

Lisa N. Johnston

“Gay Is Good”

Digital collections in LGBTQ U.S. History

June 28, 2019, was the 50th anniversary of the first day of the Stonewall Uprising. In the early morning hours, a series of spontaneous protests began at the Stonewall Inn following a police raid. Just over one year later, on July 1, 1970, librarian Israel Fishman organized the first meeting of the ALA Task Force on Gay Liberation at the ALA Annual Conference in Detroit.¹ A few months later, activist Barbara Gittings, created the organization’s first “Gay Bibliography,” complete with the “Gay Is Good” slogan she adopted from her friend, Washington, D.C. activist, Franklin Kameny. She distributed 3,000 copies at the ALA Annual Conference in 1971.² Gittings knew from experience the challenges of researching the history of sexual minorities.

The ensuing 50 years have seen the LGBTQ community gain enormous rights and visibility. The LGBTQ experience is more visible than ever, and there is a need to teach students the history as well as the current issues.³

A common thread through the resources in this article is the community-based archive. Volunteers with a desire to preserve LGBTQ history for future generations orchestrated much of the gathering of materials to compile these collections. Many of these collections welcome submissions, particularly the oral history projects.

The resources listed in this article highlight primary source materials and include a sampling of reference and secondary sources that are freely available online. This compilation is by no means exhaustive. These collections are useful for researchers of all levels, and can easily be used as classroom materials in a variety of disciplines.

History

- **Digital Transgender Archive (DTA).**

DTA is a collection of materials from 50 institutions that documents the experiences and history of gender nonconforming and trans people based at the College of the Holy Cross. International in scope, DTA brings together archives in order to both educate and encourage collaboration between institutions as varied as research libraries and grassroots organizations that have no cataloging policies. Curators use *transgender* as an umbrella term, and provide a glossary of related terminology for researchers, thus creating more entries into the history of trans and gender nonconforming people. Included are magazines, ephemera, recordings, and finding aids. The site is searchable via an interactive world map, as well as by subject. Access: <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/>.

- **GLBT Historical Society.** Based in San Francisco, the GLBT Historical Society is both a museum and an archive. They have digitized editions of the oldest continuously published LGBTQ newspaper in the United States, the *Bay Area Reporter*. The archives has partnered with the California Digital Newspaper Collection and Internet Archive to provide access. The site features collections that are available online, most significantly the Al-

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band Collection of Randy Shilts Materials, as well as recordings of

the Gay Life radio series. Researchers can also download the Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco, a comprehensive document tracing the city's LGBTQ history in the context of preservation and public history. *Access:* <https://www.glbthistory.org/>.

- **Invisible History Project (IHP).**

Founded in Alabama in 2015, IHP is an excellent example of a regionally specific community resource. Its mission is to preserve and document the experiences of both urban and rural LGBTQ people in the American South. IHP offers educational opportunities for K–12 and college-level students, sponsors an annual conference, “Queer History South,” as well as provides information on the best practices for collecting and preserving documents. IHP’s goals include providing LGBTQ history timelines for southern states and establishing a historical museum. *Access:* <https://www.invisiblehistory.org/>.

Invisible Histories Project alabama, usa

- **Lesbian Herstory Archive: Herstories (LHA).** Founded in 1974 by a group of lesbian academics, the LHA’s collection was originally housed in the Manhattan apartment of Joan Nestle. Now housed in a Brooklyn brownstone, its mission is to collect and preserve items relating to the lesbian experience. The collecting policy still reflects LHA’s founding in that they will take almost anything. The first items ranged from love letters to personal papers that would have been otherwise destroyed. Though most of the collection is not available in digital form, there is a significant archive of audiovisual artifacts available online maintained by students by the Pratt Institute School of Information. LHA’s oral history collection includes interviews with Audre Lorde, and a recently completed video project documents the history of the Daughters of Bilitis, an organization for lesbians founded in 1955.

Access: <http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka>.

- **NYPL Digital Collections.** LGBT materials in the New York Public Library (NYPL) is one of the most significant LGBT archives in the United States. Part of the library’s digital collections, the items available are the result of an ongoing project to document LGBT history with a concentration on LGBT life and activist organizations founded in New York. In 1988, NYPL received a significant collection of archives collected by the International Gay Information Center that dated back to the beginnings of the movement in the 1950s. The searchable materials include photos of notable members of the arts community, archives from the AIDS activist art collective Gran Fury, audiovisual materials from the Gay Men’s Health Crisis, and a selection of activist photography, dating from the early Gay Rights marches from the 1960s, as well as finding aids. *Access:* <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/lgbt-materials-in-the-new-york-public-library>.

- **ONE: National Gay and Lesbian Archive.** Hosted by the University of Southern California Libraries, the ONE archive is a collection of audio and video, posters, ephemera photographs, periodicals, and personal papers with a concentration on documenting the history of the LGBTQ community in Southern California. The collection of ephemera, such as matchbooks, pins, and posters from Los Angeles bars, protests, and events, provides insight into activism and the social life of the community. *Access:* <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15799coll4>.

- **OutHistory.org.** This collection of both primary and secondary source documents that is updated frequently by a community of both scholars and amateur historians. OutHis-



story was founded in 2008 by historian Jonathan Ned Katz as a digital edition of his canonical work *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* OutHistory is not only a repository of documents, photos, ephemera, oral histories, bibliographies, and

articles, it is a superb example of a public history project. Anyone may create content or contribute materials to the collections. The staff of the Digital Humanities Initiative at The New School and its director historians, Katz, John D'Emilio, and Claire Bond Potter, maintain the site. The collections include primary source documents dating from colonial America to the present day. Highlights are online exhibits on topics as varied as Transgender Children in Antebellum America to Immigration Rights. OutHistory brings together LBGTQ American History for all levels of researchers, and is a useful entry point into research in this field. *Access:* <http://www.outhistory.org/>.

- **SAA: Diverse Sexuality and Gender Division: Lavender Legacies.** A project of the Society of American Archivists (SAA), Lavender Legacies, is a list of archive collections in the U.S. and Canada. Many of the entries are for small organizations or city-specific archives, which hold collections that are not digitized, but provide contact information for researchers. Lavender Legacies is worth a browse, particularly for regional LGBTQ history. The larger organizations have digital collections linked. This project is valuable because it connects researchers with curators, as well as preserves records. *Access:* <https://www2.archivists.org/groups/diverse-sexuality-and-gender-section/lavender-legacies-guide/>.

Oral history collections and projects

- **ACT-UP Oral History Project.** Established in 2002 by scholars and activists, the ACT-UP Oral History Project documents the history of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP). The movement that changed the face of AIDS in America, ACT-UP/New York, was founded in 1987. It quickly became one of the most influential activist organizations in the world with branches organizing in other major cities. Its history and influence are preserved through interviews with the founding members of the ACT-UP New York organization. Interview transcripts are available to download, and short portions of video can be viewed online. *Access:* <http://www.actuporalhistory.org/>.

- **LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory's Oral History Hub.** This site is making a significant contribution to research on marginalized communities. The Oral History Hub, a project of the LGBTQ Digital Collaboratory at the University of Toronto, provides a diverse list of completed and current LGBTQ oral history projects with a concentration on the United States and Canada. Regions and topics range from gay rodeos, Appalachian Queers, to AIDS activism in major U.S. cities. Some of the smaller projects are sponsored by academic institutions and conducted by students, while others are from established organizations such as ACT-UP. *Access:* <http://lgbtqdigitalcollaboratory.org/oral-history-hub/>.

- **LGBTQ Religious Archives Network (LGBTQ-RAN).** This archive's mission is to collect materials that document the history of LGBTQ religious movements, as well as to encourage their study. The organization also provides advice on best practices for the collection and preservation of items ranging from letters, ephemera, and photographs to stoles and other liturgical items. Notable features are the oral histories of leaders, scholars, and activists from a variety of international religious movements. Catalog entries for digital archives, finding aids, and links to resources can be browsed by faith and geographic location. *Access:* <https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org>.



- **StoryCorps: Outloud.** In 2014, honoring the 45th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising, Story Corps began its OutLoud project. Oral histories on the LGBTQ experience before Stonewall were collected and featured on NPR's *Morning Edition* Friday mornings. In 2019, this time in honor of the 50th anniversary of Stonewall, StoryCorps is seeking participants to contribute more recordings about the pre-Stonewall years in order to preserve stories told by LGBTQ elders. The site includes documents explaining and encouraging participation, as well as recordings from the first iteration of the project. All of these interviews are stored

at the Library of Congress's American Folklife Center. Access: <https://storycorps.org/discover/outloud/>.

Media

- **Bay Area Reporter.** The indispensable Internet Archive is home to the oldest continuously published LGBTQ newspaper in the United States, the *Bay Area Reporter*. Founded in 1971 and known as *B.A.R.* until 2011, it was distributed free to patrons of San Francisco bars. The *Bay Area Reporter* is particularly notable for its reporting on the AIDS/HIV crisis. Another resource for researchers is the searchable database of more than 10,000 obituaries and death notices published from 1979 to 2009 as a project in partnership with San Francisco's GLBT Historical Society. Access: <https://archive.org/details/bayareareporter>.

- **Independent Voices: An Open Access Collection of an Alternative Press.** Independent Voice is a treasure trove of regional, small press, and activist magazines and newspapers compiled by librarians and scholars who represent a diverse selection of areas of study. Search by title or visit the "Series" tab to choose LGBT. The list of publications available via the site includes a number of titles significant to the early years of the LGBTQ movement. Highlights include *ONE: The Homosexual Magazine* (holdings: 1954–66) published by The Mattachine Society of Los Angeles. It was the first gay-positive magazine available in the United States. The Los Angeles branch of the Daughters of Bilitis' *The Lesbian Tide* (holdings: 1974–80) was the first national newspaper for lesbians. Access: <https://voices.revealdigital.com/>.

- **The Queer Zine Archive Project: QZAP: Zine Archive.** QZAP describes itself as a "labor of love" founded in 2003 to preserve and make available queer zines free of charge to scholars, artists, and general readers. Zines are usually handmade books using techniques such as photocopying or hand printing. Topics range from history, sexuality, and fiction, to name a few. The quality of the PDFs is excellent, and users are welcome to download as well as donate their collections or publications via an online form.

Zine collections have become more prevalent in academic libraries as they are relevant popular culture research tools, and popular with students. QZAP takes donations and sells "swag" to support its project. There is even a Zine Librarians unConference, which has been held annually since 2009. Access: <http://archive.qzap.org/index.php>.

Legal documents/Supreme Court cases

- **LGBT History in Government Documents.** This is a project in the form of a LibGuide by librarians Jesse Silva at the University of California-Berkeley and Kelly L. Smith of the University of California-San Diego. Using research tools such as CQ and Lexis-Nexis Academic, they have brought together U.S. government documents that trace the history of rights for LGBTQ Americans into one resource. Their LibGuide was born out of their 2016 presentation at the Federal Depository Library Conference. Their slides are attached as a useful document explaining their research. Documents are linked using a timeline that begins in 1830 and ends with the Supreme Court's 2018 Masterpiece Cakeshop case. All of the documents included are freely available. The authors also include a bibliography for supplementary reading. Access: <https://ucsd.libguides.com/lgbtdocs/timeline>.

Notes

1. "GLBTRT History Timeline," ALA, accessed, May 16, 2019, www.ala.org/rt/glbtrt/about/history.

2. Barbara Gittings, "Gays in Libraryland: The Gay and Lesbian Task Force of the American Library Association: The First Sixteen Years," in *Daring to Find Our Names: The Search for Lesbian Gay Library History*, ed. James V. Carmichael, Jr. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1988), 83.

3. Susan K. Freeman and Leila J. Rupp, "The Ins and Outs of U.S. History: Introducing Students to a Queer Past," in *Understanding and Teaching U.S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History*, ed. Susan K. Freeman and Leila J. Rupp. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 4. **ZZ**