

SHOW ME MY RIGHTS: QUEER ACTIVISM IN KANSAS CITY AND ST. LOUIS,

1977-1993

A THESIS IN
History

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by
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ABSTRACT

Radical queer (a term not in use at the time, but now more frequently employed) activists seized national headlines in the second half of the twentieth century with their fiery tactics, from so-called “die-ins” in the middle of church services to disrupting city council meetings. While many headline-grabbing protests took place in coastal cities typically characterized as queer havens, queer activists in the Heartland worked tirelessly for liberation from oppression. Queer historians in the 1990s and early 2000s tended to advance this coastal narrative, arguing that urbanization and large populations were necessary preconditions for queer activism. As they began searching elsewhere, scholars discovered evidence of thriving queer communities throughout the United States. The Kay Madden Collection at the Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America, along with the St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection at the State Historical Society of Missouri, shed light upon queer activism in Missouri. The challenges these activists faced, the resistance they displayed, and the coalitions they built with other activists provide examples of queer resistance in Kansas City and St. Louis. Queer activists in Missouri staged large protests, demanded equality, and built coalitions advocating for social reform. This thesis reveals that

queer Missourians effectively challenged heteropatriarchal norms and were active participants in the gay liberation movement.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis titled “Show Me My Rights: Queer Activism in Kansas City and St. Louis, 1977-1993,” presented by Kelsey M. Runge, candidate for the Masters of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worth of acceptance.

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Kevin; my grandmother, Marilyn Runge; and my mother and father, Michael and Janet. I am here because each of you believed in me.

DEDICATION

For every queer activist whose name is not etched into a plaque or honored with a statue, for every queer child who has ever wondered if their history matters, and for my grandmother, Marilyn M. “Shu Shu” Runge, who left this world a better place than she found it. I love you forever and know that you are smiling down on me.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Radical queer¹ activists seized national headlines in the second half of the twentieth century with their fiery tactics and unapologetic boldness. From so-called “die-ins” in the middle of church services to disrupting city council meetings, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), the Gay Liberation Front, and Queer Nation were nearly impossible to ignore. While most of the headline-grabbing activity took place in the apparent queer havens of New York and San Francisco, such activism was not limited to coastal cities. The Midwest is often overlooked, perceived by many as a conservative, polite, and passive region where radicalism could not survive.² Queer activists in the Missouri, however, worked tirelessly to overcome oppression and add their voices to the wider liberation movement. Like other social movements that gained momentum in the second half of the twentieth century, such as Black civil rights and feminism, queer liberation took root across the country.

Queer historians spent the late 1990s and early 2000s discussing urbanization and the consolidation of LGBTQ+ people in large cities. Lillian Faderman, a pioneering lesbian historian, claims that urbanization is ultimately what made the emergence of queer communities possible. The close living quarters of many cities, along with the fact that many queer people were able to escape the watchful eyes of their families and communities for the

¹ I use the terms “queer” and “queer community” throughout this discussion. While I recognize that members of the gay and lesbian community in the period under study would not likely have used this term to describe themselves, I believe it is usefully employed as an umbrella term for nonheteronormative individuals. Many participants in the movement, including bisexual people, are erased by the term “gay and lesbian.” The term “queer” is my attempt to draw these individuals back into the narrative.

² CJ Janovy, *No Place Like Home: Lessons in Activism from LGBT Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 7.

first time, enabled the growth of large queer networks.³ Allan Bérubé's study of queer veterans after World War II narrows the scope of Faderman's urbanization argument, zeroing in on coastal cities such as New York and San Francisco as the prime locations for queer community formation.⁴ He notes that many queer veterans remained in these port cities following the war in order to continue enjoying their newfound freedom.

While accurate, this approach tends to diminish the community formation that occurred elsewhere in the United States. Queer Missourians, as discussed in greater detail below, also migrated to large cities, but these cities were often located within their own state rather than across the country. Kansas City and St. Louis were home to active queer communities of their own during the gay liberation movement, which helped spur social reform in Missouri. The emphasis on bicoastal community formation also tends to downplay the dangers queer people faced in these coastal cities. Bérubé touches on the surveillance of gay bars and cruising spots, as does Nan Alamilla Boyd. Both scholars assert the prominence of coastal cities as command posts for the movement.⁵ This emphasis on the superiority of coastal cities as centers for community formation does little justice to the risks queer people faced, regardless of location. Bar raids, arrests, discrimination, and hate crimes occurred both on the coasts and in the Midwest, just as activism and community formation occurred in most urban areas of the United States, regardless of location.

Craig M. Loftin's 2012 study, *Masked Voices*, draws attention to queer activism across the country rather than limiting its scope to the coasts. Loftin focuses on the content,

³ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 8-9.

⁴ Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II*, 20th Anniversary ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 6.

⁵ Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 114.

distribution, and readership of *ONE Magazine*, the country's first self-proclaimed queer publication, to reveal pockets of queer people throughout the United States.⁶ The communities in Loftin's study extend far beyond New York and San Francisco, shedding light upon the necessity of looking elsewhere for queer history.

Numerous historians have continued this trend of dismantling the coastal narrative, shifting their focus toward the Midwest in particular. Scholars such as Martin F. Manalansan IV, Chantal Nadeau, Richard T. Rodríguez, and Siobhan B. Somerville, editors of *Queering the Middle*, helped locate previously hidden queer organizations and activists.⁷ Their revelations have led to the uncovering of additional details, such as information about LGBTQ+ protests and the demands they placed upon local elected officials to recognize their humanity. These historians also revealed powerful coalitions between queer organizations and other reform-oriented groups, including those dedicated to racial and gender equality. Such stories widen the history of queer liberation, moving beyond New York and San Francisco and into other areas of the country.

After the Stonewall Uprising of June 28, 1969, queer people throughout the United States were galvanized into action. Patrons of the Stonewall Inn, a bar in Greenwich Village, New York, fought back against a routine police raid, challenging the stereotype of queer people as weak or soft.⁸ The euphoria produced by the rebellion gave rise to new and radical queer organizations, including the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA).⁹ Protests and Pride celebrations erupted throughout the country. Queer

⁶ Craig M. Loftin, *Masked Voices: Gay Men and Lesbians in Cold War America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 2-4.

⁷ *Queering the Middle*, eds. Martin F. Manalansan IV, Chantal Nadeau, Richard T. Rodríguez, and Siobhan B. Somerville (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 1.

⁸ Linda Hirshman, *Victory: The Triumphant Gay Revolution* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2012), 96.

⁹ Hirshman, *Victory*, 107, 116.

activists were ecstatic and energized. This kind of energy, perhaps inevitably, did not last. However, events that occurred in the 1980s—the HIV/AIDS crisis and new discriminatory political movements that endangered the queer community—served to re-galvanize the queer community.

As the Stonewall high began to wear off, queer organizations fell into predictable patterns: “The charismatic period after Stonewall gave way to newborn bureaucracies.”¹⁰ These bureaucracies included the National Gay Task Force (NGTF), which focused its attention on liberal cities, and the Human Rights Campaign Fund, which raised money from millionaires for political allies who would have their pictures taken with queer leaders only if they were not released until after their elections.¹¹ Queer activism began to stall as many organizations lacked clear direction. However, there were two wakeup calls on the horizon.

In June 1981, the Centers for Disease Control’s *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* noted that five previously healthy men in Los Angeles came down with pneumocystis carinii pneumonia, and that all the men were “active homosexuals.”¹² This was the first mention of what would come to be known as acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), an infectious disease that devastated the queer community. Media outlets and far-right politicians immediately took advantage of these reports. For example, the *New York Times* announced that the new “gay cancer” spread among gay men who were having up to ten sexual encounters a night, sometimes multiple times per week.¹³ Others, including paleoconservative columnist Pat Buchanan, claimed that AIDS was nature’s way of

¹⁰ Ibid, 170.

¹¹ Ibid, 170.

¹² Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 415.

¹³ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, 415.

“exacting retribution” upon queer people.¹⁴ As AIDS cases skyrocketed throughout New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, the federal government failed to even acknowledge the disease. President Ronald Reagan did not even say the word “AIDS” until 1985, a year after three hundred thousand Americans had already been diagnosed.¹⁵ The lives lost, and the insulting negligence of the federal government, lit a fire under many queer activists that had not burned since Stonewall.

AIDS was not the only wakeup call for queer Americans. On June 30, 1986, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Bowers v. Hardwick* that queer sex, or “sodomy,” was not included in the privacy protections of the Constitution.¹⁶ This decision enabled states to create and enforce laws that criminalized same-sex intimacy. As AIDS continued to tear through the queer community, it became difficult to deny the Supreme Court’s prejudice. Chief Justice Warren Burger referred to queer sex as “a crime not fit to be named” in his special opinion, confirming what many queer Americans already knew: the government was not on their side.¹⁷ Protesters poured into the streets after the decision was released, but *Hardwick*’s impact was arguably most visible in October of 1987. Six hundred thousand queer activists gathered in Washington, D.C. for a second March on Washington to express their outrage at the ruling: “There were six times as many marchers as there’d been in 1979 because there was so much more now to be mad about and to mourn... Thousands of gays and lesbians who’d come for the march on Sunday remained in Washington till the following week so they could descend on the Supreme Court and let them know what they thought of

¹⁴ Ibid, 416.

¹⁵ Ibid, 418.

¹⁶ Hirshman, *Victory*, 193.

¹⁷ Ibid, 194.

their decision.”¹⁸ Queer people were furious. AIDS and *Hardwick* combined to reawaken the movement.

AIDS-related activism took off in New York and San Francisco, two of the hardest-hit cities. The first AIDS-specific group, New York Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC), formed in 1981.¹⁹ The New York City health commissioner continued to ignore AIDS, and GMHC stepped up when city officials would not. They cared for those who had AIDS and encouraged wealthy members of the queer community to come out and support their caregiving program.²⁰ While AIDS activism in New York was not immediately political in nature, it would eventually follow San Francisco’s example: “New York is always center ring, but it’s not always the model. From the beginning the San Francisco gay community responded to the epidemic with contentious politics: revolution, not just care revolution.”²¹ Queer people in San Francisco were already organized, due in part to the work of Harvey Milk. Milk, a City Supervisor, was the first openly gay elected official in the state of California, and he was a skilled coalition builder. The murder of Harvey Milk in 1978 was also a catalyst for gay activism in the San Francisco region, leading to the San Francisco AIDS Foundation securing a half-million-dollar AIDS grant from the city by 1982.²² Queer political power in San Francisco served as an effective model for activism that would spread to other urban areas across the United States. The *Hardwick* decision triggered even more of these protests.

¹⁸ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, 428-429.

¹⁹ Hirshman, *Victory*, 181.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 183.

²¹ *Ibid*, 184.

²² *Ibid*, 185.

This thesis focuses on the vibrant queer activism that occurred in Kansas City and St. Louis. Missouri is not typically conceptualized as the home of queer activism, but these two cities were home to a number of queer activist organizations that responded to these post-Stonewall challenges. My research centers on the social and political activities of multiple queer organizations in Missouri, as well as their coalition-building with other activists, including women's and labor groups. The Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America (GLAMA) contains a wealth of material on queer activism and community leaders in Kansas City. The archive is expansive, hosting dozens of queer history collections, but the Kay Madden Collection is the most valuable to this research. It contains five boxes of correspondence, legislative information, meeting minutes, protest information, and newspaper clippings from the Pink Triangle Political Coalition (PTPC), a group that planned protests and lobbied elected officials. Kay Madden, a lawyer who was deeply involved with queer and women's activism beginning in the 1970s, joined other Kansas Citians at the 1987 March on Washington in the wake of the *Hardwick* decision. Upon returning to Kansas City, these activists vowed to continue fighting for queer liberation, and PTPC was born. That PTPC was formed in the wake of the AIDS crisis and *Hardwick* make it an excellent example of the newly kindled queer activism at this time.

While the Kay Madden Collection provides sources for the Kansas City side, the State Historical Society of Missouri's St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection provides similar sources for St. Louis. The sources in this collection range from 1972 to 1992, which aligns with the Kay Madden Collection. It contains twenty-one boxes of flyers, correspondence, political information, newspaper clippings, and fundraising information from numerous queer organizations in St. Louis. While the St. Louis Lesbian and Gay

Archives Collection is not the only collection of queer sources from St. Louis, its wealth of information on political activism and community formation makes it an ideal complement to the Kay Madden Collection.

This thesis covers only a small portion of the queer activism that occurred in Kansas City and St. Louis from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. It focuses primarily on political activism, as queer people in these two cities utilized their shared identities to coalesce into a formidable political force. It also examines community formation and events, as the community aspect of queer life in these cities deepened the ties between activists.

My focus also centers only on Missouri's two major urban areas. There was certainly activism elsewhere in the state, including college towns like Columbia, but that is outside the scope of this research, although non-urban queer activism is certainly a worthy subject for study in its own right. My decision to focus only on the urban areas—which were and are admittedly somewhat unlike the rest of the state of Missouri in terms of population and culture—is designed to shed light upon the responses of queer activists in Kansas City and St. Louis specifically because these two urban regions were energized to contest the discrimination they experienced: the city populations reignited the fires once lit by Stonewall.

My thesis takes the form of a thematic comparative study, using two cities in Missouri as examples of queer activism in the heart of the country. While larger-than-life queer figures, including Harvey Milk and Marsha P. Johnson, certainly helped pave the way for queer liberation, grassroots activists were constantly on the ground fighting for equality. *Masked Voices* provides an excellent blueprint for this work, as Loftin's meticulous analysis

of correspondence between and publications by queer activists reveals several previously under-reported communities.

Since many queer activists in Kansas City and St. Louis focused on improving their home cities rather than migrating to the coasts, a form of queer activism unique to Missouri emerged. Queer Missourians did not attempt to replicate New York or San Francisco in their push for liberation. Rather, they used their queer Missourian identities to relate to one another and those around them. Their upbringing and shared experiences of queerness in Missouri brought these activists together and informed their efforts to secure equality. Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field effectively encapsulate what was happening in Kansas City and St. Louis during the queer liberation movement, and it will inform my analysis of queer activism in Missouri. Bourdieu maintains that those who occupy similar positions in a social space develop similar practices and are endowed with similar dispositions.²³ Habitus can represent both stasis and change. In this context, queer Missourians represent a socialized group. "Field" refers to the local social world in which actors are imbedded and toward which they orient their actions.²⁴ While these fields may constrain certain social groups, they are by no means static. People can change the principles and power dynamics that structure these fields. According to Bourdieu, the boundaries of the field become blurred and fluid in "times of crisis."²⁵ The post-Stonewall stasis that had settled in around the 1970s quickly gave way to the crises brought on by AIDS and *Hardwick*. Queer communities throughout the country began to push the boundaries of their

²³ Pierre Bourdieu, "What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32 (1987): 6.

²⁴ Jeffrey J. Sallaz and Jane Zavisca, "Bourdieu in American Sociology, 1980-2004," *Annual Review of Sociology* no. 33 (2007): 24.

²⁵ Matthew Adams, "Hybridizing Habitus and Reflexivity: Towards an Understanding of Contemporary Identity?" *Sociology* 40, no. 3 (2006): 520.

respective fields and demanded social change with renewed vigor. Queer Missourians used their shared practices and dispositions to coalesce into a recognized social class and challenge societal norms, demanding equality.

Ultimately, this thesis highlights the bold activism of queer Missourians, shedding light upon their fight for liberation. In this respect, the lived experiences of queer Missourians were quite similar to those of queer people who lived on the coasts. Their networks might have been smaller in scale, but they were still present and active. Drawing the work of queer Missourians out of the shadows and into wider discussions of the gay liberation movement helps illuminate the immense scale of queer activism in the second half of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER 2

LOCAL EXAMPLES OF OPPRESSION

Queer life in Missouri, like on the coasts, had its share of risks. Several gay bars served as community spaces for queer Midwesterners. John “Gene” E. Dawson, a gay man who moved to St. Louis from rural Iowa and embraced drag, noted that he and his friends visited the St. Louis gay bars on an almost nightly basis. While these bars certainly provided a way for queer people to socialize, they were as dangerous in the Midwest as they were on the coasts. Dawson recounted the pitfalls of visiting gay bars in St. Louis: “Of course, in that time period of paranoia and McCarthyism, it was not uncommon for authorities to raid known gay bars and haul its patrons off to jail. Some bars would not serve very effeminate guys who wore makeup.”¹ While they provided spaces for queer people to meet one another and expand their social circles, they also increased the risk of harassment by law enforcement, arrest, and other forms of discrimination.

Another instance of homophobia in St. Louis further underscores the dangers of living openly as a queer person. In 1989, Tim Cusick and Denny Lisenby, two members of the Privacy Rights Education Project (P.R.E.P.), were verbally assaulted and thrown out of a Schnucks grocery store by a manager. The manager in question reportedly had a history of discrimination against minorities.² Even a trip to the grocery store could turn dangerous for queer Missourians.

¹ John “Gene” E. Dawson, *Farm Boy, City Girl: From Gene to Miss Gina* (Chicago: MiRiona Publishing, 2020), 124.

² Privacy Rights Education Project, General Meeting Minutes, May 24, 1989, Box 1, Folder 47, S0545 St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives (1987 -) Collection, 1972-1992, State Historical Society of Missouri, University of Missouri – St. Louis, St. Louis, MO: 2. Hereafter referred to as St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection.

Homophobia also reared its head in Kansas City. In April 1990, Kansas City's City Council heard testimonies concerning a proposed ordinance to ban discrimination based upon sexual orientation. Opponents of the ordinance mobilized in large numbers, warning the City Council that God would punish Kansas City if it passed and claiming that a fate "worse than earthquakes" (in reference to the Biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah) would befall the city.³ This backlash from religious fundamentalists was not unique to Missouri, but it certainly created obstacles for queer activists. Oppression of queer people was the norm rather than the exception in the twentieth century. Outlining local examples of homophobia and oppression in Missouri, however, helps draw attention to the bravery of the activists who stood up to these antigay forces and lived openly as queer.

³ *The Kansas City Star*, "Gay Rights Proposal Debated," April 26, 1990, Box 1, Folder 16, MS314 Kay Madden Collection, Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America, University of Missouri – Kansas City, Kansas City, MO: C1. Hereafter referred to as Kay Madden Collection.

CHAPTER 3

QUEER POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM IN MISSOURI

Despite the numerous dangers associated with being openly queer in the second half of the twentieth century, several queer activist organizations emerged in Missouri. The purposes of these organizations varied, ranging from legislative reform to community event organization. These groups of activists brought many queer Missourians together and provided spaces for community growth. Members of these organizations worked tirelessly to make Missouri a safer place for its queer residents, especially in the wake of the AIDS crisis and the Supreme Court's *Hardwick* decision.¹

The Kansas City based Pink Triangle Political Coalition (PTPC), founded in October 1987, was one active queer organization in Missouri. PTPC's founding members, including Kay Madden and Dave Predmore, attended the March on Washington in October 1987. The 1987 march included nearly six times the number of participants as the first march on Washington in 1979 due to outrage over *Hardwick*. They sought to continue fighting oppression. Predmore outlined the mission of PTPC in a 1989 letter sent to the Kansas City AIDS Council:

I represent the Pink Triangle Political Coalition, the gay and lesbian legislative voice of Kansas City. PTPC seeks to initiate and support the passage of laws that ensure civil rights for gays and lesbians. To that end, we attempt to challenge society's prevailing attitudes away from homophobia and toward understanding, tolerance, and acceptance.²

¹ See introduction.

² Dave Predmore, Letter to Kansas City AIDS Council, May 15, 1989, Box 2, Folder 5, MS314 Kay Madden Collection, 1.

PTPC advocated for a new citywide antidiscrimination ordinance that included sexual orientation as a protected category.³ Kansas City's lack of legal protections for queer people spurred activists from PTPC into action. The fact that queer people were oppressed by this lack of protection did not stop members of PTPC from writing to city officials and circulating petitions for the advancement of their civil rights. They mobilized in the face of discrimination to build community and promote awareness.

PTPC was not the only queer organization in Kansas City to promote the citywide antidiscrimination ordinance. The Human Rights Ordinance Project, later known as the Human Rights Project (HRP), also worked to support the ordinance's passage beginning in 1989.⁴ In an undated flyer, HRP explained the need for protective legislation:

With this ordinance Kansas City has the opportunity to begin the process of eliminating discrimination against our lesbian, gay, and bisexual citizens. Everyone in Kansas City knows someone who is lesbian, gay, or bisexual. They are good citizens, They have contributed greatly to the renovation of urban neighborhoods, to the vitality of the local economy, and to the cultural life of the city. They spend millions on retail goods, millions on housing, and pay millions in property taxes every year. They are friends, family members, and neighbors. They vote. The time has come to give them the same protection that other Kansas Citians enjoy!⁵

With this flyer, HRP highlighted not only the value of queer citizens to Kansas City, but also the pressing need to bring equality to Kansas City. The flyer also noted that St. Louis already had protections based upon sexual orientation in place.⁶ Though Kansas City lagged behind St. Louis in terms of an antidiscrimination ordinance, PTPC and HRP's activists were determined to enact change within the city's legislation.

³ Pink Triangle Political Coalition, General Meeting Minutes, February 2, 1988, Box 2, Folder 2, MS314 Kay Madden Collection, 1.

⁴ Human Rights Ordinance Project, Press Release, 1990, Box 1, Folder 6, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

⁵ Human Rights Ordinance Project, Informational Flyer, Box 1, Folder 2, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

⁶ Human Rights Ordinance Project, Informational Flyer, Box 1, Folder 2, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

In addition to releasing information about the antidiscrimination ordinance, PTPC and HRP also directly pressured members of the City Council to support the measure. On May 9, 1990, members of HRP hand-delivered postcards supporting the ordinance to the City Council.⁷ The postcards HRP distributed included twelve different designs, each with room for signatures from supporters of the ordinance. One of the postcard designs read: “THE RIGHT OF THE KU KLUX KLAN TO DIRECT HATE TOWARD PEOPLE OF THEIR CHOICE IS PROTECTED BY LAW. THE RIGHT OF HOMOSEXUALS TO DIRECT LOVE TOWARD PEOPLE OF THEIR CHOICE IS NOT.”⁸ Activists sought to draw attention to the glaring human rights abuses within the city’s legislation. The ordinance went up for a vote the next day.

On May 10, 1990, Kansas City’s City Council voted 8-5 to send the antidiscrimination ordinance back to committee.⁹ Though sending the ordinance back to committee was not an outright rejection, queer activists expressed their disappointment and outrage over the decision. In a press release on May 14, 1990, HRP denounced the vote as an act of cowardice on the part of City Council.¹⁰ Although the ordinance stalled, queer activists vowed to continue the fight and pressure elected officials to act decisively on behalf of queer rights.¹¹ City Council continued to balk at the ordinance, but members of the queer community persisted. In a testimony before City Council on June 2, 1993, HRO co-founder David Weeda urged Councilmembers to pass the antidiscrimination ordinance, noting that he

⁷ Human Rights Ordinance Project, Press Release, May 8, 1990, Box 1, Folder 6, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

⁸ Human Rights Ordinance Project, Postcards Supporting Berkley-Shields Human Rights Ordinance, May 8, 1990, Box 1, Folder 6, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

⁹ Human Rights Ordinance Project, Press Release, May 14, 1990, Box 1, Folder 6, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

¹⁰ Human Rights Ordinance Project, Press Release, May 14, 1990, Box 1, Folder 6, Kay Madden Collection, 2.

¹¹ Human Rights Ordinance Project, Press Release, May 14, 1990, Box 1, Folder 6, Kay Madden Collection, 3.

and other activists had been working to secure inclusivity for Kansas Citizens for nearly four years.¹² When faced with setbacks, Kansas City's queer community pressed on.

PTPC, HRP, and other queer organizations in Missouri also demanded an adequate governmental response to the ongoing AIDS crisis. They carefully monitored how city officials handled the crisis, corresponding with them when they saw areas for improvement. When Kansas City Mayor Richard Berkley created a Task Force on AIDS in 1987, queer activists observed its actions. Kansas City's chapter of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) expressed their disappointment with the Task Force in 1989, noting that in over two years of existence, the officials had failed to provide a clear sense of direction.¹³ ACT UP/Kansas City concluded its letter with an offer to meet with city officials and discuss a path forward. Similarly, PTPC wrote to the Kansas City Department of Health to offer assistance with the AIDS response. Rather than standing by and allowing city officials to ignore the problem, PTPC members expressed their intentions to be involved in the conversation: "We intend to take part in the planning process by attending meetings regarding service delivery. We would like to offer whatever information we have available in order to identify the gap that exists in providing services with the idea of bridging those gaps."¹⁴ The letters from ACT UP/Kansas City and PTPC indicate that queer organizations attempted to take an active role in the implementation of policies that would benefit the queer community. Though elected officials were not always receptive to the demands of these activists, they continued to push for a safer living environment in Kansas City.

¹² David Weeda, Testimony Provided Before the Kansas City, Missouri Rules and Audit Committee in Support of KCMO City Council Ordinance #930612, June 2, 1993, Box 1, Folder 2, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

¹³ ACT UP/Kansas City, Letter to Mayor Richard Berkley, February 4, 1989, Box 2, Folder 5, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

¹⁴ Pink Triangle Political Coalition, Letter to Maggie Datwyler, May 30, 1989, Box 2, Folder 5, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

Queer activists also carefully monitored the words of Kansas City's AIDS Council. A letter from PTPC's Dave Predmore addressed the homophobic remarks of unnamed councilmembers: "We have recently been made aware of remarks by certain members of the AIDS Council that question the 'gay agenda.' We of [the] Pink Triangle Political Coalition are here this morning to affirm that there is indeed a gay agenda and that it must be heard, especially as it relates to AIDS."¹⁵ With this letter, PTPC simultaneously reprimanded and demanded action from the AIDS Council. This action not only suggests that councilmembers were frequently under the watchful eye of Kansas City's queer activists, but also that PTPC courageously advocated for pro-gay policies despite the apparent homophobia among elected officials.

Queer residents of the St. Louis metropolitan area also demanded accountability from their elected officials. Ronald C. Schnatzmeyer, a resident of Ferguson, Missouri, wrote to representative Robert A. Young in 1977 to urge his support of a statewide antidiscrimination proposal that included sexual orientation as a category of discrimination. Young's response underscored the formidable legislative obstacles queer Missourians faced: "I, of course, respect the opinions of all my constituents. I respect your views on this controversial issue. However, I have received an overwhelmingly negative response toward this proposal. The vast majority of people in my district have made it clear that they oppose any legislation of this nature."¹⁶ Schnatzmeyer was not the only constituent to contact his representatives regarding legislative reform. Lawrence A. Eggleston, Executive Director of the Missouri Gay Caucus, wrote to Representative Karen McCarthy Benson in 1977 to urge the removal of

¹⁵ Dave Predmore, Letter to Kansas City AIDS Council, May 15, 1989, Box 2, Folder 5, Kay Madden Collection, 1-2.

¹⁶ Robert A. Young, Letter to Ronald C. Schnatzmeyer, June 27, 1977, Box 1, Folder 6, St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection, 1.

consensual same-sex activity from Missouri's sexual misconduct law. Benson, who stated her support for the removal of consensual same-sex acts from the law, replied to Eggleston with a grim prediction: Missouri's House of Representatives would not likely pass protections for queer residents in the foreseeable future.¹⁷ Despite these setbacks, queer Missourians continued contacting elected officials with their concerns about legislative issues in hopes of achieving equality before the law.

In addition to directly lobbying elected officials, queer Missourians staged large protests and rallies to generate support for their movement. Perhaps one of the most well-known examples of queer protest in Missouri was the National Day of Mourning (NDOM), a series of coordinated demonstrations against the Supreme Court's 1986 *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision, which permitted states to criminalize consensual sexual activity that was not heteronormative. The National Day of Mourning was a nationwide event, but queer activists in Kansas City and St. Louis specifically worked to stage protests in Missouri. PTPC led the efforts in Kansas City, supported by ACT UP. Members of PTPC created and distributed an informational packet to those in attendance on June 30, 1989, explaining how the Hardwick decision enabled Missouri's antigay sexual misconduct law to remain in place.¹⁸ The packet also included steps individuals could take to further protest the sexual misconduct law, including contacting legislators. PTPC activists ensured that queer Missourians participated in a nationwide queer protest while tailoring it to the specific needs of Missourians. Their participation in this protest also demonstrated that these activists were part of a nationwide network dedicated to queer liberation.

¹⁷ Karen McCarthy Benson, Letter to Lawrence A. Eggleston, April 28, 1977, Box 1, Folder 6, St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection, 1.

¹⁸ Pink Triangle Political Coalition, National Day of Mourning Background Materials, June 1989, Box 2, Folder 10, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

St. Louis hosted a protest of its own on the National Day of Mourning. The Privacy Rights Education Project (P.R.E.P.) headed the efforts in St. Louis, supported by fourteen other unnamed organizations.¹⁹ P.R.E.P., like PTPC, formed in the wake of the *Hardwick* decision, further illuminating the galvanizing influence of the Supreme Court's antigay discrimination upon queer activists in Missouri. P.R.E.P. outlined its plans for the National Day of Mourning in its meeting on May 24, 1989. These plans included a press conference and a rally to urge Missouri lawmakers to repeal the discriminatory sexual misconduct law.²⁰ The *St. Louis Post Dispatch* reported on the protest, noting that activists captured the attention of passers-by as they walked to that night's St. Louis Cardinals game.²¹ While there was a mixed reception of these activists during their protest, the willingness of participants in the National Day of Mourning to be visible to the public highlights the fact that many queer St. Louisans were willing to take the risks associated with being "out" in order to make their home state safer.

While queer activists in Missouri protested government-sponsored discrimination, they also targeted businesses with antigay policies. One example is St. Louis's participation in a protest against Cracker Barrel Restaurants in 1991. In an information package distributed to supporters, an organization called Queer Nation/St. Louis explained the reasons for the protest:

Queer Nation/St. Louis and its supporters in the labor, religious, and civil rights communities will converge on St. Louis, Mo. on September 22 [1991] to protest the anti-gay policy of Cracker Barrel Old Country Stores, a chain of "family" restaurants and gift shops. In January of this year, the company instituted a policy whereby employees "whose sexual preferences fail to demonstrate normal heterosexual

¹⁹ Privacy Rights Education Project, Press Release, June 29, 1989, Box 2, Folder 6, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

²⁰ Privacy Rights Education Project, Meeting Minutes, May 24, 1989, St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection, 1.

²¹ *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, "Homosexuals Kick Off Drive to Repeal Sex Misconduct Law," June 29, 1989, Box 2, Folder 10, Kay Madden Collection, 5B.

values” would be fired. At least 12 employees have been terminated. Gays and lesbians applying for jobs at Cracker Barrel have been rejected under the policy.²²

The Cracker Barrel protests were not limited only to St. Louis; Missourians joined other activists from the South and Midwest to push back against this blatant bigotry. Participants in the protest packed into Cracker Barrel during its profitable Sunday lunch hours, occupied tables, and only ordered drinks.²³ Protest coordinators urged participants to remain peaceful, maintaining that the goal was to deprive the company of its normal business rather than inciting violence. The company formally reversed the policy that same year. Yet again, queer Missourians asserted themselves as a powerful social force, working together to secure equal rights in the state they called home. Much like queer activists responded to discrimination on a nationwide level, queer Missourians responded to workplace discrimination, the AIDS crisis, and other forms of bigotry, challenging the dominant cultural norms and demanding a place in society. Their coordinated protests and demands for the recognition of humanity helped cement their place as a legitimate social class, one which would challenge the attitudes of the majority and bring about change.

²² Queer Nation/St. Louis, Cracker Barrel Midwest Regional Protest Information Package, September 22, 1991, Box 4, Folder 155, St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection, 1.

²³ Queer Nation/St. Louis, Cracker Barrel Midwest Regional Protest Information Package, September 22, 1991, Box 4, Folder 155, St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection, 1.

CHAPTER 4

CELEBRATION AND VISIBILITY

In addition to demanding accountability from elected officials, queer organizations in Missouri worked to plan events that celebrated their identities and encouraged community cohesion. Kansas City's queer community first celebrated Gay and Lesbian Pride Week in 1991, on June 15-23.¹ Though Mayor Emanuel Cleaver II refused to issue an official proclamation for Gay and Lesbian Pride Week, citing his fear that it would be divisive, organizations such as HRP moved forward with the week's activities. In a press release on June 19, HRP issued a proclamation of its own: "Today we join with other organizations to congratulate GALA [Gay and Lesbian Awareness] and proclaim Lesbian and Gay Pride Week in Kansas City. We encourage all Kansas Citians to celebrate the rich, cultural diversity that the gay and lesbian community offers us."² Following Pride Week, HRP partnered with ACT UP, GALA, Cultural Exchange, and Lesbians for Justice to host a rally commemorating the Stonewall Riots on the steps of City Hall on June 27.³ Though city officials refused to officially recognize Gay and Lesbian Pride Week, queer Kansas Citians carved out a time and place to celebrate their identities with other members of their community.

Kansas City's queer community held celebrations outside of Gay and Lesbian Pride Week. The Block Party for Human Rights on October 17, 1991 provided yet another opportunity for queer Kansas Citians to mingle. The event was a fundraiser for HRP, but multiple organizations participated in the event. Those in attendance could partake in a

¹ Human Rights Project, Press Release, June 14, 1991, Box 1, Folder 6, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

² Human Rights Project, Press Release, June 19, 1991, Box 1, Folder 6, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

³ Human Rights Project, Press Release, June 19, 1991, Box 1, Folder 6, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

shopping spree, attend prose and poetry readings, register to vote, and enjoy food from various vendors. The night ended with a concert by folksinger Fred Small.⁴ In addition to the entertainment and food, HRP provided opportunities for activism: “City Council members have been invited, along with other elected officials from the area and members of the Mayor’s Commission on Lesbian and Gay Concerns. This will be a good opportunity for HRP supporters to visit with politicians and leaders who are committed to representing the gay and lesbian community.”⁵ Queer activists in Kansas City ensured that opportunities for celebration extended beyond Pride Week, allowing residents to embrace their identities year-round. Activities such as the Block Party for Human Rights enabled queer Kansas Citians to gather and enjoy themselves with others who sought to make the city more queer friendly, all while supporting local businesses.

St. Louis also hosted Pride celebrations. The St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Pride Celebration Committee planned and hosted a variety of events year-round, but its primary focus was the annual St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Pridefest. Pridefest included speakers, informational workshops, and other forms of entertainment. For example, in 1980, the program of events for PrideFest listed workshops on custody and property rights, social change, and coming out to parents. Other activities at PrideFest in 1980 included a dance at Washington University, a picnic in Forest Park, various film screenings, and a potluck dinner.⁶ St. Louis’s annual Pride celebration provided opportunities for education and entertainment alike.

⁴ Human Rights Project, Press Release, October 1, 1991, Box 1, Folder 6, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

⁵ Human Rights Project, Press Release, October 1, 1991, Box 1, Folder 6, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

⁶ St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Pride Celebration Committee, St. Louis Celebration of Lesbian and Gay Pride Schedule of Events, April 12, 1980, Box 1, Folder 49, St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection, 1.

The St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Pride Celebration Committee also planned a number of smaller community events throughout the year. For instance, they held a lesbian and gay “prom night” in 1988, which offered attendees an opportunity to experience the prom night they were denied as a result of the heteronormative expectations at high school dances.⁷ By attempting to host events such as “prom night” and regular community dances, the St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Pride Celebration Committee was proactive in creating new opportunities for queer St. Louisans to meet, interact, and form connections. The cost of admission to the dance served as a donation to the Committee, which was then used to fund PrideFest. One celebration served to fund another. It is impossible to calculate how successful these activities were, however, because the organizers did not maintain statistics regarding attendance at these dances. These smaller celebrations did, however, provide greater impetus for other Pride events to take place.

Yet another community dance for queer St. Louisans took place at Southern Illinois University – Edwardsville (SIUE) on December 28, 1991. Located just across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, queer residents of the St. Louis metropolitan area could easily reach this campus, which included Missouri students as a sizeable population. SIUE’s first annual “Queermas Eve Ball” was meant to be an event for everyone. It included a variety of entertainments, including drag queens and folk singers. Representatives from the St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Pride Celebration Committee and Queer Nation/St. Louis also spoke at the event.⁸ The end of the program read: “This is your Gay and Lesbian Community, Folks. Be

⁷ St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Pride Celebration Committee, Flyer Advertising Prom Night, June 9, 1988, Box 1, Folder 52, St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection, 1.

⁸ Gay and Lesbian Association of Students at Southern Illinois University – Edwardsville, Program Advertising First Annual Queermas Eve Ball, December 28, 1991, Box 1, Folder 55, St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection, 1.

supportive of these entities whenever the chance may arise.”⁹ By hosting this community event, listing local queer organizations in the program, and encouraging attendees to support these organizations, SIUE provided opportunities for queer St. Louisans to connect with one another and expand their networks, all while celebrating their identities as queer residents of the area. While perhaps not groundbreaking as events, if compared to the larger social and cultural activities that occurred in Pride celebrations on the two coasts, this kind of community-building, however small and self-contained, was vital to the well-being of the queer communities in the Midwest. Indeed, they might have been even more vital to queer identities in St. Louis and Kansas City because of the lack of support exhibited by the local and state governments. Queer Missourians did more than protest discrimination to change the attitudes of the majority in Kansas City and St. Louis. They utilized Pride celebrations to meet one another, share their experiences, and continue their march toward building a more equitable Missouri. Such celebrations went beyond parades and dances, deepening the roots of a community which fought tirelessly against oppressive forces.

⁹ Gay and Lesbian Association of Students at Southern Illinois University – Edwardsville, Program Advertising First Annual Queermas Eve Ball, December 28, 1991, Box 1, Folder 55, St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection, 1.

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CHAPTER 5

COALITION BUILDING BETWEEN ACTIVIST GROUPS IN MISSOURI

Queer Missourians were not alone in their efforts to create a fair and equitable state. Organizations such as PTPC, HRP, the St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Pride Celebration Committee, and Queer Nation/St. Louis often found support among other marginalized groups, including women's and labor organizations. The coalitions these groups of activists built were mutually beneficial, and many organizations supported one another during protests and other events. One example of coalition building between queer and other marginalized groups can be seen in Kansas City's 1989 National Day of Mourning Protest. Though PTPC and ACT UP/Kansas City spearheaded the organization of the event, a press release prior to the event lists sponsors outside of the queer community. These sponsors included the Kansas City Urban National Organization for Women and the Socialist Workers Party.¹ Though the National Day of Mourning was considered a queer protest because of the *Hardwick* decision's emphasis on "sodomy," organizations outside of the queer community lent their support to PTPC and ACT UP. Their willingness to join forces with queer activists suggests that they, too, understood the necessity for equality in Missouri.

Kansas City's proposed antidiscrimination ordinance also received support from organizations outside of the queer community. In July 1990, HRP released a list of endorsers of the ordinance to ban discrimination based upon sexual orientation. Among these endorsers were the American Civil Liberties Union of Kansas and Missouri, the Jewish Community Relations Bureau, the Kansas City Urban National Organization for Women, Loretto

¹ Pink Triangle Political Coalition, Press Release, June 7, 1989, Box 2, Folder 10, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

Women's Group, Planned Parenthood of Greater Kansas City, and Womansource.² Kansas City's existing laws already prohibited discrimination against many members of these organizations, including women and religious minorities.³ These groups still advocated for reform, however, mobilizing to support queer Kansas Citians in their fight for equality.

Queer organizations in St. Louis also built coalitions with other activist groups. One example of this is the relationship between the St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Pride Celebration Committee and the St. Louis Metro National Organization for Women. The organizations hosted a river cruise on the *Huck Finn* beginning in 1983, and this event continued until at least 1990.⁴ Funds generated by ticket sales benefitted each organization. The river cruise provided an opportunity for activists to enjoy themselves and build relationships while simultaneously benefitting their movements. These local activists worked together to create a more queer- and woman-friendly St. Louis.

Queer Nation/St. Louis's Cracker Barrel protest also generated support from groups outside the queer community. In a 1991 open letter to Cracker Barrel employees, leaders from the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, AFSCME, Nurses United, American Postal Workers Union, Lesbian and Gay Labor Network, United Federation of Teachers, United Steel Workers of America, and United Auto Workers, among others, expressed their support for queer workers.⁵ This is yet another example of queer rights activism comingling with other marginalized groups, specifically the working class.

² Human Rights Ordinance Project, List of Endorsers of Civil Rights Ordinance, July 20, 1990, Box 1, Folder 5, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

³ Human Rights Project, Informational Packet Concerning Ordinance No. 930612, 1993, Box 1, Folder 2, Kay Madden Collection, 1.

⁴ St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Pride Celebration Committee and National Organization for Women – St. Louis Metro Chapter, Flyer Advertising the Third Annual River Cruise on the Huck Finn, June 28, 1986, Box 1, Folder 51, St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection, 1.

⁵ Queer Nation/St. Louis, Cracker Barrel Midwest Regional Protest Information Package, September 22, 1991, Box 4, Folder 155, St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection, 15.

Another letter from Jesse L. Jackson of the National Rainbow Coalition, dated August 9, 1991, highlights the necessity for coalition building: “This bigotry affects all of us. This bigotry diminishes the dignity and civil rights of everyone. Bigotry and hatred do not discriminate. If Cracker Barrel is allowed to attack our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters without opposition, then tomorrow they will attack other minority workers, women, and religious minorities.”⁶ Jackson’s words were distributed to queer activists in St. Louis. They underscored the belief that discrimination against one minority would inevitably lead to discrimination against others. The support women’s and labor groups provided for queer activists in Missouri indicates that many saw their rights as intertwined: that the same arguments used to justify discrimination against one group could be used for others.

Coalition building did not benefit only queer activists. Queer Missourians provided support to other marginalized groups in return. P.R.E.P. included information on other organizations’ activities in their flyers and meetings. In a special meeting flyer from March 24, 1989, P.R.E.P. announced that Planned Parenthood called for a letter-writing campaign to denounce the “pro-life” stances of President George [H.W.] Bush and Attorney General Richard Thornburgh.⁷ While the flyer did not specifically ask readers to participate in the campaign, it did provide the addresses of Bush and Thornburgh, ensuring that those who did wish to participate in the campaign could do so. At another P.R.E.P. meeting on May 24, 1989, informed attendees of a March for the Homeless, scheduled to take place in Washington, D.C. that October. Although the distance and price of travel might have prevented the participation of queer activists in St. Louis, P.R.E.P. informed its members that

⁶ Queer Nation/St. Louis, Cracker Barrel Midwest Regional Protest Information Package, September 22, 1991, Box 4, Folder 155, St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection, 10.

⁷ Privacy Rights Education Project, Special Meeting Minutes, May 10, 1989, Box 1, Folder 47, St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection, 1.

additional information was available to those who were interested.⁸ PTPC activists also attended events hosted by other organizations, as they advertised National Organization for Women meetings at their own gatherings.⁹ There were good reasons why queer organizations in Missouri, such as P.R.E.P. and PTPC, reciprocated in supporting the activism of other protest and equity organizations. All of these groups perceived their existence as being threatened by the growing backlash of the right wing in ways that could result in a domino effect: the loss of or failure to achieve equity for one group could lead to similar losses in others. The inclusion of issues of gender identity, same-sex rights, and nonheteronormativity in groups that had previously been more hostile—such as the so-called Lavender Menace rhetoric that existed in the 1970s Women’s Movement, which rejected the inclusion of lesbians in the drive for women’s rights—also represented a real evolution of understanding among the various populations that were fighting for civil rights. Thus, activists and activities rejected by some groups in the 1960s and 1970s were embraced as allies and opportunities two decades later. This probably represents an understanding of the existential threat that the conservative movement represented for everyone who were not identified with the white, patriarchal, cis mainstream. Queer Missourians were not the only marginalized group facing crises in the late twentieth century, and they allied themselves with others whose survival depended upon challenging those who wielded power within the state.

⁸ Privacy Rights Education Project, General Meeting Minutes, May 24, 1989, Box 1, Folder 47, St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Archives Collection, 1.

⁹ Pink Triangle Political Coalition, General Meeting Minutes, June 6, 1989, Box 2, Folder 2, MS314 Kay Madden Collection, Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America, University of Missouri – Kansas City, Kansas City, MO: 1.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The persistence of queer activists and the coalitions they built with other reform-minded Missourians displays the deep desire of many residents to make their home state a more equitable place. Though most historians have typically focused on the coastal narrative, maintaining that cities such as New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco were the primary locations for queer activism, a closer look at Missouri suggests otherwise. Queer organizations such as Kansas City's Pink Triangle Political Coalition and St. Louis's Privacy Rights Education Project advocated for pro-queer policies, held elected officials accountable, and protested antigay discrimination, all while building and maintaining organizational ties with other activist groups. The obstacles created by oppressive legislation in Missouri did not prevent queer Missourians from fighting to secure equal rights in the state they called home. Missouri's queer activists reveal that legal protections were not a necessary precondition for activism and visibility. Queer Missourians staged large protests, demanded equality, and built coalitions with other activists, effectively challenging heteropatriarchal norms and actively participating in the nationwide gay liberation movement.

Queer Americans did not simply migrate to the coasts and fight for their rights in the apparent safety of these cities. Those who lived elsewhere, including Missouri, mobilized in the face of immense danger, as did those on the coasts. Queer Missourians, as well as other previously overlooked pockets of activists, are as much a part of gay liberation's history as the Stonewall rebels or the residents of San Francisco's Castro District.

Though the queer activists' battle to secure an antidiscrimination ordinance in Kansas City had to be waged for a long period of time, they eventually prevailed. On June 3, 1993,

Kansas City's City Council added sexual orientation to its list of protected categories.¹ With the passage of this antidiscrimination ordinance, Kansas City joined Columbia and St. Louis on the list of cities in Missouri to ban discrimination based upon sexual orientation. Though these measures did not eradicate homophobia, they provided vital legal protections that queer activists fought tirelessly to secure.

The battle against homophobia in Missouri, and in the United States as a whole, was far from over. Bourdieu notes that social change, once the dust settles, often amounts to another ingrained form of habitus.² As queer activists fought to secure equal rights, gaining ground in areas such as Kansas City and St. Louis, many activists on a nationwide level believed they had found a powerful political ally in presidential candidate Bill Clinton. In 1992, Clinton promised a crowd of queer supporters that he would sign an executive order banning discrimination against queer people in the military if elected.³ Much like the period after Stonewall, bureaucratic political structures took center stage. Queer Clinton supporters raised four million dollars for his campaign in 1992.⁴ Whatever relief queer Americans might have felt in the wake of their political gains was quickly disrupted by a new series of crises.

One of the first crises queer Americans faced at the beginning of Clinton's first term was the creation of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." On July 19, 1993, Clinton announced that the military's ban on queer servicemembers would be adjusted. The military could no longer inquire about the sexual orientation of applicants, but they could still discharge those who were found to be queer.⁵ As insulted as many queer activists were by "Don't Ask, Don't

¹ Mary Sanchez, "Council Outlaws Bias Against Gays," *Kansas City Star*, June 4, 1993.

² Adams, *Hybridizing Habitus*, 521.

³ Hirshman, *Victory*, 222.

⁴ Hirshman, *Victory*, 224.

⁵ Hirshman, *Victory*, 224.

Tell,” another blow to queer liberation came in 1996. After Hawaii became the first state to legalize same-sex marriage in 1993, Republicans across the country sounded the alarm. Georgia congressman Bob Barr drafted a law that forbade the federal government from recognizing same-sex marriages, and it sailed through Congress to become law.⁶ Once again, queer activists received wakeup calls. There were new societal norms to organize against.

The cycle repeats time and again. Queer activists fight for radical change, new societal norms replace the old, and new forms of oppression arise. Even in 2022, queer activists have their work cut out for them. After the Supreme Court’s 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling, which legalized same-sex marriage throughout the United States, some activists immediately made their concerns about stasis clear. The Human Rights Campaign, a powerful queer PAC, partnered with designer Kenneth Cole to create a t-shirt that read “I Do Doesn’t Mean We’re Done.”⁷ The fear that complacency would settle in following the securing of marriage equality likely drove this campaign. It would become the new social norm. Throughout 2021 and 2022, many state legislatures proposed anti-queer legislation, including Florida’s infamous “Don’t Say Gay” bill. The bill, known officially as “Parental Rights in Education,” prevents educators from discussing sexual orientation and gender identity with their students.⁸ Missouri introduced an anti-trans bill of its own, allowing school districts to ban transgender girls from participating in women’s sports.⁹ Applying Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and field to this cycle of crisis, change, and backlash provides

⁶ Hirshman, *Victory*, 234.

⁷ Kenneth Cole and HRC Announce New Partnership to Promote LGBT Equality, Human Rights Campaign, last modified September 14, 2015, <https://hrc.org/press-release>.

⁸ CS/CS/HB 1557: Parental Rights in Education, The Florida Senate, last modified March 29, 2022, <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/1557>.

⁹ House Bill No. 2140, The Missouri House of Representatives, last modified May 10, 2022, <https://house.mo.gov/BillsMobile.aspx?year=2022&code=R&bill=HB2140>.

scholars with an opportunity to investigate how the social consciousness of a given culture actually experiences change. For example, despite the current legislative determination to abolish the civil liberties that women, queer folk, and minority communities fought for successfully in previous decades, polls show that the vast majority of Americans do actually consider these liberties to be appropriate, necessary, and acceptable: a recent poll showed that 70 percent of Americans approve of same-sex marriage, for example.¹⁰ Thus, the legislative attempts to eradicate such rights really do operate in the form of a backlash—one that opposes what have become the social norms of American culture because of the efforts of activists such as those in the queer community from the 1960s forward.

Queer activists in late twentieth-century Missouri embodied Bourdieu's concept of habitus. They carved out a space for themselves as a social class while simultaneously challenging existing norms and began to radically change the attitudes of the heterosexual majority. Queer Missourians related to one another through their Missourian and queer identities alike, enabling them to become a powerful social force that challenged the majority and forced those in power to enact change.

If scholars continue to comb the archives of cities throughout the United States, they will find evidence of grassroots queer activism in previously under-studied communities. Further study will likely yield evidence of cohesive queer communities and coalition building in numerous localities, shedding light upon the mutually enriching relationships marginalized groups initiated. Historians will find that many queer Americans simply wanted to make their homes safer rather than packing up their lives and fleeing across the country. Should this

¹⁰ Record-High 70% in the U.S. Support Same-Sex Marriage, Gallup, last modified June 8, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/350486/record-high-support-same-sex-marriage.aspx>, accessed 05/20/2022.

research continue, queer activists throughout the United States will be able to point to the rich histories of those who came before them.

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