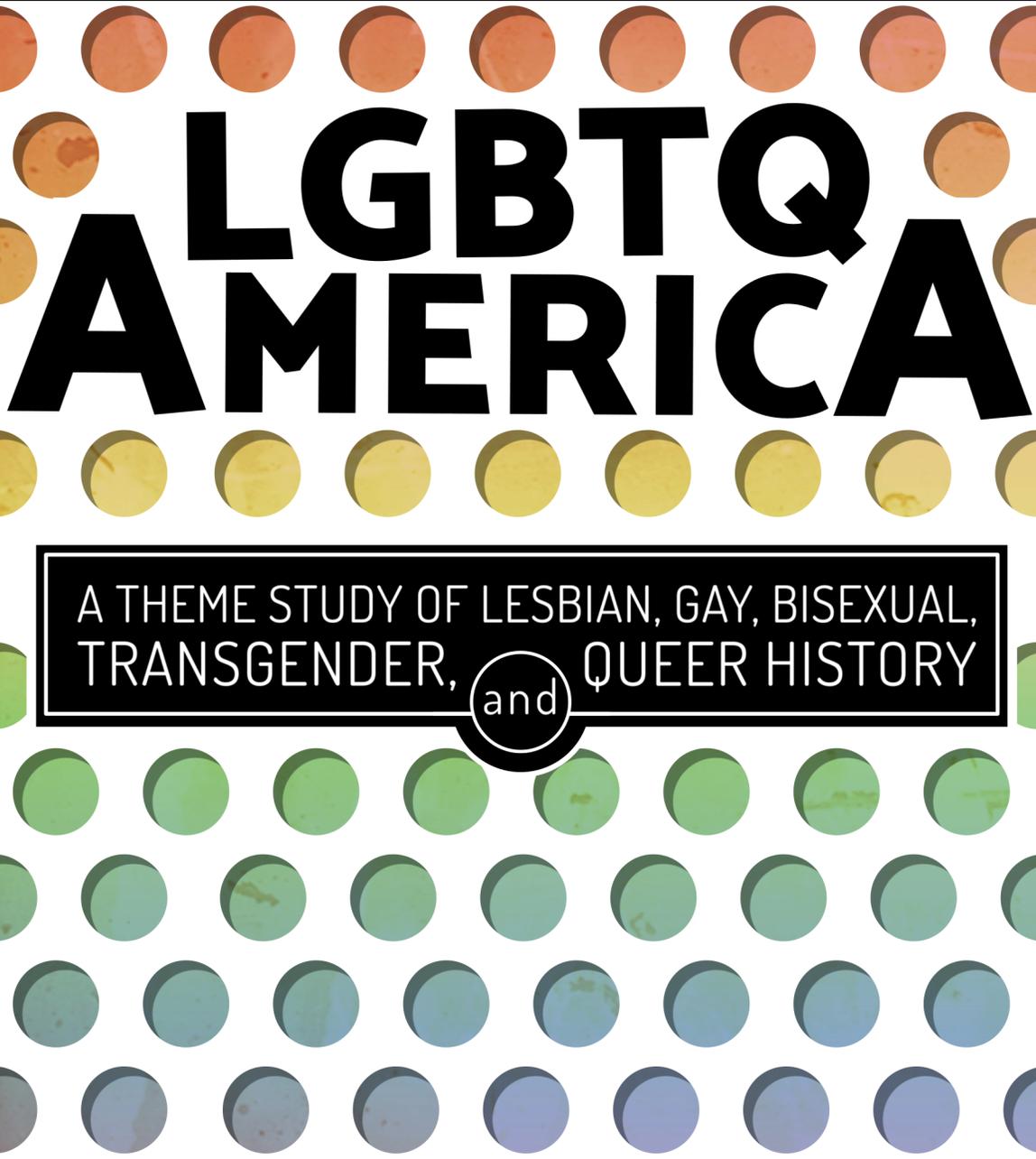


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LGBTQ AMERICA

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

Edited by Megan E. Springate



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PLACES

Unlike the Themes section of the theme study, this Places section looks at LGBTQ history and heritage at specific locations across the United States. While a broad LGBTQ American history is presented in the Introduction section, these chapters document the regional, and often quite different, histories across the country. In addition to New York City and San Francisco, often considered the epicenters of LGBTQ experience, the queer histories of Chicago, Miami, and Reno are also presented.

27 LOCATING MIAMI'S QUEER HISTORY

Julio Capó, Jr.

In the wee hours of a summer night in 1954, several Dade County deputies raided a handful of bars and nightspots throughout Miami and Miami Beach in what had popularly become known as their “pervert roundup.” Local law enforcement arrested nineteen “suspected perverts” that August night. Police, politicians, and those connected to the courts often used the term “pervert” to reference those thought to be homosexual or those who challenged gender norms, particularly by wearing clothes traditionally associated with the opposite sex. They raided those places that night just as they had in the past and would continue to do in the future. This was, by no means, an anomalous occurrence. “We don’t want perverts to set up housekeeping in this county,” claimed Dade

The author would like to express his gratitude to the whole crew connected to the NPS’s important initiative to promote and identify queer historical sites in the United States. Many thanks, in particular, to Megan Springate and the two anonymous reviewers for providing such thoughtful feedback on an earlier draft of this essay.

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County Sheriff Thomas J. Kelly. “We want them to know that they’re not welcome.”¹

Fast-forward sixty years to 2014, when the same county, by then renamed Miami-Dade County to capitalize on the namesake of its internationally-recognized major city, prohibited discrimination based on gender identity and expression. On December 2, 2014, the Miami-Dade County Commission voted eight to three to extend legal protections to transgender individuals in the realms of employment, housing, and public accommodation. County residents filled the County Hall in downtown Miami and offered over four hours of crucial debate on the matter.² Once the commissioners announced their majority vote in favor of adding the anti-discrimination clause, many of those eagerly anticipating the decision in the chambers celebrated with booming cheers and applause—even as a sizeable part of the audience expressed disappointment. In many ways, this moment represented unfinished business of a local political movement that started in earnest in the 1970s. Indeed, a lot had changed in Miami since its “pervert roundup” days.³

As this reveals, Miami has a long and rich queer history. That is, the city has a complex relationship with those whose gender and sexual identities, expressions, and behaviors have somehow been seen as different or against established norms. These queer representations are fluid and change over space and time. As such, these histories include “unsavory” vagrants, female and male impersonators, “mannish” women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender individuals, as well as many others.

Here I present a cohesive narrative of Miami’s queer past that is by no means exhaustive. Rather, I seek to concisely capture snapshots of the

¹ “Raiders Seize 19 in Pervert Roundup,” *Miami Daily News*, August 14, 1954; also see Fred Fejes, “Murder, Perversion, and Moral Panic: The 1954 Media Campaign against Miami’s Homosexuals and the Discourse of Civic Betterment,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, no. 3 (July 2000): 305–347.

² The Stephen P. Clark Government Center, or County Hall, is located at 111 NW First Street, Miami, Florida. It was built in 1985.

³ Tony Lima, executive director of SAVE Dade, personal communication with author, August 10, 2015; and Patricia Mazzei and Douglas Hanks, “Miami-Dade Commission Bans Discrimination Based on Gender Identity,” *Miami Herald*, December 2, 2014, accessed May 11, 2015, <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article4249334.html>.

area's diverse queer communities while remaining true and faithful to the historical record. While I highlight some better-known moments, I also seek to shed light on histories that have largely been erased from this narrative. Throughout this essay, I stress two themes that best represent Miami's significance in regional, national, and even international queer history. The first concerns questions of public struggle and visibility. In particular, this perspective factors how Miami's queer community negotiated its space in the city's social, cultural, political, and economic realms. My other major intervention highlights Miami's status as a city of the Americas. Shifting attention to Miami and its rich immigrant cultures—especially as the city's distinct ethnic groups gained greater political power in the urban center—helps reframe the general narrative of US queer history. It reveals this queer past is far less bound or dictated by national borders and far more racially and ethnically diverse than mainstream narratives generally ascribe.

One brief caveat: like many other metropolitan areas in the United States, the space generally perceived as “Miami” is often imprecise or misleading. In actuality, the metropolitan area of Miami represents a constellation of distinct municipalities, including Miami Beach, Coral Gables, Hialeah, and so forth. When applicable, I refer to these distinct municipalities. Otherwise, I refer to both Miami proper and Miami. The former refers to the actual City of Miami, while the latter includes parts of incorporated and unincorporated Miami-Dade County.

Incorporated in 1896 with the votes of less than 350 residents, Miami proper is, relatively speaking, a very new city. The majority of the city's early power brokers—those who controlled the city's newspapers, law enforcement, courts, and real estate—were primarily white men, and a few women, from the US Midwest, Northeast, and South. These early settlers often built their empires by exploiting the social and cultural customs of the day, particularly Jim Crow racial segregation and discrimination.⁴ A lot

⁴ N. D. B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2014).

of Miami's early laborers were "native" blacks who migrated to Miami from north and central Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina.⁵

Equally important were the migrants who came from the Caribbean and worked building the city's infrastructure and Miami's growing agricultural and service industries. Unlike other metropolitan areas in the United States, Miami never attracted a great number of immigrant-laborers from eastern or southern Europe. Instead, Miami's early labor force was largely made up of black migrants from the then-British colony of the Bahamas.⁶

Indeed, one of Miami's greatest sources of distinction—true in both the nineteenth century and today—was its connection to the Caribbean. Miami's early labor needs found hundreds of black Bahamian men traveling to Miami in search of work during the early 1900s. Their migration was further motivated by struggling local economies in the Bahamas; the product of falling global prices on pineapples and sisal, natural disasters, drought, and a general sentiment of discontent among laborers who learned they could earn higher wages abroad.⁷

In addition to the gendering of the city's construction and agricultural work as male, US immigration policy restricted many black Bahamian women from entering Miami. The reasons for this were often sexualized, as immigration officials suspected many unmarried or single Bahamian women of being prostitutes. This unbalanced immigration policy meant that many transient Bahamian men lived in "bachelor" cultures and spaces in their new, often temporary, adoptive city. Such spaces often facilitated same-sex intimacy, including sexual acts. At this time, however, women and men did not yet organize or understand their lives the way we do today; that is, those who engaged in same-sex sexual behavior did not

⁵ Marvin Dunn, *Black Miami in the Twentieth Century* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 71.

⁶ Melanie Shell-Weiss, "Coming North to the South: Migration, Labor and City-Building in Twentieth-Century Miami," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (Summer 2005): 79–99.

⁷ Raymond A. Mohl, "Black Immigrants: Bahamians in Early Twentieth-Century Miami," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (January 1987): 271–97; and Howard Johnson, "Bahamian Labor Migration to Florida in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *International Migration Review* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 84–103.

understand themselves as either “homosexual” or “heterosexual,” as neither identity yet had formal currency. This shift did not occur fully until about World War II.⁸ Meanwhile, this gender-imbalanced migration also facilitated female-dominated spaces on several of the islands in the Bahamas, particularly those in the north such as Abaco, Bimini, and Cat Island.⁹

This history, then, locates Miami's early harbor as an important site of the city's queer and migrant history. In the early 1900s the port was located between Sixth and Ninth Streets on Biscayne Bay and, due to the harbor's shallow waters, new channels were dredged to allow larger vessels to pass.¹⁰ Some of these vessels carried Bahamians trying to enter the new city. While many “sexually suspect” Bahamian women were excluded, the city's dire labor needs demanded male laborers. In particular, Miami entrepreneurs looked for young and able-bodied men to do physically demanding work. The city's early criminal records show that Miami's law enforcement policed black Bahamian migrants far more stringently than other residents; arresting them for varied crimes such as vagrancy and cohabitation. Several of the Bahamian men were charged with committing same-sex crimes, such as sodomy or a crime against nature. All of these charges marked them as sexually “perverse,” transgressive, and unnatural.¹¹

While the Bahamians represented a critical part of the city's early black, ethnic, and working-class sexual life, Miami's white male elites also carved out their own queer spaces in the early city. It is important to note that the city's early power brokers segregated black residents—including the Bahamians—away from their neighborhoods and into a part of the city then called “Colored Town” (today, it is known as historic Overtown, a neighborhood just northwest of downtown Miami) through Jim Crow laws

⁸ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

⁹ Julio Capó, Jr., “Welcome to Fairyland” (manuscript in progress).

¹⁰ Arthur Chapman, “Watch the Port of Miami,” *Tequesta* 53 (1993): 9–13.

¹¹ Capó, Jr., *Welcome to Fairyland*.

Julio Capó, Jr.

and discriminatory housing policies.¹² White women and men often frequented these black, working-class spaces. In fact, they proved to be eager clients and participants in the early city's sexual economy, which thrived in Miami's Colored Town during the first few decades of the twentieth century. These white residents often "slummed" in these racialized spaces because they believed them to be more titillating and subversive; but since it occurred "over there," they upheld a pretense of security and respectability.¹³

One of the early city's elite queer spaces was the Italian-style palazzo Vizcaya located on the shores of Biscayne Bay in the Coconut Grove neighborhood.¹⁴ James Deering, an agricultural equipment tycoon from Chicago, chose Miami—then mostly a barren swampland—as the site for his winter villa. He ordered the villa built and ultimately lived there from



Figure 1: West Parterres of the Villa Vizcaya, circa 1934. Frank Bell Photographic Collection, courtesy of Vizcaya Museum & Gardens, Miami, Florida.

¹² Connolly, *A World More Concrete*.

¹³ "Segregation for Lewd Women is Asked by Jury," *Miami Daily Metropolis*, November 29, 1918.

¹⁴ Villa Vizcaya is located at 3251 South Miami Avenue, Miami, Florida. It was listed on the NRHP on September 20, 1970 (boundary increase November 15, 1978) and designated an NHL on April 19, 1994. It is currently a museum.

late 1916 until his death in September 1925. The property, which remains in pristine condition today, defined extravagance and excess (Figure 1). In addition to its fine tropical gardens, “the interior of Villa Vizcaya is the repository of a wonderful collection of art objects, antique statuary, brocades, velvets, carpets, and hangings, which centuries ago were precious possessions in Venetian palaces,” noted one contemporary.¹⁵ Much like the working-class lodges and boarding houses many Bahamians and other black and ethnic laborers lived in, Vizcaya was a predominantly male space in its early days.

All sorts of stories—many unsubstantiated or untrue—persist about Vizcaya’s queer history. Rumor, perhaps closer to folklore, suggests that Deering hosted queer parties during his time there. Many take it a step further and describe Saturnalia where queer men would unleash their sexual inhibitions. None of this is substantiated by the available evidence. While there is no documentary evidence that Deering had sexual relationships with other men, that association somehow stuck with him over time. He was, for instance, often referred to in the historical record as a “bachelor”—a common euphemism for a contemporary queer, or potentially queer, man. Decades after his death, this association had spread so widely that a 1961 newspaper referred to Deering as “the prissy bachelor who preferred bourbon to women.”¹⁶ Perhaps this explains the origins of that unfounded rumor. Meanwhile, the evidence does reveal one of Vizcaya’s other early residents maintained a homosexual relationship at the villa. Artist, interior decorator, and architect Paul Chalfin—who proved central to Vizcaya’s aesthetic—lived openly with his male lover, Louis Koons, in the mid-1910s and early 1920s.¹⁷

The rendering of Vizcaya as a queer space, particularly with lavish gay parties, is more likely connected to Miami’s White Party. The event was first conceived in 1984 as a modest gathering to raise funds for a local

¹⁵ “Villa Vizcaya, Miami, Florida,” *Harper’s Bazaar*, July 1917, 41.

¹⁶ Jim Bishop, “Jim Bishop: Reporter,” *Lewiston Evening Journal (Maine)*, February 20, 1961, 4.

¹⁷ Interview with Diego Suarez, April 20, 1965 and June 4, 1965, “James Maher Archive Series IV, Interviews - 1964-1965,” Box 2, James Maher Papers, Vizcaya Museum & Gardens Archive, Miami, Florida.



Figure 2: The main event at the 26th annual White Party Week was held at the Vizcaya Villa on November 28, 2010. Photograph by Michele Sandberg/ZUMApres.com.

HIV/AIDS organization known as Health Crisis Network (today, Care Resource), a social service organization responding to the AIDS crisis founded in 1983 by members of the local queer community. Thousands of local LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) and allied women and men are joined every year by thousands from across the nation and abroad. Attendees dress in white, often scantily, for a number of dance parties and celebrations. Over the years, Miami's White Party has raised millions of dollars to help provide local services with people living with HIV/AIDS, a disease that devastated the queer community.¹⁸ Villa Vizcaya served as the site for this massive weeklong party until 2010 (Figure 2). In this and several other ways, the site has long held an important place in Miami's queer imaginary. Or, put another way, its significance to the queer community transcended the evidence substantiated in the historical archive and took on new meaning through a sort of local folklore that highlighted queer visibility and resilience.

¹⁸ Luisa Yanez, "To Fight AIDS, Gays Wear White Tonight and Party at Vizcaya," *Sun-Sentinel*, December 1, 1996.

By the late 1930s and 1940s, Miami had an elaborate nightlife that prominently featured both male and female impersonators. During the World War II era, with the infusion of a rich African American and Caribbean culture—including that corresponding to the aforementioned Bahamians—Miami's Colored Town became known as the "Harlem of the South." Particularly along northwest Second Avenue, the area gained a reputation for housing one of the nation's most vibrant scenes for entertainment, nightlife, and music. This included female impersonators and a growing queer culture.¹⁹

One drag revue, the Jewel Box, was particularly successful, renowned, and influential in disseminating queer culture in Miami, as well as throughout the nation and parts of North America. Performances began in 1938, perhaps even earlier, at the Embassy Hotel in Miami Beach.²⁰ The Jewel Box Revue was formally established the following year. Danny Brown and Doc Benner, reported to be lovers, owned and ran the show, which featured over two dozen female impersonators and one male impersonator. By 1946, the two men had opened up their own club space, the Jewel Club, on the Miami side of Venetian Causeway.²¹ By then, the revue had grown in popularity with its incredibly successful tour throughout North America, from Juárez, Mexico to Chatham, Ontario in Canada.²² By this period in history a growing queer community—represented by groups of people who now largely identified as lesbian and gay, for instance—had become visible in Miami. The city's queer community had carved out their own spaces in Miami: popular nightspots where they worked or starred in revues, lesbian and gay bars, or areas near the beach where they could meet others like them. Indeed, a queer culture thrived in the city, despite efforts to suppress it.

¹⁹ Dunn, *Black Miami in the Twentieth Century*, chap. 4.

²⁰ The Embassy Hotel was located at 2940 Collins Avenue, Miami Beach, Florida. It is currently the Hilton Garden Inn Miami. James Sears, *Lonely Hunters: An Oral History of Lesbian and Gay Southern Life, 1948-1968* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 23

²¹ The Jewel Club was located at 512 NE Fifteenth Street, Miami, Florida (now demolished).

²² Program, "The Jewel Box Revue: Show Sensation of the Nation," n.d., Author's Collection; Bud Coleman, "The Jewel Box Revue: America's Longest-Running, Touring Drag Show," *Theatre History Studies*, no. 17 (1997): 79-91.

While the Jewel Box Revue only featured one regular male impersonator, women in Miami often pushed gender norms to the limits. As local politicians grew increasingly worried with what became known as the “homosexual problem” in the city, commissioners passed new laws that prohibited men from impersonating women or from wearing clothes unbecoming of the masculine ideal.²³ Miami proper, for instance, passed such an ordinance in 1952—just as the city’s queer culture had become more public and visible. In January 1953, one of the most popular local entertainers and dancers, Joanne Gilbert, identified and exploited a loophole in the 1952 legislation: it did *not* apply to women. Swapping out her scanty burlesque costume for a pair of masculine britches and a shirt, Gilbert tongue-in-cheekily went on stage and thrilled her audience at the famous Clover Club.²⁴ Such resistance led commissioners to change the law in 1956 to include both women and men from being “in a state of nudity or in a dress not customarily worn by his or her sex.”²⁵ Meanwhile, Miami’s growing lesbian community and its queer women’s culture—including several bars and nightspots, such as one called Goggie’s—was featured in several pulp fiction novels and magazines during the 1950s and 1960s.²⁶

In addition to frequenting bars and nightspots throughout the city, Miami’s queer communities also established their own territory on the area’s public beaches. The city’s queer communities congregated by the sands of Twenty-Second Street in Miami Beach (Figure 3). By the early 1950s, that part of the beach attracted “men with girlish-looking hair-dos and flimsy, Bikini-type tights,” as well as queer women.²⁷ Police records

²³ City of Miami Commissioners Meeting Minutes, September 15, 1954, City of Miami Clerk's Office, Miami, Florida.

²⁴ “Miami Mish-Mash,” *Miami Daily News*, January 1, 1953, 7B. The Clover Club was located at 118 Biscayne Boulevard, Miami, Florida.

²⁵ William N. Eskridge, Jr., “Privacy Jurisprudence and the Apartheid of the Closet, 1941 - 1961,” *Florida State University Law Review* 24, no. 4 (Summer 1997): 830.

²⁶ Julia Penelope, *Call Me Lesbian: Lesbian Lives, Lesbian Theory* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1992), 7–8; and John Dexter, *Miami Call Girl* (United States: Nightstand Books, 1960).

²⁷ Stephen J. Flynn, “Turn-About Not Fair Play, Say Beach Police,” *Miami Herald*, November 21, 1953, 1B; and James T. Sears, “Growing Up as a Jewish Lesbian in South Florida: Queer Teen Life in the Fifties,” in *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 178.

reveal that those who transgressed gender norms were particularly susceptible to arrest and harassment.



Figure 3: Mid-1950s aerial view looking west at Twenty-First (on left) and Twenty-Second (on right) Streets on Miami Beach. The busy parking lot demonstrates the area's popularity and the ease in which people could access the beach, a common nighttime hangout for the city's queer communities. Photo courtesy of the State Archives of Florida (WE050, Wendler Collection).

As that suggests, in part, this increased visible queer culture led to more aggressive and violent police crackdowns. For instance, the beach parties on Twenty-Second Street helped fuel the “pervert roundup” described in the introduction to this essay. Another major manifestation of this was the state-run body called the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee, better known as the “Johns Committee.” Named after its first chairman, former State Senator and Governor Charley E. Johns, the body was created to suppress contemporary social upheaval. In particular, its origins were in dismantling successes for black civil rights. From 1956 through 1965, however, the Johns Committee also targeted

homosexuals.²⁸ This culminated in its investigation of suspected homosexual professors and students in the state university system. The state-instituted oppression on homosexuality had a massive ripple effect on Miami, as Florida investigators worked closely with Miami's politicians, law enforcement, and civic leaders to purge suspected lesbians and gays from their posts at local schools and colleges.²⁹

Despite these raids and forms of state oppression, these beaches, bars, and other spaces proved critical to creating community, combating isolation, and served as a precursor for future mobilization and political organizing. In January 1953, California-based activists who were part of the early homophile movement launched a magazine titled *ONE* to serve as a "forum where the gay minority could present its views to the public and to other homosexuals." A few months after its founding, *ONE* had a readership of over two thousand.³⁰ This included several in Florida. The homophile movement combated queer Miamians' sense of isolation and depression while simultaneously forging community. Homophiles often worked as a "watchdog" for homosexual oppression throughout the country. In January 1954, *ONE* published a piece titled "Miami Junks the Constitution" that condemned the recent police crackdown in the city. In addition to detailing the discriminatory practices of Miami's law enforcement, it reminded readers of their constitutional rights pertaining to arrest, detainment, and harassment.³¹ Make no mistake, Miami's queer culture registered in the national imagination. For some, this was a badge of shame or notoriety. For many others, it was part of the city's appeal.

²⁸ Stacy Braukman, *Communists and Perverts Under the Palms: The Johns Committee in Florida, 1956-1965* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012); Dan Bertwell, "'A Veritable Refuge for Practicing Homosexuals': The Johns Committee and the University of South Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 83, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 410-431; and James A. Schnur, "Closet Crusaders: The Johns Committee and Homophobia, 1956-1965," in *Carryin' On in the Lesbian and Gay South*, ed. John Howard (New York & London: NYU Press, 1997), 132-163.

²⁹ Julio Capó, Jr., "'It's Not Queer to Be Gay'" Miami and the Emergence of the Gay Rights Movement, 1945-1995," PhD diss., Florida International University, 2011.

³⁰ John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 73. Also see Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

³¹ "Miami Junks the Constitution," *ONE*, January 1954, 16-21.

As much of the above suggests, transgender individuals and gender expressions considered to be against the norm have always been central to Miami's queer history. For example, Miami residents closely followed one of the most sensational news stories of the 1950s: when an "ex-G.I." underwent sex reassignment surgery and debuted in the press as the "blonde beauty," Christine Jorgensen.³² Upon learning about Jorgensen's transition, Charlotte F. McLeod (née Charles E. McLeod) underwent surgery in 1953. She too told the world about the "army of people who live deeply depressed, under circumstances we cannot control," a reference to how her anatomy did not represent her gender identity as a woman.³³ "I always thought, felt, and reacted like a woman," she explained. Despite her pleas for understanding, transsexuals like McLeod were thrust into the era's Cold War debates on science and psychiatry. McLeod got entangled with contemporary anxieties over nuclear warfare and homosexuality. In fact, some conservatives and traditionalists even considered transsexuality a possible solution to the growing "homosexual problem."³⁴

McLeod moved to Miami a few years after the initial reports about her transition. She lived in relative obscurity in an apartment near Biscayne Bay.³⁵ McLeod found herself back in the spotlight—or under the microscope, as most contemporaries probed her as a curious scientific experiment—in 1959. That year, the local press reported that she had married a man at a local Baptist church. Within a month, word got out that McLeod, described in some reports as "he," had married a man.³⁶ Her marriage caused some in Miami to erroneously claim that the city had condoned same-sex marriage and prompted the city's first real public debate on the matter.³⁷

³² "Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty: Operations Transform Bronx Youth," *New York Daily News*, December 1, 1952.

³³ "In Christine's Footsteps," *Time*, March 8, 1954.

³⁴ Joy Reese Shaw, "Her Own Story: Once G.I., Now a Bride," *Miami Herald*, November 13, 1959, 20A; and Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

³⁵ Phil Meyer, "Ex-GI Changes Sex—She's Now a Miami Bride," *Miami Herald*, November 13, 1959.

³⁶ Karl M. Bowman and Bernice Engle, "Sex Offenses: The Medical and Legal Implications of Sex Variations," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1960): 308.

³⁷ John Connors, "Nothing in Law Here to Make It a Crime," *Miami Herald*, November 13, 1959, 2A.

The marriage debate changed drastically over the next five decades. Floridians banned same-sex marriage in 2008. In 2014, however, Florida judges ruled the ban unconstitutional. A stay placed on the ruling was enacted, but then lifted, and on January 5, 2015, Miami-Dade County began issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Just a few minutes after she ruled to lift the stay, Judge Sarah Zabel wed Karla Arguello and Catherina Pareto in her chambers at the Miami-Dade Courthouse (Figure 4). The two women had been partners for fourteen years.³⁸ Just a few months later, on June 26, the US Supreme Court ruled that the US



Figure 4: Karla Arguello (right) and Catherina Pareto (left) leaving the Miami-Dade County Courthouse shortly after Judge Sarah Zabel lifted the stay prohibiting same-sex marriages in the state. The women were the first same-sex couple to legally wed in Florida following the decision. AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee, January 5, 2015.

³⁸ Patricia Mazzei and Steve Rothaus, "Same-Sex Marriages Begin in Miami-Dade County," *Miami Herald*, January 5, 2015, accessed May 13, 2015, <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/gay-south-florida/article5439081.html>. Located at 73 West Flagler Street, the Miami-Dade County Courthouse has a long history with the city's queer communities. It was listed on the NRHP on January 4, 1989.

Constitution guarantees the right to same-sex marriage. With this historic decision, Florida's same-sex marriages would be legal and recognized throughout the rest of the nation.³⁹

Across Biscayne Bay in 1972, the Miami Beach Convention Center became a critical site for queer activism.⁴⁰ By the early 1970s, years of homophile and gay liberation activism—both at the local and national level—had started to galvanize Miami's queer community. Miami became a hotbed for national politics in 1972 when the convention center hosted both the Democratic and Republican National Conventions. Gay liberationists, along with many leftists, anti-war protestors, second-wave feminists, and others, had high hopes that change was possible under the



Figure 5: Protestors outside the Democratic National Convention, held at the Miami Beach Convention Center, in July 1972. On the far left, you can see signs that read "God loves gays," "Gay Activists Alliance," and "Glad to be gay." Photo courtesy of the State Archives of Florida (JB00259, John Buckley Collection).

³⁹ Katie Park, "How Same-Sex Marriage Became Legal," *Washington Post*, June 26, 2015, accessed August 11, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/advancements-in-same-sex-marriage>.

⁴⁰ The Miami Beach Convention Center is located at 1901 Convention Center Drive, Miami Beach, Florida.

proposed leadership of George McGovern (D-SD), the Democratic Party's presidential nominee. McGovern's campaign became the first to court lesbian and gay votes throughout the country. There were plans to include an ambitious gay rights platform at the July convention (Figure 5). In the end, the platform was rejected as too radical.⁴¹ Democratic delegates, however, had the opportunity to hear activists Jim Foster and Madeline Davis speak on behalf of the minority plan on sexual orientation. Their speeches were televised, which helped spread the word on gay liberation throughout the country.⁴² The following month, the Republicans endorsed incumbent Richard Nixon in the same venue. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender activists attended that convention, too, staging a protest outside that resulted in at least twenty arrests.⁴³

In the coming years, Miami became a popular site for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender tourism. For instance, the community-building, political activism, and general momentum of the 1972 presidential election led to Miami's first gay pride activities that June. The events brought many queer activists from throughout the country to the city. As part of the gay pride celebration, activists demonstrated on Lincoln Road Mall in Miami Beach, just a few blocks away from where the conventions were held.⁴⁴ They protested local ordinances that barred gender nonconformity, particularly female impersonations. Several noted that this demonstration was, in part, an effort to make transgender visitors more comfortable in the city.⁴⁵ In the coming years, particularly in the 1990s, Lincoln Road and other parts of South Beach attracted thousands of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender tourists from across the country and abroad. South Beach became the site of countless queer beach

⁴¹ Julio Capó, Jr., "Echoes of Miami Beach in Charlotte," *Miami Herald*, September 2, 2012.

⁴² Bruce Miroff, *The Liberals' Moment: The McGovern Insurgency and the Identity Crisis of the Democratic Party* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 215–218; Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, *Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), chap. 9.

⁴³ "At Least 20 Gays Arrested in Protests at GOP Conclave," *Advocate*, September 13, 1972, 3.

⁴⁴ Lincoln Road Mall is located at 400-1100 Lincoln Road from Washington Avenue to Alton Road in Miami Beach, Florida. It was listed on the NRHP on May 16, 2011.

⁴⁵ "Gay Pride in Miami: Dancing, Demonstrating," *Advocate*, July 5, 1972, 3.

parties, bars, and nightclubs.⁴⁶ The massive growth and popularity of Miami's White Party, for instance, was similarly a product of this.

Meanwhile, back in the late 1970s, Miami became the battleground site for a new national movement that sought to reverse predominantly lesbian, gay, and bisexual political advancements in the area. Miami housed several political organizations then, such as a Gay Activists Alliance and a Lesbian Task Force (through the National Organization of Women). One openly gay activist named Jack Campbell co-founded a new organization in 1976 called the Dade County Coalition for the Humanistic Rights of Gays. Its main objective was political reform, particularly through the ballot box. One of the politicians the group endorsed was Ruth Shack, who won a seat on the Metro-Dade County Commission. Shack followed through with her promises and on January 18, 1977, the commission passed an ordinance she spearheaded that barred discrimination based on "affectional or sexual preference" in employment, housing, and public accommodation.⁴⁷ The commission voted three to five at the historic Dade County Courthouse (today, the Miami-Dade County Courthouse).⁴⁸ These protections mirrored the language employed by civil rights legislation in the previous decade.⁴⁹ The 2014 amendment that extended legal protections to include gender identity and expression in the county was, in many ways, tending to unfinished business from this ordinance.

The bold 1977 ordinance was met with massive resistance from conservatives throughout Miami and the nation. Many of the opponents at the hearing before the vote had been based in "from fundamental Christian churches."⁵⁰ New coalitions linked to the New Right—a conservative and moralist political movement that attacked liberal

⁴⁶ Kai Kenttamaa Squires, "Declining Gayborhood or Homonormative Playground in the Making? South Beach Reinvented," MA Thesis, University of Miami, 2014.

⁴⁷ Morton Lucoff, "Metro Bans Bias Against Gays," *Miami News*, January 18, 1977, 1A.

⁴⁸ The Miami-Dade County Courthouse is located at 73 West Flagler Street, Miami, Florida. It was listed on the NRHP on January 4, 1989.

⁴⁹ 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 (January 2013): 126–160; Capó, Jr., "'It's Not Queer to Be Gay'".

⁵⁰ Lucoff, "Metro Bans Bias Against Gays," 1A.

reforms—challenged many of the advances the queer community had made or sought to make. No person was more visible in this movement against the ordinance and what it represented than Anita Bryant, a locally-based, national celebrity and Florida orange juice spokeswoman. She felt particularly betrayed, as she too had personally supported Shack in her bid for the commission seat. Bryant launched her “Save Our Children” campaign to overturn the measure. In the end, she and her supporters rallied enough community opposition to the ordinance to bring the matter to referendum.⁵¹ On June 7, 1977, county residents ultimately rescinded the progressive ordinance that shielded lesbians, gays, and bisexuals from discriminatory practices. They were, once again, susceptible to formal and legal inequity.⁵²

Despite that, this affair mobilized the queer communities—both within Miami and around the United States—in unprecedented ways and ushered many out of the closet and into the streets and voting booths. That is, while Miami’s queer community lost a battle on June 7 when the ordinance was overturned, it eventually won the war. Many who once felt apathetic to or separate from political debates concerning their sexualities galvanized to face-off against Anita Bryant and her supporters. Jack Campbell, who co-founded the 1976 organization that helped fund politicians amenable to lesbian and gay rights, reached out to those who passed through his business. He was the founder of a national chain of gay bathhouses, Club Baths. He expanded his empire further by opening Club Miami near Coral Gables.⁵³ The bathhouse became a key site for community building, organizing, and fundraising, as substantial portions of

⁵¹ Anita Bryant, *The Anita Bryant Story: The Survival of Our Nation’s Families and the Threat of Militant Homosexuality* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1977).

⁵² Fred Fejes, *Gay Rights and Moral Panic: The Origins of America’s Debate on Homosexuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Patrick McCreery, “Save Our Children/Let Us Marry: Gay Activists Appropriate the Rhetoric of Child Protectionism,” *Radical History Review*, no. 100 (Winter 2008): 186–207.

⁵³ Club Miami was located at 2991 Coral Way, Miami, Florida. It is under new ownership as a gay sauna called Club Aqua Miami.

the profits went to fighting Bryant and the “Save Our Children” campaign.⁵⁴

All of this prepared Miami's queer community to come to the assistance of their “sisters and brothers” from Cuba who sought to make the city their new home.⁵⁵ Thousands of Cubans had made Miami their new home both prior to, but especially after, the island's 1959 Revolution.⁵⁶ Since then, members of Miami's Cuban community have added richly to the city's growing queer culture. At the same time, in 1977 some conservative Cubans also worked against the queer communities. Many of the city's Cuban residents voted in support of Anita Bryant's referendum and celebrated the repeal of the ordinance as evidence, at least in part, of their arrival in urban politics.⁵⁷

The Mariel boatlift of 1980—a massive exodus of Cubans that proved to be one of the most controversial waves of immigration in US history—complicated these tensions. This new wave of Cuban immigration found roughly 125,000 Marielitos—as they became known, since they left from the Port of Mariel—in the United States from April to October 1980. Cuban leader Fidel Castro referred to them as the “lumpen-proletariat,” or the dregs of society who would never become an integral part of the island's revolutionary project. This “criminal” and “undesirable” population included several hundred women and men who identified as lesbian or gay, or engaged in homosexual behaviors on the island, or who expressed themselves in gender nonconforming ways.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ William N. Eskridge, Jr., *Dishonorable Passions: Sodomy Laws in America, 1861-2003* (New York: Viking, 2008), 209–210; and Clendinen and Nagourney, *Out for Good*, 293–295.

⁵⁵ Dale Leeche, “Presence of Jesus Seen at Cuban Refugee Camp,” *IN UNITY: Magazine of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches*, October 1980, 4–5.

⁵⁶ María Cristina García, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); and Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick, *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁵⁷ “Importante factor el voto cubano en la derrota de la ordenanza pro homosexuales,” *Diario Las Américas*, June 9, 1977.

⁵⁸ Julio Capó, Jr., “Queering Mariel: Mediating Cold War Foreign Policy and U.S. Citizenship among Cuba's Homosexual Exile Community, 1978 – 94,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 29, no. 4 (Summer 2010): 78–106.



Figure 6: Typical scene in Miami's "Tent City," the temporary housing camps under I-95. Downtown Miami can be seen in the background. Bob Mack, Photographer. Courtesy HistoryMiami (Miami News Collection, 1984-214-3299-5).

With the arrival of the Marielitos, some contemporaries noted that “cruising,” or the act of finding a casual sexual partner, and a growing transgender community became more visible throughout the city. Many observed how some Marielitos who had been assigned male at birth often dressed in women’s clothing in public spaces or offered fashion or preening advice in department stores.⁵⁹ Two of the most significant sites for this urban transformation were the Miami Orange Bowl in the Little Havana neighborhood and the area located under the Interstate 95 overpass near downtown by the Miami River that became known as “Tent City” (Figure 6).⁶⁰ Miami’s overlapping queer and Cuban communities came to the assistance of these Marielitos. The Cuban immigrants received access to many donations, such as mounds of clothing some used to transgress gender norms or to represent their gender identities. In

⁵⁹ Guillermo Martinez, “Tense City: Wait Is Endless, Tempers Short for Refugees,” *Miami Herald*, August 21, 1980, 1B–2B; Susana Peña, *Oye Loca: From the Mariel Boatlift to Gay Cuban Miami* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

⁶⁰ The Miami Orange Bowl was located at 1501 NW Third Street, Miami, Florida. It was demolished in 2008.

addition, Miami's queer and Cuban communities raised funds and launched sponsorship programs to help the Marielitos find homes, jobs, and learn English. They also offered them legal advice on how to navigate the immigration process in the United States.

The Marielitos proved critical to a massive change in US immigration reform. Officially since 1952—and, through other measures, as early as 1917—the United States maintained a policy of barring homosexual foreigners from entering the country.⁶¹ The queer Marielitos, however, posed a significant conundrum to the United States because they fled Cuba, a communist nation. In the midst of a heated Cold War, wherein the United States became a refuge for those fleeing communism and did so as an effective foreign policy tool, the US Government amended its immigration policy in part to accommodate and admit the incoming Marielitos. In this way, the United States' anti-communist imperative trumped its longstanding anti-gay immigration policy. From 1980 to 1990, the United States implemented a policy to only exclude homosexual foreigners from entering the United States upon a “voluntary submission by the alien that he or she is homosexual.” In this way, the queer Marielitos proved instrumental to affecting change for many future queer migrants. The Immigration Act of 1990 statutorily removed homosexuality as a ground for exclusion from entering the United States, even though queer foreigners continued to be excluded or discriminated against at the border in other ways. Despite the state's continued sexual anxieties at the border, in the coming decades Miami became a refuge for many other queer migrants—particularly from Latin America and the Caribbean.⁶²

For many of these queer immigrants, the freedom they thought they had found in their new home was complicated by an unforeseeable plague: HIV/AIDS. The disease, of course, did not only affect queer immigrants. Soon after the disease was “discovered” in 1981, many members of

⁶¹ Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); and Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

⁶² Capó, Jr., “Queering Mariel,” 96; and Capó, Jr., “It's Not Queer to Be Gay”.

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Miami's queer community became infected with the mysterious disease, inexplicably showing symptoms such as lesions on their skin, and were desperate for answers and medical attention.⁶³

Hundreds of gay, bisexual, and queer men, in particular, found themselves in Jackson Memorial, the county's public hospital.⁶⁴ So too did sympathetic queer and allied women, serving as caretakers and advocates for their sick or dying friends. One newspaper reported, "AIDS victims have poured into Jackson Memorial over the past two years, and many have died there."⁶⁵ Jackson Memorial Hospital opened up its South Florida AIDS Network (SFAN) in 1986, the first county-run organization to provide services to people infected with HIV or living with AIDS. Despite the dire need for treatment and service providers, lack of resources and funds forced SFAN to only open a few short hours a week at first.⁶⁶ Even as late as 1988, new adult AIDS patients waited an average of three to four months before being seen at the hospital's AIDS clinic. So many who were gravely ill often could not wait that period of time and, instead, had to seek treatment at the hospital emergency room.⁶⁷

As in other cities, many people in Miami grew increasingly hostile towards and discriminated against those infected, or those suspected of being infected, with the deadly disease. One of the greatest distinctions of this urban space, however, was the city's large Haitian community, which endured some of the most egregious forms of discrimination. From the beginning of the epidemic, Haitians were listed as a high-risk group for the disease. In a July 1982 report, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) revealed that twenty Haitians residing in Miami had shown evidence of

⁶³ Lawrence K. Altman, "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals," *New York Times*, July 3, 1981; and Maurice Miller, "AIDS Cases in Florida Jump 27%," *Miami Daily News*, August 11, 1983.

⁶⁴ Jackson Memorial Hospital is located at 1161 NW Twelfth Avenue, Miami, Florida.

⁶⁵ Strat Douthat, "Miami Hospital Is a Haven for AIDS Victims," *Gainesville Sun*, September 20, 1985, 8A.

⁶⁶ Jeffrey Laign, "Group Donates \$1.6 Million for AIDS Programs," *Sun-Sentinel*, October 24, 1986.

⁶⁷ Michael Lasalandra, "New AIDS Patients Waiting Months for Jackson Clinic," *Miami News*, January 8, 1988, 1A, 4A; and *The Day It Snowed in Miami*, Directed by Joe Cardona (Miami Herald/WPBT2, 2014), DVD.

“opportunistic infections.”⁶⁸ Haitians, including some whom engaged in same-sex acts, became erroneously associated with what had become known as—also erroneously—a “gay disease.” This spread the misconception that Haitians were somehow naturally prone to HIV and, as a result, many were refused work, a place to live, or admission to schools. Meanwhile, consistent with the city’s longstanding history with the Caribbean—particularly the Castro regime in Cuba—some Miami lesbian and gay activists openly criticized the Haitian government’s treatment of its own queer communities.⁶⁹

In the following years, new immigrant groups—including Nicaraguans, Colombians, Venezuelans, and Brazilians—entered Miami in large numbers and added greatly to its vibrant queer community.⁷⁰ By the 1990s, Miami had become known as a refuge for queer exiles throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.⁷¹ These Latin American and Latina/o communities played integral roles in new LGBTQ political campaigns. On December 1, 1998, Miami-Dade County commissioners prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation, and again, as in 1977, there was an effort to repeal the ordinance. Many in Miami feared that overturning the amendment would have grave effects on the city’s lucrative LGBTQ tourism industry. Local politicians and celebrities, such as Cuban-born singer Gloria Estefan, voiced their pro-gay rights stance and their opposition to repeal. Miami-Dade County’s Cuban American Mayor Alex Penelas voiced his commitment to upholding the anti-discriminatory measure: “We’re trying to build an image of international metropolis, a bridge among cultures, but we would be saying ‘By the way, it’s OK to

⁶⁸ Centers for Disease Control (CDC), “Opportunistic Infections and Kaposi’s Sarcoma Among Haitians in the United States,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)* 31, no. 26 (July 9, 1982): 353–354; LB Moskowitz et al., “Unusual Causes of Death in Haitians Residing in Miami - High Prevalence of Opportunistic Infections,” *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association* 250, no. 9 (September 2, 1983): 1187–1191.

⁶⁹ Karen Payne, “Haiti Jails Homosexuals in AIDS Fear,” *Miami Daily News*, August 10, 1983, 1A; Paul Farmer, *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

⁷⁰ Andrea Elliott, “Hispanic Gay Immigrants Come Out in U.S.—But Not to Mom, Dad,” *Miami Herald*, June 17, 2002.

⁷¹ Johnny Diaz, “More Gay Immigrants Seeking Refuge in U.S.,” *Miami Herald*, February 4, 2001, 1B.

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discriminate based on sexual orientation.”⁷² On September 10, 2002, fifty-three percent of those who showed up at the polls voted to uphold the amendment, marking a pivotal achievement for the LGBTQ community nearly thirty years in the making.⁷³ It took over a decade longer for the commission to include gender identity and expression in the anti-discrimination statutes.⁷⁴

Miami’s geography and social makeup offer a distinct—and important—narrative of the United States’ rich and diverse queer past. It is a borderland at the intersection of numerous identities: it is both south of the US South and, as Ecuadorian President Jaime Roldós Aguilera noted in 1979, the “capital of Latin America.”⁷⁵ This overview barely scratches the surface of the city’s long and textured relationship to those whose gender and sexuality did not conform to contemporary standards or established norms. Since its inception, queer individuals and communities carved out their own spaces in this international city. They have left an indelible mark and transformed the city in most significant ways.

⁷² Dana Canedy, “Miami to Vote on Repeal of Gay Rights,” *New York Times*, September 5, 2002.

⁷³ “Victory in Miami-Dade,” *The Advocate*, October 15, 2002, 16.

⁷⁴ Mazzei and Hanks, “Miami-Dade Commission Bans Discrimination Based on Gender Identity.”

⁷⁵ Raymond A. Mohl, *South of the South: Jewish Activists and the Civil Rights Movement in Miami, 1945-1960* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004); and “Cuban Victory in Miami Example for Other Cities,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 15, 1985, 18.