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"Death can't touch them now": AIDS response and memorialization in Louisville, Kentucky, 1982-1992.

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“DEATH CAN’T TOUCH THEM NOW”: AIDS RESPONSE AND MEMORIALIZATION IN LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY, 1982-1992

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ABSTRACT

“DEATH CAN’T TOUCH THEM NOW”: AIDS RESPONSE AND MEMORIALIZATION IN LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY, 1982-1992

Olivia Beutel

April 11, 2022

This thesis aims to address the role of the queer community in Louisville, Kentucky during the AIDS epidemic. Beginning with the first reported AIDS death in the city in 1983 throughout the 1980s, dialogue focused on those living with AIDS, specifically on education for prevention and aid to those afflicted by the disease. Individuals in the queer community—gay men, lesbians, bisexual men and women, transgender men and women, and others—created resources that were not being provided by the larger city government. Then, in the 1990s, national attention to the AIDS Memorial Quilt encouraged people to participate in rituals of commemoration, loss, and grieving. With the rising incidence rate of the disease in the city, more Louisvillians likewise shifted to memorialization and honoring those who had died. This newfound participation in memorialization, however, was always tied to existing goals of education, awareness, and support that had dominated since the 1980s.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2021, David Williams, a gay man and lay historian, described the gay male scene in Louisville, Kentucky in the 1970s and early 1980s as “a bubbling mixture of babyboomers from every corner of the community and all walks of life. Every Saturday night they danced on the lighted floor at the Badlands or Downtowner or put dollars in the hands of all those Fabulous Fakes [drag queens].”[1] However, this exciting burgeoning scene would soon come to a halt with the outbreak of a disease that would impact the country, and the queer community specifically: AIDS. While the epidemic spread rapidly in the 1980s through larger metropolitan areas such as New York and San Francisco, it impacted smaller cities such as Louisville more slowly. Sam Dorr, a gay man and leader in the local queer community, remembered hearing a person speak at the University of Louisville in the early 1980s about a strange disease that was affecting gay men in California, but Dorr also recalled that he and others had no clue what it was or what was about to happen.[2] Another gay man living in Louisville at the time recalled in 1982 starting to hear “rumblings of this gay cancer” that was infecting men in California.[3] But Louisvillians would soon be forced to confront and respond to the impact of AIDS on their city.

Similarly to cities across the country, as the epidemic spread, the topic of AIDS became part of Louisville’s public dialogue. From the first reported AIDS death in the city in 1983 throughout the 1980s, that dialogue focused on those living with AIDS, specifically on education for prevention and aid to those afflicted by the disease. Individuals in the queer community—gay men, lesbians, bisexual men and women, and others—created resources that were not being provided by the larger city government. However, some local individuals, Frank Simon and Paul Cameron, and organizations such as Citizens for Decency through Law and Louisville Families Against AIDS, responded negatively, focusing on the threat those with the illness posed, spreading misinformation, and stoking homophobic attitudes. Then, in the 1990s, national attention to the AIDS Memorial Quilt encouraged people to participate in rituals of commemoration, loss, and grieving. With the rising incidence rate of the disease in the city, more Louisvillians likewise shifted to memorialization and honoring those who had died. As a result, local organizations, including the Speed Art Museum and the Student Government Association and Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Alliance (GLOBAL) at the University of Louisville, partnered with NAMES, the national group responsible for the Quilt, in order to bring it to Louisville. This newfound participation in memorialization, however, was always tied to existing goals of education, awareness, and support that had dominated since the 1980s.

Throughout this thesis, the terms “queer” and “gay” are both used. In making reference to the historical past, the term “gay” is used. The majority of the first-person recollections used in this thesis use the term and therefore, in referring to people and events of the past, I continue to use it. However, in order to have a more inclusive analysis, the term “queer” is also used. Traditionally used throughout the twentieth century as a negative term, “queer” has been reclaimed by the queer community as a neutral, even positive, descriptive term.[4] Utilizing the term rather than gay encompasses all those associated within the queer community. In addition, the term “gay” was utilized in the queer community before it gained “more mainstream acceptance” in the 1970s.[5] Moreover, by utilizing both of these terms, this thesis recognizes that those involved in queer organizations throughout the decade were not solely gay men. When referencing the “queer community” throughout this paper, I’m referring to the gay men, lesbians, bisexual men and women, and transgender activists who comprised the queer associations in Louisville during the 1980s and 1990s. In doing so, I hope to encompass the contributions of all involved and all who gave their time and efforts to responding to the AIDS epidemic.

Historiography

The major work done related to this thesis can be split into four different categories: the history of AIDS, the activist response to the disease, the AIDS Memorial Quilt as a reflection of the national dialogue and memorialization around the disease, and the history of the queer community and the AIDS epidemic in Louisville. As the first decade of AIDS approached conclusion, Elizabeth Fee and Daniel Fox pulled together scholars from a variety of disciplines to explore the many ways AIDS was being examined and understood. They and other scholars argued that the disease was similar to other plagues of the past, in that it defied a cure, public officials were indifferent to the sufferings of those infected, and members of minority populations were victimized and stigmatized.[6] Journalist Randy Shilts elaborated on one of those arguments, documenting the negative impact of the lack of government and federal response to AIDS in his work, *And the Band Played On*.[7] However, over the course of the 1990s, AIDS became more distinctive from historical epidemics. As AIDS continued to impact the U.S., historians needed to understand and assess how AIDS was being handled contemporarily rather than the ways in which it was similar or dissimilar from historical epidemics. It was then that scholars began to apply the lenses of literature, medical and scientific knowledge, politics, and activism to study the impact of AIDS.[8]

As activism and social movement organizations became more prevalent in the fight against AIDS, scholars began to focus on their actions, producing works on the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and the role of women, and more specifically, lesbians, in AIDS activism. While early descriptions of ACT UP focused on white males in the organization such as David France's *How to Survive a Plague*, Sarah Schulman's *Let the Record Show* used oral histories to tell the multifaceted and complex story of the group.[9] In addition, Deborah Gould in her work, *Moving Politics*, argued the importance of emotion in the decisions of AIDS activism and how ACT UP began, progressed, and declined.[10] Avram Finkelstein adds to the story the role of art in activism and how it brought attention to AIDS. However, each of these works draw mainly on the activism and actions of those in the larger metropolitan cities of New York and Chicago.

Research on the AIDS Memorial Quilt has drawn from a variety of fields, including art history, psychology, and the social sciences. For example, Maxine Borowsky Junge, an art therapist, argued that the act of creating a panel functions as a therapeutic process akin to art therapy and in addition, contributes to the overall cultural memory.[11] Others such as Carole Blair and Neil Michael approached the AIDS Memorial Quilt by examining the commemorative process it provides for the public rather than just for those actively contributing to the quilt. They argued that the AIDS Memorial Quilt builds on the precedent of the Vietnam Veterans Wall in that both push against the strictures of public commemoration.[12] Erin Rand compared the mourning and grief that are the focus of AIDS Memorial Quilt events to the anger and militancy exhibited in other forms of AIDS activism. She argued that through the AIDS Memorial Quilt, gay men became a subject to be mourned. By attaching gay men to death and disease, she argued that they were only remembered in regards to their death and overall, AIDS.[13] Various other authors discussed the emotional impacts of the Quilt on those participating in making panels or viewing them. Their discussions provide valuable context to support the emotional and personal aspects of AIDS that begin to appear following the inaugural display of the AIDS Memorial Quilt. However, despite the variety of research done on the AIDS Memorial Quilt, few authors discuss what people used it for beyond a moment of mourning. This thesis will demonstrate how activists in Louisville employed the quilt as a center point of education and action campaigns.

. Few scholars have studied the queer history of the city of Louisville, especially the topic of AIDS. Historian Catherine Fosl, along with several other authors, published a narrative report on Kentucky LGBTQ history for the National Park Service in 2016, which provides a broad view of the subject and touches briefly on the AIDS epidemic.[14] While Fosl et al's brief discussion of the epidemic does not fully explore its impact on Louisville or Kentucky, or the queer community's reaction, the overall work provides important contextual evidence of what was happening in the LGBTQ community in Kentucky before the spread of the illness. In addition to Fosl's work, David Williams provided a short overview of the history of gay men in Louisville in the *Encyclopedia of Louisville*.[15] A short yet informative entry, Williams' article chronicles the rise of attention to AIDS within the city and how organizations responded to the epidemic following the first death in the state in 1983. This short piece makes a beginning, yet leaves room for more research.

Much of the previous historical research on the AIDS epidemic and the queer community has focused on the larger metropolitan areas of the United States. There's a growing amount of research on the queer South and Midwest.[16] However, research on the AIDS epidemic in the South is still relatively low compared to large cities or other regions of the United States.[17] Therefore, utilizing Louisville as a case study in this thesis provides information on the impact of and response to AIDS in southern and smaller metropolitan areas with low incidence rates of AIDS. In addition, it illustrates how activists and people with AIDS responded within places with restrictive sodomy laws which made it difficult to be an out queer person. It demonstrates the impact those low rates had on tactics adopted to confront the disease, including participation in the AIDS Quilt phenomenon. Most generally, this narrative contributes to the project of expanding our understanding of the history of queer people and of AIDS.

AIDS and the Early Response

The history of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, more commonly known as AIDS, begins in 1981. In that summer, the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported that four previously healthy gay men had been diagnosed with a rare cancer, Kaposi's sarcoma. These men also had various other infections, which were compounded by the fact that their immune systems were depleted. An unknown virus was attacking their CD4+ T cells, which were responsible for aiding the cells meant to kill viruses as well as those known to form antibodies.[18] The depletion of these cells left their bodies open to more infections, in short, leaving them immunodeficient. The Centers for Disease Control

(CDC) reported on these men, as did the *New York Times* shortly thereafter. In 1981 alone, 121 people died from AIDS.[19] However, because at the beginning of the epidemic the main victims of the disease were queer, the disease was often referred to as GRID, or Gay Related Immune Deficiency. Other marginalized and ostracized groups such as intravenous drug users and Haitians were early victims in the spread of AIDS as well. However, the largescale attribution of the disease to gay men would have dire consequences for the queer community and its members throughout the 1980s and the 1990s.

The connection between AIDS and the queer community caused the disease to remain outside of the concern of the general public. Many Americans, including journalists and policy makers, ignored what was happening on the one hand and even vilified the queer community as immoral and a threat to the public on the other. While the *New York Times* had originally reported the first cases of AIDS in the country, by the end of 1982, the newspaper had published only six total stories about AIDS when over 634 people had been diagnosed with the disease.[20] For comparison, when in October 1982 it was reported that there had been cyanide discovered in Tylenol capsules in Chicago, *New York Times* reporters "wrote a story on the Tylenol scare every day for the entire month of October and produced twenty-three more pieces in the two months after that."[21] Overall, seven people died from the Tylenol poisoning, a small number compared to the 260 who had died from AIDS by that time. The lack of reporting surrounding AIDS from such a prominent newspaper contributed to ignorance and denial of the situation from different groups of people, including in the government. Ronald Reagan himself only briefly mentioned AIDS twice before addressing the topic at the Third International

Conference on AIDS in 1987, after over 36,000 people had been diagnosed with it and nearly 21,000 had died.[22] Research and education lagged throughout the 1980s, contributing to the willful ignorance of those in power and in the public.

Instead of attempting to understand and put an end to the AIDS epidemic, those in power utilized it as a way to limit the queer community, according to Michael Bronski and other historians. Many, including conservative legislators and organizations, saw the disease's transmission through gay sex as perverse and dangerous, leading to the closure of queer spaces that they believed contributed to the problem. These spaces were often gay bathhouses and sex clubs, both of which Sarah Schulman argues led to the formation of the queer community that would help to fight AIDS. Those in power, historian Michael Bronski argues, used the closure of these spaces as a way to police the queer community rather than to promote public health.[23] This would be a largely debated issue in cities such as San Francisco and will be covered in the first chapter.

The AIDS epidemic emerged in America while there was already an anti-gay movement taking place, which will be discussed more in the first chapter. Groups and individuals involved in this homophobic movement utilized the disease as a way to discredit the queer community and spread anti-gay rhetoric. In particular, the leaders of the religious and political right attacked the queer community by blaming them for the epidemic. For example, Pat Buchanan, a conservative Catholic Republican, "wrote in a 1990 column that 'AIDS is nature's retribution for violating the laws of nature."[24] In addition to Buchanan, Jesse Helms, a U.S. Senator from North Carolina, advocated for the quarantine of those who had tested positive for AIDS.[25] Going further, William F. Buckley, a conservative public intellect who founded the *National Review*, proposed that "everyone detected with AIDS should be tattooed in the upper forearm, to protect common needle users, and on the buttocks to prevent the victimization of other homosexuals."[26] The conservative faction of the American public utilized the epidemic as a way to promote their disdain and fear of the queer community, meaning that a lot of the work that needed to be done to help those living with AIDS had to be done by the queer community itself.

One of the most well-known political groups to come out of the AIDS epidemic was ACT UP, officially the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, founded in the 1987 in New York City. ACT UP pushed the boundaries of action when it came to AIDS. The group and its members sought to put pressure on those in power to increase funding for research on AIDS and bring attention to the epidemic, often using theatrics and other techniques. For example, the group staged die-ins at various government locations, where members lay down as dead bodies in the area to draw attention. In addition to attempting to put pressure on government organizations, ACT UP and its members sought to educate themselves and others about the newest AIDS developments in science and health. Members of ACT UP have recently published large works on their involvement, the groups' history, the various subgroups within the main organization, and other information that provides a more diverse picture of the organization. However, the organization is only one part of the queer community and their response to the epidemic during the 1980s and 1990s.

Thesis Organization

This thesis is organized chronologically: beginning with Louisville in the 1980s, then briefly discussing national reaction to the AIDS Memorial Quilt, and finishing with a discussion of Louisville in the early 1990s, ending in 1992. Chapter one examines the early AIDS epidemic in Louisville in the 1980s, illustrating how it was featured in newspapers and newsletters of the city and the queer community and arguing that gay men, lesbians, and other allied individuals in the city focused on offering aid to those living with the disease as well as educating the general public. This chapter also includes the more negative reaction from local anti-queer activists who sought to use AIDS to demonize and marginalize the queer community. The second chapter focuses on the addition of public memorialization in the AIDS epidemic, specifically in Louisville. The chapter includes a discussion of the AIDS Memorial Quilt and the national response to it, then shifts focus to the 1990s in Louisville. At this time, the number of AIDS deaths had risen to double digits for the first time and there had been the establishment of a state NAMES chapter, the group associated with the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Because of this, memorialization efforts increased and the AIDS Memorial Quilt was displayed within the city multiple times. In response to this, those in the city incorporated memorialization into their approach to fighting AIDS.

CHAPTER 1

FIGHTING AN UNKNOWN EPIDEMIC: THE RESPONSE TO AIDS IN LOUISVILLE 1982-1989

By 1987, the AIDS epidemic had been raging through American cities for almost six years. In that year, Kentucky reported a total of sixty-two cases of AIDS and only forty-six deaths. The numbers in the state paled in comparison to the nationwide numbers of 29,137 cases and 16,481 deaths, along with the numbers of infections and deaths in individual cities such as New York. In November of 1986, the Louisville *Courier Journal* polled 737 Kentuckians who were eighteen years or older about their knowledge of AIDS. Out of the 737 people contacted, 95 percent of them said that they knew something about AIDS. That group of 696 people were then asked a variety of questions about AIDS in Kentucky and nationally. These questions focused on the severity of the epidemic in the state, sexual education around AIDS, the transmissibility of the disease, and fear of getting the disease. There were positives in the responses of those polled: “more than 90 percent” knew that AIDS was spread “through sexual intercourse” or “by sharing a drug needle,” “52 percent said AIDS victims should be able to go to work,” and “56 percent would let children with AIDS in schools.” However, some responses indicated a lack of knowledge about the disease. Only 14 percent of people identified the main methods of transmission without also adding an incorrect method. Common mistakes included attributing the spread of AIDS to “drinking out of the same glass” (43 percent), “being sneezed or coughed on by an AIDS victim” (32 percent), and transmission through mosquitoes (48 percent). It was this lack of accurate information that those involved in the fight against AIDS in Louisville sought to correct.[27]

Along with the rest of the country during the 1980s, Louisvillians were trying to grasp the consequences of the AIDS epidemic and learn how to live with the spreading disease. However, this manifested itself in two different ways. The queer community of Louisville and its allies emphasized the importance of information, education, and assistance to those with the disease. In order to do this, they published material about the disease, hosted forums, and trained individuals on how to give presentations about AIDS. In addition, groups and organizations aimed to provide support to those who needed it, oftentimes those with AIDS who could not fully live on their own. While a portion of the community focused on helping those who were living with AIDS and educating themselves, however, there were those in the larger population of the city who fought against persons with AIDS through the spread of misinformation driven by anti-gay attitudes. In both cases, people were more concerned with controlling the spread of the disease and the question of how to treat (literally and figuratively) those infected, and not yet paying attention to the people who were dying. This chapter will establish the context of the history of the queer community and of homophobia in Louisville, and demonstrate these contrasting reactions to the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic.

Queer Louisville

Much of the activism and response associated with AIDS in Louisville came from the queer community in the city. As in other cities, some of the first places for interaction and experience with others in the queer community were gay bars. These bars became pillars for the queer community in cities, providing “space for socializing, hearing community news, and meeting new friends or sexual partners.”[28] Louisville was home to various different gay bars throughout the years. However, many were not long enduring spaces. Most of these establishments were in Downtown Louisville, however, some short-lived bars, such as Octave’s, were located in the suburban areas of Louisville. The first bar to open in Louisville was the Beaux Arts Lounge in 1947.[29] In addition to the Beaux Arts Lounge, two other gay bars are listed in a 1950s guide: the Plantation Room and Gordon’s. These bars did not specifically cater to gay patrons but were considered “gay-friendly.” For example, the Beaux Arts Lounge catered to lesbians as well, meaning that “a casual customer might not realize that the men and women sitting together… were gay men and lesbians out on dates with members of their own gender.”[30] The Downtowner, which had been known as Nolan’s Cocktail Lounge and Sam Meyer’s Downtowner, was the “first bar dedicated to gay patrons.”[31] In contrast to the bars that had been gay-friendly, the Downtowner was the first to cater specifically to the queer community.

At the same time, as more people were “coming out” and identifying themselves as part of the gay community, they began to push for acceptance within the larger society. National precursors in the 1950s were the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis which organized as a society of gay men and lesbians respectively who sought to advocate “for the rights of gays and lesbians and challenged the image of them as sick and criminal.”[32] As the first organizations advocating for the rights of gay people and lesbians, these societies would set a precedent for the gay rights movement that would emerge in the 1970s. Following the Stonewall Riots in June 1969, activists founded the Gay Liberation Front in New York, which then spread throughout the country. Founded in 1970, the Louisville Gay Liberation Front, or LGLF, was the state’s first political organization of gay men and women.[33] The organization sought to change attitudes towards gay people in Louisville through various activities. The LGLF sent members to give speeches and talks at schools and other venues, utilizing conscious-raising techniques from previous “Black and women’s liberation movements.”[34] In addition to this technique, members spread notice of their “activities through leafleting, word-of-mouth, and an occasional newsletter titled ‘Trash.’”[35] Members of the organization lent their support to prominent issues during the 1970s, including “welfare rights, women’s liberation, and opposition to the Vietnam War.”[36] The group was known for being militant and leftist, which caused some to oppose the efforts of the LGLF, including some gay men and women themselves as well as local authorities. Official opposition caused the group to be short-lived. As Lynn Pfuhl, one of the founders of the LGLF, recalled, a police raid on the “gay lib” house in the Highlands neighborhood in 1971, less than two years from its founding, was the “LGLF’s killing blow.”[37] After this, many of the organization’s members moved out of Louisville to other cities and the organization disbanded. While they had not brought about the change that they sought, the organization had proved that queer discrimination existed and served as a group that brought together the queer community and increased their visibility in the city.

Following the dissolution of the Louisville Gay Liberation Front, a group of radical feminists formed the Lesbian Feminist Union in 1974. These women believed that the issues of women were being ignored by local civil rights groups. At first, the women aligned themselves with other feminist organizations, such as the National Organization for Women (NOW). However, they soon split because of the distinct issues they faced as lesbians, which they felt were ignored in larger feminist groups. The women sought to establish cultural and economic independence for lesbians, including the establishment of a woman's bar in downtown, Mother's Brew, that would be "Louisville's connection to the national lesbian-feminist movement." Despite this, Mother's Brew closed in 1978 and the group itself disbanded in 1979 because of "internal conflicts and waning membership." While the group was short lived, one man claimed that "the Lesbian Feminist Union gave a foundation upon which other gay and lesbian groups could develop."[38] This foundation would lead to the development of a plethora of queer organizations later on during the 1980s and the 1990s.

The late 1970s was also however a time of rising action against the queer community. The rising volume of homophobia resulted from concerted campaigns both nationally and locally. In the 1970s, eight states, including Kentucky, rewrote their sodomy laws to apply explicitly to gay people. As a result, gay activists in Kentucky faced possible legal action against them as out gay men. If arrested on the charge of sodomy, gay men faced penalties of up to a year in jail, a $500 fine, or both. The stigma around gay men meant that not only were they targeted by police, they faced ostracism from society, which would only grow during the AIDS epidemic. The sodomy law in Kentucky wouldn't be repealed until 1992, following a legal battle that began in 1985.

The late repeal of the Kentucky sodomy law meant that throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, in addition to fighting AIDS, queer activists in Louisville had to be wary of being labelled gay and dealt with a society and state that largely saw their existence as illegal.

Anti-gay activist Anita Bryant, known for her television ads promoting Florida orange juice, was one of the most prominent national voices. Her opposition to a Miami ordinance that would provide protections to gay men and women started her "Save Our Children" crusade in 1977. In late 1978, Bryant came to Louisville, Kentucky. In response to Bryant's appearance in Louisville, a small group of protesters formed outside of her appearance at the Kentucky Farm Bureau Convention. While there was not much attention paid to the protesters at large, it had a lasting impression on the gay community according to David Williams. The protest gave the struggling Louisville Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), which had been formed in Los Angeles in 1968 and Louisville in 1972 as a house of worship specifically for queer people and their allies, the "spark it needed to continue," allowing it to become influential throughout the 1980s in Louisville. The Louisville congregation initially met in various homes of lesbians involved until 1974 when they rented a meeting space at the First Unitarian Church at 809 S Fourth St. The same year as the protest, Dee Dale, a local lesbian originally from Texas, got involved with the church and became its worship coordinator and eventually minister in 1986. Dee Dale and the Metropolitan Community Church became influential and indispensable to the queer community during the AIDS epidemic. In addition, the protest served as "an 'icebreaker' for those who attended, allowing other organizations to form out of the friendships made that night."[39]

Categorized by David Williams as the "Season of Growth" in the history of queer Louisville, the years of 1981 and 1982 saw a number of queer organizations form, including Dignity/Integrity, a local support group for gay and lesbian Catholics and Episcopalians; the first archive for gay history; and the Gay and Lesbian Student Union at the University of Louisville.[40] Another large organization formed during the 1980s was Gays and Lesbians United for Equality (GLUE). Sam Dorr, a gay man who worked for First National Bank, lost his job after he told a superior that he was accepting the position of President of Dignity/Integrity. Those in the queer community began to talk about the need for an organization to address the discrimination that still plagued the community and in 1982 founded GLUE.[41] GLUE included representatives from a variety of queer organizations and worked as "a liaison between its member organizations and the Gay/Lesbian and non-gay communities." Meetings served as "a forum for discussion of issues important to its members." Overall, GLUE strove to "be an effective voice in combating homophobia/heterosexism" and "ending discrimination against Gays and Lesbians."[42] Organizations formed during the 1980s became critical for those involved in fighting the AIDS epidemic slowly spreading in Louisville.

National Response to AIDS

As AIDS spread, so did fear and misinformation. There was no official government plan; the Centers for Disease Control spent only $2 million out of its $102 million budget on AIDS in 1982 and few researchers and virologists in the CDC were interested in joining the AIDS Task Force.[43] Journalism became tainted by the prejudices that surrounded AIDS. An article in *Newsweek* announced "the 'homosexual plague' has (sic) started spilling over into the general population," maintaining and deepening the attribution of AIDS to the queer population.[44] In addition, reports in May 1983 by the American Medical Association and Dr. Anthony Fauci suggested, incorrectly, that household contact could potentially spread AIDS.[45]

Prior to this publication, Dr. Fauci had been recognized early on because of his efforts to save lives during the AIDS epidemic in his role as an AIDS clinician at the National Institutes of Health Hospital. According to Randy Shilts, Fauci had "risen rapidly in the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID) and was deemed a major National Institute of Health (NIH) expert on AIDS" when the report was published. However, Fauci quickly rebuked those who took his comments out of context, stating that what he said was only a possibility not a fact. In addition, he accused the press office at the American Medical Association of sensationalizing the article to gain attention. Fauci, prior to writing his editorial, had not been sent the work of Arye Rubinstein who had posited a new paradigm of AIDS transmission that clearly showed the virus passed through intrauterine contact between mother and child rather than by household contact.[46]

Fauci's response did little to quell the growing panic that came from his original statement. Because of the incorrect nature of the statement, hysteria spread and manifested in various ways. For example, in June 1983 at Gay Freedom Day celebrations in San Francisco, police officers wore rubber gloves and four city employees assigned to trash duty after the festivities wore surgical masks and disposable paper suits "afraid that they might get AIDS from the litter strewn on the streets."[47] Politicians such as Buchanan utilized this image of police officers in face masks and medical gloves to stoke the fear of AIDS and the threat the queer population posed to America.

Reporter Randy Shilts argues that the phrase “scientists don’t really know” took on a different meaning within the heterosexual population during the AIDS crisis; “they meant that scientists couldn’t prove that AIDS was not spread by casual contagion, therefore people should take any measure possible to protect themselves and society.”[48] In some cases, the fear of getting AIDS was enough that healthcare workers refused to help people. Such was the experience of Morgan McDonald, a twenty-seven year old man from Florida. McDonald had been receiving care for his AIDS related cryptosporidiosis at a private hospital and when his insurance ran out, the hospital told him he had to leave. However, there were no public programs or nursing homes that could house McDonald in his condition. This led hospital officials to send him to San Francisco General Hospital “for humanitarian reasons.” When San Francisco mayor Dianne Feinstein reached out to the governor of Florida, she received a response from a Health Department spokesman who stated that, “We are having problems in Florida because medical professionals are reluctant to provide care because they know so little about AIDS. We are seeing people take any opportunity within the law to avoid providing care.”[49] Similar refusals happened in jails and hospitals throughout the country. Even the New York State Funeral Directors Association “recommended that its 11,000 members refuse to embalm anyone who appeared to have succumbed to the epidemic.”[50] Hysteria and a lack of information caused a backlash at those who had AIDS and those who could possibly contract it. Images of fear were used to stoke anti-gay sentiment and place blame solely on the queer population for AIDS.

In large cities, people turned to education to fight AIDS, but encountered problems. In January 1982, Cleve Jones and Marc Conant, two anti-AIDS activists, one of whom would later also found the AIDS Quilt, formed the Kaposi's Sarcoma Education and Research Foundation, which was aimed at getting information to gay men in San Francisco about AIDS while also pushing for research.[51] Similarly, the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) in New York was also focused on informing the population. The GHMC had begun a new social services network in the city, providing information, services such as "Buddy Programs," and support groups for those with AIDS.[52] Leaders from around the country attended an AIDS forum in 1982 at the first National Gay and Lesbian Leadership Conference in Dallas, Texas.[53] But still, even in San Francisco by 1983, there was no official city plan for AIDS education, meaning that members of the queer community would have to educate themselves. In the city, "they crowded lectures on safe sex and burgeoning therapy groups… They educated themselves on all things relating to the immune system, often placing themselves in the unfamiliar position of lecturing less informed physicians on the intricacies of T-cells, B-cells, and macrophages."[54] Later on in 1985, an organization called Project Inform was founded in San Francisco. The group worked to take information on prevention, treatment, and testing and transform it into comprehensible terms for the community.[55]

Not everyone in the queer community was happy with the sentiment that came from education campaigns aimed at limiting the spread of AIDS. Whereas the phrase "scientists don't really know" was used in the heterosexual population to incite fear and panic, it was utilized in the queer community as a pushback against for those calling for safer-sex practices. Bathhouses had been spaces within the queer community for the expression of sexual freedom and symbols of the sexual liberation for which the community had been fighting for so long. With AIDS being spread through sexual contact, there were calls to close bathhouses in cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York in 1982 and throughout 1983. Some officials thought that the bathhouses could be utilized for educational purposes, aimed at getting the information to those most at risk.[56] However, some within the queer community thought that the closure of the bathhouses was a political move that had little to do with any medical protection as illustrated by the fact that no decision had formally been made. Despite this, by 1984, the popularity of bathhouses had decreased and many within San Francisco were closing their doors. One of the most striking images of this controversy between education and gay rights was that of five people who had lost their jobs when the Sutro Baths closed. These workers burned AIDS brochures at its closing, saying "if we can't pass them out, we might as well burn them."[57] While education was one of the most important ways of combating the spread of AIDS, it proved to have larger implications that were hard for the queer community to grasp on top of an epidemic that was ravaging them.

AIDS in Louisville

AIDS spread quickly in the large metropolitan areas of New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco during the early 1980s, but wasn't as prevalent in the South just yet.[58] For example, between 1981-1987, there were 12,933 cases of AIDS in what the CDC defined as the south, made up of sixteen states, as compared to the 24,935 cases reported in New York City alone until 1990.[59] The lack of awareness discussed in the introduction reflects the relative rate of infection. The rate of infection in Louisville was slow, reflecting the pace in the region. For example, from August of 1988 to July of 1989, there was an annual incidence rating of three cases per 100,000 people in the state of Kentucky.[60] An accumulated total of 171 cases of AIDS were reported in Louisville through October of 1990.[61] In comparison to this, the total reported cases of AIDS in New York City alone by January of 1990 was 24,383, with 15,364 deaths.[62] While overall total deaths from AIDS in the country between the years of 1982-1996 were upwards of hundreds of thousands, Louisville saw an estimated 376 deaths.[63] Not until the final year of the 1980s did deaths in Louisville increase to over 20.[64] This comparatively low incidence rate of AIDS in Louisville had an impact on the goals and focus of those who responded to the issue in the city.

Throughout the 1980s, organizations and members of the public focused mainly on educating people, especially those in the queer community, about AIDS. Education focused on informing the public on safe sex practices, the scientific and medical nature of the disease, and in some instances, the psychological impact. Unlike in larger cities, there is no record of the bathhouse controversy happening in Louisville. Instead, there was a concerted effort by the queer community to learn and disseminate as much information about AIDS as possible, including advocating safe-sex practices. The *Lavender Letter* newsletter, started in 1981, covered issues pertinent to the queer community and its allies.[65] Pam Frisk, a local lesbian who used the pseudonym Sonny Rae, published the *Lavender Letter* throughout the 1980s. It was available at gay bars and gay friendly businesses throughout Louisville and advertised events and information crucial to maintaining an informed and cohesive queer community.[66] Serving as the queer community's new source, the *Lavender Letter* published information that was pertinent and important to the queer community specifically. The newspaper foregrounded queer issues in comparison to other publications in the city, which may have not prioritized, or even discussed, the information.

Beginning with the start of the AIDS epidemic in America, the *Lavender Letter* published information on the findings of the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in regard to the disease. The first information to be published was their reprint of a *New York Times* article from 1981 that discussed the "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals."[67] The article outlined the first findings of Kaposi's sarcoma in the U.S., which would allow doctors to further identify Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. The *Letter* followed that a few months later, at the beginning of 1982, with an update from the CDC on their new findings about AIDS. This was done at the request of the readership of the newsletter, who had asked for more information. Readers' interest in this information thus drove the expansion of knowledge about the disease. These two articles began the newsletter's focus on AIDS that would continue to grow and expand throughout the 1980s. From there on out, the *Lavender Letter* featured a section on AIDS in each of its monthly newsletters. Issues included "resources for patients and their families" including "Louisville and Lexington's AIDS centers" that treated gay men "as an alternative to viscerally homophobic medical professionals."[68] By printing short, digestible reports from around the country, this section sought to keep readers up to date on debates happening in regards to AIDS discrimination, AIDS testing, scientific findings, and other national information about AIDS. The publishers hoped to make the queer community vigilant about AIDS, how to fight it, and how to help those living with the disease.

Additionally, the television program *All Together Now* provided the queer community of Louisville with a visual news program. *All Together Now* began in 1984 and aired on Dimension and Storer public access channels. The program ran for about an hour once a month and was filmed at the CommTen Center, a community center located on Preston Street and run by the members of GLUE. Similarly to the *Lavender Letter*, *All Together Now* included “updates on the AIDS epidemic, where to get treatment, how to call the GLUE hotline for more information, and a calendar of events every month.”[69] The news program was run by members of GLUE, making it another way in which members of the queer community sought to keep the community informed and aware of the AIDS epidemic. By tailoring a specific news program to the queer community, those involved in GLUE were able to discuss and talk about information that was pertinent to their lives and avoided any type of homophobic bias from larger media.

Meanwhile, medical professionals used educational forums and symposia to keep the public informed. The *Lavender Letter* publicized two such forums in 1983 and 1986, which became more common later in the decade.[70] At these events, experts in the city gave seminars on safe sex practices, the social and medical impact of AIDS, and other pertinent information. For example, the University of Louisville’s Gay and Lesbian Student Union (GLSU) held a talk with five experts including a doctoral candidate from the University’s Department of Microbiology and Immunology, two members of the University’s AIDS Task Force and two other speakers from the larger community in April of 1987. The talk focused on sexual health and “advocated adoption of 'safe sex' practices as the only defense against the rampant spread of the disease. The panel stressed such practices for individuals in high AIDS-risk groups such as gay males and intravenous drug users.

In addition to welcoming expert panelists to discuss the AIDS epidemic at the University of Louisville, some city officials in Louisville encouraged members of the public themselves to do the same. In June 1987, the city of Louisville and Jefferson

County Judge-Executive Harvey Sloane announced the establishment of a task force on AIDS that sought to "identify problems related to the incurable disease and recommend ways to minimize them in Jefferson County." The task force developed "general plans and policies in five areas: prevention, education, health services and financial and legal concerns."[71] In addition to this AIDS Task Force, a private organization, the AIDS Education Coalition, helped to inform the general public. Throughout 1987, interested Louisvillians attended courses that trained them to speak on AIDS prevention. The eight-hour course was free of charge and required those who completed it to give twelve AIDS presentations throughout the year. The purpose of these trainings was to "expand the number of people involved locally in AIDS education in order to keep Louisville's professional health educations from being overwhelmed by the task."[72] Speakers and attendees at the various talks chose to participate in this way for a variety of reasons. However, the most common reason was the ability to alleviate fear and ignorance. One man involved in the trainings held by the AIDS Education Coalition and AIDS Task Force, Jerry Oetken, who spoke to his congregation about the disease, described his reason for getting involved as:

> I just had the feeling that AIDS patients were the lepers of our time, and that so many people were fearful. What bothers me the most is the fear and ignorance in the general public, the fear of employees with AIDS, the fear of friends with AIDS. … It bothers me, too, that these people think it's a moral judgement of homosexuals. People have to realize that God does not send viruses to kill people because of their morality.[73]

In addition, some involved believed that the fact that they were members of the public just like those they would be educating would be more beneficial in getting information spread. Talks given by those trained ranged on topic and allowed them the chance to direct their presentations in specific directions for specific audiences.

Some of these forums focused more specifically on the psychological impacts of AIDS. In 1986, the University of Louisville hosted Dr. Richard Kelling, chairman of the American College Health Association's task force on AIDS and director of the University of Virginia's student health services.[74] Dr. Kelling's address focused on the importance of education and the availability of information on AIDS as the most effective way to combat AIDS in college age adults. He spoke not only about the medical impact of the disease, but also on the psychological impact. He suggested peer counseling and peer educational groups, an idea endorsed by Madelyn Jacobs, the director of the UofL student health services. Similarly, the University of Louisville's Psychiatry Department hosted a talk on AIDS, which focused on the psychological aspects of the disease. It was primarily directed to the attendees of the International Symposium of Psychopharmacology. However, it was open to the larger public as well.[75]

In addition, during the spring of 1987, members of the Gay and Lesbian Student Union at UofL discussed their involvement and support for education programming. Alan Shier, a member and officer, responded on multiple occasions about the practical implications of these programs; "this is an example of the continuous education efforts of our group on UofL's campus. The only way to combat the hysterical fear of AIDS is with the facts, and that's what we're trying to do."[76] Madelyn Jacobs from UofL as well stated that "people are beginning to realize that they don't just catch the disease by being around homosexuals. Initially the media started all the panic (towards AIDS) but education has stopped the panic."[77] Educational programs sought to change the narrative surrounding AIDS by demystifying the disease and advocating prevention methods.

While education was a large part of the response to the AIDS epidemic in Louisville, organizational aid was another. Organizations and homes focused on providing support to people living with AIDS in Louisville. The establishment of these resources was a response to the lack of large scale resources by the city of Louisville. Jack Kersey was a local gay man who was one of the first people to come out publicly in Louisville in 1978. He spoke as part of a documentary series on gay life in Louisville produced by local channel, WLKY-TV.[78] Kersey had long been an activist, however, with his coming out, he took a more leading role in the gay rights movement of the 1970s. Following this, he established the Gay Hotline in Louisville on September 15th, 1982. The idea for the hotline originally started as a branch of the Crisis and Information Center in Louisville where he and other volunteers worked to take phone calls from others in the queer community. However, about two years into volunteering, Kersey said it became obvious that there needed to be a separate queer hotline.[79] From the beginning in 1982, the Gay Hotline received calls about AIDS. It is reported that by 1984 the hotline was "receiving an average of six hundred calls" a month, but it is unknown how many of those were from people "seeking resources or information on AIDS."[80] Faced with a lack of information about the disease, he went to New York to receive training from Larry Kramer of the Gay Men's Health Crisis Center, on what was known about AIDS. Upon his return to Louisville, he and others began the AIDS Support Group, offering help to those in the city who needed it.[81] In addition, Kersey started the Community Health Trust (CHT), which offered assistance to those living with AIDS who could not fully live alone.

The Community Health Trust began in 1984 to help AIDS patients. While the organization split their focus, emphasizing education, testing, and vaccination against Hepatitis B as well, they still concentrated on AIDS.[82] The priority of the organization was "promoting AIDS education and "safe sex" satisfying sexual practices that don't involve the transfer of body fluids; … providing form letters to Kentucky's congressmen and senators asking that they vote for more research money for AIDS; and stocking the gay bars with free condoms."[83] In addition, by 1990, they "provided AZT and other medicine to hundreds of patients who were unable to either temporarily or permanently to pay for their own, thereby allowing them to live longer, heathier lives [*sic*]" and paid health insurance premiums for those with AIDS. The Community Health Trust stated that they "help to separate myth from fact by channeling the most accurate and up-to-date information to the medical establishment, public and private policy makers, people living with HIV disease, their families and friends." Finally, the organization's Speakers Bureau hosted "safer sex seminars" aimed at lessening "the incidence of infection" as well as to "control panic and discrimination."[84]

Just as the CHT aimed to provide information pertinent to the AIDS epidemic, they also sought to provide help directly to those living with the disease through two specific programs: the Buddy Program and the Glade House. The Buddy Program was an initiative that paired a volunteer with someone who had AIDS. The duties of the buddy ranged from assisting with "day-to-day needs, from household chores, to making and keeping medical appointments to just being friends" and in the later years, they included pet care. Volunteers made a six-month commitment and could be anyone over the age of eighteen with adequate time and transportation. In order to become a "buddy," individuals completed a training on “the medical aspects of HIV disease, health precautions, the psychological and social implications of the disease, issues of death and dying, essential interaction skills, resources available in the community, and Community Health Trust policy.”[85] Lesbians and straight women were some of the first people to volunteer as buddies according to Jack Kersey. Their involvement was crucial because many gay men were scared, due to the unknown nature of the transmission of AIDS.[86] In addition to serving as buddies, these women gave blood transfusions, earning the nickname, “our blood sisters.”[87] The specific buddy program focused on those who were still able to live on their own, but needed additional support

For those living with AIDS who could no longer live on their own, the Community Health Trust opened the Glade House in 1984. Prior to this, AIDS patients in the city had not been allowed to live in care facilities, meaning that they had no place to go to receive assisted living. The Glade House, located at 1022 S. Sixth Street, housed up to eight people at a time who were living with AIDS. While the housing situation provided tenants with support, it was not a nursing home, meaning that no medical care was given. Those who lived there were attended to by a staff that made sure that their needs were met and that they could continue to live comfortably. Funding for the Glade House came from those involved in the Community Health Trust, which meant that sometimes there were issues with enough money. However, the institution had support from the larger community as well. In May 1989, after two years of lobbying by Jack Kersey, the Jefferson County government and Harvey Sloane donated nearly $44,000 to pay off the mortgage on the home.[88] Despite any issues that arose, the Community Health

Trust continued the Glade House into the 1990s and opened another next door. By 1990, the Glade House had provided housing for thirty-five people with AIDS.[89]

While educating and providing aid to those living with AIDS in Louisville, activists also pushed into the political space during the 1980s. Two local lesbians Pam McMichael and Carla Wallace organized the "March for Justice" on June 27, 1987 as part of the first Gay Pride march in Kentucky.[90] Included in the calls for gay rights, racial justice, and less funding for militarism were calls for more action in relation to the AIDS epidemic. These demands included "massive funding from the federal government for AIDS education, treatment, research, and patient care." In addition, marchers wanted "a full time AIDS education coordinator for the Board of Health" and the provision of "additional housing for persons with AIDS."[91] One hundred marchers attended the march from Jefferson Street to City Hall. Marchers faced threats and the fear of being identified, which had larger consequences due to the fact that being gay was still a legally punishable offense in Kentucky.[92] The demands and the events of the March for Justice in 1987 would inspire more political action in the 1990s.

The overall response of those involved in education campaigns and organizations in Louisville during the AIDS epidemic was positive. There was a concerted effort by the queer community to understand and learn about the disease through a variety of ways, including print information and events. In addition to that, organizers and volunteers utilized resources and their time to help those who were living with the disease. But, while the overwhelming response was one of assistance and support, there were some instances of negative responses to AIDS in Louisville. These negative responses focused on vilifying those with AIDS and spreading misinformation about the disease.

Anti-Gay Rhetoric and the AIDS Epidemic

As queer activists responded to the AIDS epidemic through education and support for persons with AIDS, some in the larger city of Louisville continued to spread misinformation and vilify those with AIDS. Two anti-gay opponents in Louisville during the 1970s and the 1980s were Frank Simon, a "physician and longtime anti-abortion activist who co-headed Moral Majority of Kentucky and the American Family Association" and Paul Cameron, a psychologist at the University of Louisville.[93] Both of these men led campaigns against the queer community before and during the AIDS epidemic, spreading information aimed to restrict and limit persons with AIDS.

Frank Simon was best known for his anti-abortion stance in the 1970s, but quickly made a name for himself as a prominent anti-gay activist in Louisville. Simon insisted that he did not hate gay people, however, his actions and crusade against the queer community sought to make their lives more difficult and isolate them from the larger society. Simon utilized anti-gay rhetoric, specifically about AIDS, in order to incite fear and fight against gay rights initiatives in Louisville. Exploiting his position as a medical specialist, Simon spread misinformation aimed at generating panic around AIDS. He focused on the belief that AIDS was easily transmittable and liable to get out of control in Louisville. He stated that the "public-health officials are underplaying the risks of getting AIDS – including their reassurances that the disease isn't spread by casual contact." Simon warned his followers that "an AIDS carrier may spit on the sidewalk and someone else will follow behind, fall down and skin a knee on the spot, thereby catching the disease."[94] At the time of this warning, however, it had been established through evidence that AIDS was not transmitted through saliva. Yet, Simon continued to use his position as a physician to spread information about AIDS that was contrary to medical evidence. In doing so, Frank Simon provoked anti-AIDS sentiment in Louisville as well as contributed to the anti-gay sentiment that had been growing since the 1970s.

Simon also appealed to that anti-AIDS fear to fight legal protections for the queer community. In 1986 the Louisville-Jefferson County Human Relations Committee recommended an expansion of "city and county anti-discrimination ordinances to protect homosexuals." In response to this, Simon told city aldermen that "if you pass this, thousands of people will die from AIDS and it will be on your conscience."[95] Simon believed that by legalizing protections for the queer community, the city was promoting queerness and the spread of AIDS. Simon continued his campaign against the ordinance, and the queer community, into the next months. In April of 1986, he organized a campaign through the Louisville Families Against AIDS group that sent 30,000 cards urging aldermen not to consider the measure. These cards emphasized further messages of concern and fear over the possibility of AIDS increasing in Louisville. One card stated, "I am also concerned that there will be an epidemic of AIDS in Louisville like there is in San Francisco."[96] Any support given to the queer community, Simon and his supporters argued, was tolerating the possible spread of AIDS.

Another anti-gay activist in Louisville during the 1980s was Paul Cameron, who "became a major national campaigner to help defeat any laws protecting gays."[97] He proclaimed himself "an expert on homosexuality and AIDS" and utilized this position to spread his ideas on the containment of AIDS. Cameron, similarly to Simon, believed that public health officials were lying about the transmission of AIDS and continued to espouse ideas around the fact that AIDS could spread in scientifically unproven ways. He believed that the Public Health Services and the Center for Disease Control had not proved that AIDS couldn't be transmitted through air or saliva and that this showed that both organizations were mishandling and distorting the facts.[98]

In the late 1980s, Cameron's anti-gay and anti-AIDS sentiment spread further into Louisville. In 1986, through Citizens for Decency through Law, an anti-pornography group, Cameron advocated for making Louisville an "AIDS-free zone." He believed that AIDS, if left unchecked, would bring about "'the end of Western civilization as we know it' by the end of the century." In a presentation at the Galt House, his suggestions for making the city free of AIDS included "testing citizens for AIDS when they applied for driver's licenses, marriage licenses, and etcetera, compiling a register of those with AIDS, making the victims readily identifiable – and thus avoidable – by placing a large letter "A" on their faces with indelible ink, and quarantining them to their homes and imprisoning them if they leave."[99] There were some positive responses to Cameron's ideas, such as one woman who wrote to the *Courier Journal*, that "there is really only one way to effectively do this [contain the spread of AIDS], and this is quarantine."[100] In addition to this person, others in attendance at the talk conceded that even if they did not fully agree with his solutions, they believed that Cameron had some points that required thinking about and would like to have more information from both sides on the issue.[101]

While his talk at the Galt House in 1986 was aimed at an older audience, Cameron's plans and sentiment were spread to students at the University of Louisville as well. He spoke in March of 1987 to the university chapter of Students for America, a Christian student group. In this speech, he reiterated his previous points, emphasizing isolating and quarantining individuals who had AIDS. He told students that he "would not be opposed to isolating all people infected with AIDS in a restricted area." In addition, Cameron spoke on his research, insisting that it was based on facts, "just not the facts the APA's [American Psychological Association] findings are." Some students saw the talk as a positive one; Duane Brown, the president of Students for America, said that "input from different groups helps everyone to understand the issue more clearly." However, members of the GLSU voiced concern over the harmful nature of Cameron's rhetoric. One student said, "this sort of thing generates a hysteria; not only a hysteria but one focused at a particular segment of the population, which is very dangerous."[102] Paul Cameron's attitudes and ideas about AIDS stoked alarm around AIDS while providing one main culprit: gay men.

While there were those who agreed with Simon and Cameron, others pushed back against their ideas. Detractors of both men emphasized the harm that they posed to AIDS education in Louisville. One woman, Mary Ann Carnighan, whose son died of AIDS, stated that the statements and "facts" that Frank Simon shared were eradicating all of the educational efforts that had been done.[103] Another woman, Donna Meers, who worked for the Human Rights Coalition in Louisville, emphasized that Paul Cameron's presentation solely aroused anti-gay sentiment rather than educated the public.[104] A student at the University of Louisville responded to Cameron's speech to Students for America, saying, "Our strategy is to combat this propaganda with real information based on scientific research. We feel that information is the best way to deal with inflammatory propaganda of this nature."[105] As Simon and Cameron spread their ideas, those who disagreed with them continued to emphasize education and the importance of correct information. The medical director of the Louisville-Jefferson County Board of Health said that it was the duty of the medical community "to distinguish between real risks and dangers that are simply theoretical."[106] With education being one of the only ways to combat AIDS, the dealing with the threat of misinformation was critical in making sure that those in Louisville protected themselves from AIDS.

Frank Simon, Paul Cameron, and others used their positions in society to espouse misinformation about AIDS. In doing this, they fostered an environment of unease and fear around the disease and those who had it. Even though these attitudes had existed prior to the AIDS epidemic, they were utilized in the wake of AIDS to target and attack the queer community. Education was seen as the most important defense against AIDS by those actively involved in fighting the AIDS epidemic. It was this sentiment that drove the response to the AIDS epidemic in Louisville during the 1980s. The public sought to inform themselves, and others, on the scientific, social, and psychological impacts of AIDS. Combined with these efforts of education, members of the Louisville community provided help through time and volunteer work to help those living with AIDS. It was this two-fold approach that would continue until the 1990s when another facet was introduced: memorialization.

CHAPTER II

EMOTION AS SPUR TO ACTIVISM:

MEMORY, AN EPIDEMIC, AND LOUISVILLE 1990-1992

> April 11 1992, 12 noon: so it began. Someone reading Alan A., Antonio A., Arnold A., Benjamin A., on and on. Hearing the names of those whose life was celebrated on a 3 x 6 foot of cloth was overwhelming. Nothing in my life had prepared me for the emotions that would be experienced on that day. … As the crowd began walking along and reading the panels, dry eyes were at a minimum. These panels reflected the life of someone's son, daughter, lover or friend. So much love and caring went into these quilt panel. Some were elaborate, some very simple and direct. *Anonymous*[107]

While the focus of the response to AIDS in Louisville in the 1980s had been centered primarily on education and helping those who were living with the disease, that began to shift in the 1990s. Louisville did not experience AIDS deaths beyond single digits until the final years of the 1980s. In 1989, for the first time the city lost more than twenty people to AIDS. Then there was a large upswing in fatalities at the beginning of the 1990s, the largest growth since the epidemic had started in the city. Just as had happened around the country as the death toll mounted, organizations and individuals in Louisville made a concentrated effort to memorialize those who had died. The AIDS Memorial Quilt was one of the largest memorials created to remember persons with AIDS nationwide. Those who had been impacted by the AIDS epidemic began to participate in larger memorials and practices that sought to remember loved ones who had been lost. The words written above describe Louisville's largest display of the AIDS

Memorial Quilt. They tell of the emotion associated with the moment and the sadness of the audience members as they listened to and saw the names of those lost. However, the writer continues, “the strongest emotion and the one that lasted was a strong commitment to do something.”[108] In 1990s Louisville, the urge for memorialization was conjoined with that commitment, as people in the community sought to combine their actions over the past seven years in education about AIDS with this newfound urge to memorialize the fallen. By participating in the AIDS Memorial Quilt and utilizing it in various displays aimed at raising consciousness and money, the community of Louisville gave those who had lost loved ones a chance to remember them while simultaneously still working to help those who were living with AIDS.

AIDS Memorial Quilt

Louisville was one of many cities that contributed to and displayed the national AIDS Memorial Quilt. The AIDS Memorial Quilt originated in San Francisco during the height of the AIDS epidemic. On November 27th, 1985 the city of San Francisco hosted the fifth annual march for Harvey Milk and George Moscone, former member of the Board of Supervisors of the City and County and mayor respectively. As the first openly gay man elected in San Francisco, Harvey Milk’s victory brought with it a promise of positive change. However, the 1978 assassination of both Milk and Moscone by Dan White, a former board member, illustrated that the queer community still faced the threat of violence and oppression. Beginning on that night and continuing yearly, supporters and friends of Milk and Moscone gathered to march and remember the lives of the two men. During this march in 1985, the AIDS Memorial Quilt was born.

Cleve Jones, a gay man living in San Francisco, had worked under Harvey Milk and been involved in activism since the 1970s. He worked on the state assembly of California's health committee when he first came across AIDS. In June 1981, Jones was reading the Center for Disease Control's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report when he saw the news of three previously healthy gay men diagnosed with Kaposi's sarcoma and pneumocystis pneumonia. Soon after, Jones was contacted by Dr. Marcus Conant, a dermatologist at the University of California San Francisco, who wanted to discuss these cases in anticipation of the need for funding for research and treatment for these men. As the epidemic grew, Jones' activism and participation continued as well.

By 1985, one thousand San Franciscans had died of AIDS with more dying every day. Neither the Congress nor the President were responding to the urgent situation, and so Jones channeled his outrage over the situation and urged those at the 1985 memorial march in San Francisco to write the names of those whom they knew who had passed away on squares of cardboard. The marchers continued down towards the Civic Center and the San Francisco City Hall then to the old Federal Building facing United Nations Plaza. When they arrived, they placed their cardboard squares on the side of the building. Upon seeing these cardboard squares, Jones said they reminded him of a quilt. He said, "it was such a warm and comforting and middle-American, traditional, family values sort of symbol, and I thought this is—this is the symbol we should take."[109] A quilt, Jones believed, would give families the opportunity to grieve and remember their loved ones. In addition, it would serve as a tool and a reminder to the media and the government of their failure to "respond to the suffering and death that spread and increased with every passing day."[110] With this idea in mind, Jones and those he knew set about creating the first portion of the AIDS Memorial Quilt.

Jones' idea for a quilt continued to stay in his mind throughout 1985 and 1986. Those around him were hesitant about the idea, with one friend saying, "it's too complicated, and what's even the point? And besides nobody knows how to sew anymore."[111] Despite this, Jones continued to plan the Quilt. He and a friend, Joseph Durant, came up with a list of forty men that "they felt they knew well enough to make panels for" and began to construct them.[112] Each panel was three feet by six feet, the size of a grave, and would be displayed with others in a twelve by twelve square. In the spring of 1987, to get the word out, Jones rented a room in the San Francisco Women's Building and encouraged people to join them, one of the first meetings of what would become the NAMES Project. Only two people showed up to the meeting and Jones knew that to accomplish his goal he would need more publicity; He was determined to display the Quilt at the planned March on Washington in October of 1987.

In order to gain this publicity, Jones had the Quilt displayed in portions throughout the city. During the Gay Freedom Day celebration in San Francisco in June 1987, NAMES hung five squares of the Quilt from the mayor's balcony on City Hall.[113] The display at Gay Freedom Day grew interest in the project as Jones and his friends gave out "copies of our first brochure with instructions for creating memorial Quilt panels."[114] Following that, there were forty-one panels displayed in the window of San Francisco's Nieman Marcus store in August. The staff at Neiman Marcus proposed and coordinated it as a memorial for one of their coworkers who had passed away from AIDS. As the popularity of the Quilt grew through San Francisco, it did elsewhere as well. Jones rented a storefront on Market Street as the home of the NAMES Project and soon volunteers and donations started to come in. Panels from across the country started to come to the storefront including packages from Texas, New York, Delaware, Virginia, and Montana.[115] By September, just one month before the March on Washington, nearly 2,000 panels had arrived to the NAMES Project to be sewn into the Quilt.[116]

The first display of the AIDS Memorial Quilt was on October 11, 1987, in Washington, D.C. on the National Mall. It took place during the scheduled March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights. Foreshadowing the connection between memorialization and activism that would also be seen in Louisville, accompanying the unveiling of the Quilt was "almost a week of political activities" that included lobbying Congress, "a mass wedding of same-sex couples outside of the offices of the IRS," and "civil disobedience on the steps of the Supreme Court Building." In addition, "over half a million marched down Pennsylvania Avenue, past the White House and toward the Capitol Building, in support of federal antidiscrimination legislation and a more concerted national response to AIDS."[117] The display of the Quilt was an act of activism that sought to draw attention to the lives lost because of the lack of national response to AIDS. Jones and volunteers drove to the National Mall at one a.m. to begin unfolding the Quilt. By seven a.m. they had finished and the Quilt laid flat on the ground, inviting viewers to interact with it, for the first ever display of the complete Quilt. Visitors saw the personal elements that made up those commemorated lives including their hobbies, political leanings, age, work, intimate relationships, personal accomplishments, and aspirations. Although the panels include names, these other aspects turned the names into actual faces, personalities, and histories. The names of those lost were read by Jones and others including Whoopi Goldberg, Nancy Pelosi, Lily Tomlin, and Harvey Fierstein to name a few.[118]

With this first and subsequent events, the organizers of the AIDS Memorial Quilt displays changed the way Americans thought about those who had died from the disease by immersing participants and visitors in traditional funerary rituals. Scholar Paul Connerton notes that when encountering a new experience, people understand it through pre-existing frameworks, in this case grieving or memorialization rituals. The AIDS Memorial Quilt is spread out on the ground in 12 x 12 block groups that consist of eight panels each in most viewings. Instead of hung up like a museum piece, the Quilt lays along the ground with enough room for viewers to walk through the blocks and interact with the panels.. Due to this arrangement, with the panels' dimensions being that of a coffin, the Quilt becomes a cemetery and thus situates the visitors within funerary rituals. The people who sew the panels are loved ones sharing their memories of the deceased and providing a tangible representation to evoke emotions in others. The public events thus become a shared space for sharing and grieving, much like a funeral but also making a public statement: remember me.

When Jones and the NAMES organizers returned to San Francisco, the publicity of the AIDS Memorial Quilt had grown. Things such as poems, photographs, designs for posters and t-shirts, screenplays, and more accompanied an influx of panels. Following the first display in October, Jones, the quilt, and his newly formed organization, the NAMES Project, went on a twenty-city tour beginning in 1988. The impetus for this tour was the notes that Jones received along with the panels coming into the workshop, all of which plead him and NAMES to "bring the Quilt, let us remember our dead."[119]As the quilt toured through these cities, people lined up to present Jones with panels that they had made to remember those they'd lost. By the next October, the quilt was comprised of 9,000 panels.[120] As the AIDS epidemic continued and men and women kept dying, the number of quilt panels grew. As of 2015, the quilt contains the names of "more than 94,000 individuals, weighs 54 tons, and is recognized (under the Save America's Treasures Act) as an *American Treasure*."[121] Now the Quilt is comprised fully of 48,000 panels and has been displayed throughout the country multiple times up until the COVD-19 pandemic caused a hiatus. Contributions are still welcome as of 2022.

The AIDS Memorial Quilt turned national attention to the emotional and the personal aspects of the disease. Indeed, the NAMES Project and the AIDS Memorial Quilt aimed to "show the personalities behind the staggering AIDS statistics; to provide an outlet for those who grieve the deaths of loved ones, and to raise funds for people now living with the disease."[122] By creating a memorial focused on individuals, the people behind the AIDS Memorial Quilt shifted the national conversation around AIDS towards one that emphasized compassion and sadness rather than just anger and fear.

In cities such as Washington, D.C., Chicago, Atlanta, and Los Angeles, reactions to displays of the Quilt reflected that emotional release for those mourning. A reporter from *The Washington Post* illustrated this notion through her story on a woman in Washington, D.C.:

> The emotional tumult still is so very fresh for Ellen Nason. It rushed up on her yesterday on the Ellipse as she stood, surrounded by thousands, before a big red heart on a panel of the AIDS quilt. 'Our son, our brother, our uncle, our friend,' it read. She stood and cried, which was what so many others were doing. A volunteer with the quilt project handed her a tissue. Her brother, Bill Gillooly, 25, had AIDS. He died in December.[123]

Another example of this was in Chicago, where a woman, Sharon Rasof, sewed a quilt for Darnell Bowles. Rasof said that "she [Rasof] met him at the Metropolitan Community Church, 615 W. Wellington, one Saturday morning when people gathered to make quilted panels in memory of those who have died of AIDS." In making the quilt for Bowles, Rasof recalled the connection that she felt with him and the panel itself, saying, "They become your friends, these panels, … You talk to them, you think about what their lives were like. When you finish, you don't want to give them up."[124] The process of creating and working to memorialize these men allowed the women to grieve while also making a national statement.

In addition to the creators of panels, people who simply attended the viewing of the Quilt shared the emotional experience. Of the display in Washington, D.C., reporters said "the emotional impact of the quilt, which is spread out in view of the White House, could be heard in the chorus of sniffles and seen in the parade of people wiping tears from their cheeks and clinging to each other."[125] The gravity of the Quilt itself aroused an emotional reaction from viewers; "people are weeping silently or sobbing aloud, for her [Anita, a 10-month old girl born with AIDS] and for the names that lie in multicolored squares on the floor of the Georgia World Congress Center."[126] Remarking on the unique arrangement that forced audience participation with the Quilt, David Mandell, a man who had lost his son to AIDS, encapsulated the moment in one sentence, "If anyone can walk up to these quilts and walk away without feeling some kind of caring and compassion, there's something wrong."[127] In addition, the display gave viewers time to reflect and think about the individual nature of the AIDS epidemic. Viewers contemplated the epidemic and those who had been lost; "Some seemed lost in private reveries as they pondered the lives of lost loved ones or tried to imagine the lives of strangers depicted in the panels. Friends and strangers hugged one another. Many, overwhelmed by the panels and the obvious love that had gone into their creation, wept."[128]

Overall, the Quilt and its display evoked an emotional response that focused on individuals and memorialization. As a memorial, the Quilt gave the people who had previously been just numbers lost to the epidemic a name and personality once again. According to an attendee at the display of the Quilt at the University of California, Los Angeles, the humanity of the Quilt is encapsulated in its unfolding, stating, "I saw it, I felt the emotional content of it. I almost could feel all the spirits of these people flying out into the pavilion."[129]

Beyond inspiring a shift in the contemporary dialogue around AIDS to one of grieving and memorialization, the displays of the Memorial Quilt modeled a new form of public commemoration that centered on the continuing presence of the crisis in individual and national life.[130] Just as AIDS continues to claim victims, the Quilt continues to grow. Its most salient feature is its unfinishedness due to the fact that it is quite literally never complete. When talking about the Quilt, Carole Blair and Neil Michael state, "one of the most disturbing features about the AIDS Quilt's rhetoric always has been its massive growth, an urgent reminder that AIDS continues to claim more lives, despite medical breakthroughs with drug therapy."[131] Like in many commemorations, many victims remain only anonymously represented by the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Despite the fact that it contains the names of almost one hundred thousand individuals, there are more that are not named. A reflection of the stigma around AIDS, some may not have publicly admitted their diagnosis or even the fact that they were gay. There is still an open invitation to contribute panels to the quilt. Therefore, the rhetoric of the quilt continues to be influenced by and representative of the public due to the fact that it is still an incomplete monument.

Memorialization in Louisville

While memorialization began on a national level in 1987 and 1988, in the 1990s, this shift to commemorate and remember those who had died from AIDS began to take place in Louisville. The queer community in Louisville reported on the national project of the AIDS Memorial Quilt when it began, long before it was displayed in the community. In February 1988 the *Lavender Letter* publicized the display of the Quilt in Cleveland, Ohio, which would have been the closest location during the national tour in 1987 and 1988, on its front page. The newsletter not only covered the event, but also gave instructions to readers on how to contribute their own quilt panel, as well as the objectives of the NAMES Project itself.[132] Articles such as these continued throughout 1988 and 1989. In 1988, there was a call for people to go to Washington, D.C. in celebration of the one-year anniversary of the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Building on this, memorialization and the AIDS Memorial Quilt became a larger part of the Louisville response to the AIDS epidemic beginning in 1990.

In the beginning of the 1990s, the queer community of Louisville became more visible to the larger population as well. The Fairness Campaign, organized by Carla Wallace and Ken Herndon, began at the fifth March for Justice in 1991. The Fairness Campaign focused on “emphasizing a broader vision of social justice than simply ‘gay rights’ and locating LGBTQ people as one part of a much larger group of

Kentuckians."[133] It emphasized an intersectional approach to social justice and campaigned for a citywide fairness ordinance, which was adopted by the Board of Aldermen in January 1999. In addition, the repeal of Kentucky's sodomy laws in 1992 was another success for the queer community. Jeffery Wasson was arrested in Lexington, Kentucky, in an "undercover operation that targeted gay men" and ultimately led to "nineteen men being charged with violating Kentucky's sodomy law." In 1992, the Kentucky Supreme Court nullified the anti-sodomy statute and ruled that "the constitution of the Commonwealth of Kentucky guarantees the right to privacy and equal protection to private relationships without regard to sexual orientation."[134] The victory in Wasson was the first since 1982, when AIDS "silenced critique of sodomy laws" throughout the country.[135] These victories capped off fights that had been happening in Louisville since the 1970s. The visibility gained through these victories drew attention to the queer community at large in Louisville. By being prominently featured in the news, the local queer community entered the consciousness of the broader public in ways it had not been before. This new attention to the queer community may have driven attendance and participation in memorials that happened in the city in the 1990s.

In January 1990, attendees at a monthly meeting of GLUE, Gays and Lesbians United for Equality, learned that a NAMES Chapter in Kentucky was started by activists in Lexington. The minutes stated that there were "attempts to form a Louisville-Lexington chapter and that Louisville co-chairs" were sought for the chapter. Dee Dale, known throughout the queer community, involved in various organizations as well as being the reverend at the Metropolitan Community Church, became the first co-chair of the NAMES Chapter working with another person in Lexington.[136] Local activists organized the Kentucky NAMES Chapter in order to “increase awareness throughout the state that AIDS is an issue that affects us, to overcome the association of stereotypes to the AIDS epidemic, provide an outlet for families and loved ones who experience a loss and to include Kentucky as a part of the national efforts to increase AIDS awareness and education.” Dale and Timothy Rodman, a fellow Louisville co-chair, both stated that the quilt allowed a visual representation of AIDS as well as that the panel and the quilt itself allowed those “who have felt pressured to hide their loss an outlet to express their grief and mourn their dead.”[137] However, the NAMES Project Chapter of Kentucky had trouble getting off the ground and soon faded to the background in Louisville. In May 1990, Dee Dale requested “a donation from GLUE as seed money in order to do some fund raising to obtain the money to join the National organization.” But no decision was made on the request. Instead, the motion was tabled and not taken up again.[138] The NAMES Chapter is only mentioned once more in the January 1991 GLUE records when there was a vote on whether to approve a donation “to enable the group to purchase freestanding racks for displaying Quilt sections.”[139] This motion was approved by a vote of five to three yet marked the end of the appearance of the KY NAMES Chapter in GLUE.

However, other institutions and organizations in the city stepped in to bring the AIDS Memorial Quilt to Louisville to spur a conversation about memorializing the dead. On September 1, 1990, the Speed Art Museum hosted the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Panels exhibited at the Speed Museum were brought to Louisville by the Cleveland chapter of NAMES before traveling to Lexington. The presentation included a showing of a portion of the Quilt that contained “five 12-foot-square panels, each composed of eight smaller panels, two of which mark the death of Kentuckians," one who was from Louisville.[140] The panels presented at the Speed Art Museum were designed to travel to San Francisco to join the larger AIDS Memorial Quilt.

Local coverage of the opening of the display emphasized the emotional response of the over 500 people who attended. Barbara Clayton, mother of Ross Clayton who died from AIDS in 1990, stated, "I hope that by having this quilt here that we have enabled the public the opportunity to show their emotions. I hope that it has opened minds and hearts in this community to the realities of the epidemic and the need for an immediate and compassionate response." Her hope was not different from the hopes of Dee Dale and Timothy Rodman established earlier in the summer of 1990. While some visitors, like Clayton, had known someone who died of AIDS, others were simply curious to see what the quilt was. One man stated that a friend had told him "it was going to be on display" and that his attendance was to "show his support. It's quite meaningful, touching." The viewing of the Quilt allowed those who didn't have a connection with AIDS to build one through this experience. They were shown that those who were dying of this disease were being memorialized and remembered by those who loved them as well as those who didn't know them but paid their respects by coming. Interaction with the quilt reminded those in the city that those who have died of AIDS were not just a number, they were people too. Angelique Stewart, whose boyfriend died of AIDS went to see the exhibit and illustrated this point when she stated, "I think it's great. It's just a little piece of everybody."[141] The personalization of the Quilt reminded viewers that the people dying of AIDS were actually human beings who had personalities, loved ones, and lives that existed outside of their disease. The displays of the AIDS Memorial Quilt in Louisville allowed those who had lost people to AIDS to share their loss with a larger population without completely shifting the attention away from those still living with AIDS.

The display helped to raise awareness and concern throughout the community, resulting in changes for the better. In conjunction with the display in 1990, the government of Jefferson County donated office space designed to "bring Louisville's patchwork of private AIDS education and service groups under one roof." Groups that moved into the office space included the AIDS Education Coalition, the Community Health Trust, and Heart to Heart along with others. The collection of these organizations, group members hoped, would "enhance the visibility of AIDS organizations" while sending the message that "AIDS is in Jefferson County" and "is not restricted to the West Coast or the East Coast." In addition, having all of the organizations in one place allowed them to help those in need faster. Previously "patients and family members often had to call a number of different groups to get their needs met" and it would take "days to reach somebody" if they hadn't left their number for reasons of fear.[142] The shared, collaborative space increased the efficiency with which people could get help, critical to the city as AIDS cases continued to rise.

In 1991, the AIDS Memorial Quilt became a part of the efforts of the University of Louisville's Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Alliance (GLOBAL) to raise awareness about AIDS. In March, the Student Government Association (SGA), GLOBAL, and the Kentucky NAMES Chapter hosted an AIDS Awareness Day with the AIDS Memorial Quilt on display to let people know that that "everybody is susceptible to AIDS and to take precautions necessary to prevent themselves from contracting the disease." The display of the Quilt served as a reminder of the various people from various backgrounds who had died. Its impact as described by a student board member of the SGA was that it "showed that 'AIDS is a disease that transcends racial, cultural, sex, age, and class boundaries.'" Another student spoke of the events' impact on arousing sympathy as well as educating students on prevention and safety.[143] There was another display of a portion of the AIDS Memorial Quilt in June of 1991 at Artswatch, in conjunction with the KY NAMES Chapter and one of its UofL student members.[144]

In efforts to raise awareness and invite active participation, students at the University and community members were encouraged by a student working with the KY NAMES Chapter to make panels themselves. The panels were made at the University of Louisville "on the third Wednesday of every month, from 6-9 pm in the fiber studio of the U of L Fine Arts Building" in workshops run by a student named Kevin Elkins. Elkins himself made multiple quilt panels that he donated to the larger project including one for his friend who had passed and been buried less than a week before Elkins started to design the panel. Elkins described the process of making the panels as one of grieving; it provided him "a chance to give expression to his grief" because "otherwise you just hold in that loss. And it stays a loss forever."[145] Elkins and the others who joined him in the workshops made panels for those whom they knew who had died and for others, commemorating those that the community had lost throughout the AIDS epidemic. Both of these displays utilized the Quilt as an attempt to raise sympathies and provide mourning for those in the city as well as a chance to spread awareness of AIDS and its prevention. However, this tactic would be used on a larger scale in spring of 1992.

"An Event in Three Acts: Heart Strings, the AIDS Memorial Quilt, and You"

The largest and most reported on display of the AIDS Memorial Quilt in the city of Louisville was in 1992 during a program put on by the organization, Heart to Heart. Heart to Heart, Incorporated's purpose was "to provide a mechanism to promote public education and awareness of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and related community support services" and "to raise funds, receive gifts and donations of money, to administer the same and to do anything necessary or proper for the accomplishment of the stated purpose."[146] Heart to Heart followed this purpose through planning various community events that raised money for AIDS in the city of Louisville. Heart to Heart was connected to the Community Health Trust, fashioning itself as the fundraising arm of the organization.

In April of 1992, the organization planned what they heralded as Heart to Heart/AIDS Support Services' "most exciting and ambitious AIDS focused project ever to be executed in the United States! Ten straight days of fund raising involving the whole Kentuckiana community." This program was known as "An Event in Three Acts: Heart Strings, The AIDS Memorial Quilt, and You" and was scheduled to take place over a weekend in April. The three-part event began with a performance of the play, *Heart Strings*, which had made a national tour three years earlier including in Louisville. The play in 1989 had raised $103,000 and the organizers hoped for a similar revenue the second time around. According to reports in the *Courier Journal*, "more than 1,400 people will have been involved in planning, staffing, organizing and raising money for these events" and the goal was to gross "about $275,000 in hopes of clearing $200,000 to help people with AIDS." In addition to the play, the final event of the program was referred to as "a call to arms: what Louisville decides to do with and about the AIDS crisis after the Heart Strings performance and the Quilt have moved on to the next venue."[147] It was decided that the money raised in Louisville would be used at the Glade House, a home for those living with AIDS, for improvements and renovations. The funds raised at this display would fund the Glade House II, a property that had been purchased by the Community Health Trust next door to the Glade House I. The Community Health Trust hoped that the purchase of this adjacent lot would allow "residents of both homes … to socialize, have meals together, and be supportive of one another."[148]

The second part of the event was the display of the AIDS Memorial Quilt at the Commonwealth Convention Center. The display of the AIDS Memorial Quilt hosted by Heart to Heart/AIDS Support Services included "more than 800 panels of the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt" and was on display from April 11th to April 12th at the Commonwealth Convention Center. The display aroused a variety of emotions from those who attended, evident by the images shared in the *Courier Journal* of viewers crying and hugging one another. Each panel on display gave a glimpse at the lives of those gone. For example, the panel for Ron Jarrell, made by his mother Hazel Jerrell who had driven from Western Kentucky to add her panel for her son, included "photographs of Ron Jerrell as a baby and a man, a picture of his beloved cat, and a newspaper article that ran when he died, with the headline, 'You could always count on him.'" When asked about the impact of the event, Mrs. Jerrell emphasized that she wanted it to raise awareness. She said, "I would hope that anyone that comes to view the panels would consider the lives that are lost each day due to this, and the people who are infected by not knowing and not caring." Another woman, Myrna Brame of Louisville, reiterated the awareness the display brought to the loss of life due to the AIDS epidemic. "The quilt display is probably the most mesmerizing thing I've ever seen, because it shows that these were people like you and me. They were loved."[149] The display at the Commonwealth Convention Center illustrated the combination of efforts in the Louisville community to help those who were living with AIDS and those who had died of AIDS.

The anti-gay sentiment that had been aroused in the city during the late 1980s had not disappeared during the early 1990s, however. In the wake of the event, there were some signs of the homophobic response to AIDS rearing its head. The Heart Strings Event raised less than was hoped; donations raised came to $165,731, with $71,527 of that in cash. There were multiple theories around why the donations for the event had decreased since the last event in 1989, but those associated with Heart Strings expressed their opinion that it was because of the backlash caused by one man's actions in December and January of 1991: Frank Simon. Simon's anti-gay sentiment had not lessened since the end of the 1980s and his latest action may have impacted the AIDS benefit in the city. He had sent "graphic anti-homosexual videotapes to politicians and business leaders."[150] It was believed that the videos had made their way into the corporations throughout the city, which resulted in a decreased amount of corporate donations to the event. It was never proven that this was the result of Simon's videotapes, but newspapers argued that it was. Despite this, the event still managed to raise awareness, sympathy, and funds to help those in Louisville embedded in the fight against AIDS. Simon remained active in spreading anti-gay sentiment through the early 1990s, however, he received more attention for his work against abortion and the gay rights campaign, which sought to end discrimination against the queer community. Paul Cameron had a more limited role in the state during the 1990s. He opposed a proposed legislation that would include gay men and lesbians in protections from hate-crimes, but remained inactive further, traveling nationally rather than staying in Louisville. As the attention turned to memorializing those dying from AIDS, the homophobic response that had focused on vilifying AIDS victims, prevalent in the 1980s decreased, as the queer community gained more recognition.

Despite the low-incidence rate of infection in Louisville, the number of people dying from AIDS in the city continued to grow. By the 1990s, the passing of members of the community caused those who knew them to participate in larger trends of memorialization. In addition, changes in medicine and politics gave members of the queer community other outlets to focus their attention on. However, this did not mean that the attention that the city had paid to helping those living with AIDS disappeared. Instead, both of these groups came together and found ways in which the community could grieve their loss while also helping to maintain commitment to those living with AIDS. In addition to this, the Community Health Trust managed to continue to raise funds and assist those living with AIDS in the Glade Houses. Those in the community utilized the opportunity to raise sympathies through remembrance while also maintaining their commitment to those living with AIDS in the city. During the early 1990s, the city of Louisville was able to combine the efforts to provide education, understanding, and awareness of AIDS with the growing need to memorialize and remember the growing number of people lost to the disease. While other parts of the country focused on commemoration as well as awareness and compassion towards AIDS victims so did Louisville.

CONCLUSION

In their article, “The Contemporary Historiography of AIDS,” Elizabeth Fee and Daniel M. Fox urge historians after the end of the first decade of AIDS to “apply their skills and training to constructing a more adequate and complete history of AIDS than can be created by the press, by activists, or by physicians or scientists.” In order to do this, Fee and Fox present historians with a list of questions that should guide their research, including questions such as “How is AIDS shaping and reshaping national politics and policies?” or “How is AIDS being culturally constructed by the media?” One question in particular applies to this thesis: “how is the disease influencing the cities most sharply affected, like New York and San Francisco, and how is it being dealt with in, for instance, Ohio and Tennessee?”[151] It’s unknown what Fee and Fox or other historians at the turn of the decade would’ve thought would be the answer to this question. However, this comparison of Louisville, Kentucky to San Francisco and New York provides us with a complex answer.

Just as organizations in New York and San Francisco began to talk about and educate populations on AIDS, so did groups in Louisville. Beginning in 1983 with the first reported AIDS death in the city, the focus of organizations and individuals, such as the Community Health Trust and Jack Kersey, in Louisville was on supporting those living with AIDS. Most of the attention in the city focused on educating the queer community and the general city population. In addition, groups such as the Community

Health Trust and GLUE provided organizational aid to those living with the disease in the form of Buddy Programs and assisted living homes. Unfortunately, there was also some attention that was negative, centering on how to respond to the possible threat those with the illness posed and contributing to a spread of misinformation and the stoking of homophobic attitudes. Organizations in Louisville did not participate in national memorialization when it first began in 1987 on a large scale. However, by the 1990s, national attention to the AIDS Memorial Quilt encouraged people to participation in rituals of commemoration, loss, and grieving. Moreover, the rising incidence rate of the disease in Louisville caused a shift to memorialization and honoring those who had died in the city. Throughout the city, organizations partnered with NAMES, the national group responsible for the Quilt, in order to bring it to Louisville. In addition, this newfound participation in memorialization was partnered with the existing goals of education, awareness, and support that dominated the 1980s. Similar to other cities, queer activists in Louisville responded to the AIDS epidemic by focusing on education and organizational aid. However, because of the legal context which meant any public association with the illness could lead to potential criminal charges—through the assumption that those with AIDS were gay and thus violating the anti-sodomy law—combined with lack of sympathy from the general public, the queer community in Louisville had to rely on their own resources and media. Thus the shape of the response to the AIDS epidemic in Louisville over time was a result of the actions and ideas of those in the queer community, who faced a lack of institutional and governmental aid.

While this thesis concludes in 1992, ten years from the first AIDS death in the city, AIDS and its impact in Louisville did not. The organizational aid and efforts to educate the community of Louisville continued throughout the 1990s as did memorialization. In his final calculations, David Williams states that there are 115 people connected to the city area of Louisville and Southern Indiana who appear on the AIDS Memorial Quilt.[152] The 1990s brought a shift in AIDS in America. ACT UP's "heyday" was from 1989-1992, before the group ultimately had disagreements that led to its dissolvement in 1996.[153] Across the country, 1995 was the deadliest year since the AIDS epidemic had started and more Louisvillians died of AIDS between 1994 and 1995 than ever before (121 combined).[154]

However, the end of the 1990s looked promising from the prospect of a cure. In 1995, the Food and Drug Administration approved the very first protease inhibitor. Protease inhibitors target an enzyme in order to cut off a protein that HIV needs to replicate, therefore slowing down the development of the virus inside the body. In 1996, Dr. David Ho and other doctors developed what they called "heavily active antiretroviral therapy (HAART)" which became known as the AIDS cocktail. It contained a variety of treatments taken throughout the day in order to limit the spread of HIV, however, was very expensive and inaccessible to many living with AIDS.[155] Despite this, many saw the late 1990s as an end of the AIDS epidemic that had been so deadly. David France, author of *How to Survive a Plague*, described the optimism after learning of the curative effects of protease inhibitors. Three virology chiefs from pharmaceutical companies involved in protease inhibitor research spoke at New York University in January 1996, during which they told of the positive impact that the drugs were having on people with AIDS. France concludes his memory of this occasion: "A man I did not know put his hand on my cheek, startling me. … With a thumb, he wiped my cheeks, then kissed me on the lips, the kiss that Pericles gave Aspasia to awaken the Golden Age. It was not over. It would never be over. But it was over."[156]

This is the first in-depth study of the AIDS epidemic in Louisville, laying the ground work for further research. It is the story of how activists in Louisville educated and supported one another during an unknown time. Louisville residents fought against homophobia and responded to the AIDS epidemic just as those in New York and San Francisco did. However, this is only one of many versions of the history of AIDS in Louisville. There are many voices and experiences that may have been left out due to research constraints and available information.[157] Further research must be done to illustrate the role of women, particularly lesbians, during the AIDS epidemic. In addition, further research must be done to understand the ways in which socioeconomic and racial differences impacted those diagnosed and living with AIDS. This study provides an entry point into the history of Louisville and the response to AIDS, focusing on those involved in the fight against AIDS. In a time in which HIV and AIDS still has an impact and some may still not know the history of the previous pandemic, these histories are more important than ever. In 2021, David Williams compiled a list of all those who died of AIDS in Louisville, Southern Indiana, and other parts of Kentucky. In his publication, he writes,

> AIDS shouldn't have happened. No one deserved it. But as Myreon Taylor told a crowd at a 1991 AIDS candlelight vigil in Evansville, 'I am not my disease. I am me.' At the end of the movie *Longtime Companion*, the ghosts of everyone who died of AIDS return to life, laughing and hugging on a sunny beach. Don't dwell on their loss. Remember the good times instead. The men and women on this list live once again in these pages. Death can't touch them now.

This thesis also reminds us to honor and remember not just those who had the disease and perished, but the community members who tried to do something about it.[158]

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[1] N. David Williams, "Forever Young: Deceased Men and Women with HIV or AIDS From Kentucky and Southern Indiana," 2021.

[2] Sam Dorr, interview by Adriana Sisko, September 12, 2018, Outsouth: LGBTQ+ Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries.

[3] Michael J. Drury, interview by Adriana Sisko, June 14, 2018, Outsouth: LGBTQ+ Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries.

[4] Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), xvii. The term acquired its meaning of "bad" or "worthless" in the eighteenth century according to Bronski. It was then used on a wider scale as a negative term in the twentieth century.

[5] Bronski, xvii.

[6] Elizabeth Fee and Daniel M. Fox, "The Contemporary Historiography of AIDS," in *AIDS The Making of a Chronic Disease*, edited by Elizabeth Fee and David M. Fox, (California: University of California Press, 1992).

[7] Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988.

[8] A larger discussion and list of sources that touch on the medical field and science and AIDS can be found in Katie Batza's "Sickness and Wellness" in *The Routledge History of Queer America,* edited by Don Romesburg (New York: Routledge, 2018). In addition, Jennifer Brier's "AIDS and Action (1980-1990s)" provides an extended list of sources on AIDS and AIDS activism.

[9] Sarah Schulman, *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1987-1993* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2021).

[10] Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

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[18] Michael B. A. Oldstone, *Viruses, Plagues, and History* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2010), 253. More scientific and medical description is given in Oldstone’s chapter on AIDS, including further explanation on the CD4+ T cells and other biological function impaired by AIDS.

[19] Bronski,

[20] Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 225.

[21] Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), 191. All of the impacted Tylenol capsules were located in Chicago and none were found outside of the first report. However, the FDA and the CDC worked on testing 1.5 million similar capsules for poinsioning and the Health and Human Services Departmetn issued new regulations on tampering resistant packaging. Shilts argues that this is an example of how the Health Department and beauractic system could work positively in a health crisis.

[22] Bronski, 231.

[23] Bronski, 228.

[24] Bronski, 226.

[25] Douglas Crimp, “Introduction,” *October* 43 (1987), 8.

[26] Crimp, 8.

[27] Gideon Gil, “AIDS education is supported,” *Courier Journal* (Louisville, KY), January 11, 1987.

[28] Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 172.

[29] Fosl, 55. Catherine Fosl in her publication states that the Beux Arts was the first ‘gay friendly’ bar to open in the city. However, David Williams’ states that operating in the 1930s was the Beau Brummel at the Seelbach Hotel in Louisville.

[30] David Williams, “Gay Men,” *The Encyclopedia of Louisville,*

[31] Fosl, 55.

[32] Fosl, 61.

[33] Fosl, 77.

[34] Fosl, 78.

[35] Fosl, 79.

[36] Fosl, 80.

[37] Fosl, 81.

[38] Maggie Harper, “Queer Louisville: A City of Contradictions” (Bellarmine University, 2012), 21.

[39] Harper, 23.

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[44] Shilts, 183.
[45] Shilts, 299-301.
[46] Shilts, 299-301.
[47] Shilts, 334.
[48] Shilts, 320.
[49] Shilts, 375.
[50] Shilts, 321.
[51] Shilts, 120-122.
[52] Shilts, 179.
[53] Shilts, 180.
[54] Shilts, 377.
[55] Donna J. Graves and Shayne E. Watson, *Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco* (City and County of San Francisco, 2016), 305.
[56] Shilts, 414.
[57] Shilts, 465.
[58] Richard Ulack and William F. Skinner, *AIDS and the Social Sciences: Common Threads* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991) pg. 5. The information comes from “Table 1.2. Total Reported AIDS Cases in the U.S. by Geographical Region through March 1990.” In this table it is shown that a majority of the cases of AIDS reported happened in the three cities of New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.
[59] Centers for Disease Control, “HIV and AIDS-United States, 1981-200, https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5021a2.htm. According to the chart, the south is defined as Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.
[60] Ulack and Skinner, pg. 64.
[61] Ulack and Skinner, pg. 65.
[62] Ulack and Skinner, pg. 47.
[63] The official statistics can be found in the CDC reports at https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5021a2.htm. The tables included discuss overall number of persons diagnosed with AIDS as well as various breakdowns of data based on gender, ethnicity, region, etc.
[64] David Williams, “Forever Young: Deceased Men and Women with HIV or AIDS From Kentucky and Southern Indiana,” Appendix A.
[65] Emma Johansen’s “Land Lines: Modes of Communication in Kentucky’s Queer Past and Present” provides an extended look at “Lavender Letter” and its later iterations. The publication was published in some form from the 1980s until the 2000s. Her work explains the evolution of the gay press in Louisville and throughout the larger context of Kentucky.
[66] Harper, 30.
[67] New York Times, “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals” *Lavender Letter* 1, no. 9 (Louisville, KY), October 1981.
[68] Emma Johansen, “Land Lines: Modes of Communication in Kentucky’s Queer Past and Present” (University of Louisville, 2021), 33.
[69] Johansen, 44.

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[79] Jack Kersey, interviewed by Catherine Fosl, January 15, 2006, Louisville’s LGBTQ Movement, University of Louisville Oral History Center.

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[112] Cleve Jones, “A Vision of the Quilt,” in *Remembering the AIDS Quilt*, ed. Charles E. Morris III (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2011), xvii.

[113] Jones, *When We Rise* , 218.

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[119] Jones, “A Vision of the Quilt,” xxx.

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[128] Victor Zonana, “AIDS Quilt Helps Thousands Remember,” *The Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), April 10, 1988.

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[130] There is an interesting connection to be explored between the similarities of the NAMES AIDS Memorial Quilt and Chilean arpilleras. Both are similar artistic mediums and were utilized by those in a position of oppression to get the attention of those outside of the community. Chilean arpilleras are “brightly-colored patchwork pictures stitched onto sacking” and chronicle “the life of the poor and oppressed in Chile in the 1970s and the 1980s during the totalitarian military regime of General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte.” Women who were poor and women who had family members killed or imprisoned by the government met each week to share their burdens and create the tapestries. These women utilized the

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arpilleras to document and denounce their oppression and draw attention to their conditions in Chile. More information can be found about Chilean arpilleras in this web exhibition from the William Benton Museum of Art at the University of Connecticut: https://benton.uconn.edu/web-exhibitions-2/arpillera/.

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[156] David France, *How to Survive a Plague* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017), 509.

[157] This thesis and the information in it may be the experience of white men in Louisville seeing as the collection that the information came from was collected by a white man. Experiences during the AIDS epidemic have been influenced by race, culture, and economic status. Therefore, further research may be done in order to understand how this complicates the narrative provided in this thesis.

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CURRICULUM VITA

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EDUCATION

2020-2022	**Masters of Arts, History** University of Louisville, Louisville, KY GPA: 3.8
2016-2020	**Bachelor of Arts, History** Transylvania University, Lexington, KY Minor in English Cum Laude

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2021-Present	Worker, **University of Louisville Archives**
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HONORS AND AWARDS

2021	Melissa and Ken Draut Foundation Scholarship
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THESES

Beutel, O. (2022). “Death Can’t Touch Them Now”: AIDS Response and Memorialization in Louisville, Kentucky, 1982-1992

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PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

2021-Present	Graduate Student Council, History Department Representative
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