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## **The Invisible Histories Project: Documenting the Queer South**

James L. Baggett, Joshua Burford, Maigen Sullivan, and Catherine Oseas Champion

### **Introduction**

There is much work waiting to be done to document and better understand the history and experiences of LGBTQ people in the heart of the American South. No book-length surveys of LGBTQ history exist for Georgia or Alabama, and there are few studies of communities within those states. For Mississippi, we have John Howard's classic *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History*, but Howard's book is more than 20 years old. Robert W. Bailey's *Gay Politics, Urban Politics* is a national study of LGBTQ activism that includes a chapter on Birmingham, Alabama.<sup>1</sup> But countless books, articles, theses, dissertations, documentary films, exhibitions, historic site nominations, walking tours, and online resources remain to be created. Many LGBTQ communities await the opportunity to help preserve and engage with their histories. The staff and partners of the Invisible Histories Project are working to help create these possibilities.

### **Invisible Histories Project**

The Invisible Histories Project (IHP) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization researching, locating, collecting, and making accessible to the community the rich and diverse history of the LGBTQ South. Specifically, IHP is actively collecting in Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia. IHP acts as an intermediary between LGBTQ communities and institutions—libraries, museums, and universities. IHP strives to break barriers between organizations and local communities to ensure that preservation and research occur in a co-productive and relationship-centered way.

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<sup>1</sup> John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) Robert W. Bailey, *Gay Politics, Urban Politics: Identity and Economics in the Urban Setting* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). There is at least one thesis on an Alabama LGBTQ topic. See Patricia Todd, "The Impact of the Ryan White Care Act Funding on Alabama" (M.A. Thesis, University of Alabama at Birmingham, 1994).

Unlike a more traditional archive, IHP works with various repositories and partners (universities, libraries, archives, and museums) to keep collections local where they matter the most. IHP is a community-centered initiative that relies heavily on relationship building and resource sharing. IHP acts as a conduit of knowledge by connecting archivally and historically underrepresented LGBTQ individuals and organizations to resourced institutions. IHP assists partner institutions with processing materials; connecting with donors; researching materials in the emerging field of Southern Queer Studies; connecting with others in their state and nationally doing similar work; and returning community knowledge through exhibits, publications, and events. IHP's goal is to preserve marginalized histories and create a historical record of both everyday Queer Southern life and significant movements within the region.<sup>2</sup>

IHP's primary collecting focus is on physical materials—manuscripts, publications, photographs, ephemera and so on—as well as digital items related to Queer and Trans individuals and organizations in the Deep South. IHP also partners with other organizations and individuals to conduct oral histories. When oral history projects do occur, physical materials are always requested either before or after the interview to give a more complete understanding of the person's experience. Conversely, oral histories have been conducted as a result of someone donating their physical materials. IHP prioritizes at-risk oral histories which we consider those conducted with individuals 65 years and older and/or in poor

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<sup>2</sup> By community we primarily are referring to LGBTQ people and organizing within the US South. LGBTQ individuals and organizations (AIDS organizations for example) specifically targeting or providing services to LGBTQ people are the primary demographic for archival donations. Additionally, an organization and/or business owned/founded/operated by LGBTQ people is also of interest. We refer to some organizations who are not LGBTQ specific but provide significant overlap in the community as "Queer adjacent." As a hypothetical example, a nonprofit working on urban farming that has significant LGBTQ staffing, participants, and/or events would be accepted, but would not be as high a priority. For educational and other outreach, we also mean local communities in general including heterosexual and cisgender people. While IHP's focus and purpose centers on Queer and Trans people in the South, we recognize the importance of sharing honest representations of LGBTQ organizing within the region to those who are not within that community.

health. Exceptions to this may be made due to the historical significance of the person.

To understand how and why IHP operates, it is important to acknowledge its history within the context of US Southern culture. The Invisible Histories Project began with three questions:

1. Is there a Queer and Trans history of the US South?
2. If this history does exist, is it robust enough to research?
3. How would such materials be located and preserved if they did in fact exist?

The first question may seem obvious. Of course, there must be a history, at some level and to some degree. But when we think about stereotypes of the US South, specifically the Queer South, we are faced with notions of isolation, invisibility, fear, and a region supposedly 20 years behind the rest of the country. LGBTQ history is desperately underrepresented in mainstream narratives and education. In 2017, the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that only one in five K-12 students had inclusive curriculum that included positive representations of LGBTQ people, history, or events in any coursework or classroom. Further, almost the same number of respondents were taught negative information about LGBTQ people, history, or events.<sup>3</sup> Even if students want to access LGBTQ materials on their own, less than 20% of reported textbooks have any positive mention of LGBTQ people, events, places, or issues--though this number is growing due to large textbook purchasers like California requiring some level of LGBTQ history in their curriculum--and only 41% had access to LGBTQ-related materials in their school library.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph G. Kosciw, Emily A. Greytak, Adrian D. Zongrone, Caitlin M. Clark, and Nhan L. Truong, *The 2017 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools* (New York: GLSEN, 2018), 55, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED590243.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Jackie Botts, "ABCs of LGBTQ history mandated for more US public schools," Reuters, May 3, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-lgbt-education/abcs-of-lgbtq-history-mandated-for-more-us-public-schools-idUSKCN1S9120>; Kosciw, et al, 58.

When inclusion of LGBTQ history does occur, it is often around large urban centers, particularly on the East and West Coasts. The Stonewall Riots and Harvey Milk are good examples of events and individuals covered in inclusive education. However, the South rarely makes it into our national understanding of Queer and Trans movements and history. The South is framed as a region lacking in both community, progress, and progressive movements. As part of the larger country, the South exists as a cautionary tale of marginalization and hyper-conservatism. For example, a cultural Queer narrative exists that large coastal cities like San Francisco or New York City are the best or only locations for Queer and Trans people to thrive. In order for LGBTQ people, those few that exist, to not only thrive but survive, they must leave their Southern homes and move to large metropolitan areas typically outside the region. This idea is not only false, but completely ignores the socio-economic realities of living in such areas, especially for LGBTQ people who are more likely to live in poverty than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts.<sup>5</sup>

While critiques of Southern issues are valid and needed in order to address marginalization, poverty, and issues of access, the South often becomes a scapegoat for other regions to avoid addressing their own issues of racism, homophobia, transphobia, and socioeconomic inequality. Further, these stereotypes erase the critical and widespread work of community organizers and activist throughout the South. The South is, and always has been, the site of great community resistance and organizing although it may look quite different than other regions. The invisibility of Southern LGBTQ history is even more egregious when looking at issues of population versus representation. Instead of being a place with few Queer and Trans people, the South is home to largest percentage of LGBTQ people living in the US. Between 33-35% of all LGBTQ people in the US live in the South—this compares to 19% in the Northeast, 20% in the Midwest, 8% in the Mountain states, and 17% on the West Coast.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In the most simplistic terms, cisgender refers to people whose gender identity and orientation align within the social norms of their sex assigned at birth. Or in other words, people who are not transgender or gender nonconforming.

<sup>6</sup> See Amira Hasenbush, Andrew R. Flores, Angeliki Kastanis, Brad Sears, and Gary J. Gates, (2014). “The LGBT Divide: A Data Portrait of LGBT People in the

Further, despite the whitewashing of LGBTQ national organizations and historical records, LGBT people in all regions are more likely to be Black or Latinx than in the non-LGBT population—population ratios specifically for the South are, 17% of the non-LGBTQ population are Black compared to 22% LGBTQ people in the same racial demographic and 13% of the non-LGBTQ population compared to 16% LGBTQ for Latinx people.<sup>7</sup> Mississippi has one of the highest percentages—33% for the state as compared to an average of 22% for the nation—of same-sex households raising children under 18 years of age despite few legal protections for LGBTQ people in the state.<sup>8</sup> If we only consider these statistics, then we have the answers to the first two questions. Yes, there is a history and, yes, it is robust enough to research.

The third question was more complicated to answer. We know that institutions are often hesitant to visibly align themselves with LGBTQ and social justice efforts or may be blatantly discriminatory. There was great concern that while this history existed, perhaps there would be nowhere to archive it and no one to research it. Luckily, these concerns were as baseless as the stereotypes previously mentioned. Instead of struggling to find partners, IHP has located a wealth of enthusiastic, supportive, and innovative archives and university departments who want to play a key role in the preservation and research of LGBTQ history in the Deep South.

### **IHP Repository Partners**

IHP officially began picking up archival collections in February 2018 when co-founders Joshua Burford and Maigen Sullivan left their higher education positions to work on the project full-time in Alabama. In April 2019, IHP received a \$300,000 Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant allowing for the expansion of the IHP model into Mississippi and Georgia (excluding the Atlanta metropolitan area) over two years.

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Midwestern, Mountain & Southern States. The Williams Institute (December 2014). Retrieved from: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/17m036q5>. See “Out in the South, Part Three,” Funders for LGBTQ Issues web site at <https://lgbtfunders.org/initiatives/ots/>.

<sup>7</sup> Hasenbush, *et al.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

The model for the IHP expansion into Mississippi and Georgia is based on IHP's work in Alabama. From the beginning of the Invisible Histories Project it was crucial that we have a way to vet potential repository partners. This meant that we would need to do extensive research into the existing LGBTQ holdings of potential repositories, their record of involvement with the local Queer community, and their reputation with local Queer folks. While a diverse range of repositories of different sizes and institutional affiliation would provide a greater number of options for donors to work with and allow us more flexibility with collection strategies for materials, it was equally important that we make certain that our repositories were ready to do this type of work. Local LGBTQ communities in the South and around the country have a well-earned skepticism of museums and archives. This skepticism stems from years of being ignored, or worse, having our collections left to languish through an intentional process of non-processing and inaccessibility due to incorrect or homophobic language for metadata. One example is a university repository in Alabama that changed all the collections dealing with sexuality to the search term "Women's studies" or "Gender studies," making the collections harder to find.

In the fall of 2017, IHP reached out to the Birmingham Public Library Archives and to Special Collections at the University of Alabama Birmingham to have a conversation about becoming the first two archival repositories for IHP in Alabama. Birmingham Public Library had a proven track record of working with local LGBTQ communities, both through their collecting and their community outreach programs. UAB Special Collections made a great deal of sense for many reasons, including access to graduate students in Public Health to make use of HIV/AIDS collections and their staff's very public support of LGBTQ people in Birmingham. These two partners helped us to shape our outreach for additional support from other repositories in the state as well as the Memorandum of Understanding that we now require from our partners.

Each of our IHP Alabama partners provides a unique role in the preservation and access of new LGBTQ collections. BPL is our main partner and they have been very supportive in our efforts to get the community engaged as donors of new materials and consumers

of the materials that we have collected. Likewise, UAB Special Collections lends us the credibility of a well-respected institution and gives our Queer health-related materials a good home. The Alabama Department of Archives and History in Montgomery reached out to work with us very early on in the process to become our third repository. Their highly advanced digital librarianship and staff dedicated to textile preservation have been crucial to the success of IHP in Alabama. IHP has also been exploring a partnership with the University of South Alabama in Mobile to become a partner after several members of the local Mobile Queer community expressed the desire for their materials to remain locally accessible. This has allowed IHP to live up to its mission to keep materials as close to or in the communities they originate from in order to have the greatest impact possible. Coupled with a plan for high-impact digitization of Queer and Trans newspapers, newsletters, and magazines, IHP is working very hard to draw attention to its repository partners and bring in new researchers from universities across the country and individuals in local LGBTQ communities.

### **Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts**

As IHP developed and evolved, the Birmingham Public Library Archives became the project's primary repository. BPL's earlier efforts to collect LGBTQ material had yielded some success, but after partnering with IHP the Archives' Queer collections grew substantially. Working with IHP and independently—but always in close consultation with IHP—BPL has acquired the records of organizations such as Birmingham AIDS Outreach, West Alabama AIDS Outreach, Central Alabama Pride, Druid City Pride (Tuscaloosa), Black Birmingham Pride, and the Mystic Krewe of Caritas. The Archives has acquired the papers of more than 20 individuals, including the papers of Patricia Todd, Alabama's first openly gay state legislator, and Timothy Holder, Alabama's first openly gay and politically active Episcopal priest. These collections include correspondence, journals, publications, photographs, scrapbooks, t-shirts, and parade banners. BPL accepts hardcopy and born-digital collections. Through the work of the Archives staff, with assistance from interns from the University of Alabama and other universities as well as funding support from the Friends Foundation



of the Birmingham Public Library, almost all of these collections are processed and available for research.

BPL staff developed two projects that complement and draw from the work of IHP. The larger of the two projects is the Birmingham LGBTQ Historic Sites Survey. Archives staff and interns have used property records, city directories, LGBTQ publications, police records, oral history interviews, and word of mouth to identify and document more than 30 historic sites, including bars and clubs, buildings associated with LGBTQ organizations, businesses, churches, and public spaces connected to LGBTQ events such as Pride Parades and some of the state's first same sex marriage ceremonies. Several of these sites will be added to the Alabama Historical Commission's online Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage. These will be the first LGBTQ sites designated as historic by the State of Alabama.<sup>9</sup>

The historic site material is being digitized and will be made available online for researchers and the general public. BPL staff hope this material will provide a starting place for scholarly researchers, students, and public historians looking at Queer history in Birmingham, developing historic site tours and walking tours, and creating historic site nominations. Staff also hope this online material will be of interest to members of the general public who wish to learn more about Birmingham's Queer history or locate and visit historic sites.

The second ongoing initiative is BPL's participation in the Internet Archives' Community Webs Project. Funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the Community Webs Project is a consortium of libraries throughout the United States working to capture and preserve local Internet resources. BPL is in the third year of its effort to archive LGBTQ web sites and social media throughout Alabama.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to these larger projects, the BPL Archives is also creating a reference collection of books on LGBTQ history and life, conducting oral history interviews with an emphasis on Birmingham's gay bars, and documenting current events. In June of

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<sup>9</sup> For more information on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage see <https://ahc.alabama.gov/alabamaregister.aspx>.

<sup>10</sup> See "Empowering Public Libraries to Create Community History Web Archives," at <https://archive-it.org/blog/projects/community-webs/>.

2015, BPL Archivist Jim Baggett and Assistant Archivist Catherine Champion took a camera and digital recorder into Linn Park, a large park adjacent to the Birmingham Public Library and the county courthouse, where a crowd had gathered to celebrate the legalization of same sex marriage in Alabama. Baggett and Champion photographed the gathering and several wedding ceremonies, and conducted brief oral history interviews with couples who married that day.<sup>11</sup>

## **Internships**

Within the structure of IHP and its partners, the use of internships from second year library school students has been crucial to making collections accessible. IHP developed a coursework and internship partnership with the School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS) at the University of Alabama at the beginning of the project in order to make sure that partner institutions would not have to reallocate existing staff to process our collections. Since Fall of 2018, IHP has placed five master's students in archiving in repositories to process collections and work on descriptive language for collections. Interns are getting course credit while learning from experienced archivists in the field. Students digitize at-risk collections and create a more robust social media presence for the materials IHP collects. This partnership with UA SLIS, under the guidance of Dr. Robert Riter, is also developing coursework for students focused on the unique challenges of community-based archives. IHP has had over 40 graduate and undergraduate interns working on projects ranging from archival processing to conducting oral histories to pulling metadata from publications to locating potential collections and partners. IHP is also placing interns in both Mississippi and Georgia to work with partner repositories there and conducting online research internships related to all three states in which IHP works.

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<sup>11</sup> For more information on the BPL Archives see <http://www.cobpl.org/locations/central/archives/>.

## **Expansion Beyond Alabama**

After the Mellon grant was in place, Invisible Histories Project began its plans to expand into Mississippi and Georgia in an effort to increase the scope of the collections available related to the Queer history of the Deep South. The choice of Mississippi and Georgia as the first two states for expansion was based on the amount of shared LGBTQ history and people between the three states. Nationwide, people tend to think of Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia as sibling states that are all too often lumped together as falling behind the rest of the country on metrics related to physical health, access to education, and other social factors. For IHP, these states also share extensive Queer cultural influences and individuals. This sharing happens when there is a conjunction of geographic proximity and a similarity of community size coupled with shared political barriers that lead to the development of similar community structures.

From the outset IHP knew there would be challenges to starting a site in Mississippi that had as much to do with perception of Queer community as it did with the geography of a state that is primarily rural. Basing the original site in Birmingham, Alabama, gave IHP a chance to center its physical location that allows both the staff and donors an easy place to meet and drop off collections. Alabama, while not generally thought of as a state with large urban centers, does boast several larger cities that have become hubs for LGBTQ people seeking the anonymity of urban life. Only Jackson, Mississippi meets the criteria for urban space and that leaves a lot of area to cover.

Oxford, Mississippi, was chosen as the site for IHP-MS and a partnership was developed with the University of Mississippi because the campus was already engaged with some aspects of preservation related to Queer and Trans life in the state. In April of 2018, Burford was contacted by Dr. Jessie Wilkerson to speak to a new course related to Queer oral histories in Oxford. After this initial visit and a consultation with campus partners, the IHP-MS Oxford site was set for a roll out in May 2019. The partnerships at UM consists of faculty in the department of history, faculty in the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, staff in the Sarah Isom Center (which supports LGBTQ students), and the Department of Archives & Special Collections. This starting point for Mississippi allowed

IHP and the University of Mississippi to build a plan for the entire state that included a timeline for research of potential collections, a plan for outreach and initial contact of donors, and an exploration of various events that would lead to the collection of new materials.

It became apparent that partnerships in Jackson, Mississippi, would be necessary for the success of the project. Based on the model in Alabama, a diverse range of repositories was necessary to ensure donors would be confident in the health of their collections and for the correct preservation of differing types of materials—there are large numbers of textiles and ephemera within Queer collections. IHP reached out to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in order to secure a possible repository for the state. The addition of the State Archives enables increased collecting of larger scale items such as bar memorabilia, textiles, etc. Their participation also creates a tangible connection between local Jackson LGBTQ community members and Invisible Histories, which helps to grow both local collecting and also referral collecting in more rural parts of the state. As of summer 2020, the process of diversifying repositories in Mississippi continues as IHP seeks partners in the coastal regions of the state and in more rural areas with partners in public libraries.

In the Spring of 2020, IHP began a partnership with the School of Library & Information Science at the University of Southern Mississippi. This partnership will mirror IHP's partnership with the University of Alabama School of Library & Information Studies and will facilitate the placement of second year master's students in repositories across Mississippi. Southern Miss's robust distance education program for library science will allow IHP to place students across the state and will increase the amount of practical archival experience these students receive. The first two students to work directly with IHP will begin their work cataloging existing collections, doing a survey of search terminology metadata in catalogues, and will locate and contact potential donors across the state. IHP has collected 10 LGBTQ archival collections in Mississippi as of the Summer 2020 and an additional 40 are being researched at the time this article is being written.

The expansion into Georgia began in March 2020 almost exactly a week before most of the country went into isolation due to the Covid-19 pandemic. For the Georgia expansion, it was decided

that IHP would focus on smaller cities and rural areas as the priority for collecting new archival materials. This was a decision based on the premise of being a good partner to other LGBTQ organizations such as the Georgia LGBTQ Archives Project that had already started collecting materials in metro Atlanta. This partnership, which includes university partners like Georgia State University and community-based archives at the Atlanta History Center, would not exclude IHP from researching or working with donors anywhere in the state, but would allow us to refer collections already under the collecting scope of the Georgia LGBTQ Archives Project directly to them. The site chosen for IHP-GA was the University of West Georgia in Carrollton. West Georgia is a smaller university but it offers one of the best public history programs in the South and their certification program in museum studies gives IHP another opportunity to offer students a chance to work with LGBTQ collections in a museum setting. IHP-GA is fortunate to be working with Dr. Stephanie Chalifoux and Dr. Ann McCleary in the department of history and these two faculty have helped to shape both our approach to collecting in Georgia and the experience that graduate and undergraduate students are having working with IHP. In Summer of 2020, the first two graduate students assigned to IHP began an extensive online research project to locate and map LGBTQ sites in Alabama. Once this project is completed, there will be additional opportunities for mapping in both Mississippi and Georgia. Dr. Chalifoux has also included archival work and research into her courses that allow students the opportunity to work with donors and to get a sense of what LGBTQ archival collecting is about. IHP estimates that there will be a similar number of collections located and preserved in Georgia as has been seen in Alabama. IHP-GA is also working directly with the Georgia LGBTQ Archives Project to make sure that we are streamlining the process and that even more Queer collections are preserved.

## **Conclusion**

In many Queer communities in the South people are anxious to preserve their history and see it integrated into the larger story of their cities, states, and the region. Students and scholars are hungry for sources that will allow them to explore LGBTQ communities, families, churches, organizations, businesses, travel, music, art and

other aspects of Queer history and life. We cannot adequately and respectfully document the history of any marginalized community until the people in that community are ready and feel included. The Queer South is ready, and the staffs of the Invisible Histories Project and its partner institutions are running to keep up. In many ways we are no longer leading this effort. It is leading us.

**James L. Baggett** (he/him/his) is head of the Department of Archives and Manuscripts at the Birmingham Public Library and archivist for the City of Birmingham. He holds the MLIS degree from the University of Alabama and an MA in Public History from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Currently the vice-president/president-elect of the Alabama Historical Association, he has also served as president of the Society of Alabama Archivists and a trustee for several historical associations. He has authored two books on Alabama history and edited three others; written for magazines, newspapers, and scholarly journals; and writes the “Reading Birmingham” book column for the online news site BirminghamWatch. As head of the BPL Archives, he has focused on developing the department’s collections documenting Alabama’s Civil Rights Movement, environmentalism in Alabama, the immigrant experience, Jewish history and life, the history of the Episcopal Church in Alabama, and the history of Alabama’s LGBTQ communities.

**Joshua Burford** (he/him/his) is an archivist, an activist, and a radical educator with over 20 years’ experience working with Queer communities and social justice education. Josh is passionate about the preservation and documentation of Southern Queer History and how we can make this history more accessible to the Queer community. Josh holds an

MA in American Studies with a focus on Queer history, and a Masters in Library and Information Studies with a focus on archiving. In 2014, Josh co-curated the first ever Queer history exhibits at the Levine Museum of the New South in Charlotte, NC. Josh is also currently working as co-chair for the committee for a new Southern Queer history project called “Queer History South” which is in the process of building physical teams and a virtual presence that will connect historians, oral historians, archivists, curators, and community activists around the work of preservation and access of Southern Queer history. Josh is the director of outreach & lead archivist for the Invisible Histories Project. In 2019 Josh was selected by NBC as part of their Pride50 that honors 50 individuals who have shaped Queer history since Stonewall.

**Maigen Sullivan** (she/her/hers) is co-founder and director of research & development for the Invisible Histories Project, a nonprofit working with institutions and communities to collect, preserve, research and make accessible the rich and diverse histories of the LGBTQ Deep South. Maigen is adjunct Women & Gender Studies faculty at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and has also taught at The University of Alabama (UA). Maigen earned a BA in History with a minor in Political Science and an MA in Women’s Studies in the Department of Gender & Race Studies from UA. Maigen is currently working on her dissertation for a PhD in Educational Studies of Diverse Populations in the School of Education at UAB with an anticipated graduation date of December, 2021. Her research focuses on how public universities engage with marginalized communities by examining university support and community engagement issues experienced by university led LGBTQ public history and archiving projects throughout the South. Maigen,

through IHP, was named the 2020 Society of American Archivists Innovator of the Year and a 2020 National Association of Multicultural Education Emerging Scholar. Maigen has been an educator, advocate, and researcher for social justice and gender and sexuality issues for over a decade.

**Catherine Oseas Champion** (she/her/hers) is the assistant archivist at the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts. She holds an MLIS from the University of Alabama. Through her work with individuals, communities, and organizations she has advanced her commitment to expanding both representation within and access to collections both physically and digitally. Catherine founded the student chapter of Society of American Archivists at the University of Alabama. She currently serves on the steering committee for the Public Library and Special Collections section of SAA.