Historians have long participated in public debates and discussions, interacting with audiences that extend well beyond the students who take their classes and the specialists who read their work. This is perhaps most evident in politics and law, but it is also common in other domains. Historians regularly share their work in newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and film. They contribute to archives, libraries, and museums and influence historical houses, landmarks, monuments, and parks. Genealogists and demographers make use of scholarship on the past, as do those who work in architectural preservation, urban planning, economic development, and historical tourism. Creative artists are informed and inspired by historical research, as are those who work in science, health, technology, and business. Community-based historians typically orient themselves to the public, but so do many academic historians.¹

Members of the public are more than just passive recipients of historical scholarship; they actively produce knowledge about the past. Public audiences influence the work of historians in the questions they ask, the interpretations they develop, the affirmations they provide, and the criticisms they offer. Their choices have consequences in the books and films that are bought and sold, the texts that are praised and panned, and the narratives that are considered and consumed. Ordinary and extraordinary people save and discard historical artifacts, engage and disengage with oral history projects, and support and oppose history
education. With respect to archives, landmarks, monuments, and museums, members of the public wield power in the volunteer work they do, the physical sites they visit, the financial support they provide, and the actions they take to influence memory and commemoration. When historical professionals fail to do justice to people whose lives are not deemed worthy of recognition and remembrance, public audiences develop alternative and oppositional narratives that can transform our understanding of the past.

Queer historians—defined here as those who study nonnormative genders and sexualities in the past—have been distinctly active in the public sphere. Their work has influenced popular understandings of affection, intimacy, and eroticism; collective conversations about freedom, equality, and democracy; and global conceptions of political change, social justice, and cultural transformation. Prominent recent examples include the historians’ briefs cited by the US Supreme Court when it invalidated state sodomy laws, bans on same-sex marriage, and restrictions on the use of antidiscrimination statutes. LGBT historical research also has influenced mass media and popular culture, most notably in film, literature, television, and theater. Excluded and marginalized by academia in the past and present, LGBT historians—based at first in queer communities and only later in colleges and universities—have succeeded in reaching large public audiences.

Just as queer historians have been distinctly active in the public sphere, queer publics have been distinctly powerful in shaping the production of historical knowledge. They have engaged in extensive discussions about the past, making meaning in the movements they remember, the moments they commemorate, the sites they recognize, and the legacies they claim. Paradoxically, this may be due in part to the fact that most LGBT people do not learn about queer history in their families and schools. LGBT marginalization, in and beyond formal systems of education, incites desires for queer history. In turn, social hierarchies within LGBT cultures incite desires for queer histories of people of color, poor people, religious minorities, people with disabilities, bisexuals, lesbians, and trans people. Queer publics have influenced scholarship on the past by supporting projects that others might ignore or reject, including an extensive network of LGBT archives, libraries, and museums. LGBT communities also have inspired historically informed creative works that have moved, motivated, and mobilized. Most importantly, queer people have made LGBT history in the stories they have shared, the interviews they have recorded, the artifacts they have saved, and the memories
they have passed down. It is difficult to imagine what queer history as a field of inquiry would look like without the formative contributions of diverse LGBT communities.⁴

 QUEERING PUBLIC HISTORY

Notwithstanding the developments and dynamics just described, queer historians have rarely been recognized as significant in the world of public history. The field’s key journal, The Public Historian, began publication in 1978, but did not publish a major article about LGBT history until 2010.⁵ The National Register of Historic Places, which includes tens of thousands of sites, was established by the US Congress in 1966, but did not list a location because of its importance for LGBT history until 1999.⁶ The 1986 anthology Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public included Lisa Duggan’s essay “History’s Gay Ghetto: The Contradictions of Growth in Lesbian and Gay History,” but ironically ghettoized LGBT history by ignoring the field in seventeen other chapters. The book also passed up an obvious opportunity for queer self-reflection when contributor Terence O’Donnell began his chapter by writing (with sarcasm), “The news could not be better. Clio has come out of the closet and now, with the other muses, consorts in the marketplace. History has gone public.” Nor did O’Donnell’s chapter take queer sensibilities into consideration when concluding that “it is wonderful to have Clio out of the closet and into the marketplace, but we must not turn her into a tart working the depths of heinous compromise.” Several decades later, queer public history has come a long way, but it continues to be excluded, marginalized, and ghettoized in the larger domain of public history.⁷

Public history, defined in this study to include research, writing, and communication aimed at audiences beyond academia, has been growing as a subfield. Many college and university history departments now offer public history courses or include public history assignments in other classes. Countless instructors encourage students to use community-based archives, visit historical landmarks, participate in historical walking-tours, conduct oral histories, and pursue history-oriented internships. Multiple institutions advertise faculty positions in public history, mention public history as a preferred specialization in faculty recruitment, and reference public history in tenure and promotion policies. Many describe public history as an applied field that can open up promising career paths for students.
Introduction

In part, the growth of public history within academic history builds on the discipline’s long-standing interest in reaching broad audiences, arguably to a greater extent than in the case in many other fields. In contrast to scholars in disciplines that tend to use highly technical and specialized language, most academic historians write in relatively accessible prose and their works are commonly assigned to undergraduates. This is not necessarily the case in, say, economics, literature, mathematics, philosophy, or physics, where academic scholarship typically is aimed at more advanced specialists. History as an institutionalized discipline also does less to police its boundaries than do many other fields of study and certainly less than many professional fields. Anyone who studies the past can call themselves a historian, whereas not everyone who studies law, medicine, nursing, or psychology can call themselves a lawyer, doctor, nurse, or psychologist; if they do so without certification, there can be negative legal consequences. These claims should not be overstated: historical scholarship is less accessible than many academic historians imagine it to be; history majors continue to be disproportionately white and male; and the discipline has not adopted the academic equivalents of open-borders policies. Nevertheless, compared to academics in many other fields, historians orient much of their work to broad public audiences. Though there are costs to this in the power and prestige that history and historians are granted, the benefits make it unlikely that the discipline will abandon its self-conception as a democratic field of inquiry open to participation by all.

While the rise of public history as an academic specialty reflects the field’s long-standing commitment to broad public audiences, it also responds to great and growing anxieties about declines in the numbers of students taking history courses and majoring in history. These declines are often said to reflect changing patterns of student interest and job opportunities, but there is limited evidence to support these theories. From long-term perspectives, the reductions more likely reflect factors such as the shift from history to social studies in primary and secondary education, the reorientation of teacher training away from subject-based courses, changes in general education requirements, the rise of interdisciplinary programs, and the decline in public funding for education in general and humanities education in particular. Regardless of the reasons, academic historians could turn to LGBT specialists for ideas about how to engage large public audiences, but scholars of the queer past are rarely consulted in broader conversations about the past, present, and future of public history.
LGBT academic historians generally have had greater appreciation for public history, but they, too, have contributed to its marginalization. College- and university-based queer historians, for example, tend to date the origins of LGBT history as a field of inquiry to the 1970s and 1980s. Like most origin stories, this one is a revealing myth. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were biographers, bibliophiles, sexologists, and others who explored the queer past. In the 1950s and 1960s, North American LGBT publications featured many articles about history; LGBT movement lectures and conferences routinely included discussions about the past. This was a period when college and university history departments had little interest in, or were deeply hostile to, the study of gender and sexuality, but instead of acknowledging this history and recognizing the contributions of community-based scholars, academic historians tend to congratulate themselves for launching the study of the LGBT past.

It is true that LGBT history as a field of inquiry began to grow and change in the 1970s and 1980s. Many factors were at play in this process. The powerful social movements of the 1950s and 1960s—especially those that challenged capitalism, colonialism, white supremacy, and male supremacy—influenced new historical scholarship on oppression and resistance. The civil rights, feminist, and anti-war movements were particularly influential. By the 1970s, more and more sexual revolutionaries, gay liberationists, lesbian feminists, and trans people were interested in learning about gender and sexual histories. Many LGBT people in the 1970s and 1980s looked to the past to help them understand the growth of queer cultures, the mobilization of LGBT movements, the politics of conservative backlash, and the conflicts surrounding HIV/AIDS. Meanwhile, the discipline of history changed in the 1960s and 1970s, creating new possibilities for studying gender and sexuality. Proponents of the New Social History emphasized ordinary people, everyday experience, private life, and the importance of class, race, and gender. The field of women’s history provided useful models. More generally, democratization in higher education promoted the growth of LGBT history.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

LGBT historical knowledge developed in the 1970s and 1980s in the context of extraordinary collaborations between community-based historians and their academic counterparts. In part because the professional
discipline of history generally ignored and opposed research on the LGBT past, queer history was sustained by community-based contributors and audiences. Historical discussions, presentations, slide shows, and workshops took place in LGBT bookstores, centers, libraries, and other community spaces. LGBT newspapers and magazines published hundreds of articles about the queer past. An early example was Maurice Kenny’s groundbreaking 1975 essay on Native American history in *Gay Sunshine*. Jim Kepner’s wide-ranging three-part series, “200 Years of Oppression,” was published in 1978 in *Philadelphia Gay News*. Several influential feminist and queer anthologies of the 1980s, published by nonacademic presses and showcasing the work of community-based writers, featured historical research by and about LGBT people of color; these included *This Bridge Called My Back*, *Home Girls*, *In the Life*, *Compañeras*, and *Living the Spirit*. Essays by Gloria Hull in *Home Girls* and Charles Michael Smith in *In the Life*, for example, explored queer lives and loves in the Harlem Renaissance. These works were joined by the scholarship of Allan Bérubé on World War Two, Michael Bronski on popular culture, Madeline Davis and Joan Nestle on butch-fem communities, Eric Garber on the Harlem Renaissance, and Judith Schwarz on Greenwich Village radicals. Bérubé’s work was later recognized by a MacArthur Foundation “genius” grant. One of the most influential community-based LGBT historians was Jonathan Ned Katz, author of *Gay American History* in 1976 and *Gay/Lesbian Almanac* in 1983. Most of these researchers did not have advanced degrees in history or work as professors, but together they made LGBT history.

The challenges of doing this work without academic affiliations, professional privileges, disciplinary advantages, and financial compensation were substantial in the 1970s and 1980s. Even access to academic research libraries could be difficult. Women and people of color faced distinct challenges because of sexism, racism, and economic inequality in higher education, scholarly publishing, and society more generally. Much of this work would not have been completed without the complementary work of LGBT community-based archives, libraries, and history projects and the enthusiastic engagement of queer public audiences. Many community-based historians persevered despite ever-present risks of rejection by academic elites and ever-present threats of anti-LGBT bias, discrimination, and prejudice. In the world of queer public history, however, they were recognized for their valuable contributions.

Community-based queer historians were joined by academic researchers, most of whom had strong ties to LGBT communities in the 1970s and
1980s. Of those who turned to LGBT history after writing dissertations on other topics, many were influenced by the rise of women’s studies and feminist activism. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg was among the first, publishing on urban evangelicals before researching nineteenth-century women’s relationships. Lillian Faderman, who began her career by writing about Victorian literature, also became fascinated by the history of lesbianism. Blanche Wiesen Cook finished a dissertation on Woodrow Wilson and antimilitarism and then published on female political networks in the same era. Nancy Sahli studied Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell before exploring “smashing” among college women. Estelle Freedman initially worked on women’s prison reform and later turned to feminist separatism and sexual psychopathy. Leila J. Rupp wrote about women and war mobilization before studying lesbianism among women’s rights activists. Paula Gunn Allen authored a dissertation on Native American history and culture before completing work on Native American lesbian history. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy earned a PhD in anthropology with research on indigenous Central Americans, after which she initiated a collaborative project on bar-based lesbian communities. Esther Newton was a somewhat different case; her dissertation was an anthropological study of contemporary female impersonators, but a few years later she began producing historical work on early twentieth-century mannish lesbians.15

A smaller group of academic men similarly turned to LGBT history in the 1970s and 1980s after beginning their careers with research on other topics. Vern Bullough wrote about medieval European medical education before publishing wide-ranging scholarship on LGBT history, much of which focused on sexology. John Burnham’s dissertation addressed the history of psychoanalysis; he later researched early medical writings about gay communities. Robert Oaks worked on the American Revolution before publishing on sodomy in colonial New England. One of the most influential academics in the field’s early development was Martin Duberman, who wrote about antislavery activism, African American history, and political radicalism before publishing essays on antebellum male homoeroticism and Hopi Indian sexualities, a collection of LGBT historical documents and essays, and a transnational anthology on the “gay past.” Ronald Bayer’s work on drug policy was followed by research on homosexuality and psychiatry. Henry Abelove studied early Methodism before publishing on the history of psychoanalysis and homosexuality. Walter Williams completed a dissertation on African American attitudes toward Africa; his fourth book was a historical study of American Indian sexual diversity.16
These scholars were joined by the first generation of researchers to earn PhDs based on LGBT history projects. Salvatore Licata’s 1978 dissertation was titled “Gay Power: A History of the American Gay Movement, 1908–1974.” One year later, Robert Marotta completed “The Politics of Homosexuality: Homophile and Early Gay Liberation Organizations in New York City.” Three years later, John D’Emilio authored “Out of the Shadows: The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in the United States.” Interestingly, all three of these projects focused on movement politics. After a bit of a lull that perhaps can be attributed to the country’s conservative turn and the impact of AIDS, George Chauncey completed “Gay New York: Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940” in 1989. In the next few years, these men were joined by the first women to write dissertations addressing US LGBT history: Susan Cahn for “Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Women’s Sport” (1990); Sharon Ullman for “Broken Silences: Sex and Culture in Turn of the Century America” (1990); and Lisa Duggan for “The Trials of Alice Mitchell: Sex, Science, and Sensationalism in Turn of the Century America” (1992).17

LGBT academic historians may have been relatively privileged compared to their community-based counterparts, but they confronted enormous challenges in the 1970s and 1980s. Several have written about the hostility they encountered in academic institutions and professional pursuits. Freedman and Newton, for example, experienced anti-feminist, anti-lesbian, and anti-queer employment discrimination. Both are now esteemed senior scholars with multiple award-winning publications, but they nearly had their academic careers derailed by initial denials of tenure (the academic equivalent of firing). They are not the only ones, but referencing those who have not spoken or written publicly about their experiences might cause further harm. Duberman’s memoirs offer harrowing accounts of micro- and macro-aggressions against LGBT faculty and LGBT studies. These included attacks in print after he came out as gay and began writing about LGBT history, research obstacles when archives tried to block his use of erotic materials, and professional rejection when disciplinary organizations and academic departments marginalized LGBT historians and histories. John D’Emilio and Lisa Duggan have described multiple types of anti-LGBT animus in the discipline of history in the 1970s and 1980s; this included opposition to the very idea of hiring specialists in LGBT history for faculty positions.18 Intersectional hostility created distinct challenges for people of color who might otherwise have pursued LGBT historical research; this helps explain
the small number of people of color who entered the field in the 1970s and 1980s.\textsuperscript{19}

A series of episodes involving the American Historical Association illustrates the anti-LGBT biases of the discipline just a few decades ago. At the annual business meeting of the AHA in 1974, historian Dennis Rubini of Temple University (seconded by Duberman of Lehman College and Charles Shively of Boston State College) proposed a resolution that would put the organization on record as affirming “the right of gay historians and others to engage in the research and teaching of the history of single and gay people as well as members of all sexual minorities.” The proposed statement also declared that “attempts by colleagues, administrators, and others designed to subvert such research and teaching are to be considered violations of academic freedom.” While the resolution garnered support at the business meeting, the AHA Council later voted “not to concur,” claiming that it “singles out for separate support one particular group of historians” rather than upholding “the academic freedom of all historians.” Using a term already outdated in the 1970s, the Council noted that “homosexual historians” were protected by the AHA Statement on Professional Standards, which rejected discrimination based on sexual orientation. Rubini and Duberman’s response in the \textit{AHA Newsletter} referenced ongoing problems of homophobia in the discipline, rejections of course proposals at various institutions, and “the paucity of gay history offerings throughout the country.” When the AHA then conducted an extraordinary membership vote, 641 people supported the Council’s non-concurrence, 164 supported the business meeting’s action, and 3 abstained.\textsuperscript{20}

In the same newsletter that announced these results, the AHA published an essay by PhD students Michael Lodwick and Thomas Fieh rer, who began by noting that they found themselves “moved to new heights of alarm and despair at the general drift of the discipline.” After mentioning various reasons for this, they turned to signs that the discipline was now “placing a premium upon the odd, the unusual, even the suspect, research angle.” One of their primary illustrations was the “manifesto” by Rubini and Duberman, which demonstrated that “sexual minorities” were “on the prowl.” After quoting Rubini and Duberman, Lodwick and Fiehrer wrote, “Dare we suggest that the paucity of courses in gay history owes to the obvious fact that the history of this and other ‘sexual minorities’ is unimportant.” They then complained that historians in America were in danger of “shrinking our focus to the absurdly narrow interests of the faddists.” Among the absurd topics that
scholars might similarly soon pursue, they warned, were the history of consorts, neurotics, ugly people, and unemployed historians.\textsuperscript{21}

In the aftermath of what may have been the AHA’s first queer controversy, changes in the discipline made it possible to imagine a nightmare scenario for Lodwick and Fiehrer: scholarship on the history of unemployed gay historians, some of whom may have been consorts, neurotics, or ugly. In 2001, my analysis of the academic careers of forty-four employed and unemployed LGBT historians documented pervasive patterns of bias, prejudice, and discrimination in the history job market (see chapter 3). A few years later, I published an autobiographical essay about my own close encounters with academic unemployment (see chapter 4). While the situation has improved in the last two decades, these problems have not disappeared: in 2015, the AHA’s LGBTQ Task Force documented multiple challenges faced by LGBTQ historians in publishing, research, teaching, employment, and the AHA itself.\textsuperscript{22}

In short, LGBT academic historians may have enjoyed privileges that queer public historians did not, but they confronted major obstacles in the 1970s and 1980s. In addition, there are many reasons to avoid drawing sharp lines between academic and public historians. Joan Nestle and Michael Bronski began their work as community-based writers, but both later taught college and university courses. Will Roscoe compiled \textit{Living the Spirit} on behalf of Gay American Indians, but then completed a PhD. Cheryl Clark, whose research was published in \textit{This Bridge Called My Back} and \textit{Home Girls}, worked as a university administrator and later earned a PhD. Important LGBT studies anthologies of the 1970s and 1980s, including \textit{This Bridge}, \textit{Home Girls}, and \textit{In the Life}, were edited by public intellectuals but included the work of academics. Many LGBT public historians appeared on the conference programs of the AHA and the Organization of American Historians; many were invited to present their work at colleges and universities. The Committee on LGBT History, a historical society affiliated with the AHA, was cofounded in 1979 by academic historian Walter Williams and public historian Gregory Sprague. Three of its prizes are named for public historians—Bérubé, Nestle, and Sprague—and the Bérubé Prize recognizes work in public history. Notwithstanding its name, the Gay Academic Union, founded in New York in 1973, welcomed the participation of community-based scholars. Multiple LGBT history organizations founded in the 1970s and 1980s, including the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, the History Project in Boston, the Gerber/Hart Library and Archives in Chicago, and the Lesbian Herstory Archives in
New York, were collaborative projects that brought together academic and public historians.

Distinctions between community-based historians and their academic counterparts also should not be overstated because many of the latter saw themselves as community-based scholars, were influenced by community-based developments, and imagined their audiences as extending beyond colleges and universities. Much of the early scholarship on US lesbian history, for example, was inspired by the politics of lesbian feminism and the participation of lesbian academics in community-based feminist movements. In autobiographical reflections, Newton, D’Emilio, and Duberman have emphasized that they often wrote for nonacademic audiences. Duberman and Duggan published regularly in nonacademic periodicals such as the *Nation* and *Village Voice*; Duberman also wrote for *Harper’s*, *New Republic*, *New York Times*, *Christopher Street*, and *New York Native*. Duberman reached large public audiences through his work as a playwright; his service on the boards of the National Gay Task Force, Lambda Legal Defense, and the New York Civil Liberties Union; and his vision for the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies, established at the City University of New York in 1991. Several LGBT academic historians played founding and leading roles in community history projects; Kennedy did so for the Buffalo Women’s Oral History Project, and Ullman did so for the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco. Major LGBT history anthologies were edited by academic scholars but featured the work of nonacademic historians; *Hidden from History* (1989), for example, was edited by three academics but included multiple essays by nonacademic historians.

D’Emilio offers an instructive example. D’Emilio’s 1983 book *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, which was based on his PhD dissertation, is commonly recognized as the first major scholarly work on the homophile movement of the 1950s and 1960s. As noted above, there were two earlier dissertations on pre-Stonewall activism. More to the point for the argument here is the fact that these were preceded by community-based works, many published in the LGBT press, that anticipated academic scholarship. Moreover, D’Emilio’s work on the homophile movement was first published in *The Body Politic*, a community-based gay periodical in Toronto. This is not to say that D’Emilio’s scholarship was perfectly aligned with popular LGBT sensibilities; much of his work challenged mainstream LGBT politics and perspectives. The point is rather that even as D’Emilio embarked on a successful university career, he maintained his commitments to community-based scholarship. In
the 1990s he left academia for several years to become the founding director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force’s Policy Institute. In 2000 he coedited (with NGLTF executive director Urvashi Vaid and historian William Turner) a book on LGBT politics and policy. In 2001 he coedited a posthumous collection of essays by Allan Bérubé; and he later chaired the board of directors of the Gerber/Hart Library and Archives. As is the case with many LGBT historians, D’Emilio defies simple categorization as either a university-based scholar or a community-based one.

Whether employed by academic institutions or not, LGBT historians of the 1970s and 1980s joined together in creating a powerful movement of activist scholars. Mainstream academics sometimes claim that scholars should not be activists, asserting that political commitments can compromise scholarly objectivity. This is untenable for queer historians. LGBT historians have analyzed activism; their activism has influenced their scholarship; and their scholarship has materialized in activism. Indeed, queer activism was required to make a place for LGBT histories and historians in the academy. In the 1970s and 1980s, queer scholars fought for the inclusion of LGBT history in the courses offered by colleges and universities, the essays published by academic journals, the books published by university and trade presses, and the conference programs of academic organizations. They fought to establish academic programs in gay and lesbian, LGBT, queer, feminist, women’s, sexuality, and gender studies. They fought for grants, fellowships, and library resources. They fought for jobs, tenure, and promotion; health care and partner benefits; and inclusion in nondiscrimination, anti-harassment, and anti-bullying policies. In many contexts, LGBT historians used their skills and experiences as scholars to challenge academic departments, institutions, and organizations, further illustrating the impossibility of policing boundaries between activism and academia.

Thirty years later, queer public history is thriving, notwithstanding new and ongoing struggles. In the United States alone, thousands participate in LGBT public history projects; millions engage with the results. This book’s conclusion reflects on queer public history today, but the chapters that follow this introduction explore the field’s growth and development from the late 1980s through the 2010s, using my experiences as a lens. Before turning to those experiences, the remainder of the introduction revisits the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s to explore how I came to identify as a queer public historian and LGBT scholarly activist.
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTIONS

In the last few decades, I have been an engaged participant-observer in queer public history and LGBT scholarly activism. While not unique in this respect, my experiences have positioned me to reflect critically on the politics and poetics of these fields. The following autobiographical narrative sets the stage for the chapters that follow by linking my personal history to broader developments.

Born in 1963 and raised by middle-class Jewish parents in the northern suburbs of New York City, I learned many lessons about the history of sex, marriage, and reproduction in relation to my extended family, which had migrated from Eastern Europe in the early twentieth century. Norms were fairly clear, but there was a mystery that surrounded my work on a family tree for a school assignment. When I questioned my maternal grandfather, he indicated that his father’s first name was the same as his, which I knew was unusual in Jewish families of our time and place. Children were typically named for family members who recently had died (my names, Marc and Robert, honored my great-grandmothers Marcia and Rose), so naming a son after a living relative was seen as a death-wish. When I queried him about this, my grandfather noted that his father had died before he was born, which I initially had trouble understanding. Only later, after I became a historian of sexuality, did it occur to me that my grandfather might have been trying to avoid talking openly about his origins in a non-marital pregnancy.

There were other intriguing family mysteries. I occasionally heard gossip about a paternal great-grandfather’s many girlfriends and the appearances of impropriety when his stepdaughter moved in with him after he was widowed. There were hints of risqué stories about my favorite great aunt, who married late in life and did not have children. Another great aunt had traveled to Mexico to meet the man her yenta had found, a Jewish immigrant to Cuba. There was awkward laughter about the time my maternal grandparents, both born in Poland, mistakenly believed that their niece was dating an African American man because his name, common among Hungarian Jews, was unfamiliar to them. There was tense talk when family members divorced, especially when my great uncle’s third wife abandoned him after he began losing his memory. There were intimations of transgression when we navigated the boundaries between Ashkenazi and Sephardic culinary traditions; my family was mostly Ashkenazi (from Eastern Europe), but one of my mother’s first cousins had married a Sephardic Jew whose family
had emigrated from Turkey. There was nothing ambiguous about the family's feelings about marriages to non-Jewish “goys” and “shiksas,” though there was rejoicing when this was preceded by conversion to Judaism. As some of this suggests, I also learned familial lessons about race, class, and religion and the ways these could interact with sex, gender, and sexuality. Some of this was bigoted, but my working-class maternal grandparents, active in left and labor politics since arriving in the United States as teenagers in 1929, introduced me to more progressive perspectives.

Decades later, it is difficult to reconstruct what I learned about other types of gender and sexual transgressions when I was growing up in Shrub Oak, but I am confident that in my family and community, same-sex desires and cross-gender identifications were commonly regarded as embarrassing and shameful. I had no sense that they were worthy of historical exploration. I certainly did not know that in those very years, LGBT activists were transforming the politics of gender and sexuality, mobilizing movements and moments that would greatly influence my life. Nor did I know that historians were transforming the study of the LGBT past. In 1976, the year of my bar mitzvah, I knew that the United States was celebrating its two-hundredth birthday, but I did not know that Jonathan Ned Katz’s *Gay American History* was giving birth to a new field of scholarly inquiry that I would later claim as my own.

By 1977, I was old enough to understand that I had lost family members, including great-aunts and great-uncles, in the Holocaust, and that one of my mother’s first cousins, whom we saw regularly for Passover, Chanukah, and other family events, was an orphaned survivor who had been raised by my great-grandparents in New York. I sensed that there were reasons for concern about the rising tide of racism and sexism in and beyond the United States. I had several direct experiences with anti-Jewish harassment and hatred, including questions from a neighbor’s father about why the Jews had killed Jesus, pennies tossed in front of me to see if I would pick them up, and beatings on my way to Hebrew school. I remember feeling worried about the growth of the Christian Right and the politics of right-wing backlash, but I did not know that social conservatives such as Florida’s Anita Bryant were winning victories in their efforts to repeal recently enacted gay rights laws. Nor did I know that Harvey Milk was campaigning successfully to win election as the first openly gay member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors or that someday I would live in the district he had represented. I was focused instead on my first year at Lakeland Senior High
School, which was disrupted by the longest teachers’ strike in New York state history (forty-one days). This was when I first shared my political views in the public sphere, writing a letter about the strike that was published in the *Peekskill Evening Star* (after my first encounters with an exacting editor: my mother). While my intervention in local labor politics cannot be described as a work of queer public history or an example of scholarly activism, it anticipated my later interest in writing about political matters for public audiences (and I am proud to say that I sided with the teachers!).

As far as I can recall, I first encountered the work of gay and lesbian historians during my first year at Wesleyan University, a liberal arts college in Connecticut that I attended from 1981 to 1985. I did not consistently think of myself as gay at this point (I had two long and happy relationships with women in my high school and college years and another while in graduate school), but I was fascinated by the history, politics, psychology, and sociology of oppression and resistance. I took no general US history surveys while in college, but enrolled in courses on African American history and US women’s history. Neither of these topics had received much attention in my high school history classes, which concluded with World War Two. I likely had a self-congratulatory attitude about studying these topics as a white man. My women’s history professor assigned Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s 1975 essay “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” which had been published in the first issue of *Signs*, an interdisciplinary women’s studies journal. I also read Lillian Faderman’s *Surpassing the Love of Men*, Gayle Rubin’s early essays on gender and sexuality, and Adrienne Rich’s work on “compulsory heterosexuality.” As a young man with sexual secrets, I was intrigued by the ways that scholars such as Smith-Rosenberg were making the private public, though I could not have known that she would later serve as my PhD supervisor.

Notwithstanding my interests in history, politics, and sociology, I was a psychology major for most of my time at Wesleyan. In the 1980s, this was still commonly seen as the most appropriate discipline for studying sexuality. In fact, I wrote my first gay-themed paper for an introductory psychology course (taught by a professor whose young son would become the queer historian Timothy Stewart-Winter). The essay explored psychological theories about the origins of homosexuality, but at the last minute, after panicking about the fact that other students might see my cover page, I changed the title (but not the contents) to