

Invisible Histories Project-Mississippi Launched during Tupelo Pride, 2019

On October 11, 2019, the Invisible Histories Project-Mississippi (IHP-MS) launched at Tupelo Pride's opening event, held at the Link Centre. The mission of IHP-MS is to document and preserve the history of LGBTQ Mississippians. Co-project directors Amy McDowell (sociology) and I, and graduate assistants Maddie Shappley (sociology) and Hooper Schultz (Southern Studies) were joined by Joshua Burford and Maigen Sullivan, the directors of the first and primary IHP site in Alabama. Students from McDowell's and my graduate seminars in sociology and Southern Studies also attended.

The Tupelo Pride organizers gave the IHP-MS team the opportunity to spread the word about the project and invite people to participate. We had an information table and two pop-up exhibits. One exhibit showcased a selection of record covers from the collection of Charles Smith, known as DJ Prince Charles, a record aficionado who provided the soundtrack to several gay bars in North Mississippi in the 1990s and early 2000s. His record collection is now housed in Archives and Special Collections at the University of Mississippi. For the second exhibit, Shappley and Schultz curated "ethno-poems" from oral history interviews that they completed as part of the Queer Mississippi Oral History Project, directed by McDowell and me. The main event was a drag show, emceed by GoDiva Holliday, who was also interviewed for the oral history project.

The following day the IHP-MS team attended the second annual Tupelo Pride Festival at Fairpark

in downtown Tupelo. Many people stopped by the table to see the archival documents—magazines, photographs, newsletters, and memorabilia—on exhibit and to discuss donating materials or recording an oral history interview. On Sunday, McDowell and I wrapped up the IHP-MS launch at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Oxford, where we were invited to speak about the project's mission and goals.

With funding from a Mellon grant and in collaboration with IHP directors Joshua Burford and Maigen Sullivan, we founded IHP-MS in April 2019. With support from the Isom Center, Archives and Special Collections, and the Center for the Study of Southern Culture (which has included the project in its Future of the South Initiative), IHP-MS

hopes to expand the reach of the project. If you are interested in learning more about the project or possibly donating manuscript collections or print materials, please contact Jessie Wilkerson (jcwilker@olemiss.edu).

IHP-MS will be hosting a one-day symposium, "LGBTQ+ Activism and Advocacy in Mississippi," on the campus of the University of Mississippi on Thursday, April 30, 3:00–5:00 p.m. At the event, cohosted with the Isom Center and part of the Oxford Pride schedule, we will hear from advocates and activists about their work to make Mississippi a more welcoming, safer, and fairer state for LGBTQ+ people. Check the Center's website for more information.

Jessie Wilkerson



(Left to right): Maddie Shappley, Amy McDowell, Jessie Wilkerson, and Hooper Schultz, at the Tupelo Pride drag show, where they exhibited a record collection and oral history interviews from the Invisible Histories Project-Mississippi.