous year’s numbers, to more than 250,000 people.¹⁷⁹ Local, specific actions by southern gay activists led to the mobilization of large swathes of gay organizations across the nation. “Non-political” gays in bars more than 2000 miles from Dade County toasted their apple juice drinks as they maligned the bigotry of a pop star and commercial face. In this way, even non-activists a world away contributed their dollars,

¹⁷⁷ 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): 126-160. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed April 15, 2019).

¹⁷⁸ “5000 Threaten Juice Boycott.” *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*. 8 Nov. 1977.

¹⁷⁹ David Haltiwanger. Interview with Hooper Schultz. December 12, 2018.

if not their words, to gay liberation politics. “We were the turning point in the whole gay rights and sexual rights struggle,” mused Bob Kunst years later.¹⁸⁰

Through Bryant’s organization of SOC in Miami and the entirety of Dade County, she was able to garner support from diverse groups such as conservative Cubans as well as the Catholic diocese. County Commissioner Bob Brake joined her in calling for a referendum on the subject, which Dade County commissioners had originally declined to revote on. The forced referendum passed, and the county went to vote. As it turned out, many liberal whites who the Dade County Coalition had hoped would vote in favor of gays simply did not come to the polls for the special referendum. On the other hand, many conservatives showed up, galvanized by the media sensationalism, pedophilic fear-mongering, and star power of the religious right’s new darling, Anita Bryant.

The tidal change was overwhelming — SOC began to widen its targets and specifically design legislation to restrict the lives of gay men and lesbians nationwide in a number of ways. Within the year, Florida’s state legislature had passed legislation proposed by SOC that expressly banned gay men and lesbians from adopting children. Rather than being a phenomenon restricted to the South, the efforts of the SOC expanded to a nationwide movement of the Christian Right, who had discovered a new bogeyman, the homosexual. SOC activists worked in Midwestern cities like St. Paul, MN and Wichita, KS, as well as liberal western towns such as Eugene, OR to overturn gay rights ordinances. Nonetheless, gay activists worked swiftly to pass ordinances in other towns, and they were united by the publicized affront to their rights and to their humanity.

¹⁸⁰Bob Kunst. “Orange Crush: Bob Kunst and The Real Story of Anita Bryant, Save Our Children and the Miami Gay Rights Ordinance of 1976,” LGBT Today. June 18, 2016. <http://lgbt-today.com/orange-crush-bob-kunst-and-the-real-story-of-anita-bryant-save-our-children-and-the-miami-gay-rights-ordinance-of-1976/>

"I think it may be the catalyst we've needed to get the gay community together as a political force," Jack Campbell told Newsweek.¹⁸¹

Anita Bryant's anti-gay message was not a new accusation against the queer community. She repeated what were longstanding anti-gay tropes that homosexuals were more likely to be pedophiles, were spiritually stunted, and sought to 'recruit' impressionable youth and children into 'deviant lifestyles.' The inflammatory words of Bryant and the media attention given to her galvanized gay groups across the country and helped them to turn their attention to organizing for rights nationally. Similarly, SOC set its sights on a number of other municipalities across the country where pro-gay rights legislation had been passed to organize repeal efforts after the success of the Dade County repeal. Copycat politicians such as John Briggs in California proposed statewide legislation to ban gay men and lesbians from teaching in public schools, carrying Bryant's rhetoric of influence over children further to employment and the classroom.¹⁸²

Local groups connected to the SEGC such as ALFA and the CGA organized their own demonstrations and fundraisers in opposition to Bryant's campaign to have the ordinance repealed. Gay Atlantans planned their Pride march to coincide with Anita Bryant's appearance before a Southern Baptist group in 1978. Gay activists picketed SOC's tour stops in places like Wilmington, NC, and Norfolk, VA. These actions were reported steadily by *Lambda* and other SEGC-affiliated newspapers. Nationally known individuals like Leonard Matlovitch, who was also on the 1977 shortlist for speakers at SEGC, were present at these events.

As both local and national gay rights groups formulated their positions and recognized their shared opposition to the conservative homophobic stance of the SOC, the religious right

¹⁸¹ Steele, Richard with Holly Camp. Miami Bureau Reports. "A 'No' to the Gays". *Newsweek*. June 20, 1977. <https://advance-lexis-com.umiss.idm.oclc.org/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3SJ4-F4J0-0008-X21R-00000-00&context=1516831>.

¹⁸² Michael S. Foley. *Front Porch Politics: The Forgotten Heyday of American Activism in the 1970s and 1980s*. First paperback ed. New York: Hill & Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014.

movement emboldened by Anita Bryant and Jerry Falwell similarly entrenched their political positions. The ordinance's passage in Miami was the result of the push by southern gay liberationists working outward from the SEGC to affect communities and state policies across the southeast and the nation. This movement—of which the SEGC was but one center—operated polycentrically, without a clear start or end point in terms of ideology or chronological grounding. The SEGC and gay liberation was part of a greater move to expand the definition of what it meant to be a full citizen that continued for much of the twentieth century after the second World War. A major part of that movement was the push to guarantee rights for nationally oppressed groups in the South. The SEGC's work expanded the cultural bounds of southern queer identity, laid the groundwork for myriad local queer groups, worked to recognize and combat racial inequality, and through the Miami-Dade affair and SOC, dialectally defined the anti-gay politics and queer national politics of the last part of the twentieth century.

CONCLUSION

The Southeastern Gay Conferences and their later iteration, the Southeastern Conferences of Lesbians and Gay Men, were significant in a number of ways in their region and in the nation. Gay liberation conferences were a way of disseminating information, gathering individuals from disparate areas together, and providing channels of communication and spurring wider community development, along with which came political awareness and shared vision. The SEGCS served that function for the Southeast. Print publishing outcomes of the SEGCS, such as the journal version of *Feminary*, the gay newspaper *The Front Page*, and the Carolina Gay Association's newsletter *Lambda* even more so were ways that connected gay men and lesbians in towns across the South. These individuals were made to feel less marginalized, less isolated, and more part of a greater community through these conferences, as Steve Stone of Virginia Beach said in his letter to the CGA.¹⁸³ The groups coming together—although largely white—were from diverse religious, ideological, and geographic backgrounds within the Southeast and beyond. They held a multitude of different political identities in tension, allowing space for sometimes intense discussion and creating radical space in the South. Gay liberation activists at the SEGCS argued about Marxism, violent resistance to patriarchy and capitalism, separatism, and other radical political standpoints while also devising plans for political action within the current governmental systems available to them.

The Carolina Gay Association, in tandem with a number of fledgling gay student and community organizations, formed in the nascent gay liberation period of the early 1970s in North

¹⁸³ Steve Stone. "Letter to Howard Fradkin (*Lambda*)," *Lambda* Vol. 2 No. 3 May 1977 Special Conference Edition.

Carolina. Gay liberation in the mid-seventies — an outgrowth of the homophile movement grew into something more vibrant and militant by the Civil Rights movement and ignited by Stonewall — led to an explosion of gay cultural fixtures such as newspapers and political awareness. The CGA was a part of this greater movement. It began in a political moment, but in many ways the CGA was also a social outgrowth, providing an alternative to gay bars. Although it was a student group, many organizers mentioned that the close involvement of university staff members as constant members, though not leadership, of the group led to its staying power over the years as students cycled through the campus and left the area. The student group accomplished much in its first year, from the simple act of taking up space as an openly gay group on the university of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s campus, passing a non-discrimination ordinance in Chapel Hill — the first of its kind in the South among the first few in the nation — and also bringing openly gay speakers to teach college students about sexuality.

The Carolina Gay Association never asked specifically of the administration to get a room assigned for the CGA, they just signed up directly. “We presumed equality,” as David Haltiwanger remembered.¹⁸⁴ The CGA also created the Southeastern Gay Conferences, a series of conferences started at the university that would go on to travel around the Southeast, drawing together queer southerners who worked on myriad issues, in tension with one-another and collaborating for political and cultural power. The individuals that attended were rocked by the realization that this great conglomeration of gay men and women could happen and, as Haltiwanger said, “as a result of coming and seeing this not in New York or San Francisco, but in Chapel Hill, it empowered people.”¹⁸⁵

The conference organizers, speakers, and conference-goers imagined themselves, saw their place in the broader movement and American culture, and where they saw gay liberation or

¹⁸⁴ David Haltiwanger. Interview with Hooper Schultz. December 12, 2018.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

their own people going in the future in terms of politics or culture. The organizers were aware of how revolutionary what they were doing was, but at the same time, they did not feel any reticence towards acting. "It had influence far beyond just our campus," remembered Haltiwanger. "But it's not like we walked around patting ourselves on the back at the time."¹⁸⁶ Jewish radical leftists of earlier civil rights and left-wing American activism fit into the burgeoning gay liberation movement of the Southeast, and how considerations around race and religion were central to early SEGC conversations. Holding political differences in tension, rather than seeking to solve them, proved fertile for the activists, and held their coalitions together for the most part. When it did not, such as in the case of the religious groups leaving the third conference, the individuals who were left moved on. The conversations that were had, the different opinions that were held, were written about and reported on by the activists themselves in retrospectives.

The conferences were an opportunity for political activists and regular folks to share thoughts, hopes, and social space with each other. They were greater than the sum of their individual parts, synergistically creating more and enhancing organizing potential. Conference attendees went on to be instrumental in organizing a number of other major lesbian-feminist and gay organizations and events, especially long-lasting ones such as the Triangle Area Gay Scientists and Womonwrites. The skills they learned in printing, encouragement they received from other gay liberation activists, and social connections they made at the conferences contributed to their formation of these groups.

It becomes clear how important the Southeastern Conferences of Lesbians and Gay Men, originally the SEGCs, are to the greater gay liberation movement and to the dialectic formation of the religious right in America in the latter part of the twentieth century. Through ordinance-

¹⁸⁶ Haltiwanger.

passing workshops and meetings between different activists, the Dade County Coalition gained the momentum to pass a non-discrimination ordinance in Miami/Dade County, Florida. Anita Bryant's homophobic Save Our Children campaign, which influenced the nation-wide anti-gay rights movement of the Religious Right, simultaneously emboldened gay activists from coast to coast while also encouraging bigoted individuals to speak out against gay civil rights in communities across the country.

Cultural and artistic creations rose out of the SEGCs, including but not limited to the Womonwrites conference series, *The Front Page* gay newspaper, and the Triangle Area Gay Scientists (TAGS), which created revolutionary professional spaces for out gay people in industry. Although *The Front Page* shut its doors in 2006, the print-culture space that it created, like the physical spaces that Womonwrites and TAGS continue to create, inspired and emboldened generations of gay and lesbian southerners. Literary journals such as *Feminary* also began in workshops at the conferences, the result of individuals meeting and sharing ideas and excitement in space together. Echoing the implicit goals of both the CGA and the SEGCs, operations such as *The Front Page* and *Feminary* “tried to offer (or perhaps even create) some sense of community, some sense of history, some way to stop reinventing the wheel every couple of years, some way to build a movement for change that could mark its progress in real accomplishment.”¹⁸⁷

We can judge the effectiveness of social movements not only by their ability to effect change, produce a new product, or spread information, but also by the way that they influence individuals, through radicalization or personal change. As Jim Baxter has said, the participants in the SEGCs were profoundly changed by their experiences there. As a result, so too were the

¹⁸⁷ Jim Baxter. “Before the ‘Net, there was The Front Page.” *Indy Week*, Durham, NC. Jun. 21, 2006. <https://indyweek.com/guides/archives/net-front-page/>

towns they returned to and the national landscape they enacted new and more open gay organizing upon. For many of the men and women attending the SEGCS, it was the first time that they had been around other gay people in any significant number, especially outside of a dark bar. All of the various organizational outcomes of the SEGCS should be seen in the context of the emerging national gay liberation movement, while simultaneously in the nascent local gay rights movements of the various southern towns in which the SEGCS landed in the middle and late 70s. Issues concerning race, class, gender, and sexuality were wrestled with, but not resolved. The activists looked back on their time involved in the CGA and SEGCS, even if they were activists only in a capacity as a student, as being highly formative to their sense of self and oftentimes their careers.

As research into the Southeastern Gay Conferences continues into the future, historians may find more evidence that connects ‘family values’ politics to the gay liberation movement, the women’s movement, and civil rights organizing. Historians such as Lawrence Glickman have asserted that understanding such conservative movements as a ‘backlash’ is a reductive way of thinking that naturalizes them rather than encouraging them to be studied. Save Our Children ought not to be understood as merely a backlash to the gay liberation movement in the South, but rather a part of the broader cultural conversation of front porch politics that historian Michael Stewart Foley posits in his eponymous monograph. Gillian Frank’s work on the anti-bussing movement and Anita Bryant’s SOC in his article “‘The Civil Rights of Parents’: Race and Conservative Politics in Anita Bryant’s Campaign against Gay Rights in 1970s Florida” begins to work towards a more nuanced understanding of the conservative ideological underpinnings and organizing of such ‘parents rights’ and ‘family values’ coalitions. Specifically, it will be helpful to understand how movements feed off of oppositional rhetoric in order to solidify their own arguments.

Additional oral history collections, especially concerning non-white attendees, non-activists, and a broader range of lesbian-feminists who attended the conference, will help in the future to understand the tensions among gay liberation activists and coalitional drives that allowed them to bridge their differences for the conferences. Archival work at the ALFA and James Sears records in the Rubenstein Library at Duke University will assist in answering future in-depth questions about what major organizations felt were impactful workshops at the conferences and how attendees responded to the speakers. Insight into the motivations and experiences for non-activist gay men and lesbians who attended the conferences are of particular interest to me, as learning about the feelings of activists showed that although many of them saw themselves as part of a broader national political movement, they also recognized that most attendees were more concerned with social and local aspects of the meetings. More general research into the Southeastern Gay Conferences, their impacts in their local communities, and the outcomes of workshops, panels, and meetings is needed. The conferences serve as an origin point for so many significant cultural and political queer American fixtures, including, possibly the Radical Faeries, which only recently came to my attention through connection with archivists at Georgia State University at the Queer History South conference.

Overall, the Southeastern Gay Conferences and their impacts must not be measured only in their national, regional, and local impacts. Though their organizational structure and the developmental environment of the conferences' power to effect change was great. They must also be measured in their impacts on the lives of individuals, on those who attended and those whose lives were changed as a result of their outcomes. They created a space in which gay liberation consciousness in all its iterations flourished, and where gay southerners could learn that they were not alone. As Minnie Bruce Pratt said about her awakenings around the time she attended two of the conferences: "I just very, very explicitly said to myself, I am not going to be

a tragedy. I'm not going to be a tragedy. I'm going to fight. And I did. And so did a lot of other people.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Minnie Bruce Pratt. Interview with Hooper Schultz. March 8, 2019.

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