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Preserving Queer Spaces in Pasadena:

A Study on Queer Community History and Urban Development.

Stefanie C. Esteban
(She/They)
Spring 2025

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CLIENT: Pasadena Heritage

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Signature Page

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This work is dedicated to the queer and trans ancestors who paved the way, and to those still building and protecting space today.

Disclaimer

This report was prepared as part of the requirements for the Master of Urban and Regional Planning degree at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. I created this work under the guidance of my advisors and in collaboration with Pasadena Heritage. The opinions, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this report are my own and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the university, the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, or Pasadena Heritage. Any errors or omissions are solely my responsibility.

Contents

Abstract

Queer spaces have always been more than just physical locations, they have been places of safety, connection, resistance, and joy for LGBTQIA+ people. In Pasadena, California, many of these spaces have quietly disappeared over time, pushed out by gentrification, redevelopment, or simply forgotten due to a lack of recognition. This project aims to document what's left, remember what has been lost, and help preserve the stories that often do not make it into the official record.

Created in collaboration with Pasadena Heritage, this project culminated in an interactive StoryMap that highlights queer historic sites across the city. It includes well-known places like The Boulevard (Pasadena's only remaining gay bar), as well as lesser known but deeply significant locations, such as the site of Bayard Rustin's 1953 arrest and the story of queer foster parent Rosalee Sorensen. The goal was not just to map locations, but to capture the layers of memory, identity, and community tied to them. The StoryMap will stay with Pasadena Heritage as a long-term resource, and it is designed to be used as a self-guided walking tour during Pride Month and other public events. You can access it by visiting https://arcg.is/1zWeWv2 or scanning the QR Code on the title page.

This work is grounded in community-based, qualitative research, drawing on oral histories, archival materials, GIS mapping, and interviews with local planners, organizers, and residents. Along the way, I have tried to center voices that are often left out of mainstream narratives, especially trans people, people of color, and working-class queer communities in Pasadena.

Rather than treating historic preservation as something cold or bureaucratic, this project sees it as a form of care, a way to honor what came before and to make space for what's still possible. By focusing on Pasadena, I hope this project offers a model for how other cities can document, protect, and celebrate their own queer histories in ways that are grounded, inclusive, and community driven.

Keywords: Queer Space, Historic Preservation, Pasadena, Planning and Identity, GIS Mapping

Executive Summary

Queer spaces have long served as sanctuaries from discrimination, providing safe havens where LGBTQIA+ individuals can freely express their identities and build community. Yet, in recent decades, many of these vital spaces have vanished due to gentrification and shifts in urban policy, resulting in a significant loss of historical memory for the LGBTQIA+ community. This study seeks to document and preserve historically significant Queer spaces in Pasadena, California, by engaging local community members, historians, organizations, and allies to share their experiences, stories, and memories.

The Project Has Three Main Objectives:

- *Objective 1*: Collect oral histories, written records, and community stories from LGBTQIA+ individuals and allies who have experienced these spaces.
- *Objective 2*: Identify and document the locations of Queer spaces, both past and present, in Pasadena, including bars, clubs, historical homes, meeting places, and other sites of cultural and social importance.
- *Objective 3*: Collaborate with local organizations, such as Pasadena Heritage, to preserve the historical significance of these spaces.

The overarching goal is to create a comprehensive historical record and GIS map of significant Queer spaces in Pasadena. This initiative will not only document the physical locations and narratives associated with these spaces but also contribute to academic discussions on Queer urbanism and participatory historic preservation. By drawing on archival records, newspaper clippings, literature, and early written accounts, from the time when Spanish explorers first encountered the Tongva people, to contemporary narratives, the study will offer both a rich

historical context and a detailed understanding of how these spaces have shaped community identity, culture, and resilience.

This Research Is Guided by the Following Questions:

- What are the historically significant Queer spaces in Pasadena, and how have they contributed to the development of the local LGBTQIA+ community?
- How can documenting these spaces help preserve LGBTQIA+ history and culture for future generations?
- What role do these spaces play in fostering a sense of community and belonging within the LGBTQIA+ population, both past and present?

The core idea behind this project is that preserving Queer spaces in Pasadena will shed light on the city's LGBTQIA+ history while strengthening community identity, belonging, and cultural pride.

By incorporating diverse voices, including community members with longstanding ties, individuals who have experienced these spaces indirectly, and local organizations, the project will provide a community-centered account of Pasadena's Queer heritage. Additionally, creating a GIS map (an interactive tool for mapping and exploring historical sites) will make this history more accessible to those who want to visit and learn about these spaces firsthand. This work not only aligns with Pasadena Heritage's mission to protect the city's historical and cultural landmarks but also reflects the academic focus on inclusive urban planning and the preservation of marginalized histories.

While *the Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBT History* offers an important foundation for understanding queer heritage in Los Angeles (GPA, 2023), my capstone project focuses specifically on Pasadena, a city with its own distinct cultural landscape, planning

authority, and under-documented queer history. Similarly, while the City of Pasadena's *Historic Places: Completing Our Story initiative* aims to develop a more inclusive citywide context statement (City of Pasadena, 2024), this capstone takes a narrower, community-led approach centered specifically on LGBTQIA+ spaces. Rather than conducting a broad survey of historic resources, this project draws on oral histories, intersectional narratives, and public-facing tools. These include an interactive StoryMap and a short video that outlines the research process, its significance, and how others can replicate this work in their own communities. In doing so, it offers original insights and methodologies to the fields of urban planning and queer historic preservation, with an emphasis on accessibility, visibility, activism, and community resilience.

Report Organization

This report is organized into six chapters, each providing a critical perspective on the history, challenges, and preservation of Queer spaces in Pasadena.

- **Chapter 1** provides a historical overview of Pasadena, exploring its early development, racial and economic policies, and their impact on marginalized communities, including the LGBTQIA+ population.
- **Chapter 2** explores LGBTQIA+ histories within California, Los Angeles County, and Pasadena, examining key movements, policy changes, and the role of Queer spaces in shaping identity and activism.
- **Chapter 3** presents a case study on foster family activism and adoption rights in Pasadena, focusing on Rosalee Sorenson's legal battle in 1984 and the broader implications for LGBTQIA+ foster care and adoption rights.
- **Chapter 4** examines the legacy of Bayard Rustin in Pasadena, contextualizing his 1953 arrest within the broader framework of LGBTQIA+ policing and civil rights activism.
- **Chapter 5** highlights the significance of *The Boulevard Bar*, Pasadena's longest-standing LGBTQIA+ establishment, discussing its survival amid urban changes and the role of Queer nightlife spaces in community formation.
- **Chapter 6** concludes the report, summarizing key findings, discussing challenges and limitations, and outlining future research directions to further document and preserve Queer spaces in Pasadena.

By structuring the report in this way, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of Queer history in Pasadena, integrating historical context, case studies, and contemporary issues to emphasize the importance of preserving LGBTQIA+ spaces and narratives.

Literature Review

Recently, there has been increasing awareness of the importance of preserving marginalized communities' cultural heritage, especially within the urban planning and historic preservation fields. Queer spaces, which have historically provided refuge, community, and visibility for LGBTQIA+ communities, are at risk of being forgotten as cities evolve. In Pasadena, many such spaces have already disappeared or gone unrecognized in historical records. This project aims to document and preserve Queer spaces in Pasadena by creating a GIS-based map that highlights key locations tied to LGBTQIA+ history, ensuring the community's past is acknowledged and protected. This literature review explores the intersection of Queer space preservation, cultural heritage in urban settings, and community-driven approaches to historical documentation.

The importance of preserving LGBTQIA+ history is underscored by scholars such as Furman and Mardell, who emphasize the cultural and historical significance of Queer spaces as sites of community, identity, and resistance (Furman, A.N., & Mardell, J, 2022 | VIII-IX). Their exploration of why these spaces matter illustrates that Queer spaces are not merely physical locations but also symbols of resilience and cultural identity. Similarly, Hanhardt discusses the political and historical contexts of Queer neighborhoods, shedding light on how such spaces have both facilitated safety and been subject to systemic marginalization (Hanhardt, 2013 | 11).

Orr adds to this discourse by exploring how Queer archives can challenge dominant historical narratives and foster community engagement. By emphasizing the importance of community contributions to historical documentation, Orr highlights the potential for creating living archives that reflect diverse experiences (Orr, 2021 | 1). Linden echoes this sentiment, advocating for participatory models in historical preservation. Her work on the Queer California:

Untold Stories exhibition demonstrates how engaging with the community to fill gaps in the historical record can lead to a fuller, more inclusive account of Queer history (Linden, 2020 | 395-400). Together, these works provide a foundation for employing community-driven methods in my capstone project, where oral histories and shared experiences will contribute to documenting Pasadena's Queer spaces.

This erasure of LGBTQIA+ contributions and spaces are a recurring theme in Queer literature. In West of Jim Crow (2020), Hudson shows how systemic racial discrimination shaped Pasadena's policies. She points out that in the early 1900s, "Pasadena did not hire black teachers," and how "stores, restaurants, hotels, hospitals, and schools" were segregated (Hudson, 2020 | 210). While overt segregation has ended, its legacy continues to burden Queer people of color, who must navigate both Queer marginalization and systemic racism. Miller's article, for example, explores how Bayard Rustin's identity as a gay black man was downplayed in civil rights history, highlighting the intersectional challenges of preserving Queer narratives Miller, 2021 | 44, 51). Rustin's 1953 arrest in Pasadena offers a clear example of how race, sexuality, and activism intersect in the historical record and underscores the importance of reclaiming erased narratives.

Harris similarly documents the significance of The Boulevard, Pasadena's only gay bar, as a cultural hub for the LGBTQIA+ community. Her account discusses how Queer spaces provide essential refuge and belonging while emphasizing the challenges of preserving such spaces in the face of economic and social pressures (Harris, 2021). The literature also explores interesting strategies for preserving Queer spaces and histories. Gieseking (Gieseking, 2020 | 656), for example, emphasizes the use of spatial and digital tools, such as GIS mapping, to represent Queer urban spaces in ways that capture both their physical and symbolic significance.

Furman and Mardell similarly advocate for the use of digital tools to ensure Queer spaces are recognized and safeguarded.

Doan and Higgins go into more detail about how gentrification can increase the risk of LGBTQIA+ erasure, particularly in Atlanta's Midtown district, where rising property values and urban redevelopment have pushed out many Queer residents and businesses. While new LGBTQIA+ enclaves have formed in areas like East Atlanta and East Point, their study highlights the challenges of maintaining spaces explicitly tied to Queer identity. They point out how LGBTQIA+ presence is often leveraged to make neighborhoods more desirable, only for those same communities to be displaced once the area becomes more expensive (Doan, 2011 | 16-17). Their findings reinforce why preserving Queer spaces is so important; without intentional efforts, these places disappear, making it harder for LGBTQIA+ people to find community, organize politically, and access spaces where they feel safe and seen. As cities evolve, Queer spaces have the potential to disappear, and without documentation, their history and the role they played in shaping the community may be forgotten. Doan and Higgins' work serves as a reminder that Queer spaces don't just vanish on their own; they are often erased by larger social and economic forces, making preservation efforts essential.

Amin Ghaziani's **"**Why Gayborhoods Matter" emphasizes this point by showing how Queer spaces are not just shaped by economic and political forces, but also by the everyday experiences of the people who live in them. His concept of *street empirics* shows that gayborhoods hold deep personal and cultural meaning for Queer residents, making their loss more than just a shift in urban geography, it's a disruption of community, identity, and history (Ghaziani, 2021 | 91). While Doan and Higgins highlight the structural forces driving LGBTQIA+ displacement, Ghaziani reminds us that Queer spaces don't lose relevance simply

because societies evolve. Instead, they are actively erased, often under the illusion of progress. His work reinforces the need for documenting and preserving these spaces, not just as a record of the past but to ensure Queer communities continue to have places to gather, organize, and thrive in the future.

Nash (2010) examines shifts in Queer spaces, expressing concern over the perceived "loss" of lesbian spaces due to trans men and broader Queering (Nash, 2010 | 139). While her work provides insight into how these spaces evolve, I reject the notion that trans men's presence diminishes them. Queer communities thrive through inclusivity, and LGBTQIA+ spaces have always adapted to meet the needs of those who rely on them. This adaptability is a strength, not a loss. I align with scholars who view inclusivity as an asset, reinforcing the importance of preserving Queer spaces as sites of collective history and community. This project is rooted in that same commitment to inclusivity and community building.

This body of research collectively highlights the importance of centering community voices, employing inclusive methodologies, and addressing the systemic erasure of LGBTQIA+ histories. My project builds on these foundations by documenting and preserving Pasadena's Queer spaces through a community-driven, GIS-based approach. While existing literature has explored the preservation of Queer spaces on broader geographic scales, my project narrows its focus to Pasadena, offering a localized and specific contribution to this growing field.

Method Development

This study employs a qualitative approach to document and preserve Queer spaces in Pasadena, California. The research incorporates archival research, oral histories, semi-structured interviews, and field observations to construct a comprehensive historical record of these spaces and their significance to the LGBTQIA+ community.

Archival Research

To establish the historical relevance of specific Queer spaces in Pasadena, I conducted an extensive review of local archives, historical records, newspapers, and published materials. This research was carried out through institutions such as Pasadena Heritage, local libraries, and online databases. The archival phase began in September 2024 and is ongoing, with findings used to cross-reference oral history accounts and identify additional spaces of interest.

Oral Histories and Semi-Structured Interviews

To capture lived experiences, I conducted a semi-structured interview with a long-term Pasadena resident who has firsthand knowledge of Queer spaces in the city. The interview was conducted virtually in April 2025, and the participant was recruited through the City of Pasadena's Historic Preservation Department. Topics included personal memories of Queer spaces, community-building efforts, and the impact of urban development on these locations.

While the conversation provided insight into the participant's personal experience as a gay, cisgender white man living in Pasadena, it did not yield substantive information about local Queer spaces or community life. The participant and his husband largely did not engage in LGBTQIA+ social life within Pasadena, which limited the interview's contribution to the broader historical or spatial analysis of Queer life in the city.

Terminology: LGBTQIA+ and Queer

In this study, I will be using *Queer* and *LGBTQIA+* interchangeably. My choice to use *Queer* as an umbrella term is intentional and based on a few key reasons:

- **Reclaiming the term:** *Queer* was once used as a slur, but many in the community have reclaimed it as a source of pride, pushing back against stigma and embracing empowerment.
- **Inclusivity:** It recognizes both the shared struggles and the unique experiences within the LGBTQIA+ spectrum.
- **Complexity of gender and sexuality:** Queerness is fluid and intersectional, shaped by race, class, gender, and other identities that influence LGBTQIA+ experiences.

I want to acknowledge that *Queer* may not be a term that resonates with everyone. However, in academic and advocacy spaces, it is often used to move beyond rigid identity categories and capture the full range of LGBTQIA+ experiences. In the context of historic preservation, *Queer* also helps include identities and spaces that may not have been explicitly labeled in historical records but are still deeply tied to our community's history.

Going forward, I will use the terms *Queer* and LGBTQIA+ interchangeably, except when a more specific identity term is needed, such as when discussing individuals or case studies. My goal is to reflect the diversity of this community and challenge the binary ways sexuality and gender have often been understood, making space for the full spectrum of identities and experiences.

Chapter 1: Pasadena History

Indigenous and Early Settler History

Pasadena's evolution is a complicated narrative of cultural diversity, resistance, and transformation. The city's history reflects the contributions and struggles of many groups, each shaping its unique urban makeup. For example, early research documents the "roles of eight ethnic groups in the history and development of Pasadena," from the 1870s through the 1950s, by "the Mexican, African American, Chinese, Japanese, Armenian, German, Swedish, and Norwegian communities" (Anderson, 1995 | 3). This literature reveals how Pasadena grew into a diverse and dynamic community, where different groups coexisted, shared spaces, and influenced each other, even in places shaped by tension and change.

Long before European settlers arrived, Indigenous peoples, especially the *Hahamog-na*[1], a clan of the *Tongva*[2], flourished in the area now known as Pasadena. Early accounts describe a land "occupied by native Indians who then had twenty-seven or more village settlements within what is now Los Angeles County; each village had its local chief; and some clans had a group of villages with one hereditary or patriarchal chief overall" (Reid & McClatchie, 1895 | 17). This, according to Reid, "seems to have been the case with our *Arroyo Seco*[3] Indians when Governor Portola, the first white man here, was treated kindly by them and their head chief, Hahamovic, in January, 1770, at their village near the Garfield Spring in South Pasadena" (Reid & McClatchie,

[1] The Hahamog'na are one of the Tongva clans, with deep roots in the Arroyo Seco and surrounding areas.
[2] The Tongva are the Indigenous people whose homelands include what is now known as the Los Angeles area, including Pasadena and the surrounding regions. While often called "Gabrielino" in colonial records, many Tongva people today reclaim their original name and continue to fight for visibility, recognition, and preservation.
[3] The Arroyo Seco is a seasonal stream and canyon that runs from the San Gabriel Mountains through Pasadena and into Northeast Los Angeles, eventually joining the Los Angeles River.

1895 | 19). Moreover, the *Hahamog-na* "occupied both sides of the Arroyo Seco from Garvanza ford northward" (Reid & McClatchie, 1895 | 19).

Leadership among the Tongva was unique. Reid and McClatchie explain that "the Hahamog-na office of chief was hereditary and in the absence of a male heir devolved upon the female's nearest of kin," meaning it passed to the eldest son rather than a husband, and his role was to "settle disputes, levy war, make peace, appoint feasts, and give good advice" with only limited power outside of that (Reid & McClatchie, 1895 | 20). Spiritual life was equally structured by tradition; each village maintained a sacred space where "seers and captains, male dances and female singers" were permitted during rituals, unless used for funerals (Reid & McClatchie, 1895 | 24). Despite their significance, settler narratives often sidelined Indigenous voices. As Whitebear observed, "Indigenous women and *Two-Spirit*[4] people are highly invisiblized in all accounts with sprinkles of representation here and there" (Whitebear, 2023 | 103).

The arrival of Spanish colonizers in the late 18th century dramatically altered these established ways of life. Mission systems imposed new forms of governance and religious practice on the *Hahamog-na*, often violently suppressing their traditions. Although some settlers later claimed that Indigenous people "helped" build these missions (Whitebear, 2023 | 103), such accounts obscure the coercive processes that stripped these communities of their

Figure 1: Image of the old San Gabriel Mission, courtesy of (Lewis Publishing Company, 1889)

[4] T**wo-Spirit**: A term used by some Indigenous North American communities to describe people who embody both masculine and feminine spirits. It reflects a range of gender and sexual identities recognized within different tribal traditions.

autonomy and cultural expression. Reid recounts that the first mission was built on September 8, 1771, named the San Gabriel Mission or "old mission" (See figure 1), with the first baptism taking place on November 27 of that year (Reid & McClatchie, 1895 | 24). Reid also claims that "female Indians were assaulted by soldiers and 'obliged to undergo a long purification; and for a long time, every child born with white blood in its veins was strangled,' while any male who 'dared interfere' was killed" (Reid & McClatchie, 1895 | 24).

American Annexation and the Rise of Private Land Ownership

The American annexation of California in 1848 and the introduction of private land ownership fundamentally reshaped Pasadena's landscape. The shift from communal land use to privatized property reinforced racial and economic hierarchies, restricting access to land and wealth for marginalized communities. As land was increasingly commodified, exclusionary policies dictated who could own, rent, and occupy space, reinforcing social divisions.

This transformation also affected how marginalized groups navigated space, particularly along lines of race, class, and sexuality. Vallerand notes that "if orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence, of how we inhabit spaces, and who or what we inhabit spaces with" (Vallerand, 2021). This insight underscores how spatial belonging has long been shaped by broader power structures. As private property became the foundation of urban development, those who did not conform to dominant social norms, particularly people of color and LGBTQIA+ individuals, were systematically excluded from certain neighborhoods and public spaces.

Moreover, the division between public and private life further entrenched these exclusions. As Vallerand observes, "the opposition of public and private is grounded on a prior spatial dualism, that of inside and outside" (Vallerand, 2021). This dynamic played a crucial role in how

Queer spaces developed, often pushed into hidden or liminal areas of the city. The privatization of land reinforced these boundaries, forcing many LGBTQIA+ communities to find alternative ways to claim space, whether through bars, clubs, activist networks, or informal gathering spots.

Racial and Economic Barriers in Pasadena's Development

As Spanish and later Mexican rule reshaped the region, Pasadena underwent significant demographic changes. Immigrants from Mexico, driven by political instability and economic hardship, bolstered the city's labor force. Between 1900 and 1930, over 700,000 Mexicans entered the United States during an economic boom, spurring rapid growth in Pasadena's Mexican American community (Anderson, 1995 | 20). These newcomers often settled in neighborhoods with lower property costs and rents, even as they continued to face social exclusion (Anderson, 1995 | 17).

At the same time, early Chinese immigrants arrived and encountered fierce racism. As Anderson notes, the Chinese were "the least welcomed and the most isolated from the native-white dominated mainstream," with "racism being the key factor" (Anderson, 1995 | 80). Meanwhile, Japanese, Armenian, German, and Swedish immigrants arrived under diverse circumstances, whether fleeing persecution or seeking economic opportunity, and established their own enclaves. For instance, while Japanese immigrants initially encountered discriminatory policies that severely limited their opportunities, many eventually became key contributors to the city's commercial and industrial sectors (Anderson, 1995 | 95).

By the early 1900s, segregation had become deeply entrenched in Pasadena's public institutions. Interviews from Civil Rights History Project notes how members of the Tongva often felt the need to walk "in large groups, because we were yelled at, and things were thrown at us" (Cline, 2016 | 4). Hudson also describes how "in the early 1900s, Pasadena did not hire black

teachers, and stores, restaurants, hotels, hospitals, and schools" were segregated (Hudson, 2020). While overt segregation is a thing of the past, its legacy of discrimination continues to result in deep-rooted inequalities. The Tongva and African American communities have had to contend with both historical and ongoing marginalization that limits their access to opportunities and full civic participation.

Queer Spaces and the Struggle for Recognition

One important aspect of Pasadena's history is how past exclusion still echoes in today's struggles for visibility. As urban development accelerates, historic sites, especially those associated with marginalized communities, are increasingly at risk of disappearing. This issue is particularly pronounced for Queer spaces, which have often been overlooked or hidden within dominant historical narratives.

Queer people of color (POC) face compounded barriers, navigating both racial discrimination and the marginalization of Queer identities. The persistence of these challenges highlights the need to preserve and reclaim lost spaces, not only to document history but to ensure these communities maintain a presence in Pasadena's future. As Hudson (2020) notes, even public spaces like Brookside Park, a defining feature of the city, reflect Pasadena's historical landscape of exclusion and accessibility. "The geographic centerpiece of Pasadena, Brookside Park sits in a natural basin called the Arroyo Seco or 'dry creek' that rambles from the mountains to the Los Angeles River" (Hudson, 2020). More than just a picturesque spot, the park reflects how geography, history, and identity are woven into Pasadena's landscape.

As Pasadena continues to evolve, efforts to preserve its Queer spaces must challenge the historic exclusions embedded in land ownership, zoning policies, and urban planning. The way we inhabit space, who is allowed to claim it and under what conditions, remains central to the

struggle for community and recognition. Understanding these histories, from Indigenous governance to the privatization of land, offers crucial insights into the systemic forces that have shaped Pasadena's urban landscape. More importantly, it reinforces the urgency of preserving and protecting the spaces that marginalized communities have long fought to claim.

Pasadena's Evolution: From Resort Town to Urban Center

Its unique geography, strategic transportation networks, and shifting social landscape shaped Pasadena's development. Originally established as an agricultural cooperative in 1875, the city quickly became a scenic resort town for wealthy Midwesterners. "Located twenty-five miles inland, Pasadena lies on the site of the Rancho San Pasqual at the head of the San Gabriel Valley," a region that provided an escape from harsh winters and the pollution of industrial cities (Starr, 1986 | 99). The natural beauty of the area, "thick with sycamores, oak, willows, alder, tangled thickets of wild grapes, clematis, and other flowering plants," offered a breathtaking retreat for those seeking rest and rejuvenation (Starr, 1986 | 99).

By the late 19th century, Pasadena had become an epitomal garden city. What began as an agricultural colony "mingled at its outskirts with still extant orchards" had evolved into a community known for its "lavish landscaping tradition which made Pasadena the premier garden and floral city of Southern California" (Starr, 1986 | 100). This lush environment and warm climate made Pasadena an ideal location for health resorts and retirement communities. By the early 20th century, the city had grown into a well-established enclave, home to "a neo-Moorish opera house seating fifteen hundred… and a large number of distinguished homes facing broad, well-planted boulevards" (Starr, 1986 | 99).

However, Pasadena's growth was not just about leisure; it was also deeply connected to a broader vision for Los Angeles. In the late 19th century, urban planners and developers saw the

region as a blank slate, a place for new possibilities. In "1890, LA represented a new urban canvas, a metropolis on the verge of growth with unique possibilities for experimentation… a hopeful, almost utopian vision of a helpful Garden City" (Nicolaides, 2024 | 25). This vision extended to Pasadena, which became a model suburb, and an escape from the congestion and struggles of industrial cities. The area attracted communities of "artists, intellectuals, and domestic workers," as well as doctors and businessmen who settled "with their families in the handsome homes of 1920s Westwood," with "African American [communities] living in the blocks surrounding Central Avenue" (Nicolaides, 2024 | 19).

The Role of Transportation in Pasadena's Expansion

Pasadena's rapid expansion was partly driven by its connection to Los Angeles via rail and streetcar lines (see Figure 2). The Pacific Electric Railway linked Pasadena with downtown Los Angeles, enabling residents to commute easily while maintaining a suburban lifestyle. "Streetcars shaped not only the broad development patterns in Los Angeles, but also the built

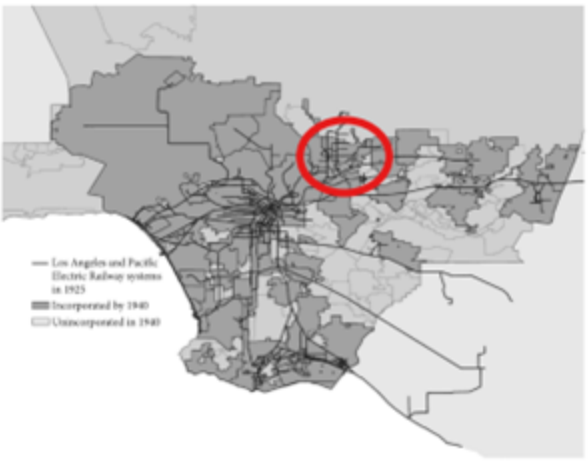

Figure 1.5 The location of streetcar lines in relation to towns incorporated before 1940.
Cartography by Jennifer Mapes, Kent State University.

Figure 2: Map showing the location of Streetcar lines before 1940-pasadena is circled in red (Image courtesy of: Nicolaides, 2024 | 36)

environment of suburbs and settlements along the lines… Pasadena, South Pasadena, Monrovia, Santa Monica, Long Beach, Redondo Beach, Watts, and Hollywood all experienced fast population growth after the arrival of the streetcars" (Nicolaides, 2024 | 35)

This transportation network reinforced Pasadena's status as both a retreat and a cultural hub. "When the opera or symphony played in Los Angeles, the Pacific Electric Railway ran special cars to and from Pasadena" (Starr, 1986 | 101). The city's resort appeal was further enhanced by the Mount Lowe Incline Railway, completed in 1893. This feat of engineering "lifted passengers up five thousand feet into the San Gabriel Mountains, where atop Mount Lowe, whatever the time of year, tourists could frolic in the snow or enjoy the hospitality of the Alpine Tavern" (Starr, 1986 | 100).

But while railroads and streetcars facilitated movement, they also structured Pasadena's social geography. Suburbs like Pasadena, for example, were deliberately designed to maintain exclusivity. In the 1920s, "several elite suburbs were developed, like Palos Verdes Estates, Pacific Palisades, and even Westwood… [were] deliberately designed away from the [streetcar] lines, largely to keep away the riffraff" (Nicolaides, 2024 | 35). This plan reflected broader efforts to shape Los Angeles into a city that reinforced racial and class hierarchies.

Racial Segregation and the Making of Pasadena's Neighborhoods

Despite Pasadena's scenic reputation, its development was shaped by exclusionary policies and racial segregation. By the early 20th century, city leaders envisioned Southern

California as a white utopia. "By 1900, after *Americanization*[5] had largely marginalized the Indigenous people, Californios, and Mexican settlers who had once dominated California, the Anglo elite who came to power imagined Southern California as a bastion of racial purity" (Nicolaides, 2024 | 29). This ideology was later embedded into urban planning and zoning laws.

One of the first steps toward racial segregation in Pasadena, and Los Angeles as a whole, was *zoning*[6]. "By 1908, the Los Angeles City Council passed the nation's first zoning ordinance, which separated industrial and residential districts… a second, stricter zoning law passed in 1921, which established clearer categories of land use, including one restricted solely to single-family detached homes; these became known as R-1 zones" (Nicolaides, 2024 | 26). These policies had profound racial implications, as they were often used to keep people of color from moving into specific areas.

By the 1910s and 1920s, real estate developers played an even greater role in enforcing segregation. "By the 1930s, the federal government reinforced these efforts through its biased housing policies, and in suburbs across LA, residents used intimidation and violence against people of color who tried moving in despite these barriers" (Nicolaides, 2024 | 29). African American, Mexican, Japanese, and Jewish communities were confined mainly to multiracial neighborhoods south and east of downtown, while "most of LA's outlying suburbs were exclusively white" (Nicolaides, 2024 | 29). However, due to early labor needs, Black Americans managed to establish footholds in a few areas, including Pasadena.

The Emergence of Pasadena's Commercial and Cultural Districts

[5] The ways the U.S. tried to force people, especially immigrants and Indigenous communities, to adopt white, English-speaking, middle-class American norms, often at the cost of their own languages, cultures, and identities.
[6] Zoning refers to how city governments divide up land for specific uses, like residential, commercial, or industrial, and how these decisions have shaped who gets to live and gather where, often reinforcing racial, economic, and social divides.

As Pasadena grew, distinct neighborhoods and commercial districts emerged. Old Town Pasadena, originally a streetcar suburb, became a center of commerce and social life. Meanwhile, the Playhouse District established the city as a hub for arts and culture, against a backdrop of increasing racial and economic division.

Los Angeles, including Pasadena, was designed to "spread out to avoid the slums, congestion, and strife of Eastern cities… [also serving as] an all-settling place for white Americans at the edge of the frontier" (Nicolaides, 2024 | 25). Real estate developers and city leaders saw racial diversity as a threat to property values, implementing *restrictive covenants*[7] and discriminatory lending practices to maintain white dominance. These policies shaped Pasadena's modern urban fabric, with elite enclaves to the south, working-class and multiracial neighborhoods to the northwest, and post-war suburban developments in the east (Nicolaides, 2024 | 20).

By the mid-20th century, Pasadena had transformed from a small agricultural colony into a sprawling suburban city. Its resort-era reputation gave way to a more complex identity, balancing historical preservation with new waves of urban development. However, the forces that shaped Pasadena's past, from racial exclusion to transportation-driven growth, continue to influence its landscape today. Understanding this history is crucial to ensuring that future planning efforts acknowledge the communities that have long fought for space and visibility within Pasadena's evolving cityscape.

Racial Segregation, Housing Policies, and Redlining

[7] Legal clauses that were used to keep marginalized communities from buying or renting homes in particular neighborhoods.

From race-restrictive housing covenants to zoning laws that marginalized LGBTQ+ communities, the city's development prioritized white, *cisgender*[8] *(cis)*, and *heteronormative*[9] spaces while forcing marginalized groups to the edges. These policies dictated where people could live and decided whose history would be remembered and whose would be erased.

Zoning and the Systematic Erasure of LGBTQ+ Communities

Urban planning has long been wielded as a tool of social control, reinforcing traditional norms while pushing out those who did not fit within them. "Planning itself serves as a tool to promote *heterosexuality*[10] and suppress *homosexuality*[11] in cities" (Doan, 2011 | 6). Zoning codes have historically defined "family" in narrow, *heteronormative*[12] terms, reinforcing housing policies that exclude LGBTQ+ households. "Plans and policies that promote urban redevelopment frequently use zoning to establish narrow definitions of what constitutes a family and fail to consider the effects of other policy changes on the LGBTQ+ populations...Although planning is often portrayed as progressive and reformist, it can also be used to serve the powerful by controlling or oppressing *minority groups*[13]" (Doan, 2011 | 9).

Beyond exclusionary zoning, redevelopment projects often destabilized *LGBTQIA+*[14] communities by inviting *gentrification*[15] under the guise of urban revitalization. "Municipal officials and planners, eager to capitalize on any glimmer of urban redevelopment, have often

[8] Someone whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.
[9] The idea that being straight is the norm or default. This mindset shows up in how cities are built and who they're built for, often ignoring or pushing out queer people and relationships.
[10] A term used to describe romantic or sexual attraction between people of the "opposite" sex or gender.
[11] A term describing romantic or sexual attraction between people of the same sex or gender.
[12] The assumption that heterosexuality is the default or "normal" way of being.
[13] communities that have been historically marginalized or underrepresented in dominant social, political, and planning systems.
[14] Refers to a broad and diverse community that includes Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual individuals, and others whose identities fall outside of dominant norms around gender and sexuality.
[15] A process where neighborhoods undergo redevelopment and property values rise, often resulting in the displacement of long-term residents, especially low-income communities and communities of color.

promoted wider urban revitalization, changing zoning codes to attract large-scale real estate firms, further exacerbating the rise in property value, and inviting a new wave of gentrification that alters the LGBT character of the neighborhood" (Doan, 2011 | 6). In cities like Pasadena, where property values continue to rise, the disappearance of Queer spaces is not a natural consequence of progress but a result of deliberate planning choices that prioritize commercial interests over cultural preservation.

As these spaces vanish, so do the support systems they provide. "A vital question for planners and policymakers is how to ensure the affordability of housing in neighborhoods that provide a measure of safety for more visibly Queer or *gender-dissonant*[16] people most at risk for discrimination. If existing LGBTQIA+ neighborhoods are "not preserved, what will happen to the Queer organizations and institutions that provide so much support to other vulnerable Queer subpopulations, including young and elderly people, the poor, and those managing chronic diseases like HIV?" (Doan, 2011 | 21). Without intentional planning efforts, such as historic preservation or cultural overlay districts, Queer spaces will likely continue to be erased, taking their history and community resources with them.

Pasadena's Longstanding History of Racial Exclusion

Racial segregation in Pasadena was enforced through legal and extralegal means, ensuring that nonwhite residents remained confined to specific areas, or were pushed out entirely. One of the earliest examples of this was the violent expulsion of Chinese residents in 1885, when a white mob attacked a Chinese laundry, setting it on fire. "City leaders and businessmen quickly signed a resolution barring Chinese people from the city center altogether, a blatant act of racial removal" (Nicolaides, 2024 | 151).

[16] A term used to describe people whose gender expression or identity doesn't align with societal expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth.

Black residents faced similar barriers as they sought access to housing, jobs, and public spaces. “Beginning in the 1910s, Black Americans were excluded from or *sequestered*[17] in many of Pasadena’s commercial venues, including theaters, restaurants, bowling alleys, golf courses, and roller-skating rinks” (Nicolaides, 2024 | 151). Even as the city expanded, officials and homeowners actively blocked Black residents from moving into white neighborhoods. “In subsequent years, as suburban home building picked up, race-restrictive covenants and homeowner associations operated in tandem to protect white residential areas. In 1939, the Pasadena Improvement Association formed, with the express purpose of perpetuating the use of covenants” (Nicolaides, 2024 | 151). These covenants explicitly barred Black, Mexican, Japanese, and other nonwhite residents from purchasing homes in certain areas, ensuring that Pasadena’s most desirable neighborhoods remained exclusively white.

Religious institutions were not immune to segregationist policies. “Many churches were also segregated. Episcopalians divided racially into two churches: All Saints, located across the street from City Hall in a stately Gothic church, and St. Barnabas, a ‘mission’ church housed in a modest chapel in Northwest, built in part because the white, upper crust parishioners of All Saints did not allow Black worshippers” (Nicolaides, 2024 | 151). This division extended beyond religious spaces and into nearly every aspect of daily life, reinforcing a social order that kept Black and other marginalized residents in the shadows.

The Commodification of Indigenous and Mexican Cultures

While people of color were pushed to the margins of Pasadena’s economic and political life, their cultures were often appropriated and *commodified*[18] by the city’s white elite. The

[17] Refers to people or communities that have been isolated because of exclusionary policies or systemic neglect.
[18] When something is commodified, it’s treated as a product to be bought, sold, or marketed—often stripping it of its deeper meaning or cultural significance.

Arroyo Seco movement, for example, romanticized Indigenous and Mexican aesthetics while ignoring the systemic inequalities these communities faced. "*Pasadenans*[19] of the Arroyo Seco Culture felt more at home in local circumstances... Arroyo Seco Culture glorified in local circumstances: in Indians and Mexicans, in the blankets, pottery, jewelry, colors, and physical textures of Southern California as desert Spanish Southwest" (Starr, 1986 | 107). This selective appreciation of Indigenous and Mexican traditions conveniently omitted the fact that these same communities were being displaced, excluded, and erased from the city's historical narratives.

The Intersection of Race, Policing, and Planning

The segregation mechanisms in Pasadena extended beyond housing policies and into broader control systems, including policing and planning enforcement. "Numerous white Queer and Queer of color scholars have pointed toward the myriad ways in which policing has harmed Queer and *BIPOC*[20] communities, as well as the limitations of inclusion models for social change that might reduce harm. We add to this discourse by considering the role of planning, itself, as a manifestation of the state monopoly on violence, which emerges through zoning, land use, and other forms of planning enforcement rather than through the actions of conventionally understood police departments" (Turesky, 2023 | 263). Planning was not just a neutral or progressive tool, it was often used to uphold social hierarchies, deepening the very inequalities it claimed to fix.

This exclusion continues to shape Pasadena today. "In every statistic, *trans*[21] and BIPOC Queer people experience more discrimination and barriers than cis and white Queer people"

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[19] Refers to people who live in or are from Pasadena, California.
[20] An acronym that stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. It's used to recognize the unique experiences of Black and Indigenous communities while also including other communities of color who face systemic oppression.
[21] Short for transgender, this term refers to people whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. It's an umbrella term that can include binary and nonbinary identities.

(Greiner, 2023). As new waves of development bring rising property values and changing demographics, the same communities that were historically displaced now face the threat of being erased once again, this time under the guise of progress.

The Future of Inclusive Planning

As Pasadena continues to grow, the question remains: whose history will be preserved, and whose will be erased? The city's past is a reminder that urban planning is never neutral, it has long been used to shape power, control space, and dictate who belongs. "The demise of Queer space is not yet inevitable, but LGBT community groups need to take a more active role to preserve it" (Doan, 2011 | 21). Similarly, racial justice in urban planning requires more than symbolic gestures, it demands a reckoning with the policies that shaped the city's landscape in the first place.

Efforts to preserve Queer and BIPOC spaces must go beyond historical recognition; they must include policies that actively protect affordability and cultural presence. "Planners should recognize the existence of this often-marginalized community and be aware of their needs for tolerant and safe spaces" (Doan, 2011 | 21). This means integrating inclusionary zoning policies, historic preservation efforts, and community-driven planning initiatives that prevent displacement. "Recognizing the central role of LGBT businesses and community organizations is very important... limitations on the size of new businesses proposed for in-town neighborhoods might reduce chain store buyouts that directly threaten the small businesses that provide *gayborhoods*[22] with local color and character" (Doan, 2011 | 21).

If the past is any indication, without intentional intervention, marginalized communities will continue to bear the brunt of gentrification, zoning changes, and redevelopment projects.

[22] term used to describe neighborhoods with a visible and active LGBTQIA+ presence. Places where queer people have historically built community, found safety, and created cultural hubs.

Moving forward, the challenge may lie in not just remembering these histories but also actively working to shape policies that ensure they are not repeated.

Civil Rights and Social Movements in Pasadena

Both exclusionary policies and the activism challenging them have actively shaped Pasadena's history over the years. While systemic barriers kept marginalized communities on the fringes, moments of resistance and advocacy have carved out space for greater inclusion and equality. The fight for civil rights in Pasadena reflects broader struggles across California, where LGBTQ+ activists, Black and Latino communities, and other marginalized groups have fought for visibility, legal recognition, and the right to exist in the city without fear of displacement or discrimination.

The LGBTQ+ Community: Fighting for Recognition and Rights

LGBTQIA+ communities have always fought to create spaces where they feel safe and supported in California's cities, including Pasadena. Urban centers became a refuge for many, as one of the few places where Queer individuals could find acceptance away from discrimination elsewhere. For example, in 1996, the San Francisco Chronicle quoted a resident of *Castro Street*[23], telling reporters, "I knew I had to get out of Nebraska in 1971. San Francisco was a mecca for gay people like me" (Ghaziani, 2020). Reporters later described the Castro "as a place that 'drew thousands of gays from all over the country because they believed it was their own mecca-in-the-making" (Ghaziani, 2020). While San Francisco became a widely recognized LGBTQIA+ hub, cities like Los Angeles and Pasadena also saw a rise in Queer communities seeking similar protections and visibility.

[23] A historic and well-known street in San Francisco that became one of the most prominent gay neighborhoods in the United States since the 1970s.

One of California's first big public demonstrations for Queer rights was the inaugural LA Pride Parade in 1970. Unlike other parades at the time, this was not merely a celebration but a defiant march demanding an end to police harassment and social stigmatization. The movement continued to gain traction throughout the 1970s, culminating in the removal of homosexuality from the *American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*[24] in 1973. This landmark decision meant that medical institutions could no longer justify *conversion therapy*[25] or classify Queerness as a mental disorder, an essential victory in the struggle for LGBTQIA+ legitimacy and dignity.

The legal system also played a crucial role in shaping the rights of Queer individuals in Pasadena and beyond. Throughout the 1980s, LGBTQIA+ activists fought for the rights of Queer foster parents and adopters, challenging legal barriers that sought to exclude them from family structures. These battles, while often overlooked in mainstream narratives, were critical in ensuring that Queer individuals could build lives and families without state interference.

Despite progress, challenges remain, particularly in city planning and development. Queer spaces, which historically provided safety and support, have been eroded by gentrification and urban redevelopment. "Society has forced us [Queers] to define ourselves as a community to protect ourselves…[Our] Community has given gays the force to fight against hate crimes, against job discrimination and housing bias. The gay community has become a family for gays whose families have thrown them out. The city's plan simply would recognize that community, along with the work it has done to turn the neighborhood into a place where straight people,

[24] Sometimes referred to as the DSM, this is the official guide used by mental health professionals in the U.S. to diagnose mental disorders. Earlier versions included classifications that pathologized homosexuality and gender variance, reflecting the medicalization of queer and trans identities throughout much of the 20th century.
[25] A harmful and discredited practice that attempts to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity, often rooted in the belief that being LGBTQIA+ is wrong or unnatural.

along with gays, want to shop, eat, and live. Why does the city do it for Chinatown? Why does it do it for Greektown?" (Ghaziani, 2020). These words highlight a persistent reality: while Queer communities have been instrumental in revitalizing neighborhoods, city governments often fail to recognize their contributions, leaving them vulnerable to displacement.

Even with landmark victories like the Obergefell decision in 2015, which granted same-sex couples the right to marry nationwide (Ridings, 2017 | 67), the fight for full equality, especially for Queer POC and trans individuals, remains ongoing.

The Racial Struggle for Economic and Social Parity

While Pasadena has long been home to communities of color, their place within the city has been precarious, shaped by cycles of displacement, economic instability, and structural racism. The shifting demographics of the city reflect both migration patterns and systemic inequalities. "After 1970, the white population declined [in Pasadena], the Latino population rose significantly, and the Black population rose and then fell. *White flight*[26] and the influx of people of color drove these trends" (Nicolaides, 2024 | 188). Still, more Black and Latino residents did not always mean more economic opportunities.

Despite their deep roots in Pasadena, both Black and Latino communities experienced economic decline in the latter half of the 20th century. "From 1970-2000, Blacks continued to occupy the lower rung on the income ladder in Pasadena, even sliding downward by 2000, suggesting their continued struggle for economic parity. Latinos experienced a similar downward slide. In the 1970s, most of Pasadena's Latinos were middle class, with a median income level slightly above the city average; thereafter, they dropped well below the city average, reflecting the poorer and working-class status of Latino newcomers to Pasadena. By contrast, Asians

[26] A term used to describe the mass movement of white residents out of urban neighborhoods in response to increasing racial or ethnic diversity.

showed steady upward mobility in income over these years…by 2006, data on wealth from 2006 revealed that Pasadena was 'the most unequal city in California'" (Nicolaides, 2024 | 188).

The barriers that prevented upward mobility for these communities were not accidental but rather the result of policies that limited their access to stable housing, employment, and financial resources. Redlining, discriminatory lending practices, and exclusionary zoning laws ensured that Black and Latino residents remained in segregated, under-resourced neighborhoods while wealthier white residents benefited from homeownership and property value appreciation. Beyond economic struggles, marginalized communities in Pasadena have had to fight for physical, social, and political space. "Marginalized communities borrow space rather than dwelling in it and are hindered in the expression of full citizenship" (Duplan, 2023 | 141).

Whether through restrictive housing policies, urban renewal projects that displaced long-standing communities, or the criminalization of nonwhite and Queer bodies in public spaces, Pasadena, like many other cities, has long treated marginalized people as temporary inhabitants rather than rightful residents.

The Ongoing Fight for an Inclusive Pasadena

The struggles for LGBTQIA+ rights, racial justice, and economic equity are deeply interconnected. While Pasadena has seen important victories, from legal protections for Queer families to the slow dismantling of racially discriminatory housing policies, the work is far from over.

The city must reckon with its past by addressing how its policies continue to create inequalities. Recognizing Pasadena's history of activism is not just about honoring past struggles; it is about ensuring that these hard-fought rights are not eroded by new forms of exclusion,

whether through gentrification, economic displacement, or political neglect. The question remains: Who gets to belong in Pasadena? The answer, shaped by decades of activism, must continue to be fought for on the streets, in courtrooms, and in city planning offices.

Urban Renewal and Gentrification in Pasadena

Pasadena's urban renewal policies have long reshaped its neighborhoods, often at the expense of marginalized communities. While Pasadena's famous scenic streets and preserved historic districts are often celebrated, these efforts have also displaced long-standing residents, especially communities of color and LGBTQIA+ households over time. As real estate prices climb and development accelerate, Pasadena continues to reflect broader patterns of gentrification in urban America where historic charm and economic revitalization often come at a cost to those who built the neighborhoods in the first place.

The Displacement of Marginalized Communities

Shifts in housing policies, consumer demand, and capital investment have fueled gentrification, reshaping Pasadena's social and economic landscape. Doan sees this rise in displacement as happening alongside "a rise in home prices that began in 1992," which was "due partly to changes in the *housing finance system*[27], partly to the increasing *privatization*[28] and demolition of public housing, and partly to shifting consumer tastes" (Doan, 2011 | 7). This wave of redevelopment dramatically altered the city, making once-affordable neighborhoods inaccessible to working-class residents, many of whom were people of color and LGBTQIA+ individuals.

[27] the network of banks, lenders, government programs, and policies that determine who gets access to loans or credit to buy or build homes.
[28] The process of transferring public services, resources, or institutions into private ownership or control.

Nowhere is this shift more apparent than in the transformation of Queer spaces. While Queer communities once revitalized struggling neighborhoods, their presence often attracted wealthier newcomers who sought an urban aesthetic without fully embracing the communities that created it. "At the same time, their renovation has made them more attractive to non-LGBT individuals in search of town living. Higher demand for property in these neighborhoods has resulted in steep rises in rents, frequent conversion of rental properties to condominiums, and competition for commercial space, which makes it difficult for less affluent LGBT people and businesses targeted to the community to remain in the neighborhoods" (Doan, 2011 | 6). What began as an opportunity to build a supportive, self-sustaining community ultimately led to a cycle of displacement as rising property values pushed out those who had first made these neighborhoods desirable.

The process of gentrification, however, is not only about rising rents but also about shifts in power and access. According to Doan, gentrification "is [often] fueled by the consumption patterns of *'financifiers,'* that is, super-gentrifiers whose considerable access to capital allows them to invest in previously gentrified neighborhoods and reinvent them according to their needs" (Doan, 2011 | 7). Unlike earlier waves of gentrifiers, who often invested their own labor into improving properties, these investors bring in professional architects and designers, reshaping entire neighborhoods with little regard for their previous character. "Super-gentrification by upper-middle-and upper-class investors employed professional architects and urban designers rather than the traditional *sweat equity*[29] of earlier, do-it-themselves pioneers. In these rapidly gentrifying areas, the whole concept of urban community is in transition" (Doan, 2011 | 8).

[29] the unpaid labor that includes physical work like repairs, renovations, or community building that individuals put into improving homes or neighborhoods.

As new wealth moves in, long-standing communities face not only economic pressure but also social friction. The tension between Queer residents and communities of color, for example, has been exacerbated by the loss of affordable housing. “Because many LGBT people now find they are unable to afford housing in traditional LGBT-identified neighborhoods in Atlanta, these individuals are more likely to seek out neighborhoods they describe as ‘diverse’…sometimes causing racial transitions within neighborhoods, greater volatility and social conflict between LGBT residents and their non-LGBT neighbors” (Doan, 2011 | 18). These tensions reflect the more profound economic and racial inequalities that shape urban renewal.

Suburbia, Inequality, and the Changing Face of Pasadena

Pasadena has long been seen as an affluent suburb, but its demographics have changed significantly over the past few decades. From 1970 to 2010, “the proportion of all suburbanites in LA who were Black American, Latino, and Asian American rose from 26% to 70%, much higher than national averages” (Nicolaides, 2024 | 4). Meanwhile, immigration, economic shifts, and rising housing costs pushed this change. However, as Pasadena diversified, it became a site of increasing economic disparity. Nicolaides explains how, By the end of the 20th century, “the older norm of breadwinner dad, stay-at-home mom, and kids had become entwined with class polarization,” while “Super-rich suburbs multiplied, as did suburbs of the poor,” resulting in “gulfs dividing these communities—places like uber-wealthy Bradbury and, just two miles away, working-class Azusa” that reveals “an emerging suburban disequilibrium” (Nicolaides, 2024 | 4).

These inequalities were not incidental but the result of decades of exclusionary policies. “Racial exclusivity was vital to the appeal of a significant grouping of suburbs…[which] represented a crucial ‘wage of whiteness’ that conferred numerous advantages through property

ownership, superior schools, safe neighborhoods, and *preferential tax breaks*[30], passed down from one generation of white families to the next" (Nicolaides, 2024 | 5). While Pasadena has been more racially diverse than many of its neighboring suburbs, the persistence of exclusionary practices, such as zoning laws and *historic preservation*[31] policies that prioritize affluent homeowners, has ensured that economic privilege remains deeply entrenched.

Ironically, even as Pasadena became more racially diverse, new suburbanites often adopted the same exclusionary practices that had previously marginalized them. According to Nicolaides, "New suburbanites of color [often] continued long-lived habits of resisting the poor, the unhoused, the undocumented, renters, even ethnic landscapes—and that resistance became multiracial" (Nicolaides, 2024 | 6). This pattern is part of a bigger trend in American suburbs, where racial and class divides still shape who has access to resources and power, even within communities of color themselves.

The Role of Historic Preservation in Pasadena's Gentrification

Historic preservation plays a complex role in Pasadena's development. On the one hand, it has helped maintain the city's architectural heritage and sense of place. On the other hand, it has been used as a tool for exclusion, reinforcing property values and making it harder for lower-income residents to remain in their neighborhoods. "Suburbs with a penchant for historic preservation, such as South Pasadena, Glendora, Monrovia, and Claremont" each have "an 'Old Town' section of mostly gentrified but well-preserved original commercial buildings previously anchored by their streetcar stop" (Nicolaides, 2024 | 38). These areas have become highly

[30] Special tax advantages or reductions given to certain individuals, businesses, or property owners—usually to encourage investment or development.
[31] The process of recognizing, protecting, and maintaining buildings, sites, or neighborhoods that have historical, cultural, or architectural significance.

desirable, attracting wealthier residents while making it increasingly difficult for longtime renters and small business owners to stay.

The preservation of Queer history in Pasadena presents an even greater challenge. Unlike architectural landmarks, *Queer spaces*[32] have often been *ephemeral*[33], existing in bars, community centers, and informal gathering spots that leave little physical trace. Preserving these histories is increasingly difficult because of the biases built into archival practices. According to Salter, "the process of record-keeping is already a record of the keeper. This truism shapes more and more of the practical work and theoretical orientation of archivists and librarians" (Salter, 2021 | 26). Traditional archives have often excluded or erased Queer narratives, reinforcing a sense of invisibility. "The most dangerous of these scripts, for Cook and Schwartz, is the presumption of 'invisibility' or transparency" (Salter, 2021 | 26).

Organizations like Pasadena Heritage have an opportunity to challenge these exclusions by recognizing Queer and BIPOC histories as integral to the city's identity. However, this requires a shift in archival practices. "The normalized assumption that the record makers are themselves invisible is a complex layering of institutional oppression in multiple official forms" (Salter, 2021 | 27). If preservation efforts prioritize elite, white, and heterosexual histories, they risk contributing to the very erasure that activists have fought against for decades.

Pasadena's Relationship with LGBTQ+ Communities

Pasadena's relationship with Queer communities is complicated; there has been progress, but also exclusion and ongoing struggles for visibility and protection. The city has taken steps

[32] Places, both physical and symbolic, where LGBTQIA+ people have gathered, built community, and expressed identity, often in response to exclusion from mainstream society.
[33] Something temporary or short-lived.

toward recognizing LGBTQIA+ rights over the years, but policies and policing practices continue to push Queer and trans people, especially those from BIPOC communities to the margins. To preserve and reclaim lost narratives, we must start by truly understanding Pasadena's Queer history; the challenges people have faced and the spaces they have built to survive and thrive.

Urban Policies and the LGBTQ+ Experience in Pasadena

Pasadena's municipal policies have reflected both slow progress and persistent gaps in LGBTQIA+ protections. In 2013, the city scored 74 out of 100 on the Human Right Campaign's (HRC) 2013 Municipality Equality Index, "up 18 points from last year" (Vuong, 2017). However, much of that progress was attributed to statewide protections rather than local initiatives. This Index rates cities based on six categories: "nondiscrimination, relationship recognition, municipality as employer, municipal services, law enforcement and relationship with the LGBT community" (Vuong, 2017). Evidently, Pasadena lost points for not having an LGBTQIA+ liaison in the mayor's office or police department, revealing a troubling gap between policy and practice.

Despite this oversight, city officials have often presented Pasadena as an inclusive city. In 2017, then-Mayor Bill Bogaard described "Pasadena as a city that is open and tolerant and welcoming to all the people that make up our community" (Vuong, 2017). Unfortunately, this image of inclusivity does not always reflect reality, especially for transgender and *gender-expansive*[34] POC, who often face more extreme forms of systemic discrimination and police harassment than their cis white counterparts.

Early Queer Visibility and Policing in Pasadena

[34] A term used to describe people whose gender identity or expression goes beyond traditional ideas of strictly male or female.

Pasadena's Queer community has always had a complicated history with law enforcement. Like in many other cities, police have historically targeted LGBTQIA+ people, often using vague laws or heavy-handed tactics to push them into hiding. Robinson, for example, interviewed a Pasadena youth named Jenelle, "a 21-year-old Latine trans woman, who told him about getting stopped by police often: 'Because people think once you're transgender, obviously you're a prostitute" and mentioned how "weird [and] gross" they feel when the police look at them (Robinson, 2020 | 219).

This phenomenon, known as "trans-profiling, is a phrase that captures how biases around gender and sexuality, along with race and class, shape policing practices. Police often hypersexualize transgender and gender-expansive black and brown youth on the streets because police often see them as engaging in sex work" (Robinson, 2020 | 219). These biases can make it dangerous for trans people to exist in public spaces, often forcing them into isolation or limiting where they can go in their own neighborhoods.

For trans people, legal documents can add another layer of risk during police encounters. According to Robinson, "not having the proper gender marker could 'out' someone to police as transgender—if police had not already profiled them as transgender—potentially furthering experiences of discrimination from the police encounter" (Robinson, 2020 | 219). This contributes to the erasure of transgender people from public life, as many avoid being in certain areas or engaging with law enforcement out of fear of harassment or arrest. "Trans-profiling practices attempt to marginalize and erase transgender and gender-expansive people of color from the public sphere by arresting them or making them afraid to be in public spaces for fear of being arrested" (Robinson, 2020 | 219).

These patterns are not unique to Pasadena; they reflect a broader national trend where non-discrimination laws do not always translate into equitable treatment. “Policing practices work to target and arrest certain poor Black and Brown youth who identify as LGBTQ, even when both cities have nondiscrimination policies based on sexual orientation and gender identity” (Robinson, 2020 | 220). This underscores the need for policies that go beyond symbolic gestures; Queer inclusion must be built into city planning, law enforcement training, and housing protections.

LGBTQ+ Spaces and Case Studies in Pasadena

Despite these challenges, Pasadena’s LGBTQ+ community has built spaces of resilience and support. Queer spaces are not just bars or hangout spots, they offer vital social services, advocacy, and a sense of belonging. O'Brian expands on this idea, explaining that “community spaces offer a wide array of resources, from health services to counseling, creating a comprehensive network for LGBTQIA+ individuals” (O’Brian, 2024). These spaces have always been essential, especially for Queer people facing family rejection or financial hardship.

Key case studies help illustrate Pasadena’s LGBTQ+ history:

- **Rosalee Sorenson**: A Pasadena resident who fought for LGBTQIA+ foster and parental rights, bringing attention to the legal and social challenges Queer families have and continue to face in California.
- **Bayard Rustin:** A key leader in the Civil Rights Movement who was often pushed aside because he was gay. He was not based in Pasadena, but his time there significantly impacted his activism.
- **The Boulevard:** one of Pasadena’s few openly Queer spaces, has stayed a vital community hub despite the city’s historically limited LGBTQIA+ nightlife.

Each of these examples sheds light on different parts of the Queer experience in Pasadena, from legal fights for family rights and the overlap of racial and Queer activism, to the role of Queer spaces in resistance and survival.

Chapter 2: Queer Spaces and LGBTQ+ History

Queer spaces are often seen as a refuge for LGBTQIA+ individuals, simply because they provide a sense of community and belonging in the face of discrimination elsewhere. They are more than just physical places; they exist because of the people who built them and the cultural and political forces that shape city life. Understanding Queer spaces through the lens of urbanism, architecture, and community resilience allows for a deeper exploration of their significance, both historically and in contemporary society.

The Meaning of Space and Queer Urbanism

Architecture and *urban planning*[35] are not always neutral and can often shape and reinforce social hierarchies around gender and sexuality. Vallerand often refers to architecture as a strong "force in the construction and performance of gender" (Vallerand, 2021). According to his studies, the built environment is not just about structures, but "a network of relations between designers, clients, and permanent and temporary users, bringing in their social, political, and historical contexts" (Vallerand, 2021). For Queer communities, this means spaces are often built without them in mind, reinforcing heteronormativity and failing to create safe, affirming environments. Queer researchers often push back against this idea of space as a fixed or neutral state. Instead, they see it as fluid, shaped by the people who move through it and the identities they bring with them. "Space is Queer not in itself, but in relation to something else, in relation to the changing people using or visiting a place; the Queerness of space is a layer of spatial

[35] A field that focuses on how cities and communities are designed, developed, and managed.

experience amongst others" (Vallerand, 2021). Queer spaces exist beyond designated LGBTQ+ neighborhoods; they emerge wherever Queer people gather, resist, and redefine urban life.

Historically, Queer spaces were not always visible or formally recognized. "Queer space existed before gay or lesbian neighborhoods appeared" (Vallerand, 2021). In many cases, LGBTQIA+ individuals found themselves in marginalized urban areas, navigating legal and social constraints to carve out places of belonging. "The historical experience of Queer populations in physical spaces prior to *Stonewall*[36] is one of a struggle for tolerance. Most often, gay-oriented establishments were constrained to marginalized sex districts" (Doan, 2011 | 8). This forced clustering led to the emergence of well-known Queer enclaves, such as "the Castro in San Francisco, West Hollywood in Los Angeles, Boys Town in Chicago, the South End in Boston, Chelsea in New York, the Gayborhood in Philadelphia, and Midtown in Atlanta" (Doan, 2011 | 6).

Queer spaces are not just politically significant; they also bring people together, making it easier to organize and drive significant advances in Queer rights. According to Doan, "the clustering of LGBT people in specific neighborhoods facilitated local political organizing and enabled the election of LGBT people to city and state office around the country." This reality was especially evident in the 1984 establishment of West Hollywood, where "a majority of its elected city council members were gay men" (Doan, 2011 | 8). However, despite their significance, Queer spaces have often failed to be truly inclusive. "Many of these *quasi-utopian*[37] spaces fall short of their claimed inclusivity because many such places exclude *bisexuals*[38],

[36] Refers to the 1969 uprising at the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City, where LGBTQIA+ patrons resisted a police raid. Widely seen as a turning point in the modern queer rights movement, it symbolizes resistance to state violence and the ongoing fight for queer liberation.
[37] Refers to spaces or ideas that aim to create an ideal or perfect community but fall short due to real-world limitations.
[38] People who experience romantic or sexual attraction to more than one gender.

transgendered people, and *gender nonconformists*[39] in general" (Doan, 2011 | 8). This exclusion makes it even more important to examine how Queer spaces are created, sustained, and preserved. Additionally, documenting and protecting Queer history requires recognizing the full spectrum of Queer identities.

The Intersection of Queer Spaces and Mental Health

Beyond social and political significance, Queer spaces also serve as protective factors for LGBTQIA+ mental health. The stress of living in a society structured around *cis-heteronormativity*[40] takes a toll on Queer individuals, particularly transgender and *nonbinary*[41] youth. "High rates of mental health concerns, violence, victimization, health risk behaviors, and reduced educational attainment among TNB[42] adolescents and young adults" are well documented, and these disparities are often "exacerbated by several socio-ecological factors, including healthcare barriers and negative experiences in healthcare and educational settings" (Shah, 2024 | 134).

The minority stress model helps explain these challenges, arguing that "individuals who hold marginalized, minority identities in society navigate a range of stressors, both distal (e.g., gender-based discrimination) and proximal (e.g., internalized transphobia), which lead to increased rates of physical and mental health conditions" (Shah, 2024 | 135). The hostile environments LGBTQIA+ individuals face, from schools to workplaces to healthcare settings,

[39] People whose appearance, behavior, or identity doesn't align with traditional expectations of their assigned sex at birth.
[40] The assumption that everyone is cisgender (identifying with the gender assigned at birth) and heterosexual, which often becomes the default lens through which policies, spaces, and histories are shaped.
[41] refers to people whose gender identity doesn't fit neatly within the categories of "man" or "woman." It's an umbrella term that can include genderfluid, agender, and other identities outside the traditional gender binary.
[42] Refers to Trans or Non-Binary.

contribute to mental health struggles, reinforcing the importance of having designated safe spaces.

Research has shown that strong community connections can mitigate these adverse effects. “School belonging was negatively associated with mental health concerns among *TGI/ENBY*[43] youth and school safety and high-quality teacher-student relationships have been **i**dentified as protective for gender-expansive young people” (Shah, 2024 | 136). Similarly, using one’s *chosen name*[44] in social settings directly supports better mental health outcomes. Shah's study revealed that “chosen name use (as a marker for the ability to live in one’s affirmed gender identity) across multiple social contexts was associated with lower depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behavior” (Shah, 2024 | 136).

Survey data reinforces just how important community is for LGBTQIA+ well-being. When asked about their primary sources of support, Shah (2024) found that Queer individuals most often turn to peers, friends, and partners as their “most important support systems” for safety and validation (Shah, 2024 | 142). Not far behind were “online communities, mental health professionals, and in-person groups like *GSAs*[45] and religious youth groups,” which were also highly valued (Shah, 2024 | 144-145). These findings make it clear why preserving Queer spaces matters, not just for historical recognition, but for the survival and well-being of Queer people everywhere.

The National Queer Movement in Los Angeles

[43] Stands for transgender, gender nonconforming, intersex (TGI), and nonbinary (ENBY) people.
[44] he name a person uses that aligns with their gender identity or personal sense of self, rather than the one assigned to them at birth. For many LGBTQIA+ people, especially trans and nonbinary folks, using their chosen name is an important affirmation of identity and respect.
[45] Gender and Sexuality Alliances (formerly Gay-Straight Alliances), are student-led groups in schools that create safer, more supportive environments for LGBTQIA+ youth and their allies.

Los Angeles County has been pivotal in Queer activism and policy development. The region has set national standards for inclusivity, with multiple cities achieving top scores on the Human Rights Campaign's Municipality Equality Index. "Six cities in California received a perfect score on the HRC Municipality Equality Index, including Los Angeles, Long Beach and West Hollywood" (Vuong, 2017). These policies have made LA County a model for other cities seeking to advance Queer rights.

However, progress has varied across cities in LA County. Despite its visible Queer community, Pasadena has often fallen behind neighboring cities in progress. This discrepancy highlights the increasing need to document Pasadena's Queer history and advocate for its preservation.

Why Pasadena's LGBTQIA+ history is Worth Documenting

Pasadena has long been a home to Queer individuals, though their stories have often been erased or ignored. The lack of formal recognition for Queer spaces has contributed to a broader issue of LGBTQIA+ invisibility in the city.

For many, the lack of designated Queer spaces makes it harder to find steady community support. This hits Queer youth especially hard, since they are more likely to face housing insecurity. Robinson notes how "LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness account for at least 40 percent of the youth homelessness population" (Robinson, 2020 | 212). These numbers indicate that without stable housing or community support, youth often face a greater risk of violence, mental health struggles, and economic instability.

Preserving Queer history is not just about looking back, it is about shaping a more inclusive future. Turesky views the importance of preserving Queer history in the built environment "through the recognition of places of *homophobia*[46] (e.g., military bases) and places of gay liberation (e.g., Compton's Cafeteria)" to better "prevent misrepresentation and erasure as an act of *archival justice*[47]" (Turesky, 2023 | 264). This project supports Turesky's mission by documenting and protecting Pasadena's Queer spaces, ensuring that LGBTQIA+ stories are not erased but recognized as a real and essential part of the city's history.

Ultimately, Pasadena is more than just a city, but also a living archive of struggle, resilience, and community. Understanding its Queer history allows us to honor those who fought for space and to advocate for a more inclusive urban future.

Early LGBTQ+ Presence in California

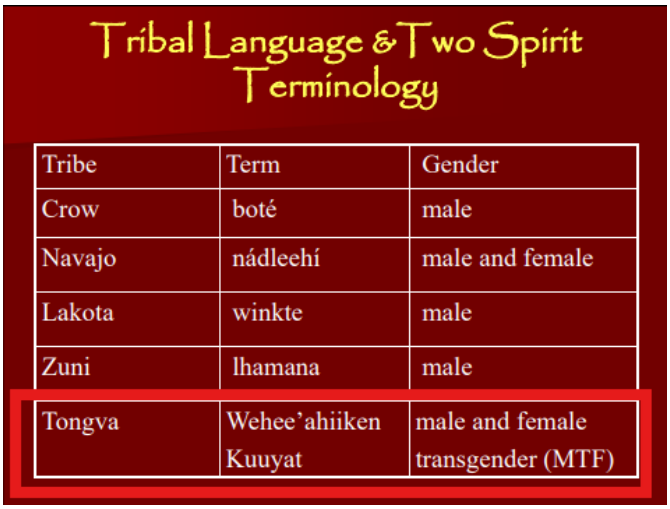

Figure 3: PowerPoint slide from the Mending the Rainbow: Working with the Native LGBT/Two Spirit Community presentation presented by Naswood in 2012, pp. 3. Image shows the name used by the Tongva, and that two-spirit is simply the umbrella term used by English speakers.

Queer identities have always existed in California, long before the arrival of European settlers. Many Indigenous communities, including the Tongva, recognized and honored gender diversity. The term *Two-Spirit,* a modern umbrella concept used in many Native communities today, reflects traditional understandings of gender beyond the

[46] refers to fear, hatred, or discrimination against people who are, or are perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer.
[47] the effort to correct historical imbalances by actively including the voices, stories, and materials of communities that have been excluded or misrepresented in traditional archives.

Western male-female binary. As Naswood explains, "Two Spirit is a contemporary term used to identify Native American Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and some Transgender individuals with traditional and cultural understandings of gender roles and identity" (Naswood, 2012 | 1). While the term originates from the *Anishinaabe*[48] language, it carries different meanings across Indigenous nations, often tied to spiritual and social roles (Naswood, 2012 | p. 2) (*see figure 3).*

Before European contact, many tribes viewed Two-Spirit people as sacred, believing they existed by the will of deities or held special roles within their communities. But colonization disrupted these traditions. As Naswood notes, "After European contact, homophobia & acculturated worldviews of gender/sexuality were adopted," forcing many Indigenous nations to conform to rigid European gender norms (Naswood, 2012 | 2). While some tribal languages still carry traditional names for Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ people, much of this history was erased under colonial rule (Naswood, 2012, p. 2). This early suppression set the stage for centuries of legal and social discrimination against Queer people in California.

Moral Panic and the Criminalization of Queerness

Colonial rule ultimately laid the foundation for California's *anti-sodomy laws*[49], which were rooted in the moral and religious values of Spanish and Mexican governance. These legal frameworks criminalized non-heteronormative behavior long before California became part of the United States (Jones, 2023). When the *Gold Rush*[50] hit in the mid-1800s, bringing an influx

[48] The Anishinaabe are a group of culturally related Indigenous peoples whose traditional territories span parts of Canada and the northern United States. The term includes nations like the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi, among others. While not local to Pasadena, the Anishinaabe are often cited in scholarship related to Indigenous resistance, land, and gender systems, offering frameworks that resonate across Indigenous communities.

[49] Anti-sodomy laws were used to criminalize same-sex intimacy and police queer identities, often targeting LGBTQIA+ people under vague morality statutes. These laws remained on the books in many U.S. states well into the 2000s and were part of a broader legal system that erased and punished queer existence.

[50] A period that brought a flood of people to California hoping to get rich. While some found opportunity, it also led to the forced removal of Native communities and set off a pattern of land grabs and exclusion that shaped the state's future.

of men seeking fortune, same-sex relationships became more visible in mining towns. Many miners, living in cramped quarters with no women around, formed close bonds and intimate relationships with one another. As historian Susan Lee Johnson describes, "Towns popped up overnight, and cabins and tents often housed multiple miners… without women, many of these men would find 'comfort' in one another" (Miguel, 2022). Some of these relationships lasted lifetimes, such as Jason Chamberlain and John Chaffee, who reportedly arrived in California together in 1849, built a home, and remained partners for life (Miguel, 2022).

As these same-sex relationships became more public, backlash grew. The Gold Rush fueled a surge in anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiment, leading to increasingly harsher sodomy laws (Jones, 2023). In 1850, California enacted its first anti-sodomy statute, sentencing those convicted to five years to life in prison. The *1872 Penal Code*[51] further reinforced these punishments, and in 1915, an amendment explicitly criminalized oral sex between women, carrying a sentence of up to 15 years in prison (Faderman, 2019).

Resistance and the Fight for Queer Rights

Despite centuries of criminalization, Queer communities in California fought back. The latter half of the 20th century saw the rise of the Queer rights movement, with the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York sparking nationwide activism (Jones, 2023). Protests, grassroots organizing, and legal battles helped challenge discriminatory laws, paving the way for progress.

[51] California's first official set of state laws. It included anti-sodomy laws that criminalized same-sex relationships and other behavior seen as "deviant," helping to legalize discrimination against queer and gender-nonconforming people for generations.

However, California's early history of colonization and criminalization left lasting scars, shaping the continued struggles for visibility, safety, and equal rights.

By examining this history, we can see how colonialism and legal repression shaped attitudes toward gender and sexuality in California. More importantly, we can recognize the resilience of Queer communities, who have always found ways to exist, resist, and reclaim their place in history.

The Rise of Queer Communities in Los Angeles

Los Angeles has always been a complicated place for Queer communities. While it became a hub for LGBTQIA+ people in the early 20th century, it was also a city where they faced constant policing and were often pushed into the shadows. Feminist and Queer scholars argue that urban planning has long been shaped by colonial and heteronormative ideas, designed to control what was seen as disorderly, including Queerness itself (Turesky, 2023, p. 264). This ongoing struggle between control and resistance shaped how Queer spaces emerged in LA, as LGBTQIA+ people fought to carve out places of survival, community, and visibility in a city that wasn't always welcoming.

Early Queer Visibility and Policing

By the early 1900s, Queer nightlife existed in Los Angeles, even if it remained hidden from public view. Newspaper reports from the time offer a glimpse into this world, though they often frame Queer individuals as criminals or deviants. A Los Angeles Herald article from 1910 (See Figure 14), for example, described the arrest of a 17-year-old for wearing his sister's clothes. The article repeatedly referred to him as a "masquerader" and went into detail about how he was chased through the streets by a growing mob, lifting his skirt as he ran. By the time the

crowd caught him, they were shouting, “show him no mercy” and calling for his clothes to be torn off (Los Angeles Herald, 1910 | 12) (*see figure 4).*

Beyond the cruelty of the mob, the way the police treated this teen says everything about the criminalization of gender nonconformity at the time. Despite being underage and only charged with a misdemeanor, he was locked up in the men’s section of the jail. This was shocking because, by 1910, juvenile courts had been widely established across the U.S. as part of the *Progressive Era’s*[52] push for a separate justice system for minors. These courts were designed to consider a child’s circumstances rather than simply punish them, with an emphasis on rehabilitation rather than incarceration alongside adult offenders (Hilotin-Lee, 2023). The entire purpose of juvenile courts was to protect young people from the dangers of the adult criminal system. In many cases, juveniles were placed in probation programs, community service, or juvenile facilities instead of being jailed with adults (Hilotin-Lee, 2023).

MOB PURSUES MAN IN WOMAN'S DRESS

Walter Waller, Ticket Agent, Has Exciting Experience on the Streets at Night

COMPANION MAKES ESCAPE

Masquerader, After Arrest, Tells Police He Took Sister's Clothes for Joke

Attired in handsome hobble gowns, stylish black hats and dainty patent leather shoes, two young persons attracted much attention at the Los Angeles-Pacific depot near Fifth and Hill streets last night, and were having considerable fun until they were recognized as being young men in women's clothing. One of the pair boarded a moving car and escaped. The other was pursued several blocks and captured on Broadway near Fourth street. At the police station the masquerader gave his name as Walter Waller and said he is a ticket agent at the Majestic theater.

The masqueraders appeared on the downtown streets some time after 9 o'clock last night and paraded along Broadway. They visited a dance hall, dancing several times with different young men. Finally they again sought

Figure 4: Section from a 1910 news article describing the turn of events for a "masquerader" caught in the act of cross-dressing, and how he was treated by the public. Courtesy of the Los Angeles Herald.

Given this shift in how the legal system handled minors, it’s hard to ignore the way this teen was treated. Rather than being placed in juvenile detention or given a lighter sentence, an option that was increasingly common at the time, they were thrown into an adult men’s jail, likely exposing them to even more danger. This decision shows just how aggressively gender

[52] The Progressive Era was a time in the late 1800s and early 1900s when people pushed for reforms to fix problems caused by industrialization, like poor working conditions, corruption, and lack of public health and housing standards. It was about making society fairer and more accountable, though it often excluded the voices of marginalized groups.

nonconformity was punished. It wasn't just about enforcing the law; it was about setting an example of those who stepped outside the rigid norms of their time.

The whole incident is a stark example of how authorities targeted Queer and gender-nonconforming people simply for existing in public. Yet it also points to something else: an early Queer nightlife scene. Before his arrest, the article notes that the teen and his friend had spent the night at a dance club, where they had been dancing with other men (Los Angeles Herald, 1910 | 12). While these gathering places were not official but constantly at risk of police crackdowns, they laid the foundation for what would later become LA's more visible Queer scenes.

Queer Spaces in an Expanding City

As Hollywood's film industry exploded throughout the 1920s and 1940s, Queer culture continued to thrive underground. Hollywood became home to gender-nonconforming performers, coded Queerness in films, and hidden gathering spaces (Ghaziani, 2020). Bars, cabarets, and private clubs provided spaces where LGBTQIA+ people could find community, even as they remained vulnerable to police raids and legal crackdowns.

Despite today's legal protections, Queer individuals still navigate bias and violence, especially youth of color, who are often drawn to urban centers to find community and safety. As Ghaziani explains, "Safety is a pronounced concern for Queer youth of color," particularly Black and Latino youth who may face rejection from their families and end up forming chosen families on the streets (Ghaziani, 2020). The formation of gayborhoods, or Queer enclaves, began to provide some refuge in the 20th century, but as urban landscapes change, these spaces continue to evolve. When the nature of oppression shifts, so do the ways Queer people respond (Ghaziani, 2020).

Los Angeles, with its vast sprawl, has never had a singular Queer district like San Francisco's Castro or New York's Greenwich Village. Instead, it has always been a patchwork of Queer spaces, from Silver Lake to West Hollywood. Turesky describes LA as a "confederation of neighborhoods in search of a Queer center," with West Hollywood becoming one of the few politically incorporated cities rooted in LGBTQIA+ activism (Turesky, 2023 | 265). While this decentralization created challenges for visibility, it also allowed for diverse and resilient communities to emerge across different parts of the city.

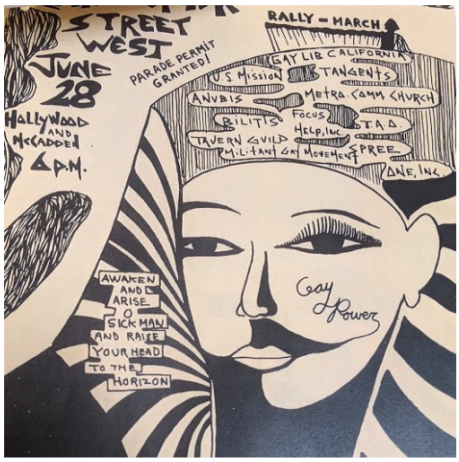

Figure 4. 1970 LA Pride poster designed by Angela Douglas. Source: Douglas (1970).

Figure 5: Image of Pride Poster from 1970, designed by Angela Douglas for the first LA Pride Parade. Courtesy of Turesky, 2023 pp. 268.

The Fight for Visibility and Belonging

Queer activism in Los Angeles has always been closely tied to public space. The city played a significant role in early Pride demonstrations, with LA's first Pride march in 1970 framed as an act of resistance against police violence and religious oppression (Turesky, 2023 | 265) (*See figure 5*). Organizers intentionally structured the event in solidarity with the Stonewall Uprising, targeting institutions that had long criminalized Queer individuals.

The LAPD has a particularly long history of antagonizing Queer communities in the city. In the mid-1970s, for example, LAPD Chief Edward Davis compared giving permits to gay

organizers to giving permits to "robbers and rapists," enforcing strict regulations that dictated how and where LGBTQ+ people could exist in public (Turesky, 2023 | 266). This hostile relationship played a role in the formation of the first Gay Rights Chapter of the *ACLU*[53], led by Dick Caudillo in Los Angeles (Turesky, 2023 | 266).

As anti-gay violence increased in the 1990s, Queer residents of LA's Christopher Street formed the *Pink Panthers*, a neighborhood patrol group modeled after the Black Panther Party. Dressed in black shirts marked with a pink triangle and paw print, the Panthers patrolled city streets, using walkie-talkies and whistles to protect community members from attacks. This grassroots response was a direct result of the increased violence that came with greater Queer visibility (Ghaziani, 2020).

Beyond policing and safety, gayborhoods also became battlegrounds for marriage equality. The push for same-sex marriage gained national attention in 1987, when activists used their residential concentration in Queer communities to organize large-scale protests (Ghaziani, 2020). Over time, as legal victories were fought and won, the role of these gayborhoods shifted again. With changing urban landscapes and rising rents, traditional Queer neighborhoods have begun to fade. This does not mean Queer spaces are disappearing, but rather, they are evolving.

Evolving Queer Spaces In Los Angeles

Today, Queer spaces in Los Angeles are more fluid. Scholars have pointed to the rise of temporary Queer spaces, known as *pop-ups*, which have become a creative response to the decline of traditional gay bars (Ghaziani, 2020). While these spaces may not be permanent, they do provide lasting moments of connection and community. As Ghaziani (2020) puts it, "When the nature of oppression changes, so too should the spatial response."

[53] American Civil Liberties Union, is a nonprofit organization that works to protect and defend people's rights and freedoms under the U.S. Constitution.

Los Angeles has never been an easy city for LGBTQIA+ people. From early arrests for gender nonconformity to police brutality and exclusionary urban planning, the fight for space and visibility has been ongoing. However, throughout these challenges, Queer people have continuously reshaped the city, claiming space for themselves in whatever ways they could. As the city continues to change, so will its Queer spaces, proving once again that resilience and reinvention are at the heart of Queer history in Los Angeles.

Moral Panic After 1940

By the mid-20th century, Queer people in the U.S. were facing some of the most intense policing and discrimination in history. Fueled by moral panic, political fearmongering, and systemic oppression, LGBTQIA+ individuals were seen as threats to everything from national security to public morality. From mass government purges to police raids and psychiatric institutionalization, Queer people were surveilled, harassed, and punished simply for existing. These policies did not just strip people of their jobs, homes, and safety; they also reinforced the idea that Queerness itself was criminal.

The Lavendar Scare: A Government-Led Purge

The *Lavender Scare*, which began in the late 1940s and lasted nearly 25 years, was one of the most aggressive government-led attacks on Queer communities in U.S. history. During this time, between 5,000 and 10,000 federal employees were investigated, interrogated, and fired for being Queer (MENA Report, 2023). This reality was not just about individual firings, it was a full-blown moral panic that painted Queer people as a national security threat (Robinson, 2020, p. 213).

The justification? Government officials claimed that gay and lesbian employees were "security risks" who could be blackmailed by foreign spies. In reality, it was not foreign enemies

who posed a danger, but the domestic agencies actively terrorizing Queer people and threatening to expose them unless they resigned (Myles, 2022). The Lavender Scare essentially created a self-fulfilling prophecy: LGBTQIA+ individuals were labeled as vulnerable to blackmail, yet it was their own government that made blackmail possible in the first place.

The policies that enabled these Queer purges were made deliberately vague, using terms like "sexual perversion" and "moral turpitude" to justify discrimination without explicitly stating that homosexuality was the target (Nolan, 2022 | 715). These laws remained in effect for decades, and remained legal until 1995 (Nolan, 2022 | 713).

The very name "Lavender Scare" came from Senator Everett Dirksen, who referred to gay men as "lavender lads" and claimed that a Republican victory in 1952 would rid the federal government of them (Nolan, 2022 | 714). This campaign of fear did not just destroy careers, it solidified the belief that Queerness was incompatible with American values. The phrase also set the stage for decades of criminalization, surveillance, and police violence against LGBTQIA+ communities.

Vice Squads: Policing Queer Bodies

While the federal government was carrying out mass firings, local law enforcement was waging its own war on Queer communities. *Vice squads*[54] were deployed in cities across the country to raid gay bars, bathhouses, and cruising areas (Robinson, 2020 | 213). These raids were more than just about enforcing the law, they were about humiliation and control. In cities like Los Angeles, police would storm into Queer spaces, arresting people in mass and forcing them to

[54] Vice squads were specialized police units that focused on enforcing laws related to activities considered "immoral" or socially deviant, like gambling, sex work, and what was historically labeled as "homosexual behavior."

pose for newspaper photos. The goal was to shame them publicly, ensuring they lost their jobs, families, and reputations.

The Lavendar Scare was not just about policing sexuality, it was also about enforcing *gender norms*[55]. People could be arrested simply for wearing clothing that did not "match" their assigned sex (Robinson, 2020 | 214). *Butch*[56] women, especially women of color, were often profiled as criminals just for existing. Young Queer POC were harassed and detained simply for being in public spaces, and their gender expression was viewed by many as inherently suspicious (Robinson, 2020 | 214).

Vice squads also engaged in entrapment tactics, where undercover officers would pose as gay men in known cruising areas, only to arrest those who responded. This experience was widespread in Washington D.C.'s Lafayette Park, which sat right across from the White House (Myles, 2022). Beyond the immediate harm of arrests, these sting operations were used to create "blacklists" of suspected LGBTQ+ individuals, ensuring that those caught could be fired, surveilled, and permanently barred from government jobs (Myles, 2022).

Weaponizing Psychiatry Against Queer People

While police were targeting Queer people in public spaces, psychiatry was being weaponized to justify discrimination. Throughout the 1930s to 1950s, LGBTQIA+ individuals were often institutionalized against their will, subjected to forced psychiatric treatment, and denied basic civil rights (Turesky, 2023 | 267).

Even after these explicit psychiatric commitments began to decline, the perception of Queer people as dangerous persisted. In 1979, the LA County Council even declared that gay

[55] The expectations society places on people based on their perceived gender—like how someone “should” dress, act, or express themselves.
[56] Someone, typically a lesbian or gender nonconforming person, who presents themselves in a more traditionally masculine way.

men were unfit to be parents, citing "medical, psychological, and popular literature" that framed them as threats to children (Kassner, 2022 | 153). The idea that Queer people, especially gay men, were inherently predatory increasingly fueled discrimination in employment, foster care, and housing.

The Lasting Impact: Incarceration and Over-Policing

Even as laws have changed, the criminalization of Queer people has never fully gone away. The U.S. incarcerates more people than any other country in the world, especially individuals who are Black, Brown, or transgender (Robinson, 2020 | 211). According to Robinson:

- Queer individuals are three times more likely to be incarcerated than the general population.
- One in six transgender people has been incarcerated at some point, with nearly half of all Black trans people experiencing incarceration.
- LGBTQIA+ youth make up 15% of those in juvenile detention, despite being only 5-8% of the overall youth population. (Robinson, 2020 | 211)

While policing practices have evolved, discrimination continues to operate through over-policing, profiling, and the criminalization of poverty (Robinson, 2020 | 210). In poor Black and Brown neighborhoods, for example, policing functions as a form of poverty governance that disproportionately targets those who do not conform to gender or sexual norms (Robinson, 2020 | 212).

Today, gender-nonconforming people are still more likely to be profiled as criminals. The way jails and prisons are structured reinforces the gender binary, leaving trans and nonbinary people vulnerable to abuse, violence, and medical neglect (Robinson, 2020 | 222). Moreover,

while sodomy laws may have been overturned, policing still works to regulate Queer people's sex lives, targeting sex workers, Queer cruising spaces, and unhoused LGBTQIA+ individuals (Robinson, 2020 | 223).

Policing Queerness in Public Spaces

The *LAPD*'s[57] history of hostility toward Queer people goes back decades. In the 1970s, LAPD Chief Edward Davis compared giving permits to gay organizers to giving permits to "robbers and rapists," enforcing strict regulations that limited where LGBTQIA+ people could gather in public (Turesky, 2023 | 266). These restrictions forced organizers to march on Hollywood Boulevard's sidewalks instead of the streets, a limitation that shaped LA Pride's route even today.

LGBTQ+ Activism and Resistance in LA County

From the 1950s onward, Queer communities across LA County found ways to push back through protests, public rituals, and the creation of spaces that allowed people to gather, organize, and feel seen. These acts of resistance were never just about survival. They were about shaping new futures and building a collective identity in a city that increasingly treated LGBTQIA+ individuals as second-class citizens (Duplan, 2023 | 143).

One of the earliest sparks of this resistance came in 1959, when patrons at Cooper's Donuts in downtown LA, composed of primarily transgender individuals, fought back against routine harassment by LAPD officers. After several patrons were arrested for not matching the gender markers on their IDs, the community resisted. The crowd clashed with police, forcing

[57] Los Angeles Police Department, is the city's main law enforcement agency.

Main Street to shut down for an entire day (Dominguez, 2017). This uprising, often left out of mainstream histories, set an early precedent for trans-led resistance in public spaces.

In many ways, these early acts were about reclaiming visibility and space. As Nash puts it, "Queer activism seeks to open up spaces across the heterosexual/homosexual divide as locations for non-normative gendered and sexualized practices and identities" (Nash, 2010 | 132). That meant challenging not just those who had access to public spaces, but what kinds of expressions and identities were allowed to exist in the open.

Throughout the 1950s and 60s, LA saw the formation of activist organizations like the *Mattachine Society*[58], which focused on protecting the rights of gay men (Dominguez, 2017). These groups ultimately laid the groundwork for larger, more visible protests later

[58] The Mattachine Society was one of the first LGBTQIA+ rights organizations in the United States, founded in 1950 in Los Angeles. It was primarily made up of gay men and aimed to fight for civil rights, challenge anti-gay laws, and create a sense of community at a time when being openly queer was criminalized and dangerous. Their early work laid the foundation for later queer activism.

Protests outside the Black Cat bar, Feb. 11, 1967. Photo courtesy of the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries.

Figure 16: Photo taken during the Black Cat protest in 1967. Courtesy of Dominguez, 2017

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One of the most important moments came on February 11, 1967, when over 200 people protested outside the Black Cat Tavern in Silver Lake. Just a few weeks prior, on New Year's Eve, LAPD officers raided the bar, physically beating patrons who were celebrating the arrival of the new year. "Fourteen people were arrested and charged with assault and public lewdness," and many others ran across the street to escape (Dominguez, 2017). While this protest did not gain the national attention that Stonewall later would, it was, at the time, the most extensively documented Queer civil rights demonstration in the country (*See figure 6*). "It represents one of the first instances when lesbian and gay activists bravely organized and stood up for their rights" (Dominguez, 2017).

Public protests like these were often accompanied by more informal but equally important acts of resistance through organized meetings, drag performances, private parties, and

other community rituals. These spaces allowed Queer people to share resources, care for each other, and "stage alternative visions for gay liberation in the streets of LA" (Turesky, 2023 | 265).

Activism was more than just a reaction to violence; it was about imagining something better. As Turesky explains, "resistance charts a new course toward transformational space that brings people and groups from the margins to the center" (Turesky, 2023 | 267). That was the power behind these early movements. It was not just about gaining rights, but about shifting culture, reclaiming dignity, and creating a community where Queer people had long been denied.

By the end of the 1960s, Queer activism was becoming more intertwined with the civil rights movement and the energy of *youth counterculture*[59]. As Dominguez puts it, "Over the course of the 20th century, Los Angeles played a significant role in the advancement of civil rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and Queer-identified people, as well as in the shaping of a collective yet diverse community identity" (Dominguez, 2017). That legacy continues today, rooted in the courageous organizing, resistance, and imagination of those generations of Queer people and *allies*[60] who came before.

The HIV/AIDS Crisis and Community Mobilization

The HIV/AIDS crisis in Los Angeles changed everything. In the early 1980s, many Queer people were still *closeted*[61], not just because of family rejection or societal pressure, but

[59] Movements led by young people, especially in the 1960s and 70s, who pushed back against mainstream norms around politics, gender, sexuality, race, war, and consumerism.
[60] Allies are people who don't identify as part of a marginalized group but actively support and advocate for the rights, safety, and dignity of those who do.
[61] refers to someone who hasn't shared or publicly acknowledged their LGBTQIA+ identity.

out of valid fear for their safety. “Before the crisis, most gays, not ready to deal with the stigma that persisted in many places, remained closeted” (Faderman, 2019). That began to change after June 1981, when the CDC reported five previously healthy young men in Los Angeles diagnosed with a rare form of pneumonia. What followed was a wave of fear, confusion, and government silence. Not long after the initial reports in Los Angeles, doctors began noticing a pattern of rare illnesses affecting men in New York. Because most of those diagnosed were gay, the illness was initially labeled *Gay-Related Immune Deficiency Syndrome* (GRIDS) (Faderman, 2019). It would later be renamed *AIDS*, but the stigma stuck.

This was not just a public health crisis. It was a political and cultural turning point. The federal government’s response was so slow that it felt like abandonment. Faderman notes that it was not until the 1985 death of movie star Rock Hudson, a personal friend of Ronald Reagan, that the President finally said the word “AIDS” out loud (Faderman, 2019). Even when Congress finally approved funding in 1987, it came with significant strings attached. While “the Senate finally agreed to an appropriation of $300 million for AIDS education," this agreement came with “an amendment stipulating that ‘education’ meant teaching ‘sexual abstinence only” (Faderman, 2019).

Faced with nonaction, Queer communities took matters into their own hands. “With so little sympathy from the outside world, gays had to learn to help one another,” and so “AIDS united gay communities more closely than ever before” (Faderman, 2019). Organizations like the Los Angeles LGBT Center became critical lifelines, offering healthcare, advocacy, and spaces for mourning, organizing, and healing. However, these spaces also revealed tensions. As Nash notes, “Organizations provide space, budget management, resources, and programming for a local trans community that often has little politically and socially in common with the gay and

lesbian community" (Nash, 2010 | 140). For some, especially trans individuals or people of color, these were their first, and sometimes uncomfortable, experiences with accessing services in predominantly white or cis-gay spaces.

Still, the crisis forced visibility. As more people came out during the AIDS crisis, the straight cis world was forced to confront its own harmful assumptions. The old stereotype of Queer people as "sickos" lurking in the shadows lost traction as loved ones, coworkers, and neighbors revealed their identities (Faderman, 2019). It shifted public conversation, even as the pain and loss increased over time.

But that visibility did not mean everyone was impacted or supported in the same way. Communities of color were especially hard hit, and the effects are still being felt today. Ridings found that Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ Indigenous people continue to face disproportionate health risks tied to long-standing structural barriers to this day. "They are [still] more likely to attempt suicide and are less likely to have insurance than their heterosexual or cisgender counterparts due to social stigma, culturally incompetent health care services, and other forms of discrimination" (Ridings, 2017 | 40). This adds another layer of vulnerability for a community already navigating systemic erasure, and underscores the need for more inclusive, culturally responsive care.

This moment also gave rise to new political frameworks. The Queer movement that emerged during this time was not just about visibility; it was about pushing back against systems that had failed the community. In response to what some saw as a decline in the momentum of 1970s gay liberation and lesbian feminist movements, a new wave of Queer activism emerged, driven in part by the renewed homophobia that surfaced during the AIDS crisis. This newer generation of activists began pushing beyond gender and sexuality, embracing broader "anti-

capitalist, anti-oppression" values (Vallerand, 2021). Activists were no longer just fighting for inclusion; they were challenging the very systems that deemed their lives disposable.

Meanwhile, leaders like Bayard Rustin worked to bridge movements, recognizing that the fight for Queer rights had become central to the broader human rights struggle in the U.S. Rustin "worked to bring the AIDS crisis to the attention of the NAACP," acknowledging how "the barometer for judging the character of people in regard to human rights is now those who consider themselves gay, homosexual, lesbian" (Gates, 2013).

It is important to remember that this mobilization did not come out of nowhere. Earlier confrontations with the medical establishment had laid the groundwork. In 1970, for example, leaders of the *Gay Liberation Front*[62] "stormed the International Conference on Behavioral Modification, located at the Downtown LA Biltmore Hotel" and "helped pave the way for the American Psychiatric Association's 1973 decision to remove homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (Turesky, 2023 | 267). These collective fights helped build the infrastructure of resistance that made community-led responses to AIDS possible. While not all parts of the LGBTQIA+ community always aligned seamlessly, these moments of collective crisis forged new solidarities. As Nash notes, even people with shared histories, like "old-time lesbian geographers and transmen," are not always "natural or automatic confidants," even when they occupy the same Queer spaces (Nash, 2010 | 130).

Policy Changes and Queer Rights in LA County

[62] One of the first major LGBTQIA+ activist groups formed in the U.S. after the 1969 Stonewall uprising. They challenged not just homophobia but also broader systems of oppression like racism, sexism, and capitalism.

The fight for Queer rights in Los Angeles County has been anything but straightforward. Progress has come in fits and starts; full of hard-won victories, painful setbacks, and ongoing efforts to make sure the gains reach the people who need them most.

Some of the first major legal changes started in the 1970s. In 1975, California passed the *Consenting Adult Sex Bill*, which didn't entirely repeal sodomy laws but made private, consensual sex between adults over 18 legal (Jones, 2023). It was a small win, but a crucial one. Then in 2003, *Lawrence v. Texas*[63] struck down all remaining sodomy laws across the country, reinforcing the right to privacy and autonomy for Queer people (Jones, 2023).

Marriage equality also followed a rollercoaster trajectory. In 2008, California briefly legalized same-sex marriage, only for *Proposition 8*[64] to pass later that year, rewriting the state constitution to define marriage as strictly between a man and a woman (HUSL, 2023). Backed by major religious institutions like the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Prop 8 temporarily reversed what had felt like a major step forward. But the community pushed back. Two same-sex couples filed suit in *Hollingsworth v. Perry*[65], and by 2010, a federal court ruled Prop 8 unconstitutional. That decision didn't take effect until 2013, when the U.S. Supreme Court dismissed the case, stating that Prop 8's defenders didn't have legal standing (HUSL, 2023).

Then, in 2017, California passed legislation allowing people with past convictions for consensual same-sex activity to apply for expungement, and Governor Jerry Brown pardoned several people who'd been wrongfully convicted under discriminatory laws (Jones, 2023). It was

[63] The ruling affirmed the right of adults to engage in private, consensual sexual relationships, marking a major victory for LGBTQIA+ rights and overturning decades of criminalization rooted in anti-gay bias.
[64] Proposition 8 was a California ballot initiative passed in 2008 that overturned the state's recognition of same-sex marriage by defining marriage as only between a man and a woman.
[65] *Hollingsworth v. Perry* was the 2013 U.S. Supreme Court case that effectively overturned California's Proposition 8 by ruling that its defenders didn't have legal standing to appeal a lower court's decision striking it down.

a long-overdue step toward accountability, even if symbolic for some. Still, the road to equality has never been clear or linear. Robinson points out that "advancements in rights [still] mainly benefit people who assimilate into dominant values" (Robinson, 2020 | 214). In other words, legal recognition often favors those who are most relatable to mainstream society, leaving behind trans individuals, Queer youth, POC, and low-income communities who do not or cannot conform.

At the federal level, cases like *Obergefell v. Hodges*[66] (2015) and *R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes v. EEOC*[67] (2020) extended marriage rights and workplace protections to Queer individuals, including transgender people (HUSL, 2023). However, rights on paper do not always translate into protections in practice. Trans people in the military, for instance, gained the right to serve openly under President Obama in 2015, only to have those rights rolled back under the Trump administration in 2017 (HUSL, 2023).

Even in progressive cities like Los Angeles, gaps remain. In 2017, then-Mayor Eric Garcetti noted that while LA scored high on LGBTQIA+ inclusion, critical issues like police search practices, jail housing policies, and youth homelessness still needed serious attention. As he put it, "There are thousands of LGBT youth in Los Angeles who struggle every day to find shelter, and there is still a disproportionate amount of violence perpetrated against transgender Angelenos" (Vuong, 2017).

Policing, in particular, continues to be a major issue. Amnesty International and other watchdog groups have documented widespread abuse of LGBTQIA+ people by law enforcement, including "invasive searches of LGBTQ people, including gender checks" and sexual assault by police officers (Ridings, 2017 | 80). A 2013 study in LA County specifically

[66] A landmark 2015 U.S. Supreme Court case that made same-sex marriage legal in all 50 states.
[67] A landmark Supreme Court case that affirmed protections for transgender employees under federal law.

highlighted the targeting of transgender Latinas by police, including verbal harassment and physical violence (Robinson, 2020 | 225). As Turesky explains, “policing has long been a tool for exclusion and regulation of Queer people in the US,” and early Pride marches were acts of resistance against this very hostile relationship (Turesky, 2023 | 266).

Despite the pushback, Queer communities continue to use public space and collective action to assert their place in the city. LA Pride, which began as a radical protest and memorial for those harmed during the Stonewall Uprising, has transformed over the decades. What started as a defiant act of resistance is now also a celebration, but that shift has not come without tension. As Turesky notes, early Pride was a form of “spatialized Queer joy,” a way for marginalized groups to claim space and be seen in a city that often rendered them invisible (Turesky, 2022 | 263).

And yet, this increased visibility comes with its own complications. On the one hand, visibility can lead to normalization and expanded rights. On the other, it can be commodified and sanitized, used to enhance a city’s image without addressing the real needs of Queer residents. As Duplan puts it, “Sexuality thus becomes a polished image or theoretical representation to be commercialized within the globalized, abstract space of capitalism” (Duplan, 2023 | 143).

Despite the progress, the fight is far from over. Policies that seem neutral on paper still often fall short in practice. Indigenous communities, for instance, continue to urge tribal governments to adopt ordinances that protect Native Queer and Two-Spirit individuals (Naswood, 2012 | 13). Meanwhile, activists and advocates continue to push for gender-sensitive practices in public policy and planning, emphasizing the need for truly participatory decision-making (Duplan, 2023 | 142).

LGBTQ+ History in Pasadena

Pasadena is known for its historic homes and well-manicured neighborhoods, but beyond that postcard image, it is also home to a resilient Queer community. Though the city leans more conservative than other parts of Los Angeles County, Queer residents have quietly and persistently built spaces for connection, advocacy, and care over the years.

Some of Pasadena's most affirming spaces have emerged in institutions that are not always considered Queer-friendly. All Saints Episcopal Church, founded in 1883, has been outspoken in supporting LGBTQIA+ rights. In a 2019 article, church leadership stated, "Being gay is not a sin," and compared using the Bible to condemn Queer people to use it as a guide to astronomy (Russell, 2019). Similarly, the First Baptist Church of Pasadena, founded in 1883, has embraced a theology that resists rigid labels around gender and sexuality, framing the body as a sacred gift rather than a binary that needs policing (FBC, n.d.).

These religious spaces offered something rare: a spiritual home that did not require Queer people to compartmentalize who they were. Pasadena City College (PCC) has also played an increasing role in recent years. The Pride Center, now known as the Quest Center, opened in 2019 to "celebrate diversity, foster inclusion, and promote equality" (PCC, n.d.). As a central hub for mentorship, community-building, and resource sharing, it has helped many students and PCC faculty find safety and connection in an otherwise fragmented city.

Other longstanding support networks include PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) Pasadena, established sometime in the late 1970s or early 1980s, have created spaces where families and LGBTQ+ individuals can learn, grow, and advocate together. Monthly meetings at Neighborhood Church serve as both support groups and places of community resilience.

Activism in a Suburban Landscape

Even with affirming spaces, Pasadena has not always been an easy place to live as an openly Queer person. In 2014, controversy broke out over Dr. Eric Walsh, the city's Public Health Department Director, after it came to light that he had delivered sermons condemning homosexuality, opposing condom distribution, and calling for being gay to be reclassified as a mental illness; directly contradicting the American Psychiatric Association's 1973 decision (BusinessWire, 2014). His public comments also disparaged single mothers, Muslims, and evolutionary science, raising concerns about his ability to serve a diverse community like Pasadena. In response, roughly 25 activists from the AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF), including President Michael Weinstein, packed a City Council meeting to demand accountability. Among them was Reverend Anthony Hill, a gay pastor living with HIV, who reminded the Council that "God loves every person regardless of who they are on the outside." In the aftermath, the city issued a public statement reaffirming that Pasadena's Public Health Department would "provide the full level of service to any person irrespective of their gender, sexual orientation, or medical history" (BusinessWire, 2014).

The incident became a wake-up call for many Pasadena residents, showing how dangerous it can be when people in positions of power let their prejudice influence the institutions meant to protect everyone in the community, rather than a select few. Even as the city faced internal criticism, Pasadena's Tournament of Roses made headlines for a very different reason: that same year, the iconic New Year's Day parade featured a historic same-sex wedding ceremony atop a float, an unprecedented move that reflected shifting public attitudes and a more inclusive vision for the city's future (Business Wire, 2014).

Visibility, Safety, and the Cost of Gentrification

Pasadena, like many cities bordering major urban centers, faces a complicated challenge: how to keep Queer life visible and sustainable amid rising rents, redevelopment, and shifting neighborhood dynamics. As urban planner Petra Doan points out, Queer neighborhood identities are often "threatened by decreasing tolerance for LGBT people and businesses due to the heterosexual residents arriving with the second wave of gentrification" (Doan, 2011 | 15). This isn't just a Pasadena issue; it is part of a larger pattern. In places like San Francisco's Castro District, "rapidly rising property values and condominium conversions… sparked public debate on the neighborhood's future as a Queer place," especially with the influx of "middle- and upper-middle-class heterosexuals" into historically LGBTQIA+ enclaves (Doan, 2011 | 9).

While Pasadena doesn't have a high-profile gayborhood like West Hollywood or the Castro, Queer residents have always found ways to create space for themselves. From The Boulevard Bar to *Club Scum*[68], *Indigenous Pride LA*[69], and the San Gabriel Valley LGBTQ Center, these places are more about survival, connection, and being seen than they are about nightlife.

Physical Queer spaces have always been about more than gathering, and play a powerful role in political organizing, identity building, and claiming a sense of place. As Duplan puts it, "research has long been focused on the 'gay neighborhood' ('*gaybourhood*') as a place for sexual dissidents—both of refuge and of community formation and political organization" (Duplan, 2023 | 143). Queer spaces aren't just social spaces; they're deeply political. When Queer people claim physical space, they challenge dominant norms and assert their right to exist in public. What Duplan calls the "reterritorialisation of the heterosexist capitalist city from the

[68] A queer punk and Latinx dance party in Los Angeles that celebrates gender nonconformity, body positivity, and underground culture.
[69] A celebration and gathering organized by and for Indigenous Two-Spirit, queer, and trans communities in Los Angeles.

margins" becomes a way of making a "claim for citizenship" and declaring that Queer people belong in public spaces too (Duplan, 2023 | 143).

For many LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly those facing marginalization due to race, class, or gender identity, finding a neighborhood that feels safe, and affirming is crucial. Doan notes that "the perception that these areas are more tolerant is often critical" when deciding where to live (Doan, 2011 | 18). But these spaces don't just magically stay intact. Rising housing costs, property speculation, and urban planning decisions often displace the very people who built these communities in the first place. As Doan observes, "the politics of property appear to be trumping the more progressive policies that once characterized the gay liberation movement" (Doan, 2011 | 17). As neighborhoods become more desirable, they attract wealthier residents, often straight families, changing the culture and making it harder for Queer people to build and sustain communities of support.

The Urgent Need for Inclusive Planning

Digital spaces have made it easier for some Queer folks to connect and build community online, but that does not replace the importance of tangible, physical spaces. This holds especially true for young people, trans individuals, and those navigating racism, poverty, or disability. As Duplan points out, the rise of digital networks has shifted how Queer identities and communities form (Duplan, 2023 | 143), but that shift does not erase the need for safety, visibility, and belonging in everyday, offline life.

The situation is especially urgent for Native and Indigenous Queer youth. Ridings reports that more than half of Native LGBTQIA+ students experience physical violence at school, and many end up skipping class just to avoid harassment (Ridings, 2017 | 6). These numbers should be a call to action. Schools, however, cannot carry the weight alone. Urban planners, healthcare

providers, and city leaders all have a role to play in making our communities safer and more affirming for everyone.

Pasadena has made strides, but sustaining Queer spaces requires more than inclusion statements or symbolic gestures. It takes long-term investment, public policy that centers on intersectionality, and a commitment to listening to those often pushed to the margins.

Reflecting on Pasadena's Role in California LGBTQ+ History

Pasadena may not always be the first city people think of when discussing Queer history in California, but its role in shaping Queer life, visibility, and resistance deserves recognition. From affirming churches and public-school programs to community-led activism and institutional pushback, Pasadena reflects both the progress and the continued challenges that define Queer life across the state.

Urban planning has a powerful role to play in how Queer spaces are recognized or erased. As Petra Doan points out, "The role of urban planning in the commodification of gay urban spaces has not been well studied. Too often, nonconformist groups (including gays and lesbians) are ignored by the planning profession and are invisible in planning documents" (Doan, 2011 | 9). Without intentional inclusion in city plans, zoning discussions, and preservation policies, Queer spaces remain vulnerable to disappearance, especially in the face of rising rents and redevelopment.

For example, the testimony of Rabbi Levi Ethan Alter, who grew up intersex and later worked in Pasadena, brings into sharp focus the deep need for safe and inclusive institutional spaces. At the doctor's office, "they would take me in a room, strip me naked. I would stand there in front of a growth chart," then "taking my picture without my clothes on, as if somehow that had anything to do with my height" (Bowman, 2018 | 18). His experience reminds us that

medical, religious, and governmental institutions have historically failed Queer people, and that our built environment must include spaces designed with healing, dignity, and belonging in mind.

This work is about the past, but most importantly, about creating a more just and vibrant future. As Vuong writes, “enduring growth for municipalities and nations stems from a diverse and tolerant social environment” (Vuong, 2017) Inclusive policies are not just a moral necessity, they help cities thrive. LGBTQIA+ inclusion has even been tied to improved city rankings, boosting cultural relevance and tourism appeal (Duplan, 2023 | 143).

Inclusion, however, is only the beginning. Turesky notes that LGBTQIA+ “recognition, alone, is not sufficient in planning for social justice," and that "to pursue just futures means not only recognizing but also understanding and engaging with difference, as well as redistributing power and resources toward historically underserved groups.” This approach ultimately creates space, as some argue, “for opposition and transformation” (Turesky, 2023 | 264–265).

Ghaziani reminds us that even before formal planning initiatives, Queer communities were already reshaping cities. “Gay men and lesbians realized that...in the 1920s and 1930s, they gravitated toward certain neighborhoods in cities across the United States. Their presence led gay bars and other businesses to open, and then more residents arrived” (Ghaziani, 2020). Today, cities can build on this legacy by proactively supporting Queer communities, such as through equitable contracting, protections for Queer workers, and culturally competent services (Vuong, 2017).

Additionally, efforts like the *Tribal Equity Toolkit*[70] show what culturally grounded, community-informed policymaking can look like. It provides tribal leaders with legal guidance

[70] Developed by Native and allied organizations, it is a resource designed to help Tribal governments create inclusive policies that support Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ community members.

to “maximize equality within their communities” and “protect the most vulnerable among us” (Ridings, 2017 | 6). Such tools help ensure that Two-Spirit and other Queer individuals are included in broader equity efforts.

Ridings also reminds us that “transforming culture is complex work," because oppressive values often become deeply embedded in institutions, appearing “invisible and unremarkable” until challenged (Ridings, 2017 | 7). This is why passing laws is insufficient, and why we need dialogue, storytelling, and grassroots engagement to spark lasting cultural change. Ridings writes, “Policy change is never effective without community engagement. It is critical that policy shifts accompany community conversations" that "provide the catalyst for the cultural change” (Ridings, 2017 | 7).

As a recent MENA Report put it, “Our Nation has made tremendous progress in advancing the cause of equality for LGBTQI+ Americans. To keep building on that progress, we must reflect honestly on the darkest chapters of our story and on how far we have come” (MENA Report, 2023). Pasadena’s story is part of that reflection. Documenting and preserving these histories matter not only to honor those who came before, but for ensuring that future generations have the tools, spaces, and community they need to keep fighting for justice.

Chapter 3: Case Study I – Foster Family Activism and Adoption Rights in Pasadena

The history of Queer parenthood in California is closely tied to the story of Rosalee Sorenson and a moment that took place in Pasadena in 1984. While not often recognized in mainstream accounts, this case was a turning point in Los Angeles County's approach to Queer foster parenting and adoption rights. It reflects both the obstacles Queer parents faced and the resilience of those who challenged discriminatory systems, often with limited support and high personal stakes.

Adoption and foster care have long been critical for LGBTQIA+ individuals looking to form families, because it brings children into their homes and often provides legal recognition as a parent to their partner's child. Ridings explains that "supporting the legal recognition of Two-Spirit/LGBTQ parents increases the strength of individual families as well as our communities" (Ridings, 2017 | 64). When legal recognition is denied, however, it can fracture households and undermine entire communities, affecting cultural and familial lineages.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as federal and state support for families declined, the foster care system became a last-resort safety net for many children (Kassner, 2022 | 148). In 1977, California passed *AB3121*, a juvenile justice reform that stopped criminalizing runaway youth and instead redefined them as "children with personal or family problems." It encouraged "community responsibility to establish alternative programs" (Kassner, 2022 | 149). However, with few active programs in place, many teens still ended up on the streets. Eventually, the legislature funded hotlines, emergency shelters, and housing programs, including stipends to foster families tasked with keeping children safe, in school, and off the streets (Kassner, 2022 |

149). Unfortunately, there were still not enough foster families to meet the need. In 1984, the Los Angeles Times reported that only 3,100 licensed foster families were available for more than 8,000 foster youth (Kassner, 2022 | 149).

In this landscape, Queer communities began to step in. By the mid-1980s, West Hollywood activists pushed Los Angeles County to recognize that Queer people were fully capable of becoming foster parents. As Kassner writes, they did not just call attention to the crisis, they helped "develop the infrastructure to act upon its eventual authorization" (Kassner, 2022 | 150). In doing so, they laid the groundwork for an unlikely revolution in Queer family life, with Los Angeles County becoming a national leader in LGBTQ+ foster parenting (Kassner, 2022 | 147). However, this progress was not without resistance.

In 1984, a seemingly mundane encounter in Pasadena sparked a legal battle that would change everything. Two boys living in Pasadena with foster mother Rosalee Sorenson were stopped by a police officer while walking to the movies (Kassner, 2022 | 156). When the officer asked who their foster parent was, they explained that Sorenson worked for *Frontiers*[71]. This magazine covered Queer news and sometimes sold ad space to escort services and hotlines, which was not uncommon for Queer publications at the time (Kassner, 2022 | 157). The officer, invoking harmful stereotypes about gay adults and pedophilia, asked the boys if they were experiencing sexual abuse at home. Despite the lack of evidence, he later claimed that Sorenson was exposing them to pornography (Kassner, 2022 | 157).

The Department of Social Services echoed the officer's claims and swiftly removed the children from Sorenson's home. While one social worker quickly regretted the decision, others refused to reverse it (Kassner, 2022 | 157). In response, with help from the ACLU, Sorenson

[71] Frontiers is an interdisciplinary journal that focuses on feminist, gender, and sexuality studies.

filed a lawsuit against Los Angeles County, arguing that the county had violated the state's *Unruh Civil Rights Act*[72], which bars discrimination by business establishments. Sorenson and her attorneys argued that the foster care system functioned like a public service and should be held to the same non-discrimination standards (Kassner, 2022 | 158).

The implications were far-reaching. If the court agreed, it could effectively establish a non-discrimination ordinance for the entire county, barring bias against LGBTQIA+ identified applicants in foster care placements. The case also illuminated broader patterns of stigma and criminalization. This resembles Kassner's assertion that the boys, simply walking down the street, may have been suspected of sex work because of their Queerness (Kassner, 2022 | 156). This lived reality also mirrors what Robinson calls the criminalization of LGBTQIA+ youth as "deviant" for challenging heteronormative and binary gender norms (Robinson, 2020 | 226).

The Pasadena case reminds us that activism doesn't always begin in the halls of government; it often starts with people simply trying to do right by those they love. Sorenson's fight wasn't just about two foster children. It was about shifting the system and redefining what kinds of families count.

Also, like many LGBTQIA+ battles, it was not fought in isolation. It emerged from networks of Queer resilience and shaped by decades of exclusion from traditional support systems. As Ghaziani reminds us, "an incitement to insurgency requires people to define their situation as unjust and to feel optimistic about their prospects for change" (Ghaziani, 2020). That optimism, fueled by community, persistence, and the drive to protect Queer families, laid the foundation for the policies we have today.

[72] A California law that guarantees all people equal access to public accommodations, regardless of characteristics like race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability.

Background: Foster Care and Adoption Rights in the 1980s

In the 1980s, LGBTQIA+ people across the United States faced severe legal and social barriers to becoming foster or adoptive parents. In California, and especially Los Angeles County, Queer individuals were often assumed to be unfit guardians simply because of their identity. Courts routinely stripped Queer parents of custody during divorce proceedings, while fostering or adopting children was rarely considered a viable path for Queer families.

The political climate did not help. "Los Angeles, after all, was a home of another 1980s revolution, *the Reagan Revolution*[73]," and a conservative shift had overtaken the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Kassner, 2022 | 147). With three of the five board members identifying as Republicans, basic Queer rights were routinely denied. One former staff member recalled that at least one supervisor "refused to support even the most basic things to do with LGBT rights" (Kassner, 2022 | 147). This climate shaped much of the local policy discourse around Queer family rights of the time.

A wave of panic rooted in harmful stereotypes fueled this ongoing discrimination. Following a high-profile child abuse lawsuit involving foster parents in Orange County, Los Angeles officials bought into these unfounded fears. They argued that placing youth with Queer foster parents might lead to similar abuse, drawing on a "popular stereotype of the gay pedophile in the 1970s, which was a conservative counter-discourse to Queer liberation" (Kassner, 2022 | 153). These claims were built on a culture in which "being gay—or even being seen talking to a gay person—could potentially lead to firing" (Kassner, 2022 | 156). This reality illustrates how

[73] The political shift during Ronald Reagan's presidency in the 1980s that emphasized conservative values, smaller government, and free-market economics.

internal allies, social workers who had quietly supported Sorenson, were often constrained by institutional fear or pressure from supervisors.

Still, despite the conservative backlash, a quiet revolution was slowly coming to life. By 1985, Los Angeles County provided legal recognition of LGBTQIA+ families, becoming one of the first jurisdictions in the country to allow openly Queer people to become foster parents (Kassner, 2022 | 147). Kassner describes this shift as "the start of a new era in Queer activism that centered family issues" (Kassner, 2022 | 148).

Much of this progress came from both inside and outside the system. "Closeted Queer and Queer-friendly county employees pushed to change county policies from the inside," often taking serious personal risks to do so (Kassner, 2022 | 148). Meanwhile, activists on the outside were laying the groundwork for change. Under the leadership of Board President Terry DeCrescenzo, groups like The Los Angeles LGBT Center (The Center) led efforts to begin placing foster youth in LGBTQIA+ friendly homes. As Kassner notes, DeCrescenzo believed these homes could "provide youth with the best chance of being part of one big happy family" (Kassner, 2022 | 152). By 1979, DeCrescenzo and The Center urged the county to legitimize and allow Queer foster parents to serve (Kassner, 2022 | 153).

Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, Queer activists saw foster parenting as a critical response to the growing crisis of youth homelessness. Even when they doubted whether the county would allow them to serve, they held onto the belief that LGBTQIA+ foster parents were key to long-term change (Kassner, 2022 | 155). As Kassner explains, "Queer activists built institutions with the capacity to present themselves as this solution" (Kassner, 2022 | 148), laying the foundation for future policy changes.

At the same time, these gains were happening during a broader shift in U.S. policy. Kassner notes how this was “a period of either conservative or neoliberal ascendancy, in which policymakers stripped away basic protections from families and made parenting a class privilege” (Kassner, 2022 | 148). In this context, expanding foster parenting was not just about recognizing Queer families, but a response to increasingly visible social crises. “As policymakers grappled with the growth of the foster system, their decisions are often pragmatic and experimental, not the result of any grand plan” (Kassner, 2022 | 148).

That strategic compromise ultimately opened the door to one of the most important Queer family rights movements in Los Angeles history. However, the battle was far from over.

Rosalee Sorenson and the 1984 Incident

Rosalee Sorenson was not just a foster parent; she was part of a quiet and transformative effort to provide stability and care for youth who had been failed by the system. First licensed in 1981, she was one of several Queer adults approved by social workers who chose to overlook the county’s discriminatory ban on LGBTQIA+ foster parents. By 1984, she had cared for sixteen children without a single complaint from the youth in her care or their case workers. Many of those children described her home as “the best place they’ve ever been in” (Kassner, 2022 | 156). That hard-won trust unraveled quickly following the police interaction in Pasadena. It also exposed the vulnerability of Sorenson’s position and fragile status of Queer families in the state; despite Sorenson’s impressive record, society’s assumptions about her Queer identity overshadowed her years of caring for foster children.

Rather than back down, Sorenson chose to fight. Ultimately faced with mounting pressure and the risk of setting a precedent that could open the door for wider anti-discrimination claims, Los Angeles County chose to settle the case before it could go to trial and “avoid the

potential consequences of a lawsuit" (Kassner, 2022 | 158). From that point forward, "official county policy would allow any adult to apply for a license to become a foster parent" regardless of sexual orientation (Kassner, 2022 | 158).

The outcome was not just a win for Sorenson, it marked a turning point in the broader recognition of Queer families in California. By forcing the county to formally authorize Queer foster parenting, the case opened the door for countless others to create families of their own. It also demonstrated how local policy change, when backed by organized advocacy and legal expertise, can have a ripple effect far beyond a single incident.

Reflection on LGBTQ+ Foster Care and Adoption Rights

The story of Rosalee Sorenson was not just a personal victory, it symbolized a broader shift in California policy and Queer family advocacy. As Kassner notes, "the fight for open Queer foster parenting had taken almost a decade," but Sorenson's threatened lawsuit was the spark that "forced the county to authorize Queer foster parents" (Kassner, 2022 | 158). This 1985 policy change marked a milestone; for the first time, Queer individuals could apply for foster parent licenses regardless of sexual orientation. This set in motion what Kassner describes as "a revolution in Queer life" (Kassner, 2022 | 161).

However, the work was far from over. Despite formal authorization, daily realities did not always match the new policy. As Kassner explains, "there was a loophole" in the Department of Children's Services guidance that allowed social workers to base placement decisions on the "best interests of the child;" a subjective standard that left room for bias (Kassner, 2022 | 159). Though sexual orientation could not be the sole reason for denying placement, this bias did not prevent social workers from using it as a disqualifier in practice. The result? While Queer foster

parents could become licensed, "it did not necessarily mean they would actually receive a foster child" after the fact (Kassner, 2022 | 159).

So, activists kept pushing. "Despite the victory of Sorenson and the ACLU," Queer-friendly social workers and advocates continued to fight to ensure "that LA County settlement carried weight in day-to-day practices" (Kassner, 2022 | 158). Over time, their persistence paid off, and for many, this shift was transformational. "For Queer people who had thought they would never be able to have children, the creation and expansion of foster parenting made children a possibility" (Kassner, 2022 | 161).

These victories, however, came with complexities. The movement's emphasis on shared Queerness as a qualifying trait sometimes erased other critical identities. As Kassner points out, "activists' publicity material and contemporary news coverage routinely emphasized teens' sexuality without mentioning race," a choice that reflected the "white-dominated" nature of organizations like The Center (Kassner, 2022 | 151). This framing often presented Queer activists as ideal caregivers by highlighting shared sexual identity while making racial difference invisible, a pattern that complicates the legacy of this otherwise groundbreaking work.

Still, the point remains: "For activists who hoped to provide Queer homeless youth an alternative to living on the street, foster parenting was a massive victory" (Kassner, 2022 | 161). As Ridings explains, "supporting the legal recognition of Two-Spirit/LGBTQ parents increases the strength of individual families as well as our communities" and helps preserve cultural heritage (Ridings, 2017 | 64). Adoption and foster care continue to be "a critical way to ensure or create family relationships," especially for those unable to form families through biological means (Ridings, 2017 | 64).

Even today, challenges remain. While California's 2003 Foster Care Non-Discrimination Act prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and mandates training for those involved in the system, legal protections are only part of the solution (Ridings, 2017 | 72). Discriminatory practices continue, often under the guise of religious liberty. As Ridings warns, religious liberty law "may also be used to discriminate against LGBTQ people in adoption or fostering children" (Ridings, 2017 | 67).

Orange County provides a striking example. Decades after losing a case in 1970, the county saw another legal challenge in the 2000s when Olive Crest, a foster and adoption agency operating on behalf of multiple counties, created a policy favoring "nuclear families" to exclude Queer applicants. In 2003, the ACLU sued on behalf of Jane Brooks and Shannon Rose, who were denied the chance to foster despite passing background checks. In 2005, the ACLU won the case, forcing Olive Crest to eliminate the discriminatory policy and comply with anti-discrimination laws or lose its license (ACLU of Southern California, 2006 | 7; 2003).

The battle for Queer parental rights is far from over, but it is also far from where it began. What started as a local response to Queer youth homelessness has grown into a national movement. Today, as Kassner puts it, "Queer activists continue to put family policies, like marriage equality and access to adoption, at the forefront of the mainstream *Queer agenda*[74]" (Kassner, 2022 | 161). Moreover, as policies evolve, so must our understanding of what inclusive, affirming care truly looks like for all children and all kinds of families.

[74] A phrase often used (sometimes mockingly or politically) to describe the push for equal rights, visibility, and dignity for LGBTQIA+ people.

Chapter 4: Case Study II – Bayard Rustin: Arrest and Legacy in Pasadena

Bayard Rustin was one of the most influential civil rights leaders of the 20th century; a strategist, organizer, and visionary whose contributions often unfolded behind the scenes. He was deeply rooted in a belief that "there is a piece of God in every person, that all are entitled to a decent life, and that a life of service to others is the way to happiness and true fulfillment" (Haughton, 2005). His activism bridged movements: racial justice, economic equity, nonviolence, and later, Queer rights.

Piccotti notes how Rustin's worldview combined the principles of *Quaker pacifism*[75], Gandhi's nonviolent resistance, and the socialism championed by A. Philip Randolph (Piccotti, 2023). This blend guided his resistance to injustice. By the 1950s, he was already a seasoned organizer of international demonstrations against nuclear weapons and would go on to co-find the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1957, after taking part in the *Montgomery Bus Boycott*[76] in Alabama (Piccotti, 2023).

However, in 1953, a stop in Pasadena altered his trajectory. Rustin was arrested for engaging in consensual same-sex conduct and served 50 days in jail, forced to register as a sex offender after his release (Katz, 2020). His sexuality, always known to some degree, became a tool for public shaming, used by enemies to discredit both him and the movements he supported.

[75] Refers to the commitment among members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) to nonviolence and peace.

[76] A pivotal protest campaign that began in 1955 after Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Sparked and sustained by the Black community, this year-long boycott challenged racial segregation in public transit and helped launch the civil rights movement.

As Katz writes, “Rustin was a great American who was both gay and Black at a time when the sheer fact of being either or both could land you in jail” (Katz, 2020).

Systemic Policing of Queer People in the Mid-20th Century

Rustin’s arrest in Pasadena did not occur in a vacuum. It reflected a more extensive system of laws and practices that criminalized Queerness at nearly every level. Throughout California and the nation, vague charges like vagrancy, loitering, and sodomy were routinely used to target LGBTQIA+ individuals (State of California, 2020). Law enforcement often targeted Queer people and the spaces they gathered in, keeping them under watch and treating them as suspicious by default. It was part of a larger system where discrimination wasn’t just tolerated, it was written into policy and practice. As President Biden noted in the 2023 MENA Report, “For so many members of the LGBTQI+ community, hate, discrimination, and isolation throughout our country’s history have denied them the full promise of America” (MENA Report, 2023).

In 1951, just two years before Rustin’s arrest, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover launched a campaign to identify and punish what he called “sex deviates” (Katz, 2020). That same year, the federal government was actively purging suspected Queer employees from its ranks; a campaign that would later be known as the Lavender Scare. Executive Order 10450, signed by President Eisenhower in 1953, formally banned gay and lesbian people from working in federal positions (Nolan, 2022 | 715). Senator Kenneth Wherry went so far as to claim, “you cannot hardly separate homosexuals from subversives,” linking Queerness to Communism and national betrayal in the public’s imagination (Nolan, 2022 | 715).

As a result, LGBTQIA+ individuals were treated not only as social deviants but also as political threats. In California, anyone convicted of "lewd conduct" (which could include anything as minor as kissing) was required to register as a sex offender starting in 1947, a practice that continued well after the state repealed its laws against same-sex intimacy in 1975 (Dominguez, 2017; Katz, 2020).

These laws disproportionately targeted people who were already on the margins, especially those who were poor LGBTQIA+ individuals and people of color. As Robinson explains, "Middle-class whiteness helps to normalize certain gay people while further pushing to the margins poor LGBTQ people of color" (Robinson, 2020 | 214). Even within Queer spaces, poor and non-white individuals are often excluded or criminalized. Policing practices, Robinson writes, become tools for reinforcing racial and gender hierarchies, targeting Queer and trans people of color through what they describe as "*de facto discrimination*[77]" (Robinson, 2020 | 226).

Rustin's arrest is a clear example of how these systems operated. He was not arrested for any act of violence or unrest. Earlier that day, he had given a lecture in Pasadena on anti-colonial resistance in West Africa (PasadenaNow, 2020). However, even with his credentials, his commitment to nonviolence, and his contributions to justice, he was not safe from laws designed to surveil and punish Queer people. The fact that this happened in Pasadena, a city often perceived as progressive, underscores how widespread and normalized Queer criminalization was during the 1950s.

Rustin's Early Activism

[77] Unequal treatment that happens in practice, even if not officially sanctioned by law.

Before his name became associated with one of the most iconic civil rights marches in U.S. history, Bayard Rustin had already spent years organizing, resisting, and challenging injustice across multiple fronts. He did not just believe in nonviolence; he lived it. Long before his arrest in Pasadena, Rustin had already "protested racial segregation in the U.S. Armed Forces, served 26 months in prison for refusing to appear before the draft board during World War II, and ended up on a chain gang in North Carolina after he participated in the *Journey of Reconciliation*[78], which saw African American activists ride at the front of interstate buses in the segregated South" (Katz, 2020). The Journey of Reconciliation, which Rustin helped plan and implement in the 1940s, would ultimately inspire the *Freedom Rides*[79] of the 1960s (City of Pasadena, 2023).

He was deeply rooted in pacifist circles, serving as "treasurer of the Congress of Racial Equality and as co-secretary of race relations for the *Fellowship of Reconciliation*[80], a pacifist human rights group" (Katz, 2020). Rustin's gift for organizing and his deep commitment to justice eventually brought him into Martin Luther King Jr.'s circle. He was the one who introduced King to Gandhi's teachings on nonviolence, an approach that would ultimately define the movement (Katz, 2020). Together, they helped lead the Montgomery Bus Boycott; a powerful act of collective resistance that helped ignite the civil rights movement (State of California, 2020) and led to the "1956 Supreme Court decision declaring the city's segregated buses unconstitutional" (Katz, 2020). Rustin was also at the heart of organizing the 1963 *March*

[78] A 1947 interracial bus ride through the upper South organized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) to challenge segregation in interstate travel.
[79] In 1961, interracial groups of civil rights activists rode buses into the segregated South to test the Supreme Court's ruling that segregation in interstate bus terminals was unconstitutional.
[80] A pacifist organization founded in the early 20th century that played a major role in U.S. civil rights and peace movements.

on Washington[81], uniting over 250,000 people who showed up in the nation's capital to stand for justice and demand equal rights for Black Americans (Katz, 2020) (*see Figure 7*).

Getty Images

Bayard Rustin, at the podium, was the deputy director and a chief architect of the March on Washington.

Figure 7: Photo from the March on Washington, featuring Bayard Rustin at the Podium while speaking to the public. Courtesy of Picotti, 2023.

Rustin's commitment to liberation went far beyond U.S. borders. In 1942, he reported on the humanitarian conditions at Manzanar, a Japanese American internment camp in California (State of California, 2020). He later coordinated a massive anti-nuclear demonstration in England that drew 10,000 participants (Piccotti, 2023). Additionally, Rustin "traveled around the country and world to promote civil and human rights, and trained hundreds of people on nonviolence" (State of California, 2020)

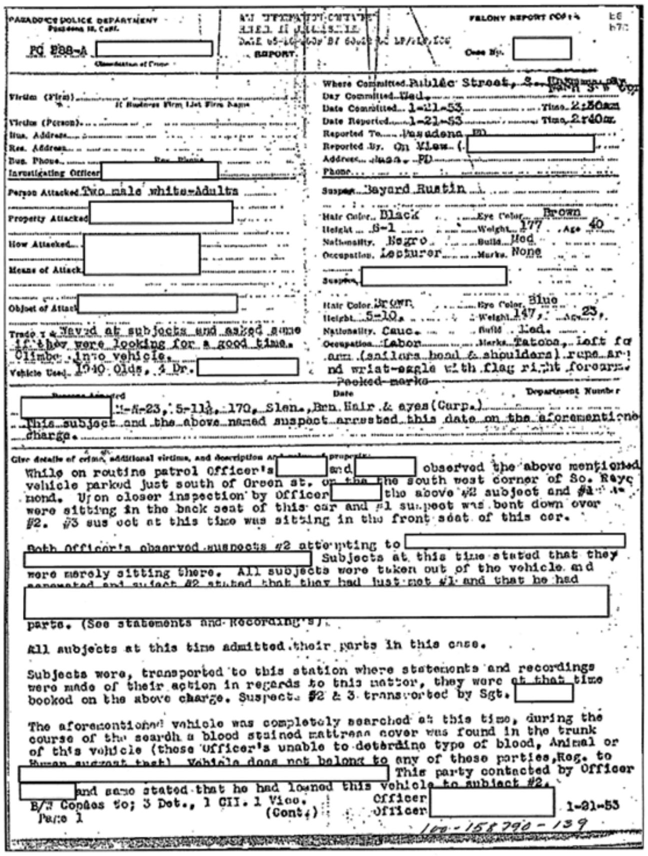
However, even with all he had accomplished, Rustin was still seen as a threat, not because of his politics alone, but because he was an openly gay Black man in an increasingly homophobic and racist era. In an interview, he admitted that he felt his sexuality had to be "sublimated if I am to live with myself and in this world longer" (Katz, 2020). Still, he chose not to hide. That choice and the courage it took would become a defining part of his legacy. As Haughton writes, "Rustin's conviction and his relatively open attitude about his homosexuality set the stage for him to become an elder gay icon in the decades to come" (Haughton, 2005). For Rustin, fighting for gay rights was inseparable from fighting for the dignity of all oppressed

[81] A historic civil rights demonstration held on August 28, 1963, in Washington, D.C. where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech.

people. For him, “gay rights became entwined with his belief in the inherent dignity of Afro-Americans and other oppressed people” (Haughton, 2005).

In January 1953, while discussing anti-colonial movements in West Africa on a lecture tour, Rustin visited Pasadena. His talk was held under the "auspices of the American Association of University Women," a respected organization with a Pasadena branch founded in (Haughton, 2005). Not long after delivering his lecture, Rustin was arrested.

According to police records (See figure 8), the vehicle he was in was parked "just south of Green Street, on the southwest corner of South Raymond," and the arrest took place at "2:30 am" (Pasadena Police Department, 1953).



PASADENA POLICE DEPARTMENT
Pasadena 18, Calif.
FELONY REPORT FORM

PC 288-A [redacted]
Classification of Crime
REPORT
Case No. [redacted]

Where Committed: Public Street, S. Raymond
Day Committed: Wed.
Date Committed: 1-21-53 Time: 2:30am
Date Reported: 1-21-53 Time: 2:40am
Reported To: Pasadena PD
Reported By: On View ([redacted]
Address: Pasa. PD
Investigating Officer: [redacted]

Person Attacked: Two male white-Adults
Property Attacked: [redacted]
How Attacked: [redacted]
Means of Attack: [redacted]
Object of Attack: [redacted]
Trademark: Waved at subjects and asked same if they were looking for a good time. Climbed into vehicle.
Vehicle Used: 1940 Olds, 4 Dr. [redacted]

Suspect: Bayard Rustin
Hair Color: Black Eye Color: Brown
Height: 6-1 Weight: 177 Age: 40
Nationality: Negro Build: Med
Occupation: Lecturer Marks: None

Suspect: [redacted]
Hair Color: Brown Eye Color: Blue
Height: 5-10 Weight: 147 Age: 23
Nationality: Cauc. Build: Med.
Occupation: Labor Marks: Tatoos, left forearm (sailors head & shoulders) rope around wrist-eagle with flag right forearm. Pocked-marks

Persons Arrested / Date / Department Number
[redacted] M-W-23, 5-11½, 170, Slen., Brn. Hair & eyes (Corp.)
This subject and the above named suspect arrested this date on the aforementioned charge.

Give details of crime, additional victims, and description and value of property:
While on routine patrol Officer's [redacted] and [redacted] observed the above mentioned vehicle parked just south of Green st. on the south west corner of So. Raymond. Upon closer inspection by Officer [redacted] the above #2 subject and #1 were sitting in the back seat of this car and #1 suspect was bent down over #2. #3 suspect at this time was sitting in the front seat of this car.

Both Officer's observed suspects #2 attempting to [redacted] Subjects at this time stated that they were merely sitting there. All subjects were taken out of the vehicle and [redacted] parts. (See statements and Recording's).

All subjects at this time admitted their parts in this case.

Subjects were, transported to this station where statements and recordings were made of their action in regards to this matter, they were at that time booked on the above charge. Suspects #2 & 3 transported by Sgt. [redacted]

The aforementioned vehicle was completely searched at this time, during the course of the search a blood stained mattress cover was found in the trunk of this vehicle (these Officer's unable to determine type of blood, Animal or [redacted] This party contacted by Officer [redacted] and same stated that he had loaned this vehicle to subject #2.

B/W Copies to; 3 Det., 1 CII. 1 Vice.
Page 1 (Cont.)
Officer
Officer [redacted] 1-21-53
100-158790-139

Figure 8: Police report from Bayard Rustin's arrest in Pasadena in 1953.Courtesy of the Pasadena Police Department, 2023)

After the arrest, Rustin was taken to the Pasadena Police Department at 207 N. Garfield Avenue (Harris, 2021). What followed wasn't just about enforcing the law, it was about punishing who he was. Though Rustin was already known for standing up to racism and injustice, it was his sexuality that drew the harshest spotlight. Despite this, Rustin never lost sight of the bigger picture. His work did not just influence movements; it brought people together and expanded the boundaries of what felt possible, both within Queer liberation and far beyond it.

Legal and Social Consequences of the Arrest

Bayard Rustin's 1953 arrest in Pasadena had long-lasting legal and social consequences that shaped the trajectory of his life and work. Legally, Rustin was "convicted of a misdemeanor vagrancy offense for consensual adult sexual activity," a charge that, like so many others at the time, had little to do with justice and everything to do with policing Queerness (State of California, 2020). These types of convictions were "often life-ruining," landing people on sex offender registries for decades and marking them with a stigma that was nearly impossible to shake (State of California, 2020).

Rustin's arrest made him "subjected to discriminatory arrest and prosecution for engaging in consensual conduct with people of the same sex," a reality that many Queer people of the era faced simply for existing outside of heteronormative norms (State of California, 2020). While he remained a critical force in the civil rights movement, the charge stuck with him. As Katz notes, "Rustin went on to play a key role in the civil rights movement, working closely with Martin Luther King Jr., but his conviction remained a stain on his reputation" (Katz, 2020).

That stain had real consequences. Rustin was immediately forced to step back from public leadership roles. He cancelled his speaking engagements, resigned from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and dropped out of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Although his brilliance as an organizer was widely recognized, "his radical views and homosexuality forced Rustin to take a less public role" in the Civil Rights Movement (Piccotti, 2023). Even though he played a key role in shaping major moments in history, the shadow of his conviction followed him for the rest of his life. The arrest even complicated his relationship with King. After the scandal, King was advised to "cut ties with Rustin because he was gay" (Piccotti, 2023). Still, their mutual respect endured, and King still looked to Rustin for counsel on

important matters. By 1963, the two were working together again in preparation for the March on Washington (Piccotti, 2023).

Rustin's sexuality continued to be used against him, sometimes by fellow civil rights leaders. In 1960, Representative Adam Clayton Powell Jr. threatened to tell the press that Rustin and King were lovers if King did not cut ties with him. As Gates recounts, "Rustin experienced one of the lowest points in his career in 1960, and the author of this crisis was not J. Edgar Hoover; it was another Black leader" (Gates, 2013). Moreover, in 1963, as the March on Washington approached, Senator Strom Thurmond attempted to derail the entire event by referring to Rustin's "sex perversion" and reading "Rustin's entire arrest file into the Congressional record in an effort to discredit the Civil Rights Movement" (Katz, 2020; PasadenaNow, 2020).

Despite the public shaming, Rustin's work never stopped. Unfortunately, being both Black and gay in mid-century America, especially in the public eye, came at a heavy cost. His experience made it painfully clear how easily homophobia could be used to sideline someone, even within movements that claimed to stand for justice.

Criminalizing Queer Behavior Amongst Marginalized Communities

Bayard Rustin's story is part of an extensive and ongoing pattern, one where the criminal legal system has disproportionately targeted Black and Brown LGBTQIA+ individuals. While many Queer urbanists today focus on challenging car dependency and heteronormativity, "systemic inequities of racism, sexism, and transphobia replicate themselves in our own niche sphere of society" (Greiner, 2023). These layers of oppression often go unacknowledged, yet they shape who gets to feel safe and who does not.

In public spaces, “police disproportionately stop, search, and interrogate Black and Brown people on the streets, especially poor Black and Brown young men” (Robinson, 2020 | 212). These are not just everyday run-ins; they leave a mark. They shape how young Black people come to understand themselves and how they think the world sees them. “Discriminatory experiences of aggressive policing” have led many to internalize the belief that law enforcement sees them as “symbolic assailants,” people perceived as threats simply for existing (Robinson, 2020 | 212).

The same patterns play out for Black women, who have historically been subjected to policing that deems them “dangerous, masculine, and deviant” (Robinson, 2020 | 213). Gender nonconforming and transgender people of color face heightened scrutiny, too. Even within LGBTQIA+ spaces, “middle-class, White LGBTQ people” often experience more safety and inclusion, while poor and racialized members of the community are criminalized as "hypersexual and deviant” (Robinson, 2020 | 219). This divide is not just social; it is systemic.

Rustin’s experience with the law, rooted in both racism and homophobia, speaks to what Robinson calls “*The New Jim Crow*[82],” a form of “hyper-incarceration” that continues the legacy of segregation and subjugation through more covert means (Robinson, 2020 | 226). Trans and gender-expansive youth of color are often seen by law enforcement as inherently criminal. Lacking the protective cover of heteronormativity, they are more likely to be profiled, punished, and placed in unsafe conditions (Robinson, 2020 | 227). These realities expose the limits of formal equality and underscore why intersectional justice remains critical.

[82] Era when the U.S. criminal justice system functions as a modern system of racial control, targeting Black and Brown communities through mass incarceration and systemic discrimination even after the end of formal segregation.

The Long-Term Impact of Rustin's Arrest on Civil Rights

Despite the attempts to erase him from the spotlight, Rustin never stopped organizing. After being arrested for his civil disobedience and open homosexuality multiple times, "he continued to fight for equality until his death in 1987 at age 75" (Piccotti, 2023). His work behind the scenes shaped some of the most pivotal victories of the 20th century. The March on Washington, credited with laying the groundwork for both the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*[83] and *the Voting Rights Act of 1965*[84], was just one example of his lasting impact (Piccotti, 2023).

Rustin's activism did not stop with the marches. In 1965, he and A. Philip Randolph co-founded the A. Philip Randolph Institute to advocate for Black trade unionists, and Rustin served as its leader until 1979 (Piccotti, 2023). He continued to push for civil rights, economic justice, and global peace, speaking widely and publishing his ideas in collections like *Down the Line*[85] in 1971 and *Strategies for Freedom*[86] in 1976 (Piccotti, 2023).

Even in his final years, Rustin expanded his reach. When Dr. King was assassinated in 1968, Rustin marched alongside sanitation workers demanding fair wages in Memphis (Gates, 2013). He continued to advocate for several international causes, supporting refugees, pushing for democracy, and organizing humanitarian efforts abroad. "The gay community is morally obligated "to do whatever is possible to encourage more and more gays to come out of the closet," Rustin said in a 1987 interview with the Village Voice, calling more people to action

[83] A landmark federal law that banned discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in public spaces, schools, employment, and other key areas of daily life.
[84] A landmark federal law that outlawed racial discrimination in voting practices, especially in the South. It aimed to enforce the rights guaranteed by the 14th and 15th Amendments.
[85] A short documentary film produced by the Los Angeles Gay Community Services Center that captured the experiences, activism, and resilience of queer Angelenos in the early post-Stonewall era.
[86] A documentary film produced by the Los Angeles Gay Community Services Center that highlighted the organization's early efforts to provide support, advocacy, and visibility for LGBTQIA+ communities.

(Gates, 2013). Rustin's final chapter came during a 1987 human rights mission to Haiti, where he spent his last days continuing the work that defined his life (Haughton, 2005).

After his death, his legacy began to receive the recognition it deserved. In 1989, New York City dedicated a plaque in his honor. In 2013, President Barack Obama awarded him the *Presidential Medal of Freedom*[87], calling him "an unyielding activist for civil rights, dignity, and equality for all" (Katz, 2020). And in 2020, nearly 70 years after his arrest, California Governor Gavin Newsom issued a full pardon and launched a clemency initiative for others who had been punished for consensual same-sex conduct (Katz, 2020). As Katz notes, Bayard's posthumous pardon "shows that California is finally addressing a great injustice" (Katz, 2020).

Yet, even today, the fight Rustin began is far from over. The modern LGBTQIA+ movement often centers assimilation and domestic respectability, what Nash describes as "neo-liberal, assimilationist politics" that favor some while excluding others. Too often, Queer spaces aren't built with everyone in mind; they can feel closed off to folks who don't fit into the mold of middle-class whiteness or traditional gender norms (Nash, 2010 | 135). Rustin's life reminds us why it's so important to listen to those living in the margins of society; people whose experiences, like his, were shaped by the combined weight of racism, Queerness, and unequal power structures.

Reflection on Bayard Rustin's Legacy

Bayard Rustin's story is part of a larger pattern of Queer resistance and state surveillance that have shaped the lives of many over the years. His 1953 arrest in Pasadena for consensual

[87] The highest civilian honor in the United States, awarded by the president to individuals who have made especially meritorious contributions to the nation's security, world peace, culture, or other significant public or private endeavors.

same-sex intimacy reflected what countless LGBTQIA+ people are still up against today: a system that punishes Queer people for simply for existing. As Katz notes, “generations of LGBT people—including countless gay men—were branded criminals and sex offenders simply because they had consensual sex” (Katz, 2020). The system did not stop at criminalizing Queer intimacy; rather, it reinforced deeper layers of racial and gendered policing.

In Pasadena and beyond, these forces fell hardest on those already living at the intersections of race, poverty, and gender nonconformity. In Robinson's study, black men often shared that just being out in public was enough for police to treat them with suspicion, while Black women frequently feared being targeted for sexual misconduct by officers, especially after dark (Robinson, 2020 | 213). For trans and gender-expansive youth of color, the risks were even more significant.

These legacies continue today, though they often wear new disguises. “The new Jim Crow may be harder to challenge than earlier forms of racism because hyper-incarceration is not seen explicitly as racial discrimination” (Robinson, 2020 | 227). Rustin’s case gives us a local anchor to understand how these broader structures of state violence have evolved and how they persist.

Preserving these histories is not about looking back with nostalgia. It is about refusing to forget. As Pasadena’s City Council affirmed in 2023, “a recent wave of anti-LGBTQ legislation across the United States threatens to erode the advances Rustin and others helped to make possible” (City of Pasadena, 2023). Recognizing Rustin's role in Pasadena’s history is not just symbolic; it is a call to action. That same year, the city included support for a U.S. postage stamp in his honor as part of its federal legislative platform, affirming that Rustin’s story deserves a permanent place in public memory.

Historic preservation efforts have a role to play here, too. As Katz writes, “Rustin’s legacy is the basis for the new effort in California that promises to bring justice to other people who were persecuted on the basis of their sexual orientation” (Katz, 2020). Documenting places tied to Queer resistance, like where Rustin was arrested or spoke in Pasadena, can deepen our understanding of how these movements took shape on the ground. It also expands whose stories we preserve in our archives, on plaques, and in community memory.

However, as we celebrate progress, we must also remain clear-eyed about the work that remains. Not everyone has benefited equally from recent gains in Queer rights. “Certain White LGBTQ youth who are not gender-expansive may benefit from newly found acceptance, but transgender and gender-expansive youth of color may now bear the brunt of this re-enforcement of the *gender binary*[88]” (Robinson, 2020 | 228). And while California has become a “proudly LGBTQ-allied state,” the scars of the past remain: same-sex intimacy was not decriminalized until 1975, and it was not until 1997 that those convicted under these laws could even request removal from the sex offender registry, without a pardon (State of California, 2020).

Assimilation into a narrow vision of Queerness, what Nash calls “*homonormativity*[89],” can often render the most vulnerable invisible again (Nash, 2010 | 135). History shows us that movements fracture when they fail to reflect the full diversity of their people. As early as the 1970s, “Queer social groups that formed around LA Pride began to fracture,” exposing tensions between leadership goals and the varied needs within the Queer community (Turesky, 2023 | 270). However, in its earliest years, “Pride seemed relatively radical, featuring trans women and women of color” and offering space for Queer people to resist loneliness by building community

[88] The belief that there are only two genders, male and female, based solely on a person’s assigned sex at birth.
[89] Refers to the ways some LGBTQIA+ identities are deemed more acceptable or "normal" when they closely mirror heterosexual norms, like monogamy, marriage, or traditional gender roles, often at the expense of more marginalized or nonconforming queer experiences.

and joy (Turesky, 2023 | 272) (*See figures 9 and 10*). That spirit rooted in collective memory, radical inclusion, and visibility for those at the margins must help guide Pasadena's next steps.

Preserving Pasadena's Queer history means more than recognizing what happened, it means uplifting the people who lived it. Through oral histories, archival work, and community engagement, we can honor those who paved the way and ensure that their stories remain rooted in the spaces they helped shape. The work of remembrance is also the work of justice.

Figure 7. A contingent of "Gay Chicanos and Latinos" marches in an early Pride parade. Source: Photograph of Pride marchers [ca. 1975].

Figure 9: photo from the 1975 LA Pride Parade, featuring a contingency of gay Chicanos and Latinos. Courtesy of Turesky, 2023 pp. 270

Chapter 5: Case Study III-The Boulevard Bar: Pasadena's Enduring Gay Landmark

Gay bars have never just been about drinks and dancing. They have been places where LGBTQIA+ people could find each other, affirm their identities, and build their chosen family. Sociologist Babri calls them "an informal public '*third place*[90]*'* distinct from the home and the workplace" (Babri, 2023), spaces that hold the community in a way few others can. For decades, public bars and clubs have been a refuge from discrimination and a place to build community for many, however fragile.

The survival of Queer bars and clubs has always depended on community needs in an ever-evolving world with shifting tolerance levels, political climate, and economic realities. Gentrification has pushed many Queer businesses out, as rising rents, neighborhood changes, and increased policing place new pressures on those that remain (Doan, 2011 | 16). Doan writes that "the survival of LGBT neighborhoods is contingent upon the continued presence of businesses that cater to the needs of the community," but this is threatened when "highly visible elements of the gay community," like bars, are targeted or closed (Doan, 2011 | 16). In some cases, this threat is literal. Doan recounts a *2009 police raid on The Eagle in Atlanta*[91], where patrons were reportedly forced to lie on the ground for hours while being subjected to anti-gay slurs. These incidents are not isolated; they point to a deeper pattern where, as Doan puts it, "the cultural icons of Queer neighborhoods are clearly at risk" (Doan, 2011 | 16).

[90] Social spaces outside of home (the "first place") and work (the "second place") where people gather, build community, and connect, like coffee shops, parks, or bars.
[91] The raid sparked outrage and lawsuits, highlighting ongoing tensions between law enforcement and LGBTQIA+ communities, especially around civil rights and public safety in queer spaces.

In some cities, Queer spaces are not just shrinking, they are disappearing. This is partly because people outside the LGBTQIA+ community have started to occupy these spaces, causing many Queer individuals to lose that sense of safety, comfort, and belonging that once made these venues so attractive. In San Francisco alone, “their numbers dropped from thirteen to three in just eleven years,” a trend that extends far beyond the United States (Ghaziani, 2020). In response, Queer communities have found creative ways to reclaim space, turning to pop-ups and other temporary gatherings. These events may be short-lived, but they still offer meaningful opportunities for connection, self-expression, and community, especially as more permanent venues begin to lose what once made them feel like home (Ghaziani, 2020).

Queer bars are often seen as safe and affirming, but that is not the case for everyone. For many, they have also been spaces of exclusion. Nash points out that trans men, in particular, have often been pushed out of lesbian spaces through subtle but persistent forms of gatekeeping and policing (Nash, 2010 | 138). In an interview with the Design Trust for Public Space, Jah Elyse Sayers, “a working-class Black gender-nonconforming trans-masculine person,” described experiencing “being ignored by staff, dealing with transphobia from other patrons, and being asked to leave because [he had] not bought anything yet or in a while” while navigating gay bars and nightclubs (Greiner, 2023).

These stories are a reminder that Queer bars are not automatically inclusive. There is still work to do to ensure these spaces reflect the full diversity of the LGBTQIA+ community, not just a select few. Maybe the answer is not just improving what already exists, but creating new spaces shaped by and for specific Queer identities. This, however, becomes harder when the few spaces we do have keep disappearing.

Even with their flaws, these spaces have carried deep meaning for many. “Gay bars have operated as the most visible institution of LGBTQ+ public life for the better part of a century” (Babri, 2023). They have offered a safe space to come out, to meet others, and to organize around urgent struggles, from racism and police violence to the AIDS crisis and displacement. As Babri notes, “Coming out meant going out,” and “gay bars provided the space for affirming identities and forging connections with kindred strangers” (Babri, 2023).

For many, the streets themselves have also become sites of meaning. Urban space is often central to how LGBTQIA+ identities may be formed and expressed (Ghaziani, 2020). Ghaziani calls this *street empirics*[92], to describe how visibility, culture, and community take shape on sidewalks and corners, not just inside "closet-like" buildings (Ghaziani, 2020). When people are pushed out of these spaces, their visibility disappears, too. As Ghaziani explains, “When gays are spatially isolated, they are not gay, because they are invisible” (Ghaziani, 2020).

Queer spaces are often shaped by decades of legal battles, social stigma, and the need to carve out space in a world that often-pushed Queer people to the margins. At a time when being openly Queer could mean harassment, arrest, or worse, bars became some of the only public places where Queer people could express themselves freely. As the city’s longest-running Queer bar, The Boulevard has given Queer generations a place to gather, return, and feel at home in Pasadena. “You can go away for an entire year and come back [to The Boulevard], and you know we are going to be here,” one patron said. “People come back, and they go, ‘Oh my god, I have not seen you guys in a year,’ and it is fun to see that… people come back home” (Collins, 2021). For staff, it is more than a job. “Being able to work with gay people and have a gay family, it meant everything” (Harris, 2021). The Boulevard is more than a story of survival. It is

[92] Refers to the knowledge, observations, and lived experiences gathered directly from people navigating public life, especially in marginalized communities.

a story about place, about being seen, and about a community that holds on even when everything around them keeps changing.

The Boulevard Bar: Origins and Evolution

The Boulevard Bar opened its doors in 1999 when Steve Terradot purchased the space to create “a safe haven for the gay community in the area" and an "alternative to the West Hollywood bar scene” (Harris, 2021). At a time when many LGBTQIA+ people in Pasadena lacked a central gathering spot of their own, The Boulevard offered something more local, more accessible, and more rooted in the chosen family than the glitzier, more commercial nightlife down the freeway.

From the start, The Boulevard was more than just a bar; it was a place where people looked out for each other. As Collins put it, “Especially in the gay community, we are there for our friends because they become our family. They are our family” (Collins, 2021). That connection shaped the bar’s early days and helped it grow into a neighborhood spot people could count on.

In the early 2000s, The Boulevard was full of life. There was karaoke almost every night, drag shows several times a week with queens coming in from all over California, and a crowd that showed up for each other. The disco ball spun over birthday parties, post-shift hangouts, and regulars who made the bar feel like home (Harris, 2021). It was a spot to get a drink, where people could find each other and feel like they belonged.

The Boulevard became a place for milestones and memories. Jeff Archibald, dean at Pasadena City College, first started going in 2003. It was where he celebrated his 40th birthday and where he and his now husband met up with friends after their wedding reception. Jeff was also a regular on “dress rehearsal Thursdays,” when you could test out your karaoke song before

the big Saturday crowd (Harris, 2021). Teacher John Perreault, another longtime regular, even has a cocktail named after him: *Professor Peach*. He described The Boulevard as a place that feels comfortable and welcoming, saying he appreciates that "it's not so crowded that you feel as though you're lost" (Harris, 2021).

Drag[93] became central to The Boulevard's identity, continuing a tradition that took root in gay bars nationwide starting in the 1960s. While some gay men dressed in drag before then, it was not until the mid-20th century that drag began to establish itself as a regular feature of Queer nightlife (Babri, 2023). At The Boulevard, drag shows served as both entertainment and community ritual, part performance, part celebration of Queerness in all its forms.

The bar also hosted events like its annual Pride Tea Dance, part of a legacy that dates back to earlier moments in Queer resistance. "Gay tea dances emerged as a response to the illegal restrictions on bars serving alcohol to openly gay individuals. They were commonly held in New York City during the mid-20th century, particularly in areas like Fire Island, Cherry Grove, and the Pines" (Fuoco-Karasinski, 2023). The Boulevard's Tea Dance echoed that history, bringing people together through music, movement, and memory in defiance of a world that often tried to silence Queer joy.

As times changed, so did the role of bars like The Boulevard. One patron explained, "Things have changed for gay bars, and maybe some younger people do not feel that need for them like my generation did, but for a lot of people this is their safe place to come in and not be judged" (Harris, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic further heightened awareness of how fragile these spaces are. "Just seeing and knowing so many bars did not survive the pandemic, it was

[93] A performance style where individuals dress and often exaggerate gendered traits—usually for entertainment, political expression, or self-exploration. Drag has deep cultural roots and has long served as both a celebration of gender fluidity and a challenge to rigid gender norms.

important for me to tell my friends and my community that we cannot lose this [Boulevard] bar" (Harris, 2021). As Collins put it plainly, "Gay nightlife is disappearing around SoCal" (Collins, 2021).

Despite all the economic pressures, shifting generational needs, and a global pandemic, The Boulevard remains. It continues to offer what few other places can: a space to be seen, to belong, and to be part of something bigger than yourself.

Why The Boulevard Still Stands

The fact that The Boulevard Bar is still standing in Pasadena feels rare, especially when so many other LGBTQIA+ bars across Southern California and the country have closed. Rising rents, shifting nightlife trends, and city policies that overlook the cultural value of these spaces have made it hard for many Queer bars to survive.

For example, because California law prevents commercial rent control, business owners can be priced out of their neighborhoods anytime (Shucart, 2017). Additionally, while historic preservation policies in cities like Pasadena may protect a building's architecture, they often fail to safeguard the communities or stories inside them (Shucart, 2017). As a result, many beloved Queer spaces have been lost, not due to a lack of relevance, but because the systems around them failed to recognize their cultural value.

In the words of Shucart, "Many gay institutions sink beneath the surface of the rising tide of hyper-gentrification" (Shucart, 2017). Moreover, when these spaces go, something deeper disappears with them. Their closure represents "an incalculable loss to the Queer community," as they once served "the same role in the LGBT rights movement as churches did for the African American civil rights movement, acting as a safe place for Queer people to congregate and share political ideas" (Shucart, 2017). Bars like The Boulevard have often been places to find safety,

build community, and organize for change. They have helped people imagine a future where they belong.

Despite these pressures, The Boulevard endured. That survival is due, in large part, to the people who refused to let it disappear. When the pandemic forced the bar to shut down in March 2020, the first time in over 40 years, the bills piled up quickly, and there was a lot of uncertainty about its future (Harris, 2021). However, the community responded. The owners and a group of longtime patrons organized a fundraiser and shared it widely on social media. “Since it was posted, the GoFundMe page has been shared nearly 1,000 times.” In just two months, it raised over “$19,000” to help cover expenses and keep the space alive (Harris, 2021).

The Boulevard’s survival reflects deep loyalty and the ongoing importance of spaces that bring Queer people together. “For decades, gay bars and clubs have provided a haven from discrimination, fostering a sense of belonging and camaraderie. The evolution of LGBTQIA+ rights is intricately woven into the history of these establishments” (O’Brian, 2024). These spaces matter because Queer people, as Ghaziani notes, “are more interested in politics, more interested in public affairs, and more likely to be engaged in civic and political activities than their heterosexual counterparts” (Ghaziani, 2020). This type of civic engagement shows up in moments when a community rallies to protect a space it cannot afford to lose.

At the same time, there are structural reasons Queer spaces remain essential. Because Queerness is not always visible, LGBTQIA+ people often rely on shared spaces, like gayborhoods and Queer bars, to find connection, build relationships, and feel seen. These spaces offer a sense of belonging in a world that can still feel isolating or hostile, especially when they provide some distance from the *heterosexual gaze*[94] (Ghaziani, 2020).

[94] Refers to the way media, architecture, or even public space is often designed with straight people in mind as the default audience.

The Boulevard's continued existence is the result of a fiercely committed community, a need that has not gone away, and the kind of organizing that has always been part of Queer survival. In a region where many other bars have disappeared, The Boulevard reminds us of what is possible when people fight to hold onto something that matters.

The Future of LGBTQ+ Spaces in Pasadena

Even as The Boulevard Bar continues to stand, the future of LGBTQIA+ nightlife in Pasadena, and in cities like it, is far from certain. As the world changes, so do the ways Queer people find each other. Dating apps, online communities, and shifting cultural trends have all played a role in the decline of brick-and-mortar Queer spaces. The political and cultural landscape continues to evolve, but that evolution has come at a cost: many historic gay bars and Queer venues have closed, leaving a lasting impact on the communities they once supported (O'Brian, 2024).

That impact is especially felt in suburban areas like Pasadena, where Queer spaces have always been limited. As Shucart writes, "Queer people do not just want community, we need community. If you stay in the suburbs, if you stay in cities that are predominantly straight, sure you will find tolerance—maybe acceptance—but you will always be that gay sidekick who dies first in the horror movie. If you find your community, you can actually be the star" (Shucart, 2017). In this context, nightlife venues help people feel centered, valued, and visible.

There are also real economic and cultural reasons to fight for these spaces. Queer nightlife contributes to the economic health of cities by attracting visitors and fostering a sense

of cultural vibrancy (Shucart, 2017). However, these venues are too often erased by policies and planning decisions that do not see their value. Shucart explains that Queer culture "is under assault. Not from blind economic forces, but from the machinations of an industry that often sees LGBT spaces as a barrier to their bottom line—realtors associations and for-profit developers" (Shucart, 2017). In many cases, "a gay bar or a Latino venue where Latin music is commonly played or a bar that is a historic place for African-Americans to congregate" is often seen by developers as a blight, and "something that brings down the value of a neighborhood, just by their existence" (Shucart, 2017).

That is why preservation must be more than aesthetic. The culture of Queer nightlife includes dance clubs, bathhouses, private parties, and other community-driven events, even if they do not meet the formal definitions of bars (Babri, 2023). If we want to preserve Queer history, we need to expand what we are willing to recognize and protect.

Shucart proposes a model that cities like Pasadena could adopt. The first step is to create a process for identifying and cataloging historic businesses threatened by gentrification. Then, a case can be made that the business itself, not just the building, holds cultural and historical value. If the proper commissions approve, the business could gain official recognition as a historic and cultural asset (Shucart, 2017). From there, venues could access rent stabilization funds and other financial protections to help them survive in an increasingly aggressive real estate market (Shucart, 2017).

Longer-term solutions may also involve shifting ownership models entirely. Shucart argues that the only way to protect Queer spaces realistically is to take them out of the speculative real estate market. That means supporting co-ops and worker-owned models that allow LGBTQIA+ people to own their spaces collectively (Shucart, 2017). As he puts it, "The

businesses need to belong to them, the buildings that house the businesses need to belong to them, the apartments where they live need to belong to them, empty lots to build future housing need to belong to them," because "that is the only way this community will ever be truly protected" (Shucart, 2017). Documenting spaces like The Boulevard is one step toward that kind of future. Babri reminds us, "It is equally important that we understand history as not just a series of dates and facts but also as something lived and felt" (Babri, 2023).

The Boulevard Bar holds a unique place in Pasadena's Queer history. It has survived when so many others have closed, thanks to the loyalty of its community and the deep need for spaces where Queer people can gather, be visible, and feel safe. The Boulevard's story is a call to action. Suppose we want to protect Queer spaces for future generations. In that case, we need policies that recognize their cultural significance, support their sustainability, and center Queer voices in decisions about what gets preserved and who gets to belong.

Chapter 6: Future Research Directions

Where are We Now

The fight for queer visibility and safety has never been linear. While the last decade has seen historic policy shifts and increased representation at the national level, the violence and erasure that LGBTQIA+ people continue to face reminds us that progress and vulnerability can exist side by side. “The 2016 massacre of forty-nine people at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida horrified LGBTQ communities everywhere,” a devastating moment that made clear that “despite significant triumphs in recent years, the LGBTQ community [still] had cause to feel vulnerable” (Faderman, 2019).

This vulnerability is often rooted in violence and structural inequalities. According to the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, LGBTQIA+ Americans are more likely to have lower incomes than the general population and less likely to have children (Greainer, 2023). These conditions affect access to housing, healthcare, political power, and the very ability to remain in the neighborhoods where queer communities have historically gathered.

At the same time, some government actions reflect a growing recognition of LGBTQIA+ history and civil rights. In 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom announced a clemency initiative to pardon people who had been prosecuted in California for being gay (State of California, 2020). On a national level, the federal government has also begun to acknowledge this legacy. The 2023 MENA Report, released on the 70th anniversary of the Lavender Scare, urged the nation to “acknowledge the importance of telling the complete history of our Nation, reflecting on the lives changed by this discrimination, honoring the courageous Americans who fought to end this injustice, and celebrating the contributions of today’s proud LGBTQI+ public servants including

members of our Armed Forces" (MENA Report, 2023). President Biden echoed this sentiment through the appointment of "barrier-breaking LGBTQI+ leaders to the highest levels of government, including the first openly gay Senate-confirmed Cabinet Secretary, the first two openly transgender Americans to be confirmed by the United States Senate, and the first open lesbian to achieve the rank of Ambassador" (MENA Report, 2023). These moves have made it easier for queer people to see themselves reflected in national leadership and to feel that their stories are part of the country's broader narrative.

However, representation in government is not enough to shift deeply entrenched systems of power. Scholars like Miraftab argue that "inclusion," when shaped by neoliberal participation models, often serves as tokenism that distracts from real systemic change (Turesky, 2023 | 263). *Insurgent planning*[95], grounded in oppositional practices like C. Cohen's proposal for *Queer politics*[96], offers a different path forward (Turesky, 2023 | 263). Rather than focus solely on formal identity-based inclusion, Cohen's framework asks us to pay attention to how power operates across and within systems of oppression to create space for truly transformative political work (Turesky, 2023 | 263).

This push to rethink planning also reflects changes happening in queer research. Scholars are asking harder questions about who gets to define gender and sexuality, whose voices are heard, and what kinds of knowledge are taken seriously. As Ramazanoğlu and Holland note, and Nash affirms, this type of research makes space for a politics of knowing that is deeply tied to lived experience and power (Nash, 2010 | 131).

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[95] A grassroots effort that challenges traditional top-down approaches to urban planning. It's about everyday people, especially those from marginalized communities, organizing to shape their own neighborhoods and futures, often pushing back against systems that have excluded them.

[96] The movements, ideas, and actions that challenge the norms around gender and sexuality, especially the ones that try to box people in.

We are at a critical point in the movement for LGBTQIA+ visibility, preservation, and justice. While policy advancements should not be dismissed, they must be paired with critical, community-rooted work that continues to ask hard questions about power, space, memory, and survival.

The Current Role of Space in Queer Identity and Community Formation

Space continues to shape how queer identities are formed, expressed, and sustained. Whether physical, digital, or spiritual, LGBTQIA+ people create and inhabit spaces with deep ties to community building, resistance, and visibility.

Space is not neutral; it is encountered through lived experience. To understand how people engage with space, we must consider gender, race, class, and sexuality. Identity in relation to space is not fixed to the person who designed it or the one using it. It is always in motion, performed through its use (Vallerand, 2021). This performative quality is central to what makes a space feel queer. Queer theory invites us to move beyond the idea that queer spaces are just bars or neighborhoods; it challenges both heteronormativity and homonormativity and reminds us that queer space is shaped by context, relationships, and resistance (Vallerand, 2021).

Pride parades are a vivid example of how space becomes a tool for both joy and political expression. “Pride began as an invented space, but it became an invited space as historically marginalized Queer subgroups needed to assert oppositional practices as a way of creating their own terms for engagement and joy” (Turesky, 2023 | 263). Pride reclaims streets and public areas, creating visibility where queer people have long been pushed out. Turesky explains how “Pride marches reflect a spatialized *Queer joy*[97],” a joy that centers ritual, community, and public acts of resistance in urban space (Turesky, 2023 | 263). This ritual quality has always been part

[97] The powerful, unapologetic celebration of being one's full self in a world that often tries to erase or suppress it.

of Pride's emotional landscape. In early LA Pride events, religious symbols, and practices were often present, not just as a cultural expression but to process trauma, express collective grief, and affirm queer identity as something sacred and shared (Turesky, 2023 | 265) (*see Figure 11*).

Figure 1. Parade float connecting Christ's crucifixion to police violence suffered by queer individuals at Stonewall. Source: Mason (1970).

Figure 11: Photo from the 1970 LA Pride Parade, featuring a parade float with religious symbols to connect the suffering of Christ with the suffering of LGBTIA+ individuals at the hands of police. Courtesy of Turesky, 2023 pp. 265.

Religious institutions also serve as meaningful spaces of care and community, especially for those seeking alternatives to bar or party culture. Churches can offer intimate gatherings where people share stories, heal, and connect in ways that feel personal and grounded (O'Brian, 2024). Good Shepherd Church in Pasadena, for example, was founded by Rev. Rick Eisenlord in 2010 to serve LGBTQIA+ people through faith-based outreach. "The well-being of our beneficiaries in the LGBT community is too important," he wrote (NASDAQ OMX's News Release Distribution Channel, 2014). Similarly, Rabbi Dr. Levi Ethan Alter, who was based in Pasadena as of 2018, reflected on the power of affirming theology, saying, "God created a

diverse world... I am part of that world, God loves me, I am a child of God, and he wanted to make me this way" (Bowman, 2018 | 4).

Online spaces have also expanded how Queer people connect, organize, and explore identity. "Online communities transcend geographical boundaries, connecting individuals globally and providing a platform for discussions, support, and advocacy" (O'Brian, 2024). However, these platforms come with real risks when digital spaces cause harm, especially when they fail to protect Queer users or mismanage their data. Miles provides examples of how "Twitter has become a site of ongoing homophobic and transphobic harassment," and queer creators on YouTube have had their content unfairly flagged, demonetized, or hidden due to algorithmic bias (Myles, 2022 | 1218–1219). Meanwhile, dating apps like Grindr have reshaped queer intimacy by embedding location-based matchmaking into everyday routines.

This process, called *datafication*[98], has real consequences for queer people. It turns deeply personal parts of Queer life into bits of information that can be collected, sold, or misused, often without clear consent or accountability (Myles, 2022 | 1207). When Grindr was forced to sell in 2020, it became a symbol of something bigger, due to the anxieties about surveillance, safety, and the idea that queer people themselves could be seen as a risk. For Grindr to be seen as a threat to national security, queer people had to be framed as inherently risky; vulnerable to blackmail, morally suspect, and politically dangerous (Myles, 2022 | 1206–1215). Myles calls this "Lavender Scare 2.0," a reference to Cold War-era policies that targeted LGBTQIA+ federal employees. "In its effort to purge itself of its Queer employees in the name of national security, the U.S. government became the main instigator of blackmail against its own workforce, thus operating a form of self-fulfilling prophecy" (Myles, 2022 | 1216). These

[98] The process of turning aspects of people's lives, like habits, identities, and relationships, into digital data that can be tracked, analyzed, and sometimes exploited.

patterns show how queer people's presence, both online and offline, has long been treated as a threat, rather than something to be supported or protected.

Space in queer life is always shifting; it changes with new technology, culture, community needs, and policy. But one thing stays the same: queer people still need places to connect, to feel seen, to make meaning, and to imagine lives beyond the limits the world has tried to place on us. Whether it is a bar, a church, a group chat, or a parade, these spaces matter.

Telling Our Stories, Claiming Our Spaces

As queer communities continue to resist erasure, the preservation of our stories, especially through oral histories and spatial data, remains a vital act of both memory and defiance. These tools do more than archive facts; they reclaim the richness and complexity of queer life in places like Pasadena. They remind us that we have always been here, even when our presence has been ignored or denied.

In my research, I have learned that oral histories are not just a supplement to planning, they are essential. They allow people to speak on their terms, with emotion, contradiction, and vulnerability. As Nash writes, "Locally situated knowledge about everyday lives and practices highlight the specificity of lived experience in a place while recognizing the possibility of momentarily shared or collective meanings of social reality" (Nash, 2010 | 132). What is powerful about oral history is not solely what it reveals, but also the connection it builds. It creates space for others to recognize themselves in someone else's experience.

One impactful example came from Rabbi Levi Ethan Alter: "So many people grow up all alone. They think they're the only one. Whereas in my case, I grew up with family members who preceded me in earlier generations who were intersex," though "there has been a great deal of lying, and secrecy, and shame" (Bowman, 2018 | 2). His reflection shows how personal

experience, family, community, and institutions like medicine can shape personal identity, all of which have historically reinforced shame.

Just as oral histories illuminate interior lives and systemic pressures, *GIS mapping*[99] gives us the power to visualize and publicly affirm queer presence. When done thoughtfully, spatial data can help mark queer history, call attention to systemic gaps, and build more inclusive futures.

Additionally, urban planning that claims to value inclusion must do more than make symbolic gestures; it must directly challenge the exclusionary practices that shape cities. Duplan notes how "the inclusive city has become a normative idiom imbued with the neoliberal grammar of public politics," often focused on consumption rather than true equity (Duplan, 2023 | 138). Policymakers often frame inclusion to promote justice and accessibility, especially for people with physical disabilities. However, this framing can come with limitations by reducing inclusion to a person's ability to work, produce, or spend money (Duplan, 2023 | 140–141). As Duplan points out, "public policies define what an emancipated lifestyle is based on contribution to the productive economy and through consumption practices, thereby shaping a sense of self and a sense of belonging according to the liberal, individualist norms that define their public" (Duplan, 2023 | 144).

This understanding of inclusion is closely tied to the goals of the UN Habitat Program's Global Campaign on Urban Governance, which began promoting the concept of the "inclusive city" in the early 2000s as part of a larger mission to reduce global poverty (UN Human Settlements Programme, 2004 | 2). Drawing inspiration from Brazilian models that emphasized direct democracy, the program envisioned cities where everyone, "regardless of wealth, race,

[99] Geographic Information Systems mapping, is a tool that lets people layer and analyze data tied to specific locations.

gender, age, or religion, is enabled to participate productively and positively in the opportunities cities have to offer" (UN Human Settlements Programme, 2004 | 2-3). However, as Duplan notes, inclusion under this framework is still heavily linked to economic participation and civic involvement, with "inclusive decision-making processes" often used to define who gets to belong and in what ways (Duplan, 2023 | 140). The result is a model of inclusion that can feel more like a checklist than a commitment, prioritizing productivity over safety, care, and the full humanity of marginalized communities.

That is where things get complicated; cities talk about being inclusive but, too often, focus on fitting people into the system without making space for them to feel safe, seen, or free. Public spaces often come with unspoken rules and discriminatory attitudes, especially when concerns about children's safety are used to justify exclusion from family-friendly or open areas. The street, while technically public, is not always a safe option either, given how transgender and BIPOC queer folks continue to face harassment and violence just for existing out in public. Meanwhile, private spaces are not always within reach, either. As Greiner notes, many LGBTQIA+ people are less likely to own homes and more likely to experience housing instability, limiting access to the safety and comfort that private space can offer (Greiner, 2023).

Real inclusion in our cities is not just about putting LGBTQIA+ communities on a map; it is about making space where people can see their history, feel connected, and know they truly belong. "While there will likely always be a need for places that are designed by and for Queer people exclusively, public places that are geared towards the general public must also be Queer inclusive" (Greiner, 2023). Combining oral histories with spatial tools like GIS mapping creates preservation practices rooted in lived experience and collective power. These practices do not just document history; they insist on a more inclusive future.

Challenges and Limitations

As with any research, this project came with its share of challenges; some of which were rooted in historical erasure, while others in contemporary gaps, and a few simply logistical. One of the most significant barriers I faced was the lack of available data on queer stories, especially when trying to take an intersectional approach. Many existing archives and reports, especially from the 1970s and 1980s, focused almost exclusively on sexual orientation, with little attention paid to race or gender identity. This was particularly noticeable when looking into foster care and adoption systems, where LGBTQIA+ narratives exist, but they often reflect a narrow lens. As Shah points out, "limited research on TNB youth as a distinct subpopulation [exists], given that non-binary identity is not always assessed in studies" (Shah, 2024 | 135). Even today, trans and nonbinary people are often lumped into broader categories or left out entirely.

That lack of representation is also reflected in how urban spaces are researched and built. Feminist and queer urban scholars have noted that cis men still dominate the professional and decision-making spaces of planning, resulting in cities that are often designed with male experiences in mind rather than inclusive, universal needs (Duplan, 2023 | 141). While the idea of the "inclusive city" is frequently used in policy and planning to signal progress, it rarely challenges the underlying heteronormative assumptions baked into our built environment (Duplan, 2023 | 145).

This has real-world consequences. As Greiner notes, planners have historically worked to eliminate or sanitize queer spaces to make them feel safer for straight people, which helps explain why "there are fewer than 30 lesbian bars in all of the U.S." Greiner calls for a shift in

our approach: one that embraces "*Queer Urbanism*[100]" as a framework to build cities where LGBTQIA+ people are truly welcomed and centered (Greiner, 2023). But even within queer spaces and movements, challenges persist. "Both trans men and women are often deliberately excluded from certain gay and lesbian spaces based on some perceived biological and/or gendered and sexed 'imperfections,'" and lesbian spaces have sometimes actively policed who gets to belong (Nash, 2010 | 136). These internal tensions are rarely documented, leaving even fewer records of trans histories compared to those of LGB individuals.

Greiner also highlights how "systemic inequities of racism, sexism, and transphobia replicate themselves in our own niche sphere of society," urging us to confront the discomfort that some white cis gay and straight men feel when they are no longer centered. Until people in power reflect on why that discomfort exists, it will remain a barrier to real change (Greiner, 2023). Vallerand echoes this sentiment in planning and design, noting how the relationship between the built environment, gender identity, and sexual orientation remains understudied, likely because these connections are still seen as invisible or not clearly linked to harm (Vallerand, 2021). Even within architectural discourse, there is often limited attention to how class, race, and gender shape people's access to space and power (Vallerand, 2021).

This lack of archival evidence was especially clear when attempting to recover queer of color histories. As Babri writes, "Queer of color histories were the hardest to reconstruct because of this lack of archival evidence," and, like Babri, my position as someone without direct lived experience in all these communities added another layer of distance to work through (Babri, 2023).

[100] Queer Urbanism looks at how cities are shaped by, and can better support, LGBTQIA+ lives.

In addition to these structural and scholarly limitations, there were a handful of personal and logistical ones for this study. Time constraints shaped how much I could explore. I had to strategically choose which stories to chase, knowing I could not pursue every lead. I also faced challenges in finding community members who were comfortable being interviewed, especially when it came to older residents or gender expansive individuals whose stories were less visible in public memory. Despite this, I was grateful to have meaningful conversations with representatives from local organizations, staff at the Pasadena Historic Preservation Department, and a historic preservation planner in San Francisco who shared how he integrates queer history into his work.

This project could never be comprehensive, but I hope it contributes to ongoing efforts to document, preserve, and imagine queer space in more inclusive and honest ways. Understanding these limitations helps me stay grounded in what this work is really about: listening to what is missing and finding ways to make space for it anyway.

Future Research Directions

This study was deeply inspired by the work of others who have called for a more expansive and justice-driven approach to researching queer life, identity, and space. I owe much of the direction of my research to scholars, planners, and activists who have highlighted the many gaps in how we understand the LGBTQIA+ experience regarding race, class, gender identity, and state violence.

Robinson, for example, pushes us to look more closely at policing and its impact on poor LGBTQIA+ people of color. They argue that “future studies should interview and observe police to get at a better understanding of how and why police engage in trans-profiling and disproportionately arrest poor LGBTQ people of color” and recommend a closer look at whether

these criminalizing processes extend beyond people experiencing homelessness (Robinson, 2020 | 228). While my research focused more on queer preservation and planning, Robinson's insights remind us that space and safety are intimately connected, and that mapping queer life must also involve confronting the systems that seek to erase or control it. Future studies should also take up Robinson's call to document resistance strategies that poor LGBTQIA+ youth of color use to challenge those same systems (Robinson, 2020 | 228).

I was also motivated by researchers like Turesky, who urged planning scholars and practitioners to center joy, emotional labor, and care, rather than just infrastructure or economic development. "How might planning redistribute resources toward abolition and reparation movements, and toward marginalized individuals and communities more generally?" (Turesky, 2023 | 273). This thinking informed my emphasis on oral histories and grassroots knowledge. Similarly, Greiner's call to reimagine the planning process by hiring and meaningfully involving queer people in all stages, from consultation to design, was foundational. As they note, "the needs and values of Queers should become part of the discourse of urban planning and design" (Greiner, 2023).

My study also aligns with calls for more attention to trans and nonbinary experiences. As Shah notes, we still need "enhanced research on gender identity among adolescents, with attention to the unique identity-related experiences, needs, and resiliency of TNB individuals as they develop over the life course" (Shah, 2024 | 135). While my research included trans perspectives where possible, I encountered firsthand how often trans narratives are excluded from archives or overlooked in community memory. More work is needed to recover these histories and document the needs of trans people in urban planning and preservation spaces.

Some of the directions I did not have time to explore fully include questions raised by Kassner around queer foster parenting. Did queer households serve as the support networks they were imagined to be in the 1970s and 1980s? Were these families included in public records or deliberately excluded? (Kassner, 2022 | 162). These questions remain critical, especially as queer people continue to face legal and cultural barriers to family-making today.

Rabbi Levi Ethan Alter also emphasized the need for increased funding and structural support for research on intersex and queer identities, noting that "we need to advocate for fellowships, for research money, for postdocs to do their fellowship years in this," especially in institutions that support long-term investigation of human difference and care (Bowman, 2018 | 51–52). Though my study was not biomedical in focus, I deeply agree with the urgency of funding queer research in all fields, from neurology to historic preservation.

Looking ahead, my research also opens new directions that I did not initially set out to study but became unavoidable through the process. For example, while there is growing attention to queer preservation in large cities, there is still very little documentation of queer space in mid-sized cities like Pasadena, especially outside of nightlife contexts. This gap raises questions about where queer life exists beyond bars and Pride events, and how planners and preservationists might protect those everyday, often quiet, spaces.

I also found that even within progressive urban planning circles, there is still discomfort when queer space is explicitly named, especially when it challenges dominant narratives of family, property, or safety. As Greiner puts it, "Until white cis gay and straight men get OK with being uncomfortable… nothing will change" (Greiner, 2023). There is more to explore here about how discomfort appears in planning processes and how planners might move through that discomfort instead of avoiding it.

Another direction this work points to is the need to document how queer organizations and cultural groups, like the ones I spoke with in Pasadena, preserve space in their own ways, even without formal historic designation. These forms of care, organizing, and storytelling often happen under the radar, but they are just as vital. What would it look like to build preservation practices that support and amplify these efforts instead of only celebrating sites after they have disappeared?

Finally, I echo Turesky's call to rethink what gets valued in planning. There is still too little room for joy, effect, mutual aid, and relationality in how we evaluate a successful plan (Turesky, 2023 | 273). If queer people are well-positioned to "flip the script," as Greiner suggests, it may be because we already know how to imagine otherwise. Our experiences navigating exclusion have taught us to build community in unexpected places. Future research should follow that lead, not just by documenting harm but by lifting queer visions for the future.

Final Thoughts

During this project, I kept asking myself: how can we preserve queer spaces in a way that respects the past and helps create a more just future? What started to document overlooked queer histories in Pasadena grew into something bigger when I began looking at how planning, memory, identity, and care all connect. I did not set out to find universal truths or neat answers, because queer life rarely fits into those kinds of boxes. Instead, I tried to hold space for complexity, for what is visible and what has been kept hidden, for the joy and the painful, for what we know and still need to learn.

One of the clearest things I have come to understand is that queer communities have always known how to create space, even when denied it. That creativity, that refusal to disappear, is a form of resistance. However, resistance alone is not enough. If we are serious

about equity, we need planning practices that do not assume one version of family, one way of belonging, or one kind of history worth saving. Preservation must become more flexible, more participatory, and more attuned to the needs of those who are usually left out of the conversation.

Queer people are uniquely equipped to imagine something different, not because our experiences are all the same, but because so many of us have had to navigate systems that were never built with us in mind. That perspective is powerful. It invites us to think beyond rigid categories and to value what is often dismissed: feelings, relationships, improvisation, and adaptation. It means asking different questions, like: Who is this space for? Who feels welcome here? What is being remembered, and what is being forgotten?

Moving forward, I believe that queer historic preservation must go beyond plaques and building facades. It must include land access, funding for community spaces, and policies that support queer organizations in staying rooted. We need to recognize the emotional and cultural work that goes into keeping these spaces alive and ask queer communities what they need; not just once, but again and again. Preservation is not neutral, and it should be used as a tool for justice and healing.

This project is just one small contribution to that broader vision. I hope it encourages others, especially planners, historians, and community members, to keep asking difficult questions, to look beyond what is already on the map, and to value the histories that do not fit neatly into categories. There is no one way to preserve queer space, just as there is no one way to be queer. However, if we listen, stay open to change, and lead with care, we can start creating cities where everyone sees themselves, not just in history, but in what is still to come.

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Appendix

Bayard Rustin Police Arrest Report

PASADENA POLICE DEPARTMENT
Pasadena 18, Calif.

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED
DATE 05-10-2003 BY 60322 UC LP/PLJ/SCW

FELONY REPORT FORM

b6
b7C

PC 288-A [redacted]
Classification of Crime

REPORT.

Case No. [redacted]

Victim (Firm)
If Business Firm List Firm Name
Victim (Person)
Bus. Address
Res. Address
Bus. Phone   Res. Phone
Investigating Officer [redacted]

Where Committed Public Street, S. [illegible] Park S W Cor
Day Committed Wed.
Date Committed 1-21-53   Time 2:50am
Date Reported 1-21-53   Time 2:40am
Reported To Pasadena PD
Reported By On View ([redacted]
Address Pasa. PD
Phone

Person Attacked Two male white-Adults
Property Attacked [redacted]
How Attacked [redacted]
Means of Attack
Object of Attack [redacted]
Trade Mark Waved at subjects and asked same if they were looking for a good time. Climbe into vehicle.
Vehicle Used 1940 Olds, 4 Dr. [redacted]

Suspect Bayard Rustin
Hair Color Black   Eye Color Brown
Height 6-1   Weight 177   Age 40
Nationality Negro   Build Med
Occupation Lecturer   Marks None

Suspect [redacted]
Hair Color Brown   Eye Color Blue
Height 5-10   Weight 147   Age 23
Nationality Cauc.   Build Med.
Occupation Labor   Marks Tatoos, Left forearm (sailors head & shoulders) rope arm and wrist-eagle with flag right forearm. ~~Pocked marks~~

Persons Arrested   Date   Department Number
[redacted] M-W-23, 5-11½, 170, Slen., Brn. Hair & eyes (Carp.)
This subject and the above named suspect arrested this date on the aforementioned charge.

Give details of crime, additional victims, and description and value of property:

While on routine patrol Officer's [redacted] and [redacted] observed the above mentioned vehicle parked just south of Green st. on the the south west corner of So. Raymond. Upon closer inspection by Officer [redacted] the above #2 subject and #1 [illegible] were sitting in the back seat of this car and #1 suspect was bent down over #2. #3 suspect at this time was sitting in the front seat of this car.

Both Officer's observed suspects #2 attempting to [redacted] Subjects at this time stated that they were merely sitting there. All subjects were taken out of the vehicle and separated and subject #2 stated that they had just met #1 and that he had [redacted] parts. (See statements and Recording's).

All subjects at this time admitted their parts in this case.

Subjects were, transported to this station where statements and recordings were made of their action in regards to this matter, they were at that time booked on the above charge. Suspects #2 & 3 transported by Sgt. [redacted]

The aforementioned vehicle was completely searched at this time, during the course of the search a blood stained mattress cover was found in the trunk of this vehicle (these Officer's unable to determine type of blood, Animal or Human suggest test). Vehicle does not belong to any of these parties, Reg. to [redacted] This party contacted by Officer [redacted] and same stated that he had loaned this vehicle to subject #2.

B/W Copies to; 3 Det., 1 CII. 1 Vice.
Page 1   (Cont.)

Officer
Officer [redacted]   1-21-53

100-158790-139

HISTORIC SITE RECORDS

The Boulevard Bar (3199 E Foothill Blvd, Pasadena, CA)

Period Of Significance:
1985s–*Present* (period of use as a Queer gathering space)

Significance Criteria:

- Association with LGBTQIA+ social history in Pasadena
- Cultural significance as a longstanding and currently active queer nightlife space
- Reflects patterns of community formation, resilience, and visibility for LGBTQIA+ individuals

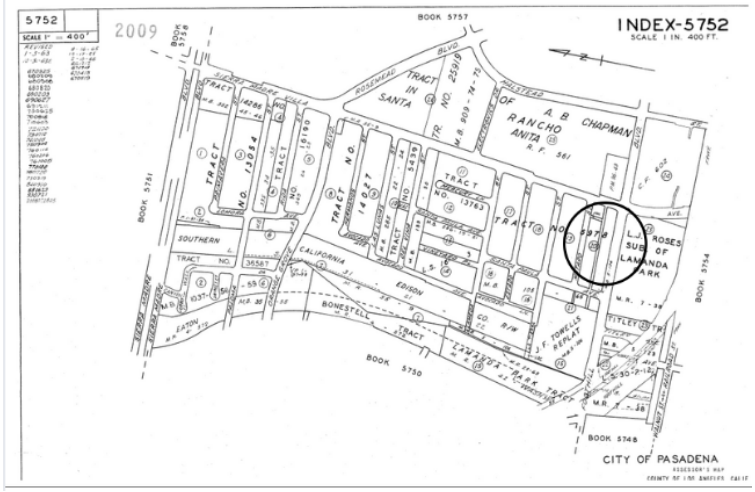
Statement of Significance:
The Boulevard is Pasadena's only remaining gay bar and a culturally significant site for the local LGBTQIA+ community. It has served for decades as a social,

GPS Coordinates:
(34.150347238158524, -118.08460566743057)

Year Built: 1927 | **Effective Year:** 1930

Land Use Code:
1210 (General Office Use)

Block/Lots:



Assessor's map, courtesy of LA County Planning Department. (n.d.). Assessor Map. Lacounty.gov. Retrieved April 20, 2025, from https://maps.assessor.lacounty.gov/GeoCortex/Essentials/PAIS/REST/sites/PAIS/VirtualDirectory/AssessorMaps/ViewMap.html?val=5752-NDX

Parcel Area:
Los Angeles County Assessor's Parcel

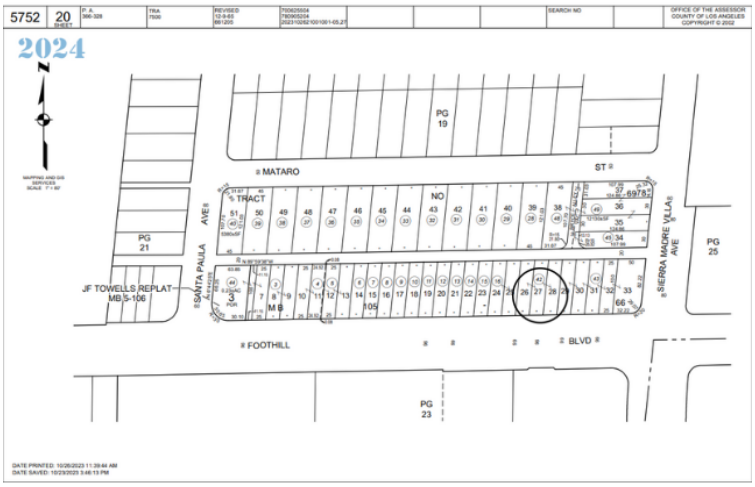
expressive, and political space, especially vital given the ongoing disappearance of queer nightlife spaces across the country. Its location in a mid-sized city rather than a major urban LGBTQIA+ district makes it a rare and important example of queer presence outside of major metropolitan centers. The building's continued use adds to its cultural integrity and importance in preservation of conversations.

Integrity:

High — While the building may have experienced minor updates since its construction in 1927, it has retained its use and cultural relevance as a queer social space. The visibility of LGBTQIA+ symbols and consistent community use further support its integrity.

Character Defining Features:

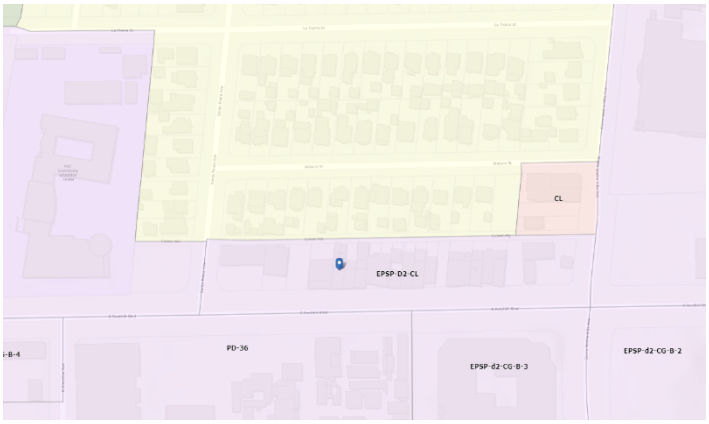
- Single-story, stand-alone structure
- Longtime signage associated with LGBTQIA+ visibility
- Interior bar and dance floor typical of queer nightlife venues
- Function as a safe and affirming space for



Assessor's Parcel, Courtesy of Los Angeles County at https://maps.assessor.lacounty.gov/GeoCortex/Essentials/PAIS/REST/sites/PAIS/VirtualDirectory/AssessorMaps/ViewMap.html?val=5752-02

Zoning:

epsp-d2-cl (East Pasadena Specific Plan, Sub-area d2, Limited Commercial District) General Commercial District within the same specific plan area.



Zoning map, Courtesy of LA County Planning office at https://pasgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Embed/index.html?webmap=2c3295b27e0649a181db3512bf0940d4&extent=-118.1904,34.1223,-118.0637,34.1933&zoom=true&previewImage=false&scale=false&search=true&searchextent

LGBTQIA+ individuals

Past Survey/Historic Context Statement(s):

Pasadena's only existing gay bar, The Boulevard at 3199 E. Foothill, opened in 1979. Owner Steve Terradot has worked at The Boulevard since 1985. During the pandemic, the bar was closed for 15 months, threatening its continued operation. A GoFundMe effort by the community raised enough funds to keep the bar in operation and to perform some needed upgrades. Now The Boulevard is a lively spot with new state-of-the-art karaoke system and Drag performances. (City of Pasadena, 2024)

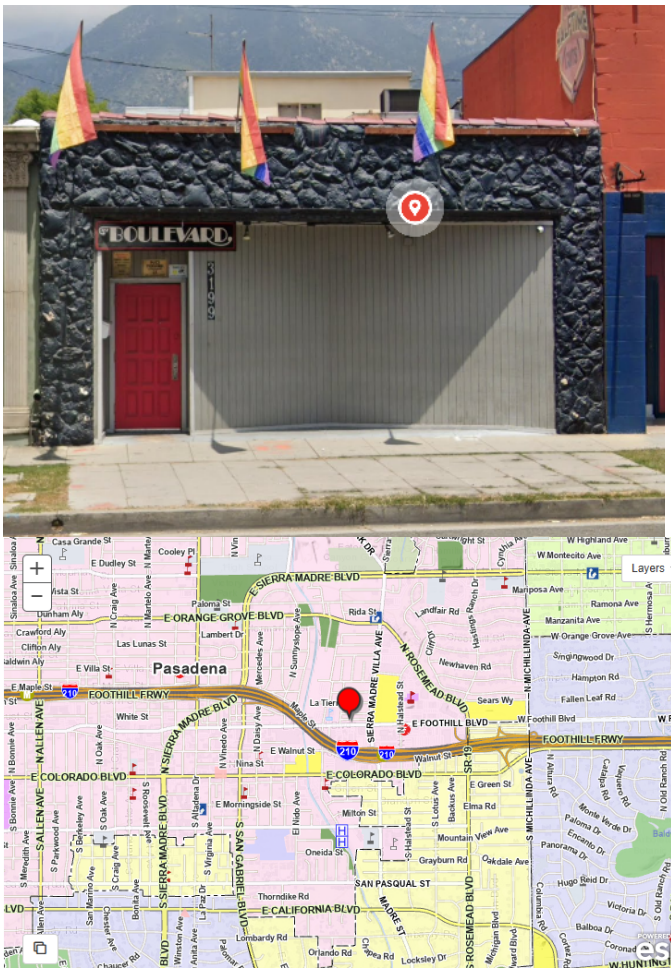


Image Courtesy of Los Angeles County Assessor Portal. (n.d.). Lacounty.gov. Retrieved March 27, 2025, from https://portal.assessor.lacounty.gov/parceldetail/5752020006

Site of Bayard Rustin's Arrest

Period Of Significance: 1953

Significance Criteria:

- Association with Bayard Rustin, a key figure in civil rights and LGBTQIA+ history
- Event marking queer criminalization

Statement of Significance:
In 1953, civil rights leader Bayard Rustin was arrested in Pasadena on charges related to consensual sex with another man. This event shaped his life and career, revealing how queer people of color were targeted and criminalized. The site stands as a key location tied to the intersection of race, sexuality, and civil rights, and marks an important chapter in Pasadena's LGBTQIA+ past.
Integrity: While aspects like materials, workmanship, and design may not apply, the site retains high integrity in location and association, which are most relevant for a "site of event"

Character Defining Features:

- None remaining physically, but location holds deep historical memory

Past Survey/Historic Context Statement(s):
During a speaking tour in January 1953, political and civil rights activist Bayard Rustin (1912-1987) was arrested for consensual sex with two men in a parked car near Castle Green.

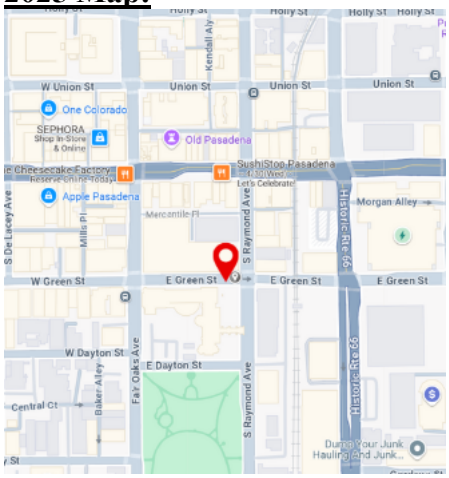
GPS Coordinates: (34.144529, -118.149076)
N. Green:101 E GREEN ST, PASADENA CA 91105-2069
S. Green: 71 S RAYMOND AVE PASADENA CA 91105

Year Built: N. Green: 1967 | S. Green: 1900

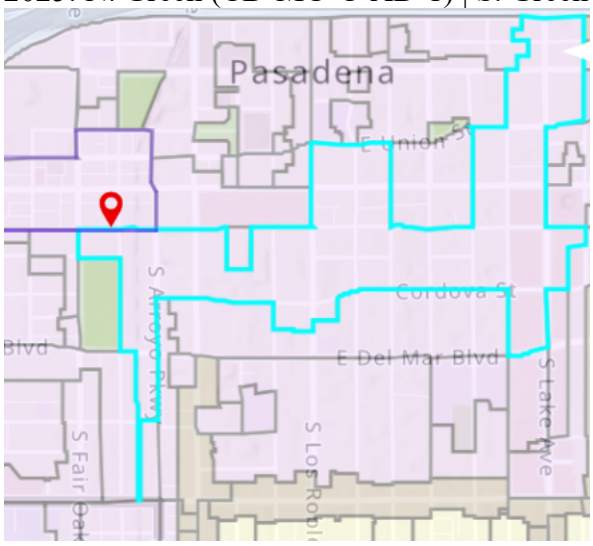
Effective Year: N. Green: 1967 | S. Green: 1974

Land Use Code: N. Green: 8800 | S. Green: 0550

2025 Map:



Zoning:
2025: N. Green (CD-MU-C-AD-1) | S. Green (CD-MU-G)



1963: Mercantile


WALNUT
ST
COLORADO
BLVD
ARROYO
OAKS
FAIR
CALIFORNIA
BLVD
LAKE AVE


5722
2008
INDEX 5722
SCALE 1 IN. = 400 FT.
BOOK 5734
BOOK 5721
BOOK 5723
BOOK 5720
TRACT
DALE


E Green St

Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT

You are being invited to participate in a research study, which the Cal Poly Pomona Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved for conduct by the investigators named here. This form is designed to provide you - as a human subject/participant - with information about this study. The investigator or his/her representative will describe this study to you and answer any of your questions. You are entitled to an Experimental Research Subject's Bill of Rights and a copy of this form. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject or participant, complaints about the informed consent process of this research study or experience an adverse event (something goes wrong), please contact the Research Compliance Office within Cal Poly Pomona's Office of Research at 909.869.4215. More information is available at the IRB website, http://www.cpp.edu/~research/irb/index.shtml

[Queer Spaces Preservation in Pasadena: A Study on LGBTQ+ Community History and Urban Development]
Primary Investigator: [Stefanie Esteban] Faculty Advisor: [Dr. Alvaro Huerta]
IRB protocol [IRB-24-209]

Voluntary Status: You have met the requirements for enrollment as a volunteer in a research study conducted by the researchers listed above. You are now being invited to participate in this study.

Before you can make your decision, you will need to know what the study is about, the possible risks and benefits of being in this study, and what you will have to do in this study. The research team will discuss with you the details, and they will provide you this consent form to read. You may also decide to discuss it with your family and/or friends. Some of the language may be difficult to understand and if this is the case, please ask the researcher and/or the research team for an explanation. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw any time without penalty and there will be no loss of any benefits to which you are entitled.

Purpose: The Primary Investigator states: "In my graduate program at Cal Poly Pomona, I am developing a project on documenting and preserving significant queer spaces in Pasadena by collecting stories, experiences, and historical data from individuals and organizations connected to these spaces. The goal is to contribute to the preservation of LGBTQ+ history and highlight the cultural and community identity tied to these locations."

Procedures: You will be asked a few questions regarding your experiences, stories, and memories related to queer spaces in Pasadena. These interviews will aim to gather information about your connection to these spaces, their significance to the community, and their historical context. The interview will last approximately 30-60 minutes and will be audio- or video-recorded (with your consent) for transcription and analysis.

Additionally, you may be invited to contribute archival materials, such as photographs, documents, or other items, that can provide further insights into the history and importance of queer spaces in Pasadena.

After the raw data has been collected, all names will be removed. Your name will be assigned a code number. Only the code number will be left as identifiers.

Commitment and Compensation: Your total participation in the study will involve one session, lasting approximately 30-60 minutes. You will not receive financial compensation for your participation. However, your contribution will play a vital role in preserving LGBTQ+ history and ensuring that the significance of queer spaces in Pasadena is documented and shared with future generations.

Possible Risks and Benefits: It is expected that participation in this study will provide you with no more than minimal risk or discomfort, which means that you should not experience any more difficulty than what would occur in your normal daily life. However, there is always the chance of an unexpected risk. The foreseeable risks in this study include an accidental disclosure of your private information, or discomfort by answering questions that are embarrassing. If you feel uncomfortable or distressed, please tell the

researcher and he/she will ask you whether you wish to continue. You can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

While you may not receive any direct personal benefits from participating in this study, your contribution is intended to add to the collective knowledge about the history and significance of queer spaces in Pasadena. By sharing your experiences and stories, you will help preserve LGBTQ+ history and contribute to a better understanding of how these spaces have fostered community identity and resilience over time.

This study may also benefit others by promoting awareness of the importance of preserving queer spaces, encouraging the creation of more inclusive environments, and inspiring future efforts to document and protect LGBTQ+ cultural heritage.

Confidentiality and Consent: The investigator and staff involved with the study will not reveal the personal information which they collect about you. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study -- and that can be identified with you -- will remain private and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential by removing your name and all identifiers. Once the project is completed, all interview materials will be destroyed. Do be aware that the results, in either anonymous or a summarized format, will likely be published or presented at conferences.

I will not share what you share with me (or identifiable information/biospecimen)/your answers with other researchers.

New Information: During the course of this study, the investigators may discover information that could be important to you. They will notify you as soon as possible when such information becomes available.

Consent: I consent to participate in the study. I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

_____

Printed name of participant Signature Date

_____

Signature of Primary investigator Date:

_____ Witness/Date (if necessary Legal Authorized Representative)

Consent for Audio or Video Recording:

By signing below, you confirm that you consent to being audio or video recorded during the interview for the purposes of transcription and analysis. These recordings will be stored securely and destroyed after the study is completed.

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Outreach Templates

Hi [Recipient's Name],

I hope you're doing well! My name is Stefanie Esteban (pronouns she/they), and I'm working on a research project to document and preserve queer spaces in Los Angeles County, with a special focus on Pasadena. I'm collaborating with Pasadena Heritage to collect stories, memories, and historical materials from individuals like you who have experiences with these important spaces.

While this project focuses on queer spaces in Pasadena, I'm also interested in how events or developments in other parts of Los Angeles County may have influenced queer spaces here. As you know, what happens in Los Angeles often has widespread effects across the county, so your insights about broader events in LA could help me understand their impact on Pasadena. This connection is important for tracing how changes in one city resonate across the region.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and everything you share will be treated with care and respect. The Cal Poly Pomona Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved this research under protocol IRB NUMBER: IRB-24-209

If you'd like to participate or have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at scesteban@cpp.edu or 310-972-8141. I'd love to hear from you and learn about your experiences!

Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute to our community's history!

Best regards,
Stefanie Esteban

The Cal Poly Pomona Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved for conduct this research involving human subjects under protocol IRB 24 - 209

Flyer Text:

Help Us Preserve LGBTQ+ History in Los Angeles County

Were you part of any queer spaces in Pasadena or nearby cities? I'd love to hear your story! My name is Stefanie Esteban (pronouns she/they), and I'm working with Pasadena Heritage to document and preserve queer spaces across Los Angeles County, with a special focus on Pasadena. I'm interested in learning how events in other parts of LA County might have shaped queer spaces in Pasadena, since what happens in LA often affects nearby cities.

- Share your story through an interview
- Help preserve our community's history for future generations
- Voluntary and confidential

Interested? Contact Stefanie at scesteban@cpp.edu or 310-972-8141.

The Cal Poly Pomona Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved this research under protocol IRB 24-209.

The Cal Poly Pomona Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved for conduct this research involving human subjects under protocol IRB 24 - 209

Example Instagram post:

Figure 2: Graphics courtesy of Canva.com

Example Flyer:

Figure 3: Graphics courtesy of Canva.com

Debriefing Statement

Thank you for participating in this study on the documentation and preservation of queer spaces in Pasadena. Your contribution is invaluable in helping to preserve the history and experiences of these important spaces.

The purpose of this study is to collect and analyze stories, memories, and archival materials related to queer spaces in Pasadena, with the goal of contributing to the historical record and fostering a better understanding of their significance. By sharing your experiences, you are helping to ensure that future generations can learn about and appreciate the role of queer spaces in shaping community identity and resilience.

Please be assured that the confidentiality of your participation is protected. Pseudonyms will be used to maintain anonymity unless you have specifically given consent for your real name to be used. All personally identifiable information will be securely stored and will not be linked to your interview responses.

If, at any point, you feel uncomfortable with your participation, you have the right to withdraw from the study, even after today's session. Should you wish to withdraw or have any questions about your involvement, please contact me at **scesteban@cpp.edu** or **310-972-8141**.

Thank you again for your valuable contribution to this important project.

Best regards,
Stefanie Esteban

The Cal Poly Pomona Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved for conduct this research involving human subjects under protocol IRB 24 - 209

Interview Questions

Historical and Cultural Context

1. Can you describe the first queer-friendly space you remember in Pasadena and what it meant to you or the community?
2. What kinds of spaces (e.g., bars, community centers, parks) were significant to the LGBTQ+ community in Pasadena in the past?
3. Do you know of any specific events or milestones in Pasadena's history that marked progress or setbacks for LGBTQ+ visibility and rights?
4. How has the character or atmosphere of queer spaces in Pasadena changed over the years?
5. Are there any locations in Pasadena that you feel have been "queer spaces" informally but aren't widely recognized as such?

Personal Experiences

6. What role have queer spaces in Pasadena played in your life personally?
7. Can you share a memory of a meaningful or transformative experience you had in a queer space in Pasadena?
8. Were/are there certain places that felt safer or more inclusive than others, and what made them feel that way?
9. Have you noticed differences in the types of people who frequent queer spaces in Pasadena now versus in the past?

Social Impact and Community Building

10. What role do you think queer spaces have played in building a sense of community within Pasadena's LGBTQ+ population?
11. How have queer spaces in Pasadena impacted the visibility and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community within the city?
12. Are there spaces that served as a bridge between the LGBTQ+ community and the broader Pasadena community?
13. How have queer spaces in Pasadena fostered a sense of solidarity, advocacy, or activism among LGBTQ+ individuals?
14. Are there specific spaces where you felt you could connect across generational, racial, or cultural lines within the LGBTQ+ community?

Preservation and Recognition

15. Which spaces do you believe should be preserved or formally recognized as part of Pasadena's LGBTQ+ history?
16. What challenges, if any, do you think exist in preserving or protecting queer spaces in Pasadena?
17. How can a project like this best honor and preserve the history of queer spaces in Pasadena?
18. Are there any stories or symbols associated with specific spaces that you think would be important to document or commemorate?
19. How do you envision the future of queer spaces in Pasadena—do you feel there's a need for more, and if so, what should they look like?

Closing

20. Is there anything else you'd like to share about queer spaces in Pasadena or ideas on how they can be preserved and celebrated?

GLOSSARY

LGBTQIA+ TERMINOLOGY

- **Cisgender (cis):** The opposite of transgender. A person whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Enby**: phonetic way to say *nonbinary*, referring to someone whose gender identity isn't strictly male or female.
- **Gender Expansive:** term for people who don't fit neatly into traditional binary gender categories of male and female.
- **Gender Identity:** A person's deep, internal sense of their gender, which may or may not match the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Intersex:** people born with physical sex traits (like chromosomes, hormones, or anatomy) that don't fit typical definitions of male or female. It's a natural variation in human biology, and many intersex people have been subjected to medical interventions without consent to make their bodies fit binary norms.
- **Latine:** gender-neutral alternative to *Latino/Latina*, used in Spanish-speaking communities to be more inclusive without relying on the English-influenced *Latinx*.
- **LGBTQIA+:** Stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer, with the plus sign (+) acknowledging that there are more identities beyond these five (like nonbinary, asexual, and intersex folks).
- **Queer:** A broad term that includes anyone who isn't straight or cisgender. Some people use it as an identity, while others see it as a political stance. It's been reclaimed by many in the LGBTQIA+ community, but it's still a slur in some contexts, so use with awareness.
- **Sexual Orientation:** Who you're romantically, emotionally, or sexually attracted to (if anyone).
- **TGI:** Short for *Trans, Gender Nonconforming, and Intersex*
- **Transgender (trans):** Someone whose gender identity doesn't match the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Two-Spirit:** A term used by some Indigenous communities to describe people with both masculine and feminine spirits. It's not just about gender or sexuality—it's also a spiritual and cultural role.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION & URBAN PLANNING TERMS

- **Archival Research:** involves digging into historical documents, records, photos, and other preserved materials, often from libraries, museums, or digital collections, to uncover information about the past.
- **Built Environment: T**he human-made surroundings we live, work, and move through, like buildings, roads, parks, and infrastructure.
- **Cultural Heritage:** The traditions, places, and artifacts that a community values and passes down. This can be anything from historic buildings to oral histories, music, or even a long-standing local business.
- **Gentrification:** The process of wealthier people moving into an area, driving up housing prices, and pushing out lower-income residents—often displacing people of color and LGBTQ+ communities in the process.
- **GIS Mapping (Geographic Information Systems):** A technology that creates detailed maps of spaces by layering different types of data. In this project, GIS is being used to document and preserve Queer spaces in Pasadena.
- **Historic Preservation:** The process of protecting old buildings, places, and stories to make sure they aren't erased. This is especially important for marginalized communities whose histories weren't always valued or recorded.
- **Hourglass Economy:** economic structure characterized by the expansion of high-income and low-income jobs, with shrinking middle class, resulting in increased income inequality
- **Oral History:** the practice of recording and sharing personal stories and firsthand experiences, usually through interviews.
- **Public vs. Private Space: t**he distinction between areas that are open and accessible to everyone, like parks, sidewalks, and libraries (public space), and areas that are owned or controlled by individuals or organizations, like homes, businesses, or gated communities (private space).
- **Queer Urbanism:** An approach to urban planning that centers LGBTQ+ experiences, advocating for inclusive spaces that challenge heteronormative designs.

- **Qualitative Research:** understanding people's experiences, perspectives, and emotions through methods like interviews, observations, and open-ended questions.
- **Radical Planning**: A community-driven approach to urban development that challenges traditional top-down planning methods, emphasizing social justice and grassroots participation. The term was popularized by urban planner John Friedmann in his 1987 book, *Planning in the Public Domain: From Knowledge to Action*.
- **Redlining:** A racist housing policy from the 1930s-1960s where banks refused to give loans to people in predominantly Black, immigrant, and lower-income neighborhoods. The effects of redlining still shape cities today.
- **Zoning Laws:** City rules that decide what types of buildings and businesses can exist in certain areas. These laws have historically been used to exclude certain groups, including LGBTQ+ spaces.

QUEER SPACES & SOCIAL JUSTICE

- **BIPOC**: Black, Indigenous, and people of color.
- **Gay Bar:** A bar or nightclub that has historically been a safe haven for LGBTQ+ people. For much of history, bars were some of the only places where Queer people could gather openly.
- **Community Archive:** A collection of documents, photos, and personal stories put together by a community instead of a traditional institution. These archives are crucial for preserving LGBTQ+ history since official records often ignored or erased it.
- **Gender Policing:** when society or individuals enforce rigid expectations about how people should behave based on their gender. It involves criticizing or punishing someone for not conforming to traditional gender roles or stereotypes, whether it's about how they dress, speak, or act.
- **Heteronormativity:** assumption that being straight and cisgender is the default, shaping social norms, policies, and expectations in ways that exclude or marginalize LGBTQ+ people.
- **Homonormativity:** The idea that some Queer people are seen as "acceptable" (think white, middle-class, monogamous, non-political) while others, like trans folks, people of color, and those who don't fit into traditional relationships, are pushed aside.

- **Intersectionality:** The idea that people experience discrimination in different ways depending on how their identities (race, gender, sexuality, class, disability, etc.) overlap.
- **Lavender Scare:** The anti-LGBTQ+ purge of the 1950s and ‘60s, where Queer people were fired from government jobs under the excuse that they were a “security risk.”
- **Oral History:** A method of preserving history through interviews and personal storytelling, often used when written records don’t exist (or weren’t made) about certain communities.
- **Participatory Historic Preservation:** A way of preserving history that involves the people who lived it, instead of just relying on experts. This means collecting oral histories, working with community members, and making sure history isn’t just told from a top-down perspective.
- **Public Memory:** The way history is collectively remembered and told. Who gets statues, who gets street names, and whose history is taught in schools? All of that is public memory, and it’s often shaped by power and privilege.
- **Queer Space:** A place where LGBTQ+ people can exist, gather, and be themselves without fear. It can be a physical location (like a bar or community center) or something more symbolic (like an underground zine or online space).
- **Queer Theory:** a way of thinking that challenges traditional ideas about gender and sexuality.
- **Trans-Profiling:** the practice of targeting or treating someone differently based on assumptions about their gender identity, particularly if they are transgender. It's when people make judgments or assumptions about someone’s gender expression or identity and act on those biases in ways that can be harmful or discriminatory**.**