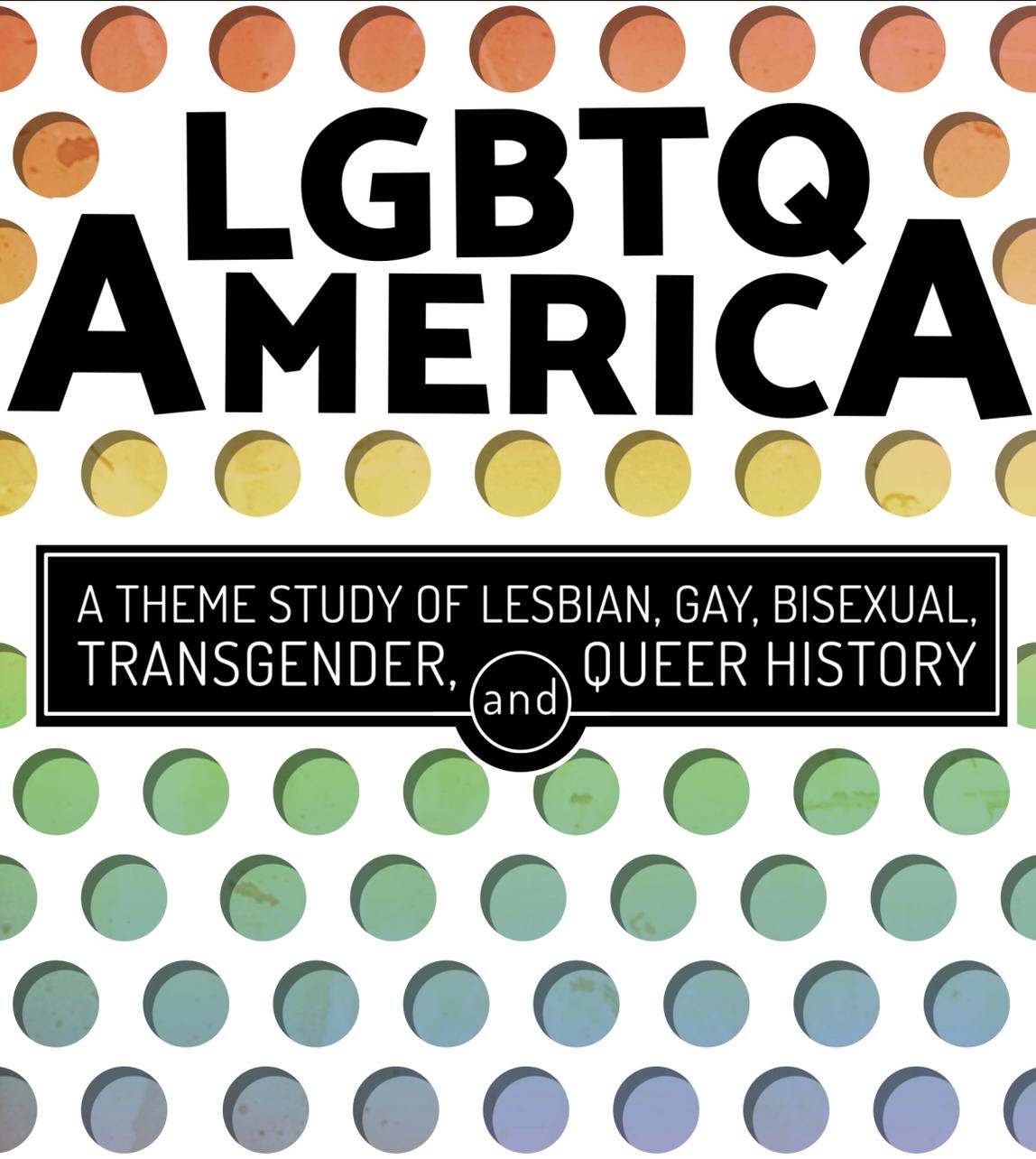


National Park Service
Department of the Interior

Cultural Resources, Partnerships, and Science

2016

National Park Service
CENTENNIAL



LGBTQ AMERICA

A THEME STUDY OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL,
TRANSGENDER, and QUEER HISTORY

Edited by Megan E. Springate



Published online 2016

www.nps.gov/subjects/tellingallamericansstories/lgbtqthemestudy.htm

LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History is a publication of the [National Park Foundation](#) and the [National Park Service](#).

We are very grateful for the generous support of the [Gill Foundation](#), which has made this publication possible.

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Washington, DC

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INCLUSIVE STORIES



Although scholars of LGBTQ history have generally been inclusive of women, the working classes, and gender-nonconforming people, the narrative that is found in mainstream media and that many people think of when they think of LGBTQ history is overwhelmingly white, middle-class, male, and has been focused on urban communities. While these are important histories, they do not present a full picture of LGBTQ history. To include other communities, we asked the authors to look beyond the more well-known stories. Inclusion within each chapter, however, isn't enough to describe the geographic, economic, legal, and other cultural factors that shaped these diverse histories. Therefore, we commissioned chapters providing broad historical contexts for two spirit, transgender, Latino/a, African American Pacific Islander, and bisexual communities. These chapters, read in concert with the chapter on intersectionality, serve as examples of rich, multi-faceted narrative within a fuller history of the United States.

“WHERE WE COULD BE OURSELVES”: AFRICAN AMERICAN LGBTQ HISTORIC PLACES AND WHY THEY MATTER

Jeffrey A. Harris

Introduction

My first forays into African American LGBTQ history were purely for self-education. As an out African American man, I sought out whatever information I could find, from novels, to anthologies, to biographies, to documentaries. In many ways, I was looking for a sense of community, and a sense of belonging as an LGBTQ African American through the information I sought. Yet, it wasn't until I started working in historic preservation that I began asking different questions, and seeking new information. Though I began my work in history by following the traditional academic path, historic preservation proved to be a revelation for me. I began to understand more fully the power and importance of visiting

historic places. I took note of the impact on people that historic sites had. I also saw how academic history and historic preservation could work in tandem to broaden our overall understanding of the past.

I remember visiting Montpelier, the home of our fourth president, James Madison, and I had something of an epiphany.¹ As a docent conducted our tour of the grounds, she spoke of the praise the Madison family received regarding the beauty of their estate. As I looked toward the mountains in the distance, and did a visual sweep of the manicured lawns, I turned around and looked at the home itself (it was in the midst of a major renovation at that time). Then, it hit me, as though I was struck by lightning, that everything I was taking in had been the work of the enslaved Africans who were owned by the Madison family. I understood that the praise the docent mentioned earlier needed to be directed toward those who actually did the work to make Montpelier beautiful. I began to swell with pride at THEIR work. I looked at my surroundings again, imagining what it would have looked like back when James and Dolley Madison were living, and I felt a sense of ownership of Montpelier on behalf of those who were forced to work there, and on behalf of the descendants of those who worked there. I realized, for myself, that there was no need to feel shame over slavery, something that many people do feel (along with anger and sadness). Instead, I offered congratulations, silently, to those spirits who did that work, and did it well. If no one in their lives offered genuine thanks for THEIR work, I wanted to do it those many years later, and I did.

I shared that anecdote, because I wanted to convey the impact that visiting an historic site can have on a person. I felt a similar sense of pride, when I moved to the Logan Circle neighborhood of Washington, DC, in the mid-2000s.² Occasionally, I would walk around the surrounding neighborhoods looking for the residences of noted African Americans, and

¹ Montpelier, near Orange, Virginia, was added to the NRHP on October 15, 1966 and designated an NHL on December 19, 1960.

² There are two historic districts in the Logan Circle neighborhood: the Logan Circle Historic District was added to the NRHP on June 30, 1972; the Fourteenth Street Historic District was added to the NRHP on November 9, 1994.

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I took special care to look for the homes of African American LGBTQ Washington residents. I hoped to build on the legacies that they left behind, because I was following in their footsteps. That is why I accepted the opportunity to participate in this LGBTQ theme study. I recognized the deep need for the African American LGBTQ community not only to know where our predecessors made their history, but also to identify places that are still available for us to visit, even if that visit constitutes standing outside of a door, or driving by a building where something incredible happened. And it certainly is important for historic places associated with African American LGBTQ history to be recognized as places worthy of inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

Though I will focus more attention on some of these historic sites within the body of this study, I wanted to share a partial list of the few African American LGBTQ-related historic sites that either are National Historic Landmarks (NHL) or are currently listed on the NRHP. Two NHL sites that have African American LGBTQ historic relevance are: The residence of writer Claude McKay in Harlem, New York, and Villa Lewaro, the estate of Madame C. J. Walker, the hair straightening and beauty products magnate, and her daughter, A'Lelia, in Irvington-on-Hudson, New York.³ Six sites on the NRHP that have African American LGBTQ historic relevance include: The residence of writer Langston Hughes, the Apollo Theater in Harlem, the apartment complex where Countee Cullen lived (the Dunbar Apartments), as well as the residence of civil and LGBTQ rights activist Bayard Rustin, all of which are in New York City; the residence of Gertrude “Ma” Rainey in Columbus, Georgia; and Azurest South, the Petersburg, Virginia home of architect Amaza Lee Meredith.⁴ Of

³ The Claude McKay Residence (Harlem YMCA) at 180 West 135th Street, New York City, New York was listed on the NRHP and designated an NHL on December 8, 1976. Villa Lewaro is located on North Broadway (US 9), Irvington, New York. It was added to the NRHP and designated an NHL on May 11, 1976.

⁴ The Apollo Theater is located at 253 West 125th Street, New York City, New York. It was added to the NRHP on November 17, 1983. The Langston Hughes House in Harlem, New York was listed on the NRHP on October 29, 1982. The Dunbar Apartments in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City, New York were listed on the NRHP on March 29, 1979. The Bayard Rustin Residence in the Chelsea neighborhood of New York City was added to the NRHP on March 8, 2016. The Ma Rainey House (now the Ma Rainey House and Blues Museum) is located at 805 Fifth Avenue, Columbus, Georgia; it was

these, only the Bayard Rustin site has as express African American LGBTQ narrative highlighted in its nomination. Of course, as scholars and researchers discover new information, or revisit existing information and find missed LGBTQ context clues, then the number of these sites will grow.⁵



Figure 1: Azurest South, Ettrick, Virginia, 1987. Courtesy of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

It was during my tenure as program coordinator of the African American Historic Places Initiative at the National Trust for Historic Preservation that I learned of Azurest South (Figure 1).

Located on the campus of Virginia State University, a historically black university, Azurest South was the home of architect Amaza Lee Meredith. The home itself, completed in 1939, is an example of the International Style in architecture, and Meredith was, at that time, one of the nation's few African American female architects. Though trained as a teacher, Meredith explored her artistic expression through architecture, and she designed homes for family and friends. Meredith also dabbled in real estate development, with the creation of Azurest North, an African American resort community in Sag Harbor, New York. Azurest South was listed on the NRHP in 1993, particularly for its architectural distinction. However, as I read through the National Register nomination, I noticed that Dr. Edna Meade Colson, a former dean of the university's School of Education, was identified as

added to the NRHP on November 18, 1992. Azurest South, at 2900 Boisseau Street, Ettrick, Virginia, was added to the NRHP on December 30, 1993.

⁵ For a list of the ten LGBTQ-associated properties currently listed on the NRHP and designated NHLs, see Springate, Introduction (this volume).

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Meredith’s “companion.” The nomination also provided a description of the second bedroom in the home, a room identified as Dr. Colson’s. Meredith preceded Colson in death, and in the two years before Colson passed away, the university co-owned Azurest South with Colson.⁶ It was clear to me that I’d stumbled upon an African American LGBTQ historic place that was listed on the NRHP, but wasn’t identified expressly as such. Meredith and Colson likely did not live in a LGBTQ vacuum, meaning that there likely was a LGBTQ community at Virginia State, no matter how clandestine it may have been, to which they belonged. But at Azurest South, they were able to create a space where they could be themselves.

Purpose of the Chapter

This chapter is part of a longstanding effort to identify African American historic places that should be considered for listing on the NRHP. But it is, more specifically, an examination of African American historic places that are directly related to the African American LGBTQ experience. The historic places that will be highlighted are currently listed on the National Register, but without specific mention of their LGBTQ historical ties, unlisted historic places that are extant, and African American LGBTQ historic places that have been lost. As Gail Dubrow, author of “Deviant History, Defiant Heritage” notes, there are those who view sexual orientation as a private matter: “Corollary thinking suggests that we have no business ‘outing’ closeted gay people and that sexual orientation is largely irrelevant to the interpretation of the past...”⁷ In spite of that concern, it is of particular importance that the African American LGBTQ community be represented openly through its sites of historic significance. The African American community as a whole had experienced efforts at historical erasure in the past. Through scholarship, however, historians

⁶ Azurest South now serves as the home of the Virginia State University Alumni Association.

⁷ “While the idea of privacy continues to be critical to protecting the right of queer folk to love whomever they choose, it is an increasingly problematic concept for public policy and practice, particularly when used as a rationale for the suppression of public discourse on controversial subjects. Gail Dubrow, “Deviant History, Defiant Heritage,” *The Friends of 1800* website, 2002, accessed June 5, 2016, <http://www.friendsof1800.org/VIEWPOINT/dubrow.html>.

and preservationists have enriched the American historical narrative, and have identified historic places tied to African Americans, including historic places that many would not automatically consider African American historic places. The White House and the US Capitol Building are great examples.⁸ Historical erasure has also been experienced by the African American LGBTQ community both in broader LGBTQ history and African American history. This study will help to move the needle in the direction not only of combatting that erasure, but also in gaining national recognition for African American LGBTQ historic places.

The African American LGBTQ community, for the most part, and unlike the broader white LGBTQ community, was integrated into, and has remained within, broader African American historic communities. Even following the Stonewall rebellion, and the growing acceptance and visibility of the LGBTQ community as a whole, there have not been significant movements to create African American LGBTQ enclaves or for LGBTQ African Americans to leave African American communities for LGBTQ-identified communities. Racism and economic disparities, both social and structural, have certainly contributed to this circumstance. As Professor of Rhetoric Charles Nero noted in his study tracing the development of the Faubourg Marigny neighborhood of New Orleans into a “gay ghetto,” this racialized social and physical segregation was often by design: “Exploiting personal and friendship networks that had been established because of shared sexual—and racial and gender—identities was crucial...in the Marigny.”⁹ African American LGBTQ people were excluded from home ownership in the neighborhood “because they were neither a part of their formal networks of middle class gay men nor were they employed in the low wage service sector of gay owned businesses.”¹⁰ As a result, the gay enclave of Faubourg Marigny is largely white. These circumstances are not unique to Faubourg Marigny. In his study of

⁸ The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC, was designated an NHL on December 19, 1960. The United States Capitol building, Capitol Hill, Washington, DC, was designated an NHL on December 19, 1960.

⁹ Charles I. Nero, “Why Are the Gay Ghettoes White?” in *Black Queer Studies: A Cultural Anthology*, eds. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 233.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 234.

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Harlem’s African American gay male community, anthropologist William Hawkeswood notes that, “...given the relative social and economic marginalization experienced by most residents of Harlem...that apart from organized religion’s traditional dogma against homosexuality, gayness does not in itself draw condemnation from others in the community.”¹¹ Historian Timothy Stewart-Winter, in his study on gay politics in Chicago, notes that African American LGBTQ life was a visible component of the broader African American community in the city, which definitely was not the case for Chicago’s white LGBTQ community.¹² It is not surprising that many African American LGBTQ people have historically remained within African American communities and that therefore the vast majority of African American LGBTQ historic places are located there.

There is no question that the vast majority of the earliest LGBTQ historical studies focused primarily on the experiences of white males, largely reflecting the experiences of their authors—themselves predominantly white men.¹³ Historian Kevin J. Mumford notes that “[m]any of the best and most important studies have avoided further investigation into the meanings of race for the gay past.”¹⁴ Despite the avoidance of race, almost every general LGBTQ history covering the early twentieth century features information about Harlem and/or the Harlem Renaissance. This, I believe, is a testament to the power and visibility of Harlem’s African American LGBTQ community and the willingness of Harlemites to provide spaces for interracial interactions rarely allowed

¹¹ William G. Hawkeswood, *One of the Children: Black Gay Men in Harlem*, ed. Alex W. Costley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), xii.

¹² Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 19.

¹³ In his important work on the history of LGBTQ New York City, *The Gay Metropolis, 1940-1996*, Charles Kaiser stated the following, regarding his focus: “Some of the ordinary and extraordinary citizens who nurtured the spectacular growth of that larger metropolis are the main subjects of this book. While the women I have written about are among the most compelling characters in this saga, men gradually became my principal focus—because their story is also mine.” See Charles Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis, 1940-1996* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), xii.

¹⁴ “As more researchers engage the queer turn, wholly new sexual landscapes promise to emerge, and yet one methodological flaw that limits both the older and recent scholarship has been inattention to questions of diversity and prejudice.” See Kevin J. Mumford, *Not Straight, Not White: Black Gay Men from the March on Washington to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 2.

elsewhere during this period.¹⁵ In part, this was helped by the vice industry that had established itself in Harlem (keeping the vice out of places like the white LGBTQ enclave of Greenwich Village), so “Harlem clubs... continued to mix straight and gay, thereby providing homosexuals with a proportionally greater number of gathering spots than were available in the more uptight downtown white world.”¹⁶ Because white members of the LGBTQ community could make the trip uptown to “slum” among the Harlemites, they too could be themselves—even if for an evening.¹⁷ As a result, early chroniclers of LGBTQ history found many references to Harlem in the archives and papers that they mined.

Harlem Renaissance Era

Harlem has a special place in African American LGBTQ history. Not only was there a concentration of African American LGBTQ folk there, but their presence was visible and documented—uncommonly so in the early twentieth century. The participants of the Harlem Renaissance left an historical record, from Richard Bruce Nugent’s “Smoke, Lilies and Jade,” the first known African American literary work with an explicit gay theme, to the various drag balls that were attended (and chronicled) by interracial audiences. The Harlem African American LGBTQ community, which included people from across the country, left an indelible mark on African American, LGBTQ, and American history. But not without limits; as George Chauncey noted, though LGBTQ people “were casually accepted by many

¹⁵ Harlem was also something of a vice district, so there was a greater tolerance by the city for the salacious and licentious behavior. As historian George Chauncey noted in his book *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*: “The ascendancy of Harlem’s nightlife...also owed much to the willingness of city authorities to look the other way as the largely white-controlled ‘vice industry’ took shape in a poor black neighborhood.” George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 3rd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 247.

¹⁶ Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Penguin Group, 1994), 42.

¹⁷ According to Jack Dowling, who was interviewed by Charles Kaiser for *The Gay Metropolis, 1940-1996*, he and his friends used to patronize the Harlem club, Lucky’s. “It was a big bar where the waiters and waitresses would sing, and the patrons would sing, and people would come and listen to jazz. It was a straight bar, but there were a lot of gay people from downtown, and there were a lot of Black gay guys there.” Kaiser, 122. Lucky’s Rendezvous was located at 773 St. Nicholas Avenue and 148th Street, Harlem, New York City, New York. See Ulysses, “REMEMBER: Lucky’s Rendezvous,” *Harlem + Bespoke* (blog), June 11, 2012, <http://harlembespoke.blogspot.com/2012/06/remember-luckys-rendezvous.html>.

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poor Harlemites and managed to earn a degree of begrudging respect from others, they were excoriated by the district’s moral guardians.”¹⁸ Cultural Studies scholar, Shane Vogel, notes that many of the more famous artists of this era, members known as the “Cabaret School,” “rejected the narratives and logics of normative racial uplift and sexual respectability that initially guided the Harlem Renaissance.”¹⁹ Scholars and preservationists of African American LGBTQ history owe much to the “Cabaret School” of the Harlem Renaissance.

Decades after the Harlem Renaissance, its LGBTQ history survived in stories told across the generations: “Many stories abound about the legendary figures of the Harlem Renaissance. There is the ‘Langston Hughes chair’ in one gay bar, the apartment where Countee Cullen and Harold Jackman played out their long-term affair, the solicitation of young college students by the eminent Alain Locke, and tales of the restroom and park sex of Richard Bruce Nugent and Wallace Thurman.”²⁰ These oral histories mention places that researchers may be able to find, like the specific apartment of the Cullen/Jackman affair, or which park Nugent and Thurman enjoyed. African American women certainly weren’t excluded from these sorts of recollections. “Harlemites might ridicule stereotypic bulldaggers or drag queens, but in the twenties especially, bisexuality had a certain cachet in sophisticated circles, and in the world of show biz the rumored lesbianism of such favored entertainers as Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Alberta Hunter and Ethel Waters tended to be ignored as irrelevant.”²¹

The historical scholarship focused on the era of the Harlem Renaissance, as well as gay life in the 1920s and 1930s, has been

¹⁸ Chauncey, 253.

¹⁹ Shane Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 4.

²⁰ Hawkeswood, 154.

²¹ “A lesbian subculture seems to have developed earlier in Harlem than elsewhere, probably because blacks, knowing the pain of being treated as outsiders, had developed an attitude toward homosexuality relatively more tolerant than was characteristic of white heterosexual circles....” See Duberman, 42.

particularly helpful in identifying African American LGBTQ historic places.²² LGBTQ literary luminaries like Langston Hughes and Claude McKay have residences that are currently listed on the NRHP; McKay's residence has also been designated an NHL.²³ The Dunbar Apartments were home to Countee Cullen, and the complex is listed on the National Register.²⁴ In addition to historical research, the literary canon of the Harlem Renaissance itself provides the names of LGBTQ writers and the places associated with them. Unfortunately, one of the most significant historic places tied to African American LGBTQ literature, the "267 House," was demolished in 2002, and a new building was built in its place.²⁵ The "267 House" (also referred to as "Niggerati Manor" by its residents) was a rooming house where Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman, and Richard Bruce Nugent all used to live. It was here where Wallace Thurman sought contributions from other young artists for a publication made for them, as opposed to being targeted to an outside audience. The 1926 publication was *Fire!!*, and included the aforementioned "Smoke, Lilies and Jade" short story from Richard Bruce Nugent.²⁶ Thurman would go on to use the "267 House" as a primary locale in his novel, *Infants of the Spring* (1932). Despite its historical significance, the building was not landmarked before its demolition.

²² Historian David Levering Lewis and his works on the Harlem Renaissance and W. E. B. Du Bois have been particularly helpful in their detail.

²³ Langston Hughes residence on East 127th Street, New York City, New York was listed on the NRHP on October 29, 1982. The Claude McKay Residence (also known as the Harlem YMCA) is located at 180 West 135th Street, New York City, New York. It was listed on the NRHP and designated an NHL on December 8, 1976.

²⁴ The Dunbar Apartments Complex is located along West 149th and West 150th Streets between Frederick Douglass and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevards, New York City, New York. It was added to the NRHP on March 29, 1979.

²⁵ "This used to be the home and hangout of...so many of the literary luminaries of the Harlem Renaissance. Their former rooming house stood here until 2002, when New York City sold the peaked roofed brownstone, one of six in a matching row, to an investor in Rye, N.Y. The home came down, and a new one, no bigger, was built in its place, its most distinguishing feature being a driveway." See Matt A.V. Chaban, "Much to Save in Harlem, but Historic Preservation Lags, a Critic Says," *New York Times*, February 29, 2016. The "267 House/Niggerati Manor" (now demolished) was located at 267 West 136th Street, New York City, New York.

²⁶ There was only one volume published, and there were only a few copies sold prior to a fire that destroyed the majority of the publication's copies. "Fire!!" marked the first appearance in print of one of the most interesting minor characters of the Renaissance. Twenty-one year old Richard Bruce Nugent was a self-conscious decadent who had shortened his name to Richard Bruce to allay maternal embarrassment about his homosexuality." David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (Australia: Penguin Books, 1997), 196.

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Another important site for African American LGBTQ history was “The Dark Tower,” named after Countee Cullen’s poem “From the Dark Tower.”²⁷ This was the home and salon of A’Lelia Walker, the daughter of Madame C. J. Walker. Walker was not only an ally of LGBTQ Harlemites, but her “romantic partiality to accomplished women was an open secret in Harlem....”²⁸ “The Dark Tower” was demolished in 1941. Surviving is Walker’s Irvington-on-Hudson estate, Villa Lewaro, which is an NHL (1976) (Figure 2). The narrative for the National Landmark designation, in light of the evidence of Walker not only being a strong supporter of the LGBTQ community (publicly), but also being a member of the LGBTQ community herself (privately), could be updated to include that information.²⁹

The losses of “The Dark Tower” and the “267 House,” were genuine blows to African American LGBTQ history, but are not the only such places in Harlem to have been lost. The Rockland Palace, which hosted some of the most legendary of drag balls during the Harlem Renaissance, is gone.³⁰



Figure 2: Villa Lewaro, Irvington, New York. Photo from the Historic American Buildings Survey, n.d. (HABS NY,60-IRV,5-1).

²⁷ David Lewis noted that it was Richard Bruce Nugent who suggested naming the salon after Cullen’s poem “The Dark Tower.” *Ibid.*, 168-69. The Dark Tower (now demolished) was located at 108-110 West 136th Street, New York City, New York. This is now the location of the Countee Cullen Branch of the New York City Public Library.

²⁸ David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2000), 224-225.

²⁹ Villa Lewaro was added to the NRHP and designated an NHL on May 11, 1976.

³⁰ The Rockland Palace (now demolished) was located at 280 West 155th Street, New York City, New York.

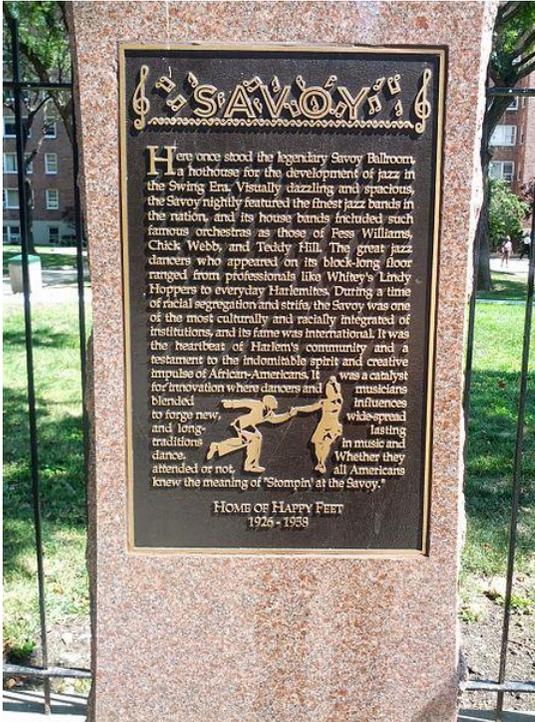


Figure 3: Plaque commemorating the Savoy Ballroom, Harlem, New York City, New York, 2013. Photo by Lukeholladay.³¹

So too are places that were integrated (heterosexual/homosexual) gathering spaces, like the Savoy Ballroom and Harry Hansberry's Clam House, where the drag king Gladys Bentley held court (Figure 3).³² Despite these losses, there remain places from the Harlem Renaissance era that have been identified as historically significant, but efforts at designations either have stalled or haven't begun. There are efforts to improve the pace of designations in Harlem generally, but they remain slow going.³³

Harlem was not the only African American community where LGBTQ denizens felt a sense of freedom. Many urban communities "provided Black gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, who might have been closeted in small towns or other cities, an opportunity to meet one another in clubs, or street corners, and in storefront churches."³³ And there has been a

³¹ License: CC BY-SA 3.0. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Savoyplaque_large.jpg

³² The Savoy Ballroom (now demolished) was located at 596 Lenox Avenue; Harry Hansberry's Clam House (now demolished) was located at 146 West 133rd Street, both in New York City, New York. See Springate, *Archeology* (this volume) for a discussion of the archeological potential of places where standing structures are no longer extant.

³³ According to New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission, as of February 2016, approximately seventeen percent of properties in Harlem have protections through designations. That's in comparison with other Manhattan neighborhoods that have at least sixty percent of properties protected. Chaban, *Ibid*.

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marked increase in interest in the history of the African American LGBTQ folks in various communities across the nation. Historians, anthropologists, and local organizations have been scouring sources, conducting oral histories, and identifying historic sites in an effort to expand our knowledge and understanding of the lives of LGBTQ African Americans. For example, even though he wasn't a Harlemit, Howard University professor Dr. Alain Locke, the nation's first African American Rhodes Scholar, was central to the Harlem Renaissance.³⁵ Not only did Locke seek to identify writers and artists with potential for success during his travels, but he also encouraged those he met who weren't living in Harlem to move there to have more direct access to the various publications (like *The Crisis* from the NAACP or *Opportunity* from The Urban League) and publishing houses. Langston Hughes was one who followed Locke's suggestion to move from Washington, DC, to Harlem.³⁶ It's likely that the combination of Hughes' talent and good looks greatly influenced Locke's interest in him; after all, “Professor Locke had a



Figure 4: The Georgia Douglas Johnson house, Washington, DC, 2010. Photo by AgnosticPreachersKid.³⁴

³⁴ License: CC BY-SA 3.0. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1461_S_Street.JPG

³⁵ Dr. Locke was chair of the Philosophy Department at Howard University. Locke Hall, 2441 Sixth Street NW, Washington, DC, is named in his honor. Locke's home on R Street NW, Washington, DC, is a contributing resource to the Fourteenth Street Historic District, added to the NRHP on November 9, 1994. When in New York City, Locke often stayed at the Hotel Olga, 42 West 120th Street.

³⁶ Places associated with Langston Hughes include the Harlem YMCA (now the Claude McKay Residence), 180 West 135th Street, New York City, New York, added to the NRHP and designated an NHL on December 8, 1976; his residence on East 127th Street, New York City, New York, added to the NRHP on October 29, 1982; his residence on S Street NW, Washington, DC, is a contributing resource to the Dupont Circle Historic District, added to the NRHP on January 21, 1978 (boundary increases February 6, 1985 and June 10, 2005); the 267 House on West 136th Street in New York City, New

weakness for his male students and for intelligent males in general.”³⁷ Locke was also a part of Washington, DC’s literary and artistic community. He participated in the famed “Saturday Nighters” salons in the home of the writer Georgia Douglas Johnson in the period before the start of the Harlem Renaissance (Figure 4).³⁸

Just as there are places associated with African American intellectuals from the Harlem Renaissance, expanding historical research is also highlighting places associated with African American LGBTQ entertainers—where they lived, and where they performed.

Blues/Jazz Era African American LGBTQ Entertainment

The field of entertainment has long served as a safe haven for the LGBTQ community, including African Americans. From the rise of the bawdy blues performers, to the proliferation of drag balls, to the emergence of jazz era entertainers hiding in plain sight, to the performances on the disco stage to the house club, the African American LGBTQ community has made its presence in entertainment known. In many ways, ragtime/jazz artist Antonio “Tony” Jackson, and blues artists Gladys Bentley and Gertrude “Ma” Rainey were pioneers in visibility and openness.

It was during the era of the Great Migration that Jackson moved from the Storyville community of New Orleans (the original home of jazz) to the

York (now demolished) where he socialized with other members of the Harlem Renaissance; Rockland Palace (now demolished), 280 West 155th Street, New York City, New York where he attended and wrote about the drag balls; and Yaddo in Saratoga Springs, New York, located within the Union Avenue Historic District (listed on the NRHP on April 4, 1978 and designated an NHL on March 11, 2013) where Hughes spent time as an artist in residence.

³⁷ Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 87.

³⁸ “In the living room of [Johnson’s] S Street house..., a freewheeling jumble of the gifted, famous, and odd came together on Saturday nights. There were the poets Waring Cuney, Mae Miller, Sterling Brown, Angelina Grimke, and Albert Rose. There were the artists Richard Bruce Nugent and Mae Howard Jackson. Writers like Jean Toomer and Alice Dunbar-Nelson (former wife of Paul Laurence Dunbar), and philosopher-critic Locke came regularly to enjoy the train of famous and to-be-famous visitors.” *Ibid*, 127. Johnson’s home is located on S Street NW, Washington, DC.

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Bronzeville community of Chicago.³⁹ According to the famed jazz musician Jelly Roll Morton, a contemporary of Jackson, Jackson made the move because he believed that both his music and his sexuality would be better appreciated in Chicago.⁴⁰ It was rumored that his 1916 song “Pretty Baby” originally referred to one of Jackson’s male lovers.⁴¹ Gladys Bentley also was known in Bronzeville for her tuxedo-clad performances and suggestive lyrics that alluded to bisexual tastes, but she really made her mark in Harlem.⁴² Rainey, who maintained her base primarily in her hometown of Columbus, Georgia, hid in plain sight, using her lyrics to suggest certain truths.⁴³

Rainey, like Jackson, performed as blues emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. Beginning her career in Columbus, and following her marriage to Will “Pa” Rainey, Ma Rainey toured with her husband’s company, the Rabbit Foot Minstrels. She was one of the earliest blues artists to record her performances, earning her the title of “Mother of the Blues.” On a trip to Chattanooga, Tennessee, Rainey discovered a young Bessie Smith, who later would become the “Empress of the Blues.” Though it was research that revealed Rainey’s bisexuality (and that of her protégé, Smith), her bisexuality was in her lyrics for anyone to hear.

³⁹ Jackson performed at the Beaux Arts Café on the second floor of the Pekin Theater (now demolished), 2700 South State Street, Chicago, Illinois. The Beaux Arts, which opened in 1911, was a “scandalous” venue where a racially diverse audience socialized and danced. See Kendall, “Bob Mott and the Pekin Theater,” *The Chicago Crime Scenes Project* (blog), January 17, 2009, <http://chicagocrimescenes.blogspot.com/2009/01/bob-mott-and-pekin-theater.html>. In 2011, Jackson was inducted into Chicago’s Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame, see “Tony Jackson,” Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame website, http://www.glhalloffame.org/index.pl?item=372&todo=view_item.

⁴⁰ Tristan Cabello, “Queer Bronzeville: African American LGBTQs on Chicago’s South Side, 1900-1985,” *Windy City Times*, February 29, 2012, accessed June 19, 2016, <http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/lgbt/Queer-Bronzeville-African-American-LGBTs-on-Chicagos-South-Side-1900-1985/36389.html>.

⁴¹ David Ehrenstein, “Gay New Orleans 101,” *Advocate*, October 11, 2005, 50.

⁴² Cabello, “Queer Bronzeville.” Bentley performed at venues across the country, including Harry Hansberry’s Clam House, 133rd Street, Harlem, New York City, New York; Rockland Palace (now demolished), 280 West 115th Street, New York City, New York; the Ubangi Club (now demolished), 131st Street at Seventh Avenue, New York City, New York; Joaquin’s El Rancho, Vine Street, Los Angeles, California; and Mona’s Club 440, 440 Broadway, San Francisco, California. Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 76.

⁴³ Ma Rainey’s home, now a museum honoring her legacy, is located at 805 Fifth Avenue, Columbus, Georgia.

Rainey's song "Prove It on Me Blues" "speaks directly to the issue of lesbianism. In it, she admits to her preference for male attire and female companionship, yet she dares her audience to 'prove it' on her."⁴⁴ Rainey was able to be explicit on stage and on her records, while maintaining her intimate relationships with women in private spaces. Rainey's successors, including Bessie Smith, Alberta Hunter (a student of Tony Jackson), Josephine Baker, and Ethel Waters followed her lead in their subsequent relationships with women, adopting heterosexual public personas [like Rainey], most favoring a 'red hot mama' style. Bentley and comedienne Jackie "Moms" Mabley were notable exceptions who were much more open with their sexuality.⁴⁵

That several of these female entertainers donned men's clothing during their performances was not surprising, considering that drag balls (and smaller performances with female/male impersonators) in the African American community were quite popular in the first half of the twentieth century. Independent of the annual drag balls, "in cities with high black populations some nightclubs featured female impersonators. New York's 101 Ranch, Detroit's Uncle Tom's Cabin, and Chicago's Joe's Deluxe Club were among biggest."⁴⁶ Langston Hughes recalled his time attending the Hamilton Club Lodge Ball at the Rockland Palace with

⁴⁴ Eric Garber, "A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem," American Studies at the University of Virginia website, accessed June 19, 2016, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug97/blues/garber.html>.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Many of these performers, including Bessie Smith, "Moms" Mabley, and Ethel Waters, performed at the Apollo Theater, 253 West 125th Street, New York City, New York. The Apollo was added to the NRHP on November 17, 1983. Like Bentley, Mabley performed at the Ubangi Club (now demolished), 131st Street at Seventh Avenue, New York City, New York. In 1962, Mabley performed at Carnegie Hall, 881 Seventh Avenue, New York City, New York (added to the NRHP on October 15, 1966 and designated an NHL on December 29, 1962). Alberta Hunter got her big break performing at the Dreamland Café, 3518-3520 South State Street, Chicago, Illinois. In addition to the Apollo, Ethel Waters also performed at Edmond's Cellar, Fifth Avenue and 132nd Street, New York City, New York; she lived in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. Both Josephine Baker and Ethel Waters performed at the Plantation Club, Broadway and 50th Streets, New York City, New York. See Aberjhani and Sandra L. West, *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Facts on File, 2003); Jonathan Gill, *Harlem: The Four Hundred Year History from Dutch Village to Capital of Black America* (New York: Grove Press, 2011).

⁴⁶ Gregory Conerly, "Swishing and Swaggering: Homosexuality in Black Magazines during the 1950s," in *The Greatest Taboo*, 389. The 101 Ranch (now demolished) was located at 101 West 139th Street, New York City, New York; Joe's Deluxe Club (now demolished) was located at 6323 South Parkway, Chicago, Illinois.

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Figure 5: The Hotel Pershing, Chicago, Illinois, home to drag balls in the 1930s. From a postcard, ca. 1948, courtesy of Megan E. Springate.

A'Lelia Walker: “[I]t was fashionable for the intelligentsia and social leaders of both Harlem and the downtown area to occupy boxes at this ball and look down from above at the queerly assorted throng on the dancing floor, males in flowing gowns and feathered headdresses and females in tuxedos and box-back suits.”⁴⁷ *Ebony* magazine published a report of a New York drag ball: “Harlem’s annual drag ball at the Fun Makers Social Club was a hit in 1944. The men who don silks, satins and laces for the yearly masquerades are as style conscious as the women of a social club planning an annual charity affair or a society dowager

⁴⁷ Langston Hughes, *Autobiography: The Big Sea (The Collected Works of Langston Hughes)*, vol. 13, ed. Joseph McLaren (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 208. Rockland Palace (now demolished) was located at 280 West 115th Street, New York City, New York.

selecting a debutante gown for her favorite daughter.”⁴⁸ Back in the 1930s, years before *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines existed, Finnie’s Club in Chicago hosted drag balls, eventually becoming so popular that they had to move them to the Pershing Hotel’s Ballroom (Figure 5).⁴⁹ In the 1950s, *Ebony* did a feature on Harlem Renaissance era drag king and lesbian, Gladys Bentley. By that time Bentley had moved to the West Coast, and had a fairly successful performance career in California;⁵⁰ she later demonized lesbianism in her retirement.⁵¹ It’s clear that the drag ball scene was all the rage in the early twentieth century. Unfortunately, very few drag ball sites from that dynamic era remain extant. One that does remain is New York City’s Webster Hall which hosted bohemian masquerade balls and drag balls in the 1910s and 1920s.⁵²

The openness of the 1920s and 1930s eventually gave way to the struggles of the Great Depression, which certainly affected many African Americans. Though popular magazines like *Ebony* and *Jet* featured stories on LGBTQ events, the overarching scene was becoming more underground. By the time jazz composer and pianist Billy Strayhorn was hitting his creative stride with Edward “Duke” Ellington in the late 1930s and into the 1940s, the quiet acceptance of and tolerance toward the African American LGBTQ community was beginning to wane.

Strayhorn was one of the few openly gay jazz men, yet his sexuality seemed to not be much of an issue—perhaps because he allowed Ellington to be the public face of their many collaborative efforts. Strayhorn composed “Take the ‘A’ Train,” one of the most recognized

⁴⁸ Kaiser, 40-41. Gregory Conerly, in his essay “Swishing and Swaggering,” focused his research on the mid-twentieth-century powerhouses of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines. Generally, they focused their coverage on Halloween and Thanksgiving events that were held in Chicago and New York City.

⁴⁹ Conerly, 387. The Pershing Hotel (now demolished) was located at 6400 Cottage Grove, Chicago, Illinois.

⁵⁰ In San Francisco where she played at the lesbian venue Mona’s Club 440 during World War II, Bentley was “[a]dvertised as ‘America’s Sepia Piano Artist’ and the ‘Brown Bomber of Sophisticated Songs.’” Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*, 76. Mona’s Club 440 was located at 440 Broadway, San Francisco, California.

⁵¹ “Bentley, at the time of the article written in 1952, was ‘happily married and living a normal existence.’ But, she claimed, ‘I am still haunted by the sex underworld in which I once lived. I want to help others, who are trapped in its dark recesses by telling my story.’” Conerly, 391.

⁵² Webster Hall and Annex are located at 119-125 East 11th Street, New York City, New York.

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songs of Ellington’s orchestra. He also composed “Something to Live For” and “Lush Life.”⁵³ During this prolific period, Strayhorn was partnered with Aaron Bridgers, another openly gay pianist and composer, and they lived together in the Hamilton Heights neighborhood of Manhattan from 1939 until Bridgers moved to France in 1948.⁵⁴

As with other African American LGBTQ historic places from the Harlem Renaissance, many of the places associated with African American LGBTQ entertainers from the early decades of the twentieth century have been lost, or not been considered for historic designation. The Apollo Theater, listed on the NRHP was an important performance venue for almost every African American LGBTQ entertainer throughout the twentieth century—an aspect of its history omitted from its nomination.⁵⁵ Important places that survive include the home of Billy Strayhorn and Aaron Bridgers, where Strayhorn composed some of his most recognized work and the home of singer and actress Ethel Waters. Further research may provide information for places associated with Jackie “Moms” Mabley and Gladys Bentley (who moved to California in the 1930s), who were open lesbians in the 1920s and 1930s, or for places associated with more private African American LGBTQ entertainers, like Josephine Baker and Alberta Hunter.

Middle/Late Twentieth-Century African American LGBTQ Activism and Activists

Though there have been continual efforts to ensure full equality and freedom for African Americans since the nation’s founding, the mid-

⁵³ Tom Vitale, “100 Years of Billy Strayhorn, Emotional Architect of Song,” NPR, *Weekend Edition Sunday*, November 29, 2015, accessed June 21, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/2015/11/29/457598579/100-years-of-billy-strayhorn-emotional-architect-of-song>.

⁵⁴ Kevin Henriques, “Aaron Bridgers,” *Guardian*, December 21, 2003. The home of Strayhorn and Bridgers was located within the Hamilton Heights Historic District, listed on the NRHP on September 30, 1983. Strayhorn’s Childhood Home (now demolished) was at 7212 Tioga Street, Rear, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

⁵⁵ The Apollo Theater, 253 West 125th Street, New York City, New York was added to the NRHP on November 17, 1983.

twentieth century represented a high water mark for organizational and activist success. This same time period also proved to be a watershed for the LGBTQ community.⁵⁶ Despite the fact that African American LGBTQ individuals played important roles in both movements, it was not until 2016 that places associated with them as African American and LGBTQ people were nationally recognized. An increasing scholarship is not only helping to identify and/or confirm African American LGBTQ participants, but is also revealing associated historic places that can be considered for



Figure 6: Bayard Rustin Residence, New York City, New York, ca. 2013. Photo courtesy of Walter Naegle.

possible future historic designations. It is important to note that the nation's first LGBTQ civil rights organization, the Society for Human Rights founded by Henry Gerber in Chicago, had an African American president, John T. Graves. Beyond Graves' dealings with Gerber at the Henry Gerber House, there are no known extant places associated with Graves. Perhaps continued research on the Society for Human Rights and Gerber will reveal relevant places for this important figure in African American LGBTQ history.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ See Springate, *Civil Rights* (this volume).

⁵⁷ The Henry Gerber House was designated a NHL on July 21, 2015. See Tammye Nash, "Henry Gerber: The Gay Rights Pioneer You Probably Never Heard of," *Dallas Voice*, February 17, 2015, accessed July 30, 2016, <http://www.dallasvoice.com/henry-gerber-gay-rights-pioneer-heard-10190163.html>.

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Currently, there is just one known National Register listing for an African American LGBTQ participant in the civil rights movement: the Bayard Rustin Residence (Figure 6).⁵⁹ Rustin, an openly gay, yet discreet, man is perhaps best known as the principal organizer of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. He was also the person who introduced nonviolence as a key principle for the civil rights movement, helped to usher in direct action protest tactics, and he restored the legitimacy of mass protesting.⁶⁰ Because of Rustin’s sexuality, he was asked to step back from public work in the civil rights movement, and he was nearly erased from public memory. Fortunately, the LGBTQ community has helped to ensure that that erasure was not successful, and there has



Figure 7: Pauli Murray mural, Durham, North Carolina, 2014. “True Community is based upon equality, mutuality, and reciprocity. It affirms the richness of individual diversity as well as the common human ties that bind us together.” Photo by Connie Ma.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ License: CC BY-SA 2.0. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ironypoisoning/15472932724>

⁵⁹ Bayard Rustin’s residence in the Chelsea neighborhood of New York City, New York was listed on the NRHP on March 8, 2016.

⁶⁰ John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York: The Free Press, 2003), 1.

been a resurrection of Rustin's name as a significant civil rights and gay rights activist.⁶¹

Pauli Murray was a contemporary of Rustin. Both were members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and participated in efforts to test the 1946 Supreme Court ruling that deemed segregation in interstate bus travel unconstitutional (predating the Freedom Rides by almost twenty years). Murray, who was gender nonconforming, was open about her relationships with women, but she never identified as a lesbian, and offered critiques of both society and the civil rights movement for their discrimination based on gender (Figure 7). She coined the term "Jane Crow," and noted that "Black women faced with these dual barriers, have often found that sex bias is more formidable than racial bias."⁶² Murray went on to become one of the cofounders of the National Organization for Women. There is currently an effort to have Murray's childhood home in Durham, North Carolina designated an NHL.⁶³

Writers James Baldwin and Lorraine Hansberry used their pens and their voices to advance civil rights. Baldwin, who was openly gay, followed in Richard Bruce Nugent's footsteps when he wrote a gay protagonist into his novel, *Giovanni's Room* (1956). In 1957, Baldwin was given an opportunity to report about the South for the *Partisan Review*. It was through his reporting that he became a national voice of both the civil rights movement and the broader African American community. Hansberry, in her play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, articulated the struggles of African American families striving for upward mobility. An activist from her time as a student at the University of Wisconsin, Hansberry continued that activism into the civil rights era. A 1963 meeting of Attorney General Robert Kennedy with

⁶¹ See, for example, D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*.

⁶² Pauli Murray, "The Liberation of Black Women," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: The New Press, 1995).

⁶³ The Pauli Murray Childhood Home is located at 906 Carroll Street, Durham, North Carolina. It was named a National Treasure by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 2015, and is currently being developed as the Pauli Murray Center for History and Social Justice, with a planned opening to the public in 2020. See "National Treasures: Pauli Murray House," National Trust for Historic Preservation website, <https://savingplaces.org/places/pauli-murray-house>; "Pauli Murray Project," Duke Human Rights Center at the Franklin Humanities Institute website, Pauli Murray Project, <http://paulimurrayproject.org/becoming-involved>.

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civil rights activists, including Baldwin and Hansberry, that came in the aftermath of brutal police attacks on peaceful demonstrators in Birmingham, Alabama, became contentious when Hansberry challenged Kennedy to use his authority (and that of President Kennedy) more forcefully to protect African American demonstrators—or risk those demonstrators resorting to violence in frustration. “This memorable moment of emotionality, radical refusal and principled resolve,” writes historian Kevin Mumford “ought to be seen as a signal beginning of modern black gay activism.”⁶⁴

Neither Baldwin nor Hansberry has National Register listed or NHL designated places associated with them, despite the survival of several locations. Two places survive in New York City associated with Baldwin: his apartment in Greenwich Village where he wrote *Another Country* and his home on the Upper West Side that he owned until his death in 1987, and where he wrote *Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone*.⁶⁵ Hansberry spent her first years living in Chicago’s South Side; in 1937, her parents purchased a home in an all-white neighborhood. They were sued for violating the restrictive covenant preventing African Americans from moving there. The case went to the United States Supreme Court (Hansberry v. Lee), which decided in favor of the Hansberrys.⁶⁶ However, it was in New York City’s Greenwich Village, where Hansberry wrote *A Raisin in the Sun*, and it is also where she lived as she more fully explored her interests in women.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Mumford, 12-13.

⁶⁵ Baldwin’s residence on Horatio Street, Greenwich Village, New York City, New York is within the Greenwich Village Historic District, listed on the NRHP on June 19, 1979. A plaque was unveiled at this location in 2015. The James Baldwin House is located on the Upper West Side, New York City, New York. Danielle Tcholakian, “James Baldwin Historic Plaque to Be Unveiled at 81 Horatio St.,” *DNAINfo*, October 6, 2015, accessed June 21, 2016, <https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20151006/west-village/james-baldwin-historic-plaque-be-unveiled-at-81-horatio-st>.

⁶⁶ The Hansberry home on Chicago’s South Side (now demolished) was at 5330 South Calumet Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. The home purchased by Lorraine’s parents in 1937 was in Chicago’s Woodlawn neighborhood. It has been designated an historic site at the local level. Alison Shay, “Remembering Hansberry v. Lee,” *Publishing the Long Civil Rights Movement* (blog), November 12, 2012, <https://lcrm.lib.unc.edu/blog/index.php/tag/hansberry-v-lee>.

⁶⁷ Her Greenwich Village residence was on Bleecker Street, New York City, New York. She also lived on Waverly Place, New York City. Though she did not live to see the Stonewall riots of 1969, Lorraine

With its listing on the NRHP in 1999, the Stonewall Inn was the first explicitly LGBTQ historic site to gain historic designation specifically for its central place in American LGBTQ history.⁶⁸ The bar was a place where minorities could be patrons without encountering the levels of racism found at other gay bars. According to historian Martin Duberman, the Stonewall bouncer, Ed Murphy, reportedly “had a soft spot in general for Hispanics... and also for blacks; indeed, later gay bar owners who employed Murphy would worry that he would ‘turn the club black’ and—since racism has always been alive and well in the gay world—frighten off white clientele.”⁶⁹ The Stonewall Inn was also a place where transgender and gender nonconforming patrons felt safe to be themselves without judgment from those in the LGBTQ community who disapproved of their appearance. Kevin Mumford offered this assessment of Duberman’s approach to the subject of the riots: “In Duberman’s telling, the 1969 police raid of a gay bar signaled not only the usual violent repression, but also an emergent coalition of the respectable activist, the street drag queen, and the bar fly, alongside black and Hispanic gays.”⁷⁰ Scholarship, as well as the personal recollections of Stonewall participants, like Miss Major and the late Marsha P. Johnson, reveals that the first designated LGBTQ historic site is also an African American (and Hispanic) LGBTQ historic site.

The activism of writer and poet Audre Lorde straddled the era of the Stonewall Riots; she published her first work of poetry, *The First Cities*, in 1968. But it was in the post-Stonewall era, and with the rise of the black power, women’s, and gay liberation movements that Lorde gave voice to the intersections that defined the experiences and perspectives of African American lesbians. In her works, like *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*

Hansberry’s Bleecker Street home was less than two blocks away from the site. See NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission, *150 Years of LGBT History*, PowerPoint presentation, accessed June 21, 2016, http://www.nyc.gov/html/lpc/downloads/pdf/LGBT-PRIDE_2014.pdf, 13.

⁶⁸ National Register of Historic Places, Stonewall, New York, New York County, New York, National Register #99000562. Stonewall, 51-53 Christopher Street, New York City, New York was listed on the NRHP on June 28, 1999; designated an NHL on February 16, 2000; and declared the Stonewall National Monument on June 24, 2016.

⁶⁹ Duberman, 183.

⁷⁰ Mumford, 89.

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(1982) and *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984), Lorde offered searing critiques of these liberation movements from a black lesbian feminist perspective. Lorde also influenced the work of activist Barbara Smith, who cofounded the Combahee River Collective in 1974 (see below) and, in 1980 (at the suggestion of Lorde), Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, the nation’s first publishing company dedicated solely to works by women of color. Writer Joseph Beam, disillusioned not only with the racism of the broader LGBTQ movement, but also with the invisibility of African American gay male voices, “predicted that ‘black gays are soon to follow the lead of black lesbians; our voices, from a whisper to a scream,’ would soon be recorded, collected, and published.”⁷¹ It was Beam who took on that project (with mentoring from Barbara Smith), resulting in *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology*. The publication was the first of its kind: all of the contributors were African American gay men writing about their experiences for an African American gay male audience.⁷²

There are places associated with Lorde, Smith, and Beam that are extant. For example, the home Lorde shared with her partner, Dr. Frances Clayton and where she wrote *Zami* and *Sister Outsider* is located on Staten Island, New York. There are several places in Boston and New York City associated with Smith, who among the three is the only one still living, which may be good candidates for NRHP or NHL nomination. Beam was based in Philadelphia, and his home in the Rittenhouse Square neighborhood where he produced *In the Life*, remains extant. As with Rustin, Murray, Baldwin, and Hansberry, these African American LGBTQ activists and artists (and this is far from a complete list) have had national impacts on American and LGBTQ history.

⁷¹ Mumford, 140.

⁷² In this way, *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology* (Boston: Alyson Books, 1986) is reminiscent of Wallace Thurman’s *Fire!!*, which gave young Harlem Renaissance writers a place to produce art by and for themselves.

Post-Stonewall & HIV/AIDS Era African American LGBTQ Organizations

In the flurry of LGBTQ activism that arose post-Stonewall, many members of the African American LGBTQ community found themselves and issues important to them excluded or not represented. Finding racism in the existing LGBTQ organizations and homophobia in existing African American organizations, they organized among themselves.⁷³ Several of these organizations were the first of their kind in American history.⁷⁴

The nation's oldest African American lesbian organization, the African Ancestral Lesbians United for Social Change (AALUSC) has a somewhat labyrinthine origin story. Having begun as the Black Lesbian Caucus of the Gay Activists Alliance (which itself formed from the splintering of the Gay Liberation Front), in 1974 the organization became the Salsa Soul Sisters, Third World Wimmin Incorporated Collective. In 1990, they changed their name to the AALUSC.⁷⁵ 1974 was also the year that the Combahee River Collective (CRC), another African American feminist lesbian organization, was established. They began as the Boston chapter of the National Black Feminist Organization with the express purpose of providing a space where African American feminist lesbians could be themselves wholly, without having to sublimate any aspect of their identities.⁷⁶ The members of the CRC "held seven retreats in the northeast between 1977 and

⁷³ There were also concerns that existing LGBTQ organizations at that time simply weren't interested in working on "non-LGBTQ" issues that directly affected the African American LGBTQ community, like employment, police brutality, poverty, and health care.

⁷⁴ Criteria considerations for both NRHP and NHL nominations exist that allow researchers to nominate places where the significant events took place less than fifty years prior. See Springate and de la Vega (this volume).

⁷⁵ The Salsa Soul Sisters, Third World Wimmin Incorporated Collective included African American and Latina women. They met primarily at a private residence near Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village, New York City, New York. The AALUSC currently meets at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center, 208 West 13th Street, New York City, New York. Third World Gay Women, Inc., "Salsa Soul Sisters Pamphlet," *Greenwich Village History* website, accessed June 18, 2016, <http://gvh.aphdigital.org/items/show/1159>.

⁷⁶ In the mid-1970s, the Combahee River Collective met at the Women's Center, 595 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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1980.”⁷⁷ The Combahee River Collective Statement, written by members Barbara Smith, Demita Frazier, and Beverly Smith in 1977, came out of the first retreat. The statement highlights the importance of the intersecting identities of African American women (particularly around race and sexual orientation) in feminist organizing.⁷⁸ The subsequent retreats afforded the CRC opportunities to build upon principles established in its statement.

The nation’s oldest national African American LGBTQ organization, the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays, was founded as the National Coalition of Black Gays (NCBG) in Columbia, Maryland in 1978 by bisexual activist ABilly S. Jones (now ABilly S. Jones-Hennin), Darlene Garner, and Delores Berry. The First National Conference of Third World Lesbians and Gays was organized by the NCGB at the former Harambee House Hotel at Howard University (now the Howard Center) the following year, with approximately 450 conference attendees, and in conjunction with the first National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights.⁷⁹ The NCGB also organized the 1986 National Conference on AIDS in the Black Community, the first national conference on HIV/AIDS focused specifically on the African American community.⁸⁰

The National Conference of Third World Lesbians and Gays was a catalyst for the creation of the Lambda Student Alliance (LSA) at Howard

⁷⁷ The retreats themselves took place “mostly in private homes,” which is reflective of the overarching theme of this study, highlighting the spaces where members of the African American LGBTQ community could be themselves. Duchess Harris, “From the Kennedy Commission to the Combahee Collective: Black Feminist Organizing, 1960-1980,” in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, eds. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 295.

⁷⁸ See also Springate, *Intersectionality* (this volume).

⁷⁹ Robert Crisman, “History Made: First Lesbians/gays of Color Conference,” Freedom Socialist Party website, Winter 1979, accessed June 19, 2016, <http://www.socialism.com/drupal-6.8/articles/history-made-first-lesbians-gays-color-conference>. The Harambee House Hotel was located on the 2200 block of Georgia Avenue NW, Washington, DC.

⁸⁰ See “ABilly S. Jones-Hennin,” Rainbow History Project Digital Collections website, accessed June 19, 2016, <https://rainbowhistory.omeka.net/exhibits/show/pioneers/2007awardees/jones-hennin>. The National Conference on AIDS in the Black Community was held at the Washington Convention Center (now demolished), 909 H Street NW, Washington, DC. Gil Gerald, “Speech to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference Women’s Conference on AIDS,” in *Speaking for Our Lives: Historic Speeches and Rhetoric for Gay and Lesbian Rights (1892-2000)*, ed. Robert B. Marks Ridinger (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2004), 515.

University in 1979.⁸¹ Interested students like Sidney Brinkley worked with faculty member James Tinney to establish the organization. In the January 1980 issue of *Blacklight*, the LSA's publication, Bill Stevens noted the challenges not only in publicizing the organization but also in gaining official recognition from the university. The organization initially advertised using posters under the (incorrect) assumption that African American LGBTQ students would recognize "Lambda" as being synonymous with gay. The uphill struggle for the LSA to gain university recognition was exacerbated by vocal opposition to the group, including the interruption of an LSA meeting by Muslim students.⁸² In 1981, the LSA became the first LGBTQ student organization recognized by a historically black college or university. Their publication, *Blacklight*, was the nation's first African American LGBTQ publication.⁸³

In 1986, as the HIV/AIDS crisis was raging, Rev. Charles Angel established Gay Men of African Descent (GMAD) to meet the holistic needs of African American gay, bisexual, and same gender loving men.⁸⁴ "The organization represented the largest constituency of black gay men on the East Coast, and is the nation's largest and oldest black gay organization dedicated exclusively to the welfare of black gay men."⁸⁵ Though it wasn't created as an HIV/AIDS organization, it became one because of the need for an African American male-identified organization. Sadly, Rev. Angel himself succumbed to complications from HIV/AIDS in 1987.

This is far from an exhaustive listing of African American LGBTQ organizations, but the goal was to highlight those that may have national historic relevance. And with the emergence of the HIV/AIDS crisis, the LGBTQ community responded with the creation of organizations that had historic impacts in the various cities and states where they were

⁸¹ Howard University is located at 2400 Sixth Street NW, Washington, DC.

⁸² Bill Stevens, "The Gay Movement Comes to Howard University," *Blacklight*, 2014, accessed June 19, 2016, <http://www.blacklightonline.com/howard.html>.

⁸³ Mumford, 157.

⁸⁴ GMAD was located at 540 Atlantic Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

⁸⁵ "Gay Men of African Descent, Inc. records, 1986-1998," New York Public Library Archives & Manuscripts website, accessed June 22, 2016, <http://archives.nypl.org/scm/21213>.

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established, like GMAD, and those organizations and their founding sites can be researched for NRHP and/or NHL designation.

Black Pride

Black Pride events have proliferated across the United States providing African American LGBTQ communities the opportunity to celebrate both of their identities simultaneously. The first Black Pride event (though it was not called Black Pride at that time) was held Memorial Day weekend in 1975 at a bar called the Clubhouse.⁸⁷ The event was called the “Children’s Hour,” which is a play on words: “Children” is often used in the African American LGBTQ community as a euphemism for themselves. The “Children’s Hour” events were held annually at the Clubhouse from 1975 to 1990, when the venue closed its doors. Inspired by the Children’s



Figure 8: Banneker Field is part of the Banneker Recreation Center complex, Washington, DC. Photo by Smallbones, 2011.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ License: Public Domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Banneker_Rec_Center_DC.jpg

⁸⁷ The Clubhouse was located at 1296 Upshur Street NW, Washington, DC.

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Hours, in 1991, Welmore Cook, Theodore Kirkland, and Earnest Hopkins organized the first DC Black Pride event to use that name as an HIV/AIDS fundraiser.⁸⁸ It was held at Banneker Field, and served as the model for subsequent Black Pride events (Figure 8).⁸⁹ The locations of other cities' Black Pride events may also be considered significant. For example, Los Angeles held its first Black Pride event, called "At the Beach" in 1988; New York City had its first Black Pride in 1997.⁹⁰

African American LGBTQ Cruising/Sexual Engagement Sites

Clandestine liaisons, anonymous couplings, and sexual partner searches in public and/or partially private spaces have been central to the LGBTQ experience. Entertainment venues and bars—including the Stonewall Inn and Julius', both of which have been designated historic sites—have long been places where the LGBTQ people gather and socialize.⁹¹ In both cases, however, their historic designation rests primarily on the central role they played in the modern LGBTQ civil rights movement, not about their roles as places of cruising/sexual engagement. Of course the possibility of cruising/sexual engagement drew patrons to these bars; however, could that aspect of an LGBTQ site's history contribute to its significance?⁹²

There is precedence for places of sexual engagement being listed on the National Register. The Fort Laramie Three Mile Hog Ranch in Fort Laramie, Wyoming served not only as a community center of sorts,

⁸⁸ Frank Muzzy, *Gay and Lesbian Washington, D.C.*, Images of America Series (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), 51.

⁸⁹ Banneker Field is part of the Banneker Recreation Center, 2500 Georgia Avenue NW, Washington, DC. It was added to the NRHP on April 28, 1986.

⁹⁰ Atlanta held its first Black Pride event in 1996. Les Fabian Brathwaite, "Black Pride Matters," *Advocate*, June/July 2016, 55.

⁹¹ Stonewall and Julius', both in New York City, are listed on the NRHP. See note 66 for information on Stonewall. Julius', at 159 West 10th Street, New York City, New York, was listed on the NRHP on April 21, 2016.

⁹² For discussions of the importance of places associated with cruising and sexual engagement to LGBTQ history, see, for example, Hanhardt, Johnson, Baim, and Giesecking (this volume). See also Dubrow (this volume) for a discussion regarding pushback to having LGBTQ places added to the NRHP and designated NHLs.

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providing patrons with access to alcohol and entertainment, but as a bordello, it also served as a site of [hetero]sexual engagement.⁹³ The Fort Laramie Three Mile Hog Ranch “was one of the very few military bordellos left in the western United States at the time of its nomination to the National Register of Historic Places,” in 1975.⁹⁴ The role of this place as one of sexual engagement was partially determinative in its designation. In 1973, Portland, Oregon’s Hotel Alma building became home to the Club Baths bathhouse and a restaurant catering to a gay clientele; it continuously hosted gay bathhouses under several names until 2007 when the building was sold. While the Hotel Alma was listed on the NRHP with a period of significance of 1911, when it was built, the nomination does not shy away from the building’s history as a gay bathhouse, and places it into the context of both LGBTQ life in Portland, as well as the post-Stonewall era more broadly.⁹⁵

One of the most significant African American LGBTQ historic sites related to cruising/sexual engagement is the Mount Morris Turkish Baths in Harlem.⁹⁶ The bathhouse was in operation from 1893 to 2003, and it was the only bathhouse in New York City that specifically catered to African American men (beginning in the 1930s). Primarily an African American LGBTQ space, it was also patronized to a much lesser extent by non-African American gay and bisexual men, and straight men of various races and ethnicities: “Harlem royalty like Joe Louis and Sam Cooke used to sweat here years ago, and it [was] nothing to see French tourists, straight businessmen and Hasidic Jews perspiring in the steam room side by side....”⁹⁷ Mount Morris Baths was one of the very few bathhouses

⁹³ The Fort Laramie Three Mile Hog Ranch, located outside Fort Laramie, Wyoming was added to the NRHP on April 23, 1975.

⁹⁴ “National Register of Historic Places: Fort Laramie Three Mile Hog Ranch,” Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office website, accessed June 14, 2016, <http://wyoshpo.state.wy.us/NationalRegister/Site.aspx?ID=179>.

⁹⁵ Hotel Alma (now the Crystal Hotel), 1201-1217 SW Stark Street, Portland, Oregon was added to the NRHP on September 9, 2009. John M. Tess, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Hotel Alma (Washington, DC: National Park Service, July 2009). For more on the importance of periods of significance, see Springate and de la Vega (this volume).

⁹⁶ Mount Morris Turkish Baths were located at 28 East 125th Street, New York City, New York.

⁹⁷ Alan Feuer, “Mount Morris Journal; A Gay Bathhouse in Harlem? Hey, It’s No Secret,” *New York Times*, January 19, 2003.

across the country that were not closed down during the AIDS panic of the 1980s; instead of closing, they provided public outreach and education about the disease. In 2003, organizations dedicated to HIV/AIDS education were conducting educational tours of the bathhouse.⁹⁸ The site currently is an apartment building with street level retail space.

There are many other potentially significant sites of cruising and sexual engagement to the African American LGBTQ community. For example, in Washington, DC, Meridian Hill Park, a National Historic Landmark, was an infamous site of cruising/sexual engagement prior to the park's restoration;⁹⁹ Marcus Garvey Park and the West Side Piers in New York City have storied places in the histories of African American same-gender loving men.¹⁰⁰ The Wentworth, a bar located adjacent to the Apollo Theater, was in fact two bars: a straight bar in front, and then behind it, with a separate side entrance, a black lesbian bar.¹⁰¹ It is likely that sites of cruising/sexual engagement related to African American same-gender loving women, outside of lesbian bars, will be the private homes of African American women: Villa Lewaro, the New York estate of the Harlem Renaissance era figure A'Lelia Walker, and the no longer extant "Dark Tower" home in Harlem, are two examples.¹⁰² Other examples could

⁹⁸ With the arrival of HIV/AIDS, it is not a surprise that Mount Morris moved beyond its role as a site of cruising/sexual engagement, and became a site of education for men in the LGBTQ community. "[S]peakers from advocacy groups like the Gay Men's Health Crisis and the Minority Task Force on AIDS discuss topics of particular interests to gay men. There are lectures on being gay in high school and on gay men raising families." Ibid.

⁹⁹ Anonymous, "The Secret Garden," *Washington City Paper*, August 25, 2000, accessed June 14, 2016, <http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/article/13020626/the-secret-garden>. Meridian Hill Park (also known in the African American DC community as Malcolm X Park), 2400 Fifteenth Street NW, Washington, DC, was added to the NRHP on October 25, 1974 and designated an NHL on April 19, 1994. The term "same gender loving" includes those African American men who engage in same-sex sexual contact, but do not identify as gay or bisexual, particularly at sites of cruising/sexual engagement.

¹⁰⁰ Marcus Garvey Park, formerly Mount Morris Park, 18 Mount Morris Park West, New York City, New York is part of the Mount Morris Park Historic District, added to the NRHP on February 6, 1973, boundary increase May 24, 1996. The West Side Piers, individual piers, are located along the Hudson River, Greenwich Village, New York City, New York.

¹⁰¹ Duberman, 42.

¹⁰² Lesbian dancer Mabel Hampton recalled Walker's "funny parties," "...the more intimate gatherings at The Dark Tower, [that] illustrate the extent to which the millionaires was willing to participate in Harlem's sexual bohemia." Devon W. Carbado, Dwight A. McBride, and Donald Weise, eds., "1900-1950: The Harlem Renaissance," in *Black Like Us: A Century of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual African American Fiction* (New York: Cleis Press, 2002).

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include the Georgia home of Ma Rainey, the Detroit home of LGBTQ activist Ruth Ellis, or the New York home of Ethel Waters.

Gail Dubrow wrote that “[q]uestions of morality...tend to come into play when the landmarks of GLBT history are proposed for designation, with queer folks claiming we need role models and homophobes arguing against the government legitimizing deviant lifestyles.”¹⁰³ Therefore, it is understandable that the possibility of nominating African American LGBTQ historic sites related to cruising/sexual engagements may invite controversy. The impact of these places in creating community and in the lives of the African American LGBTQ community members, however, cannot be underestimated. Both the Fort Laramie Three Mile Hog Ranch and the Hotel Alma are examples of places on the NRHP with explicit reference to their importance as places of cruising/sexual engagement; the inclusion of a similar African American LGBTQ site would not be breaking new designation ground.

Planning for Future African American LGBTQ Historic Places

With regard to the preservation of African American LGBTQ historic places, let the historic African American gay bar, Washington, DC’s Nob Hill serve as a cautionary tale (Figure 9).¹⁰⁴ Nob Hill was the oldest gay bar in Washington, DC, and one of the nation’s oldest African American gay bars. Like so many other African American LGBTQ historic places, Nob Hill was part of the African American community of Columbia Heights. It opened in 1957. Significantly, it was an African American gay bar that was owned by gay African Americans until it closed in 2004 and passed out of African American gay ownership.¹⁰⁵ None of the other gay bars that

¹⁰³ Gail Dubrow, “Deviant History, Defiant Heritage.” See also Dubrow (this volume).

¹⁰⁴ Nob Hill was located at 1101 Kenyon Street NW, Washington, DC.

¹⁰⁵ Sean Bugg and Randy Shulman, “Closed for Business,” *Metro Weekly*, February 25, 2004, accessed June 21, 2016, <http://www.metroweekly.com/2004/02/closed-for-business>.

catered to African Americans in DC was African American owned. When Nob Hill closed, the former middle-class African American neighborhood of the 1950s was known as an “up and coming” neighborhood for “urban pioneers”



Figure 9: Nob Hill, Washington, DC, ca. 2003. Photo courtesy of Todd Franson/Metro Weekly.

seeking to revitalize a Columbia Heights that went into decline following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the subsequent riots in 1968. The Wonderland Ballroom opened in the space a few months after Nob Hill’s 2004 closing, and it is a vibrant community bar to this day. The new owners are not interested in having the building nominated.

There are many African American LGBTQ historic persons and places that were not included in this chapter. This should not be taken as a judgment against the significance of any of those persons or places, but instead a reflection of the limitations of space and current research. It is important that the African American LGBTQ community expand the discussion of historical legacies to include historic preservation. As noted throughout this study, historical research, scholarship, and local interest in African American LGBTQ historic places can be a boon for identifying individuals, organizations, and places that are historically important. But there also should be active consideration for what has happened in the more recent past, as well as what is happening currently in the African American LGBTQ community. For example, what is the status of the home of the late “Queen of Disco,” Sylvester? What are the important addresses of Essex Hemphill, Marlon Riggs, and E. Lynn Harris, and have there been discussions around preparations for seeking historic designation for their

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homes? Who is prepared to ask Angela Davis or Alice Walker which places associated with them should be considered the most historically relevant to them? What are the historic preservation-related plans that will highlight the late Rep. Barbara Jordan’s ties to the LGBTQ community? HIV/AIDS organizations like the Black AIDS Institute (Los Angeles) or Us Helping Us (Washington, DC) have been vital to the African American LGBTQ community, but what’s being done to make sure that they will receive the historic recognition they deserve?¹⁰⁶ What about the location



Figure 10: Jewel's Catch One, Los Angeles, California, ca. 2015. Photo by Adrian Scott Fine/L.A. Conservancy courtesy of the L.A. Conservancy.

of Jewel's Catch One night club, now that it is closed (Figure 10)?¹⁰⁷ These are just a handful of the questions that should be addressed when considering the historic preservation-based legacies of the African American LGBTQ historic places.

¹⁰⁶ The Black AIDS Institute was founded in 1999 as the African American AIDS Policy Training Institute. It is currently located at 1833 West Eighth Street, Los Angeles, California. Us Helping Us was founded in 1985 by Rainey Cheeks and the support of African American gay and bisexual men to provide holistic support for those affected by HIV/AIDS. They met at the Clubhouse (1296 Upshur Street NW, Washington, DC) until it closed in 1990, when they began meeting in Rainey's DC apartment. Their first formal location was a rented house near the Washington Navy Yard in DC's Southeast. See "About Us," Black AIDS Institute website, <https://www.blackaids.org/about-the-institute>; "About Us," Us Helping Us, People Into Living, Inc. website, <http://www.uhupil.org/#/about/cttm>.

¹⁰⁷ Jewel's Catch One, 4067 West Pico Boulevard, Los Angeles, California was the nation's first black gay and lesbian disco, opened in 1972 by Jewel Thais-Williams. When the club closed in 2015 with Jewel's retirement, it was the last black-owned gay club in the city.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I made it a point to highlight African American LGBTQ-related historic places that have been lost. So many of these historic places are located in African American neighborhoods across the country that are experiencing tremendous changes both physically and demographically, whether through revitalization (that does not explicitly acknowledge the African American LGBTQ historical relationship) or demolition, that the historic places that remain are under direct threat. These include historic places from the Harlem Renaissance to the more recent past. With continued scholarship, there even may be opportunities to identify African American LGBTQ historic places preceding the twentieth century.¹⁰⁸ Though so many have already been lost, we have the opportunity to develop strategies to preserve African American LGBTQ historic places, including nominating them to the NRHP or for designation as NHLs. Though there are sure to be more places that will be lost, we have the chance now to help validate those places where members of the African American LGBTQ community could be themselves.

¹⁰⁸ A great example of scholarship providing new information on nineteenth-century African American LGBTQ lives is Farah Jasmine Griffin, ed., *Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends: Letters from Rebecca Primus of Royal Oak, Maryland, and Addie Brown of Hartford, Connecticut* (New York: Knopf, 1999). Unfortunately, there are no known extant historic places associated with Primus and Brown.