

**The Making of a Queer of Color Critique of Lesbian and Gay
Politics: In/Exclusion and the Black Pride 4**

By

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Abstract

On June 17th, 2017 protesters called the Black Pride 4 blocked Stonewall Columbus' Pride Parade to draw attention to racism within the LGBT movement. Their arrests and trial led to a tension in discourse over who was acting in the legacy of the Stonewall riots and whether the LGBT movement has been gentrified by white middle class gays, leading to the marginalization of Queer People of Color (QPOC). At the heart of this tension is a fight over whether LGBT politics should be one of assimilation or liberation. This article traces the roots of these critiques in a short intellectual history, explores how they were used by actors in the Black Pride 4 case, and analyzes how the representations of these critiques in discourse evolved throughout the case using the frameworks on intersectionality and queer of color critique. The Black Pride 4 case, and the wave of other actions like it, are caused by an LGBT movement that has historically prioritized white gay voices and needs over those of QPOC. These confrontations have led to a fragmentation within the LGBT movement that challenges the dominant narrative that the mainstream LGBT offers—that the LGBT movement is unifying, inclusive, and fighting for the rights of all members of its community.

Keywords: Queer of Color Critique, Intersectionality, Discourse Analysis, Intellectual History, LGBT, Social Movement, QPOC

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Xoxo,

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Introduction

“The queer community has never been a monolithic entity. There’ve always been divisions along racial, gender, age, and class lines. As far back as I can remember—and I came out in April 1971—there were gays who lived in mansions and those who live in the streets, gays who worked for Wall Street and those who sold their bodies to pay the rent.”¹

Tommi Aviocolli Mecca

“The gay community’s emphasis on the similarities of experiences between (white) heterosexuality and lesbian/gay homosexuality, through a shared racism against brown folk, has helped white gays and lesbians to assimilate and become part of the white, heterosexual nation.”²

Priyank Jindal

On June 17th, 2017 there was a call for silence.³ The Black Pride 4, part of a group of ten queer people of color (POC), blocked Stonewall Columbus Pride , and to remind festival-goers that being a black person, a black trans person, could still be a death sentence.⁴ They called for seven minutes of silence for the acquittal of the cop who murdered Philando Castile and to protest the murders of eleven trans women within the past year.⁵ Within ten seconds, the police, supported by Stonewall Columbus Pride, responded by violently tackling the protesters,

¹Sycamore, Mattilda. *That's Revolting!: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*. Soft Skull Press, 2004, 29.

² Ibid., 40.

³ Scott, Cameron. "Rainbow Rant: In Defense of the Black Pride 4." Columbus Alive. February 21, 2018.

⁴ Ibid.,

⁵ Ibid.,

macing them, and pushing them onto police bikes, removing them from the scene.⁶ Darius Stubbs, from the Ohio ACLU, described that the “Columbus police officers grab[bed], body slam[med], dog pile[d] and mace[d] the activists; White onlookers film[ed] and cheer[ed] from the sidewalks.”⁷

The Stonewall Columbus Pride Parade was named in honor of the riot in 1969 that inspired the first U.S. Pride Parade the year after, but the Black Pride 4 contested whether or not Columbus accurately reflected the mentality of Stonewall.⁸ As Wriply Bennet, one of the activists involved explained, the action was “birthed out of us realizing that we've been shut out of the community that we fought for.”⁹ For example, the Stonewall Columbus Pride Parade’s website recommends to, “Listen to Police and Pride Security. They are there to keep you safe.”¹⁰ However, as *Teen Vogue* reports, “Since 2013, the Columbus Division of Police has killed 28 people, 21 of whom were black.” This illustrates a tension within the Columbus LGBT movement—who does Pride represent and who is excluded from this definition of Pride and LGBT politics?

The Black Pride 4 are the activists who were arrested that day and charged with “trumped up charges,” in Stubbs’ words.¹¹ Stonewall Columbus Pride responded by supporting the arrests and testifying against the activists.¹² Jess Fourier, an author for *Feministing*, wrote that Stonewall Columbus Pride’s response was a:

...slap in the face to the radical roots of the queer and trans liberation movement that an organization that bears the name of the Stonewall Riots — a riot led by black and

⁶ Stubbs, Darius. "Commentary." ACLU of Ohio.

⁷ Ibid.,.

⁸ Stein, Perry. "Pride's Raucous Parades Began as Suit-and-tie Protests Called the 'Annual Reminder'." The Washington Post. June 10, 2017.

⁹ Bennet, Wriply. "Black Pride 4." Online interview by author. March 19, 2018.

¹⁰ Pride Festival 2017." Columbus, Ohio Pride Festival 2017.

¹¹ Ibid.,.

¹² Fournier, Jess. "Mainstream LGBTQ Group Helped Convict Black Queer ..."

brown trans women against police brutality — is helping criminalize black queer and trans people for demanding action from their so-called community.¹³

This action was reflected by a wave of similar protests in DC¹⁴, Minneapolis,¹⁵ Seattle,¹⁶ Chicago,¹⁷ and New York City¹⁸ from June 10th to June 26th. Critiques of corporate sponsorship, the increased policing of low-income people and POC, the militarization of the police, gay gentrification, and the racist prioritization of white middle-upper class gay's needs over those of low-income QPOC were repeated at each of the protests.¹⁹ The tactics used in these actions were also similar—psychically blocking and occupying the site of contention, releasing demands for the Pride Parade's organizers, and asking for a moment of silence.²⁰ The action in Minneapolis also included a die-in, harkening back to ACT UP's activism during the AIDS crisis.²¹

I contend that these actions are in response to an increasingly white-washed, corporatized, and middle-class LGBT movement that has replaced its history of liberation and radical politics with a sanitized assimilationist approach, that has left the most marginalized of the LGBT community feeling abandoned. I am interested in the tensions between how actors are represented in discourse, what tactics are used, differing visions of LGBT politics, and how each organization uses Stonewall as an avenue for legitimacy. I argue that the Black Pride 4 has created a radical queer of color politics based on intersectionality built around the needs of the most marginal of the LGBT movement.

¹³ Fournier, Jess. "Mainstream LGBTQ Group Helped Convict Black Queer ..."

¹⁴ Michelson, Noah. "Protesters Disrupt D.C. Pride Parade, Hit Organizers With List Of Demands For 'Justice'." The Huffington Post. June 14, 2017.

¹⁵ Pheifer, Pat. "Pride, with Police Included, Marches on after Protest." Star Tribune. June 26, 2017.

¹⁶ Millman, Zosha. "BLM Marchers Briefly Interrupt Pride Parade." Seattlepi.com. June 26, 2017.

¹⁷ Diavolo, Lucy. "Why These Activists Are Demanding More From Pride." Teen Vogue. June 26, 2017.

¹⁸ Duffy, Nick. "NYC Pride Is Becoming a Protest Again." PinkNews. March 30, 2017.

¹⁹ Grinberg, Emanuella. "At Pride Celebrations, Calls of 'No Justice, No Pride'." CNN. June 26, 2017.

²⁰ Ibid.,

²¹ Pheifer, Pat. "Pride, with Police Included, Marches on after Protest." Star Tribune. June 26, 2017.

In this article I explore how Black Queer Intersectional Columbus (BQIC), an organization that grew out of the Black Pride 4, and Stonewall Columbus, the organization viewed as its opponent, offer different visions of LGBT politics that are in tension with one another. At the roots of this contention is a debate about whether LGBT politics should focus on liberation or assimilation. Mainstream tactics have been critiqued as ‘gentrifying’ the movement—coopting a movement that had been started by QPOC, erasing them from the history of the LGBT movement, and prioritizing white gays needs over those of QPOC.²² In turn, the prioritization has been said to marginalize QPOC.²³

This research is important, because it has both scholarly and political implications. It seeks to illustrate that studying racial tensions and multiplicities of identities and oppression in social movement studies is necessary to understand and dismantle histories of marginalization that affected QPOC. This case gained national recognition and was one of a wave of similar protests that highlight a fragmentation in the LGBT movement. The LGBT movement has a history of marginalizing QPOC—what began as a movement focused on liberation evolved into one hoping to assimilate into mainstream American culture. This history of prioritizing whiteness as an invisible reference point and gay as a universal reference point in the movement led to this tension.

This tension, as illustrated by the case of the Black Pride 4, led to a counter movement in contestation not just with larger sexual and racial social norms represented by the larger society, but those supposedly representing LGBT people as well. The Black Pride 4 broke off from and has since then actively boycotted Stonewall Columbus Pride and condemned that

²² Johnson, Myles E. "The Stonewall Riots Could Only Be Started by Someone Who Was Tired and Black'." Timeline. August 05, 2017.

²³ Warner, Michael. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, 75.

organization as white supremacist collaborators.²⁴ This fragmentation can be seen in other cities that have higher QPOC population, such as DC and LA.²⁵

The implications of this contestation have a profound effect on the future of LGBT politics. If QPOC erode support from larger LGBT organizations, will the LGBT movement continue to have visibility, bargaining and lobbying power, and political influence, or will it be recognized as being complicit in white supremacy and create a vacuum in which other social organizations can take over?

This type of research explores questions of identity, oppression, and group solidarity in new ways. I am expanding earlier queer critiques and academic studies on assimilation/liberation to include QPOC voices and experience, which has been previously marginalized in scholarship on social movement studies. The discipline of political science can add to previous scholarship on racialization and social theory, by using theories of fragmentation/cleavages, situating the case against traditional questions asked by resource mobilization theory, and offer new ways to measure the complex power relations between actors.

This research will build on earlier critical race scholarship has focused on bringing black voices into law narrative and legal scholarship. Academics such as Kimberlee Crenshaw and her concept of ‘intersectionality’ has had a profound impact on understanding black experiences and oppressions. Critical race theory has influenced queer scholarship by Cathy Cohen, Roderick Ferguson, and José Esteban Muñoz, who have questioned whiteness as the invisible reference point in Lesbian and Gay studies.

Cathy Cohen is a political scientist at the University of Chicago, who is most well known for her scholarship on the intersections of blackness and queerness, but does not work

²⁴"BQIC." May 2nd, 2017.

²⁵ "From Pride To Protest: LGBT Parades Take On A New Tone This Year." RSS

in social movement studies. Like Kimberlee Crenshaw, she is situated in a woman of color theory and practice. Roderick Ferguson is a professor in African American Studies and Woman and Gender Studies at the University of Illinois, who works on racialization in literature. As a scholar within the humanities, he is focused on constructing new theories and concepts to understand how racialization is socially created and what political and social implications it has. However, he often keeps his analysis theoretical, and does not use his theory of queer of color critique to analyze social movements themselves. José Esteban Muñoz was a scholar in performative studies, who used queer of color critique to understand racialized bodies and performative politics and aesthetics. Despite the huge impact of his scholarship, which has influenced scholars such as Jack Halberstram, his research was disconnected from social movement theories, as well.

My research builds upon theories of intersectionality and queer of color critique within the frameworks of woman of color activism and critical race scholarship. I will be using the theories that the scholars above have formulated to analyze a political case of contention and its influence on a national social movement. I am working from within a discipline of political science with a focus on social movement studies, which has historically ignored the theories that I am working with. The case that I am using to analyze these political implications through queer of color theories is the contestation between the Black Pride 4 and their supporters, marginalized QPOC fighting for liberation, and Stonewall Columbus Pride, a ‘mainstream’ organization whom envisions assimilation as the future of LGBT politics. This case offers the opportunity to research QPOC protest in tension with LGBT assimilation, represented by Stonewall Columbus Pride. This case garnered international attention and can represent QPOC protest of Pride, making it generalizable to larger racial tensions within the US LGBT movement itself.

My intended audience is both within and outside of academia. I would like to prove that political science should embrace new intersectional methodologies from outside the discipline. This paper attempts to bridge the gap between traditional political science and critical race and queer theories, which the discipline of political science has largely ignored. I echo Nicole Smith and Donna Lee when I say that I believe political science should embrace feminist and queer theories. They argue that the lack of serious work on issues of gender and sexuality in the discipline of political science:

... implies that something odd is going on in political science...political science is consciously marginalising issues of gender and sexuality and hardly doing justice to the political analysis of social relations that queer theorists have been successfully doing for quite some time.²⁶

I am also writing this to reach activists, policy makers, and scholars outside of academia and argue that the goals of the contemporary LGBT movement may have negative political implications for the QPOC they say they represent. If the movement continues to embrace tactics of assimilation, do not challenge an invisible reference point of whiteness, and continue to prioritize 'gay' as a universal unifying identity instead of working to encompass intersectional identities, a wave of fragmentation may undermine the movement itself. If the LGBT movement does not take a movement of introspection, then the continued prominence of the movement may be challenged.

²⁶ Smith, Nicola J., and Donna Lee. 2015. "What's Queer About Political Science?." *British Journal Of Politics & International Relations* 17, no. 1, 50.

Framework and Literature Review:

Traditional social movement studies have depended on theories such as resource mobilization and have been challenged by emerging political theories such as homonationalism and affect/emotion work theories. For this specific case, I have chosen to use theories of intersectionality and queer of color critique, which help deconstruct issues surrounding multiple oppressions and identities. In this section, I briefly explore earlier theories that have been used to analyze similar cases, but that I believe would fall short in this specific case.

Social movement studies have historically focused on what inspires collective action. The size of the movement dictates its likelihood of success—the larger the group, the more diverse the interests, the more likely it is to fragment and not achieve its goals.²⁷ Even if the movement does not fragment, the larger the group, the more people have to share the collective good that they are lobbying for, making the share of success smaller for each individual.²⁸ Resource mobilization theorists are concerned with how movements are organized, how the organization is maintained, who the main actors of the movement are, how tactics of meaning making and framing are used to accomplish the movements goal, and how social capital and financial capital are mobilized.²⁹

As theorized by Olson in *The Logic of Collective Action*, groups and movements are a way in which the most *common* interests of a group are achieved—from a race conscious perspective, this would be the most privileged interests.³⁰ The size of the movement also dictates its likelihood of success—the larger the group, the more diverse the interests, the more

²⁷Olson, Mancur. *Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge, Mass., 1971, 13.

²⁸ Ibid, 38.

²⁹ McCarthy, John D., and Mayer N. Zald. *Social Movements in an Organizational Society: Collected Essays*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1987, 20.

³⁰Olson, Mancur. *Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge, Mass., 1971, 7.

likely it is to fragment and not achieve its goals.³¹ Even if the movement doesn't fragment, the larger the group the more people have to share the collective good that they are lobbying for, making the share of success smaller for each individual.³²

From this framework, it can be understood that as the movement began to grow and the interests of the members became more diverse, the more prone it was to fragmentation and contentious actions like that of the Black Pride 4. However, the LGBT movement began as a movement for liberation, not assimilation, by black women of color and trans folk/drag queens and was inspired by the revolutionary spirit of the Black Panther movement.³³ This complicates the narrative offered by resource mobilization—why did a liberation movement turn to assimilationist tactics, possibly abandoning those who started the movement? The easiest answer: financial and social capital. An accommodationist movement offers a greater number of resources for those who will be accepted by the structure—white, middle-upper class gay and lesbians.

Scholars such as Katherine Bruce and Gwyneth McClendon have depended on resource mobilization to understand LGBT Pride, protest, and contentious politics. Both articles explore political and cultural meaning-making, selective incentives, and the grievances/repertoire of action that LGBT groups use to maneuver benefits and costs of action.

I contend that using this theory to understand the case of LGBT movement vastly oversimplifies it. Through a resource mobilization lens, it wouldn't make sense that the Black Pride 4 would have protested, because assimilating into the larger group of mainstream gay politics and actions would lead to greater resource accumulation, social capital increases, and other benefits. Though social movement studies can gain from an analysis that explores issues

³¹Olson, Mancur. *Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge, Mass., 1971, 13.

³² Ibid, 38.

³³ Johnson, Myles E. "The Stonewall Riots Could Only Be Started by Someone Who Was Tired and Black." Timeline. August 05, 2017

of framing, bargaining, and collective action, resource mobilization ignores the historical context of said movements and the cultural/political reference point of said actors, then theories such as intersectionality emphasizes.

Resource mobilization theory has faced similar criticisms from gender studies and has been rather abandoned by disciplines that work on LGBT protest. Resource mobilization is a ‘positivist’ approach, a method of knowing that is ‘scientific,’ while Women and Gender Studies (WGST) research is often ‘interpretivist’ in nature. Interpretivists use an ‘abductive’ logic—a mode on inquiry in which perplexing cases can be understood.³⁴ Swartz-Shea and Yanow describe this as a, “puzzling-out process, [in which] the researcher tacks continually, constantly, back and forth in an iterative-recursive fashion between what is puzzling and possible explanations for it.”³⁵ It is a “circular-spiral pattern” of thinking that is question-driven and continually in flux.³⁶ Interpretivists focus on meaning making, discourses, and the symbols.³⁷ Interpretivist scholars ask not just *what* knowledge is, but *whom is it for*.³⁸ Instead of positivist theories, such as research mobilization, WGST scholars have increasingly used theories of homonationalism and affect theory to understand LGBT protest. However, I contend that these theories also fall short in being able to understand the case of the Black Pride 4.

Jasbir Puar has used theories of homonationalism, a form of US exceptionalism that is specific to LGBT people, and performativity to understand why and how the LGBT movement has assimilated into the larger structure of oppression. Her argument is that there is a ‘collusion’ between LGBT people as nationalist actors that separates white queer minorities from

³⁴ Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine, and Dvora Yanow. 2012. *Interpretive research design: concepts and processes*. New York, NY: Routledge, 27.

³⁵ Ibid, 27.

³⁶ Ibid, 28.

³⁷ Ibid, 46.

³⁸ Ibid, 47.

organizing with and supporting brown/immigrant ‘others.’³⁹ Homonationalism and the performativity of nationalist LGBT subjects can be helpful frameworks when analyzing the historical turn of the LGBT movement to assimilation and can be a weapon when criticizing white national subjects, but cannot be expanded to understand those who were never able to assimilate in the first place, such as QPOC, because of historic marginalization.

Another theory that WGST scholars have turned to is affect theory. Affect theory is based on the understanding that emotion is a tactic that can be consciously constructed. Emma Russell uses these theories to analyze how the police’s image in LGBT communities is continually negotiated, how the meaning of ‘police’ in LGBT communities are in tension with earlier histories of police violence and LGBT push-back, how cultural politics can be used to influence the meaning of ‘police’ and how LGBT people engage with that concept. She argues that police visibility at LGBT sites normalizes police presence, ‘pink-washes’ its history of violence against LGBT people, and re-brands it as pro-LGBT.⁴⁰ Her case is a majority-white LGBT march in Australia that has not only embraced police but “features police foremost” in the parade itself.⁴¹

Emotion work may be helpful to understand histories of tension attempting to reconcile differences, such as the police as both an oppressor and an ally in different contexts, but it doesn’t work as successfully outside these spaces of negotiation. The case of the Black Pride 4, from an affect theory perspective, can be one of anger, frustration, and grief caused by the conscious knowledge that QPOC have been displaced from the LGBT movement, that the Stonewall Columbus Pride March itself has attempted to suppress QPOC voices, and that police violence has murdered dozens of QPOC in the US. However, this doesn’t answer the

³⁹ Puar, Jasbir K. "Mapping US Homonormativities." *Gender, Place & Culture* 13, no. 1 (2006): 67-88.

⁴⁰ Russell, Emma K. "A ‘fair Cop’: Queer Histories, Affect and Police Image Work in Pride March." *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal* 13, no. 3 (2016): 277-93

⁴¹ Ibid, 290.

‘why’ questions that I am interested in. I am interested beyond the emotion work behind this case, but the political history leading up to this action and the political implications of said action, which cannot be completely explained with affect theory.

Though these scholars have helped develop the field of social movement studies, they have mostly abandoned the complex interaction between race and queerness. I would like to build off this scholarship but move towards theories that can deal with said complexity. My research concerning the case of the Black Pride 4 will be framed by theories of intersectionality and queer of color critique.

Theories: Intersectionality and Queer of Color Critique

Intersectionality envisions marginalized groups not as a monolith, but as a community of difference. The basic principle of this concept is that gender, class, race, and sexuality are based on differences, inequalities, and identities that are categorized in opposition to one another.⁴² These categories can be structures, discourses, and identities that construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct each other—they are not static, everything is in process/in flux. These categories have been ‘institutionalized’ and unconscious norms that become integrated into ways of thinking, language and meaning-making, and conceptions of selves. Intersectionality contends that multiple identities cannot be separated—that a queer black woman cannot be categorized as black, queer, and a woman, but that the oppression she faces is specific to the intersectionality of her identities.

As Crenshaw explains the importance of this conception, by contending that, “...ignoring difference within groups contributed to tension among groups.”⁴³ In the context of my case, this can be understood as the LGBT community attempting to frame itself as a group that faces the same oppression, even though members of the community have different privileges, life experiences, and marginalization. Crenshaw contends that the prevailing inaccurate framing of a group as sharing the same experiences and oppression harms women of color. I argue that this argument can be expanded to include QPOC.

Cathy Cohen in “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics,” explore similar questions that I do in this article surrounding issues of racism

⁴² Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989 , Article 8.

⁴³ Delgado, Richard, Jean Stefancic, and Angela P. Harris. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press, 2001. 357.

in the LGBT movement, the “limits of...civil rights strategy,” and the problems surrounding gentrification, assimilation, and mainstreaming.⁴⁴ In her article, she explains how the LGBT movement has helped the “more privileged” while abandoning the “most vulnerable”⁴⁵ a sentiment that I too share. In her analysis, she emphasizes how this has caused a tension “over who and what type of issues would be represented in lesbian and gay politics and in the larger community discourse.”⁴⁶ She hypothesizes that this fight over representation and the future of LGBT politics will cause fragmentation in the movement and that to save the movement a new “transformational coalition politics” that includes the marginalized must be created.⁴⁷ However, for her that new politics is not queer politics, for she is equally disillusioned with it.

Queer politics, to her, have historically not been inclusive.⁴⁸ Though she recognizes that queer politics has great potential a theory, she argues that in practice it has often been used to create simple gay/straight dichotomies that do not actually offer liberation and are equally “coded with class, gender, and race privilege.”⁴⁹ She instead envisions a new politics that recognizes “multiplicity and interconnectedness of our identities” that is built around the marginalized, not the privileged.⁵⁰ She is alluding to the radical potential of movements based on intersectionality and, I would argue, queer of color critique. Though queer theory may not have successfully challenged and dismantled structures of oppression, I would argue that a politics based around queer of color critique could.

A queer of color critique expands this theory to incorporate how queerness and blackness are interconnected politically and socially. It recognizes that the unconscious

⁴⁴Cohen, Cathy. 1997. “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” GLQ 3: 437.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 443.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 448.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 482.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 440.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 447-449.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 480.

‘reference point’ is always the norm—whiteness, straightness, maleness, cis-ness, etc. This is contrasted against the ‘other—’ the black, the queer, the femme, the trans. This dualism automatically privileges the ‘norm’ at the expense of the ‘other—’ going even farther, what is ‘normal’ is constructed against what is ‘abnormal.’ As Ferguson explains:

...African American culture indexes a social heterogeneity that oversteps the boundaries of gender propriety and sexual normativity...racist practice articulates itself generally as agender and sexual regulation, and that gender and sexual differences variegate racial formations.⁵¹

Ferguson’s analysis contends that black culture itself is queered by a society which draws the boundaries of the normative outside of this group. He argues that regulation by the formal means of the state and informal means of coercion by society creates a racialization and gendered subject that is inherently deviant. For him, black queer studies is more than queer, a term that has often alienated black LGBT folk, but ‘quare—’ a new vision of queer politics that embraces a genealogy of black liberation and afro-feminism and is centered around the black queer subject and its politicized identity.⁵² As he explains:

Quare studies would reinstate the subject and the identity around which the subject circulates that queer theory so easily dismissed. By refocusing our attention of the racialized bodies, experiences, and knowledges of transgendered people, lesbians, gays, and bisexuals of color, quare studies ground the discursive process of mediated identification and subjectivity in a political praxis that speaks to the material existence of ‘colored’ bodies.⁵³

Queer of color critique, or quare studies, offers a way to understand QPOC as experiencing different forms of oppression and material/social conditions than other LGBT

⁵¹ Ferguson, Roderick A. *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, 2-3.

⁵² Ibid.,

⁵³ Ibid, 136.

people. For the case of the Black Pride 4, this allows an analysis to be conducted based on how systems have been consciously created to objectify and oppress racialized queer bodies in a different way than white LGBT bodies.

The Black Pride 4 are activists whose critiques, action, and repercussions of their actions were influenced by the complex interaction between their identities of being black and queer—intersectional identities. The disconnect exemplified by both the Columbus Police department and Stonewall Columbus Pride can be understood through the theory offered by critical race theory that whiteness as a reference point is often hidden and unchallenged. Understanding the LGBT movement as positioning itself as a universal and unified ‘gay’ movement that has an unacknowledged/challenged white reference point can help understand why QPOC have spoken out about their needs being ignored.

At the heart of these tensions are questions of assimilation/liberation, whether the LGBT movement has been ‘gentrified,’ and whether LGBT politics marginalizes the oppressed members of its community or embraces the marginalized. These questions can be explored through a short intellectual history of the LGBT movement and a discourse analysis of the Black Pride 4 case. In this analysis, it is found that though the LGBT movement began from a place of radical politics, it evolved into an accommodationist movement that left QPOC behind in order to gain social/political/economic capital for the more privileged members of its community. This history of ignoring the needs of QPOC led to the Black Pride 4/Stonewall Columbus contestation that fragmented the Columbus LGBT community and uncovered a larger issue around race/privilege in the national LGBT movement.

Methodology

The data to be analyzed are articles, op-eds, demands, statements, and manifestos from local news networks and national/local NGOS from the reporting of the blockage of the parade to the aftermath of the trial. Actors are represented from leftist organizations and NGOS, such as Socialist Worker, TransOhio, Worker World, Feministing, No Justice No Pride, Injustice Today, Brave Ohio, the ACLU of Ohio, BQIC, local news outlets, such as the Columbus Underground, Columbus Freepress, Columbus Dispatch, Ohio Outlook, national news networks, such as NBC News and CBC News, and social media platforms to explore the hidden transcripts from Reddit. The data explored here are all the documents found between the start of the case and the aftermath of the trial until May 2018. It does not bring in new data from BQIC's Community Pride, because of the time constraints surrounding this paper.

To analyze this data, I will be using discourse analysis to analyze the meaning-making, (counter) discourses, differing representations of actions and actors, and contesting narratives and descriptions surrounding the case. This data offers a limited view of the contestation as it is muddled by personal biases, political stances, and other implications. The voices who are present in discourse are themselves in a privileged position, as well. Those with social capital are given the space to air their grievances, while those who may belong to said community, QPOC, but have complications to their image, such as being a sex worker, drug addict, or poor, are not always offered space. However, it provides a glimpse into this situation that can be pieced together to understand why the LGBT movement is facing internal critiques that are breaking apart the movement.

Discourse analysis has the potential to be an extremely helpful tool in social movement studies. As Fairclough contends in *Discourse and Social Change*, language can be understood as a "form of social practice," meaning that it is an "mode of action...[and] mode of

representation.”⁵⁴ This means that discourse is a relational, political tool used to construct identities, communities, knowledge, belief-systems, and institutions.⁵⁵ Fairclough argues that it is a “discursive practice” that has the potential to both replicate and dismantle the societal structure.⁵⁶ This potential makes discourse a “mode of political and ideological practice,” meaning that discourse contributes to social contention, movements, and change.⁵⁷

What these counter-movement actions have created is a reverse discourse—a discourse that contends that the LGBT movement prioritizes white comfort over black lives. Foucault argues that there is dominate discourse that is in continual tension with other discourses, which he calls ‘discursive relations.’⁵⁸ Counter discourses challenge the dominate discourse, therefore destabilizing understood meaning of the object and the discursive practice that surrounds it⁵⁹. This ‘discursive practice’ is the politics that have consequences in the larger social context. Foucault describes that the meaning of an object and the politics of said object are in continual flux because of this. It is part of a continual process in which a ‘constellation’ of discourses fight over said meaning. This is a political process in which the ‘discursive practice’ surrounding it can be challenged. The position of the object/subject can therefore be changed through discursive practices.⁶⁰

The discourse that the LGBT movement espouses caters to middle-upper class issues like gay marriage, the repeal of ‘don’t ask don’t tell,’ the pushing for openly trans people in the military, and the right to adopt children as a gay couple, while eclipsing the struggles of the most marginalized in the community to just survive. This discourse is supported by institutional sites, such as the US government, making it a dominant discourse.⁶¹ This is labeled an

⁵⁴ Fairclough, Norman. 1992. *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 63.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 64.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 65.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 67.

⁵⁸ Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1969, 46.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 47-48.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 52.

⁶¹ Ibid, 51.

‘assimilationist’ approach to gay advocacy, while the counter movement calls for a return to gay liberation in which society itself should be ‘queered,’ instead of LGBT people accommodating a system of oppression. This fight over discourse has a direct effect on how QPOC are viewed, how they are treated, and what political rights and power they are granted.

The Intellectual History of the Queer (of Color) Critiques of Pride:

To help contextualize my case, I will briefly explore the intellectual history of the LGBT movement from 1969 to the present. This is important to do, because by understanding the intellectual genealogies that have led to this tension, the contention can be better historicized and legitimized. As Ferguson explains, “These interests [interrogating a cultural and political history negotiated from a place of whiteness] necessarily made queer of color critique into a historiographical venture.”⁶² I will spend extra attention in this section to issues of racialized tensions, the historical gentrification of the movement by white gays, and queer critiques that have led to the Black Pride 4. As explained by Ferguson, this is important to do, because queer of color critique offers a way in which to

distinguish women of color and queer of color investments in comparative analyses and coalitional politics from the comparative and coalitional conventions set by dominant Western and cultural nationalist formations, conventions that presumed monolithic, transparent, and fixed notions of culture and difference.⁶³

This short intellectual history will be one inspired by intersectionality and queer of color critique, meaning that this will be challenging the absence of QPOC experience in the dominant narrative of LGBT history and attempt to “address connections between race, sexuality, and political economy...” in LGBT politics.⁶⁴

⁶² Ferguson, Roderick A. "Queer of Color Critique." Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature. March 21, 2018.

⁶³Ibid.,.

⁶⁴Ibid.,.

I have coded the eras the following:

1. Gay Liberation—1969 to 1976
2. Gay Advocacy—1977 to 1986
3. Crisis—1987 to 1993
4. Gay Civil Rights and Legal Protection—1994 to 2008
5. Queer Critique—2009 to Present

These codes are used to simplify and categorize the data used in the intellectual history.

The distinction between the codes above are based on themes that I recognized, such as changing discourse, different visions of LGBT politics, and evolving tactics of resistance. These codes help illustrate a change over time trend where liberation discourse became less dominant than advocacy and civil rights discourse. These codes are not perfect—there is always an undercurrent of different LGBT politics and some organizations that I argue represents an era continued throughout many of these eras. However, they help show how the needs of QPOC became less prioritized over time, leading to fragmentation within the LGBT movement.

In this historical analysis, dichotomies can be used to better understand the tensions that have fragmented the LGBT movement, such as:

1. Assimilation v. Liberation
2. Gentrification v. the ‘Roots’ of the Movement
3. Marginalizing v. Encompassing the Marginal
4. Universalism v. Intersectionality

These dichotomies are at the foundation of the tensions between the Black Pride 4 and Stonewall Columbus, as well as between the larger LGBT movement and QPOC. Assimilation represents how the LGBT movement has been appropriated into larger cultural and political systems in the U.S., while liberation is a political philosophy in tension with becoming integrated into larger structures of oppression and privilege. Warner described this as ‘respectability’ politics, in which the LGBT movement self-polices based on ‘community

standard’ of what is ‘normal’ and ‘moral.’⁶⁵ POC has historically been viewed as ‘amoral, abnormal, and overtly sexual’ because of racialized perceptions, which disallow them from being assimilated and being granted greater privileges.⁶⁶ Therefore, racial and sexual liberation that challenges these larger structures is the best avenue for political power.

Examples of organizations fighting for liberation are the Gay Liberation Front in the in 70s and No Justice No Pride or Black Pride 4 in the contemporary political landscape. Examples of groups that have been criticized for assimilation tactics would be the Human Rights Campaign and the Log Cabin Republicans that were founded in the 70/80s and are still active. This tension is one of meaning with political implications that has led to different visions of the future of the LGBT movement. As academic Mary Bernstein explains, “From the early 70s on, the movement began to shift from seeing the state as an oppressor to demanding that the state provide protections...”⁶⁷ This shift illustrate the start of said fragmentation.

However, this shift did not occur for QPOC, who didn’t begin to align with the state, but instead continued to view the state as an oppressive force, turning the mainstream LGBT movement and white LG people into co-conspirators. As explained by Khary Septh, editor in chief of The Tenth, the oppression that WPOC face is, “the type of thing that the white boys don’t have to deal with: we must be gentle with the evolving psychosis of our oppressors.”⁶⁸ Septh explains that the ‘white boys’ themselves are the ‘oppressors,’ but that they can ‘evolve’ to understand the lived experiences of QPOC.

The dichotomy of gentrification versus the ‘roots’ of the movement, as represented by the Stonewall Riots and what it stood for, can be understood similarly. Activists from both the assimilation/liberation debate contend that they are acting in the image of Stonewall. Stonewall

⁶⁵ Warner, Michael. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, 34.

⁶⁶ See Siobhan Somerville’s *Queering the Color Line*

⁶⁷ Bernstein, Mary. "United States: Multi-Institutional Politics, Social Movements, and the States." In *The Lesbian and Gay Movement and the State*. Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011, 200.

⁶⁸ Outmagazine. "What Is the State of Black Gay America?" OUT. September 19, 2016.

is a symbol that has been used to legitimize political actions and the actors organizing them. At the heart of this tension is the question of who does Stonewall belong to and who is acting in its image? Were those at the forefront drag queens and trans people of color or were they white gay men? Was the movement whitewashed and coopted, or is the expansion of civil liberties to LGBT people where the movement had always wanted to go?

Yasmin Nair, a queer activist and scholar from Chicago who helped found *Against Equality* with Ryan Conrad, challenges the dominant discourse offered by mainstream LGBT politics. She contends that the narrative has been sanitized for gay and lesbian assimilationist politics, at the expense of the QPOC who started the LGBT movement. As she contends:

Stonewall was initiated largely by unruly drag queens and transgender people, the sort who would have been avoided by the 'gay men' who achieve such prominence in [this]sanitized version of gay history...⁶⁹

These questions are at the heart of the controversy between actors such as the Black Pride 4 and the Pride parades that they are protesting, such as the Stonewall Columbus Pride Parade. Stonewall's meaning has been contested by actors who argue that they are the true 'heir' to the original movement. Organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign and No Justice No Pride, and individual white gay and QPOC activists, both argue that they are acting in its' legacy. After the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was struck down, a campaign the Human Right Campaign spearheaded, they released the following statement:

Despite the monumental nature of the Supreme Court's decision to strike down the discriminatory Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and return marriage to California, it is just another waypoint on the fight for full equality for LGBT Americans. As it happens, that journey started 44 years ago today, at the Stonewall Inn in New York.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Conrad, Ryan. *Against Equality: Queer Revolution, Not Mere Inclusion*. Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2014, 16.

⁷⁰ Human Rights Campaign. "HRC Marks the 44th Anniversary of Stonewall."

In this statement, the Human Rights Campaign is connecting their vision of LGBT politics as a direct continuation of the politics behind the Stonewall Riots, legitimating their campaign. No Justice No Pride argues that they are fighting to ‘reclaim’ Pride and acts “in an effort to return Pride back to its roots as a direct response to state violence, led by visionary, transgender women of color.”⁷¹ In this discourse, No Justice No Pride contends that Pride has been coopted and they are working in Stonewall’s image.

Questions of marginalization are a branch of the gentrification and assimilation issues. Has the LGBT movement begun to prioritize the needs of white gays over those of QPOC? Have white gays gentrified the movement that QPOC began? By assimilating into larger oppressive structures, is the LGBT movement, in turn, oppressing QPOC? These are the criticisms that liberation-focused organizations and activists emphasize. As BQIC asks its supporters:

Do you feel comfortable attending mainstream Pride? Many queer and trans people of color answer a resounding NO. Mainstream Pride festivals across the nation have widely been whitewashed and corporatized, in addition to their reliance on overwhelming police presence. Falling in line with that pattern of complicity and collusion with systemic oppression, Stonewall Columbus refused to condemn or hold the CPD accountable after the Black Pride 4 were brutally arrested at the SWC Pride Festival and Parade last June.⁷²

This question posed by BQIC has direct implications not only on the local Stonewall Columbus Pride March , but on the national LGBT movement as well. This discourse of being ‘reliant’ on the police and the prison industrial complex, being complicit in white supremacy, and ‘colluding’ in state oppression, paint the mainstream LGBT movement as a co-conspirator in the oppression of QPOC.⁷³

⁷¹ Njnp. "Reclaim Pride -." Home -.

⁷² "BQIC." May 30th, 2018.

⁷³ "BQIC." May 2nd, 2017

The dichotomy between intersectionality and universalism is a question of identity and prioritization of one identity over others. The mainstream LGBT movement is based on the idea that being gay is connected to a universal experience and identity that can be used to create a mass community that engages in collective action. Intersectionality, however, is built around the premise that gay experience is not universal and that a LGBT movement should acknowledge and encompass differing identities, oppressions, and experiences. As mentioned earlier, intersectionality can be understood as each individual having “a multiplicity of identities (race and gender, but also age, class, religion, sexual orientation, ability/disability, and more)”⁷⁴ that effects their lived experience. Therefore, the experience as a gay white man and a black lesbian cannot be understood as the same ‘gay’ experience.

Gay Liberation—1969 to 1976

Starting with Stonewall in an intellectual history of the LGBT movement is expected, but a little misleading. Stonewall was not the start—it’s only the start in the historical imagining. Resistance to political and social norms have been around as long as the norms themselves. However, Stonewall was when LGBT resistance broke through into mainstream American consciousness—the façade of invisibility, of the non-existence of LGBT people, was broken. Stonewall started with a bottle being thrown and led to an estimated 20,000 people in the streets marching the next year on the anniversary of the Stonewall Riots.⁷⁵ At the forefront of the first Pride March was the Gay Liberation Front, a fast-moving organization that was founded in response to Stonewall and quickly organized continue the momentum.

This era of gay history is focused on liberation and radical politics. As Jeffrey Weeks explains, “gay liberation was a radical movement of and for people marginalized and

⁷⁴Shames, Shauna Lani. "Intersectionality and Political Ambition." Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. July 19, 2017

⁷⁵ Neal, Brandi. "What New York City's First Pride Parade Looked Like." Bustle. April 26, 2018.

oppressed...[it] saw itself as part of a wider emancipatory movement...”⁷⁶ The Gay Liberation Front encompassed this vision of LGBT politics. Though they were a short-lived organization, they left their mark on LGBT history through the introduction of the Pride March as a seizing of public space and site of resistance, set the stage for a wave of other organizations acting out their goals, and de-stigmatized being LGBT. They also fought for the liberation of all people and actively created coalitions with other movements such as the Quebécois, Venceremos Brigade, organizations that fought for access to safe abortions, and the Cuban Revolution.⁷⁷

During this era, The Combahee River Collective was also founded with roots in revolutionary intersectional movements. It began in 1974 by black lesbian feminists in Boston to challenge the white feminist movement and its history of excluding black women’s needs and prioritizing their whiteness over their woman-ness. Their collective statement has been one of the most influential documents in black feminist and black lesbian thought.⁷⁸ Their main means of action were in the form of a retreat, which harkens back to the feminist consciousness-raising in the 1960s.⁷⁹

They created a space for black women outside of black male circles, which historically have been rife with misogyny, and white feminist communities, so that black women could explore their identities and cement their politics. In their statement, this space is described not as separatism, which has been criticized as a racist tactic⁸⁰, but a space that allows for a “process of defining and clarifying our politics” that can then be used to create change in the larger world.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Paternotte, David, and Manon Tremblay. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Lesbian and Gay Activism*. London ; New York: Routledge, 2016, 45.

⁷⁷Sycamore, Mattilda. *That's Revolting!: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*. Soft Skull Press, 2004, 15-16.

⁷⁸"Combahee River Collective (1974-1980) | The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed."

⁷⁹ Napikoski, Linda. "The Combahee River Collective: Black Women's Liberation." ThoughtCo.

⁸⁰ See Julie R. Enszer’s “Rethinking Lesbian Separatism.”

⁸¹ Combahee River Collective (1974-1980) | The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed."

In their manifesto, they consciously created a genealogy of black feminist thought, of which they situated themselves within, and then used that framework as a jumping-off point to create their own politics.⁸² They created a black feminist political sphere that embraced intersectionality and the multiplicities of identity, and was adamantly anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist. As a collective, their tactic may have been creating a space for consciousness-raising, but the actions of their members extended well beyond the personal, into activist work on “sterilization abuse, abortion rights, battered women, rape and health care.”⁸³ They have acted as a keystone organization which has inspired generations of black feminist activist who have used their theory as a foundation for their own activism.

Gay Advocacy—1977 to 1986

From 1979-1989, the world was realigned by Thatcher and Reagan into a society where efficiency, individualism, privatization, and deregulation were emphasized. The philosophy in which they rewrote the economic world order became known as ‘neoliberalism.’⁸⁴ The LGBT movement during this era was not left unaffected by this model—instead of challenging the neo-conservative politics, the LGBT changed to work within this system.

The organization that most illustrates this philosophy is the Log Cabin Republicans, a group founded in 1977, right before Reagan’s presidency. Their missions are to, “support equality under the law for all, free markets, individual liberty, limited government, and a strong national defense.”⁸⁵ They offer a very different conception of ‘gay’ and what ‘gay politics’ can be compared to earlier organizations, such as the Gay Liberation Front or Combahee River Collective. The Log Cabin Republicans are proud supporters of the GOP and have attempted

⁸² Combahee River Collective (1974-1980) | The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed."

⁸³ Ibid.,

⁸⁴ See Wendy Brown’s *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*.

⁸⁵ "About Us." Log Cabin Republicans.

to re-imagine conservative issues like “federalism, state autonomy, and liberty” as principles that can be used to further gay rights from within the conservative movement.⁸⁶ Their main tactics are advocacy, education, and lobbying to gain social and cultural capital for gay conservatives.⁸⁷

Rogers and Lott have criticized the Log Cabin Republicans for prioritizing their whiteness and using their gayness as a reason to refuse to acknowledge their other privileges.⁸⁸ Rogers and Lott build on Patricia Collins’ conception of the matrix of domination⁸⁹ to argue that the Log Cabin Republicans have used their one oppressed identity as ‘gay’ in order to subvert left gay politics and attempt to “‘refashion’ lesbian politics along centrist lines.”⁹⁰ They are not alone in this critique— queer activists, such as Mattilda Sycamore, see the Log Cabin Republicans in complete opposition to their own politics.⁹¹ The GOP has a history of privileging supporters from oppressed groups—they offer a protection from being criticized as ‘homophobic’ or ‘racist.’ For members of oppressed groups that are conscious of this, such as white gays, it makes more sense to ally with the ‘enemy’ that privileges their whiteness and can tokenize them as a gay, instead of working with poor queers and people of color.

Crisis—1987 to 1993

The breakout of AIDS in the 1980s changed how the U.S. saw LGBT people and how LGBT people saw themselves. Earlier goals of liberation and advocacy were abruptly

⁸⁶ "Our History." Log Cabin Republicans.

⁸⁷ Rogers, Mary F., and Phillip B. Lott. "Backlash, the Matrix of Domination, and Log Cabin Republicans." *The Sociological Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1997): 497-512.499.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 498

⁸⁹ See Patricia Collins’ *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 499.

⁹¹ Sycamore, Mattilda. *That's Revolting!: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*. Soft Skull Press, 2004.

challenged by this crisis. The US saw LGBT people as more than just ‘other,’ but as an immediate health danger. AIDS was seen as a punishment for the sin of promiscuity by many Americans, and so the LGBT movement changed its narrative from one of sexual liberation to one of assimilation to emphasize that ‘we’re just like you.’

ACT UP was the most influential organization that grew out of the epidemic, but even it has been criticized for perpetuating the idea of AIDS as a “gay white man's disease” and believed that the identity of ‘gay’ was a unifier that could transcend other identities.⁹² Christophe Broqua explains that though ACT UP achieved many successes it was a divided organization that represented a divided movement. Broqua argues that it was divided between “white gay males, interested in treatment research” and “representatives from the most dominates minority groups...who had the least representation in AID institutions and were eager to fight beyond just HIV/AIDS treatment issues.”⁹³ Issues surrounding race within the organization led to fracturing among its members and other groups and committees that branched off of it—such as the Majority Action Committee, Fed Up Queers, and Queer Nation. Robert Vazquez-Pacheco describes this tension in an interview with *The Body*:

One of the things that I saw was that the gay white men...organized because they knew that the system that they grew up with wasn't working for them. It suddenly had betrayed them and didn't actually care about their lives. They didn't say that the system was flawed; they believed it could be repaired, tweaked for it to work better. Whereas for women and people of color, women and people of color said, "This system has never worked for us.”⁹⁴

For Vazquez-Pacheco, despite the well-meaning actions of white members and leaders in ACT UP, they refused to acknowledge their place of privilege and to dismantle their

⁹² Terrell, Kellee. "Robert Vazquez-Pacheco on Race, ACT UP and Why Older HIV/AIDS Leaders Need to Pass the Torch." TheBody.com.

⁹³ Paternotte, David, and Manon Tremblay. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Lesbian and Gay Activism*. London ; New York: Routledge, 2016, 63.

⁹⁴ Terrell, Kellee. "Robert Vazquez-Pacheco on Race, ACT UP and Why Older HIV/AIDS Leaders Need to Pass the Torch." TheBody.com.

complicity in white supremacy. Vazquez-Pacheco describes members as prioritizing their identity of ‘gay’ as a way to unite/erase other identities and came to discussions on AIDS from the unchallenged positionality of whiteness.

Gay Civil Rights and Legal Protection—1994 to 2008

In October 1998, a 21-year-old white, male, gay student was lured by two men, hit in the face 21 times with a gun, tied and bound, left to die, and fell into a coma from his injuries.⁹⁵ His murder left the U.S. in shock. The murder of Matthew Shepherd has been heralded as the event that inspired a wave of hate crime legislation, spearheaded by Shepherd’s mother. In 2009, President Obama solidified this local hate crime legislation into a national law, called the Matthew Shepherd Act.⁹⁶ The disposition behind anti-hate crime legislation and the organization’s that push for it, can be understood through the Matthew Shepard Foundation’s mission: “to erase hate by replacing it with understanding, compassion and acceptance.”⁹⁷

The Matthew Shepard Foundation has worked on multiple projects on multiple fronts—an oral history project turned into a play, LGBT youth support, and research, policy, and advocacy for hate crime legislation.⁹⁸ The Matthew Shepherd Act is considered its greatest success and represents the focus of lesbian and gay tactics from 1994 to 2008—turning the LGBT movement into a civil rights movement. As explained by Craig Rimmerman, a political science scholar at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, the focus on hate crime legislation illustrates how LGBT organizations have:

⁹⁵ "The Murder of Matthew Shepard." WyoHistory.org.

⁹⁶ Pilkington, Ed. "Fifteen Years after Matthew Shepard's Murder, Wyoming Remains Anti-gay." *The Guardian*. October 10, 2013.

⁹⁷ About Us." Matthew Shepard Foundation..

⁹⁸ Home." Matthew Shepard Foundation.

...relied on an insider assimilationist strategy, one that strives for access to those in power and is rooted in an interest-group and legislative-lobbying approach to change. The strategy is largely based on civil rights, legal reform, legitimization, political access, and visibility.⁹⁹

These tactics work with, instead of challenging, the systems that the lesbian and gay movement wants to change. It is a slow process for change—prioritizing gradual long-term goals of assimilation instead of liberation.¹⁰⁰ These tactics can be successful, because changing systems that work against LGBT people into systems that accept LGBT people, and provide them with access to social and political power, can be transformative.¹⁰¹ Hate crime legislation can also be thought of as a ‘common movement’ that unites individuals around a common cause and has the capability to create a large coalition.¹⁰² The larger the group of unified rational actors, the more likely the success of the movement, and the more likely the individuals will gain benefits from said success. In this case, survival and protection from the state.

The push against tactics of assimilation, however, can represent how fragmented the lesbian and gay movement really is.¹⁰³ This sort of coalition depends of a collective identity that ends up prioritizing the ‘gay’ identity over any others, which erases the multiplicities of identities and oppressions. The assimilationist legal approach is also very “limiting,” according to Rimmerman. It does not offer transformation or liberation—which queer activists works towards. Queer advocates have felt ‘left out’ or ‘betrayed’ by these tactics, which may have led to the contestation represented by the Black Pride 4.

If the lesbian and gay movement prioritizes the identity ‘gay’ and erases the complexity of being a person of color and queer, QPOC may recognize how assimilation by the LG

⁹⁹ Rimmerman, Craig A. *The Lesbian and Gay Movements: Assimilation or Liberation?* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2015, 133.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.,.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 134.

¹⁰² Ibid, 138.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 147.

movement into the structures that oppress them, may change the LG movement from their community to an extension of their enemy. This changes the framing of the LGBT movement and challenges the collective identity and the unified movement of LGBT—fragmenting the movement as these groups create cleavages outside of it.

Queer Critique—2009 to Present

From 2009 to 2017, Obama’s presidency was represented by a liberal notion of tolerance and acceptance. Organizations recognized that an opportunity was present to push through gay marriage and hate crime legislation, as well as dismantle policies such as ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell.’ Older organizations that began in the 70s finally succeeded in their goals of advocacy and civil rights—for them Obama’s presidency represented success after success.

However, younger organizations grew in opposition to these so-called ‘successes—’ they too recognized an opportunity existed. These younger organizations began to rage a war against older LGBT groups that they viewed as ‘selling out.’ They saw themselves as the true heir of the LGBT movement as saw these older LGBT groups, instead of the system itself, as being in their way.

Against Equality, is exemplary of this—they are an archiving project that collects the work by queer activists to anthologize queer history. Their narrative is mostly that that white, upper middle-class lesbians and gay profit off these advocacy and civil rights policies that further marginalize QPOC.¹⁰⁴ To them, ‘gay rights’ is just an empty platitude that perpetuates the inequalities caused by neoliberalism.¹⁰⁵ *Against Equality* contends that queer politics, “does not merely shout out for sexual liberation...but insists upon a radical political and economic reorientation of the world.” To them, queer politics are inherently radical politics.

¹⁰⁴Conrad, Ryan. *Against Equality: Queer Revolution, Not Mere Inclusion*. Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2014, 4.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.,

As Mattilda Sycamore explains in *That's Revolting*, “Gay assimilationists have created the ultimate genetically modified organism, combining virulent strains of nationalism, patriotism, consumerism, and patriarchy...”¹⁰⁶ To queer radicals critiquing the LGBT movement in the last decade, queer politics are more than in tension with, but completely opposite of contemporary LGBT politics. These activists argue that gay politics have been ‘gentrified’ by the ‘gaybian elite.’¹⁰⁷

This perspective is echoed by director and scholar Eric A. Stanley, who argues that, “gay marriage and voting are symbolic gestures that reinforce structures while claiming to reconfigure them.”¹⁰⁸ In this statement, Stanley argues that gay marriage, and its supporters, are acting as extensions of oppressive institutions that oppress the most marginal in the LGBT movement. Dean Spade and Craig Willse, scholar-activists, say this outright:

Current conversation about Prop 8 hide how the same-sex marriage battle has been part of a conservative gay politics that de-prioritizes people of color, poor peoples, trans people, women, immigrants and people with disabilities. Why isn’t Prop 8’s passage frames as evidence of the mainstream gay agenda’s failure to ally with people of color on issues that are central to racial and economic justice in the U.S.?¹⁰⁹

Spade and Willse contend that gay marriage is inherently a racist tactic that prioritizes white gay inclusion over the economic needs and bodily security of QPOC. The main theme in this argument is that assimilation is not enough—that queer liberation that directly challenge structures of power and prioritizes the needs of the most disenfranchised is needed. As Ryan Conrad contends, “privilege breeds complacency.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Sycamore, Mattilda. *That's Revolting!: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*. Soft Skull Press, 2004, 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 3-4.

¹⁰⁸ Conrad, Ryan. *Against Equality: Queer Revolution, Not Mere Inclusion*. Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2014, 29.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 31.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 63.

These queer critiques lead directly up to the queer of color critiques offered by the Black Pride 4 and other QPOC organizations. BQIC similarly criticizes Stonewall Columbus for supporting the prison industrial complex and over policing Pride, as well as whitewashing LGBT politics¹¹¹. As Ferguson explains:

Queer of color critique also provided a method for analyzing cultural formations as registries of the intersections of race, political economy, gender, and sexuality. In this way, queer of color critique ...situate those formations within analyses of racial capitalism and the racial state.¹¹²

Therefore, queer critiques of assimilation, gentrification, and marginalization have laid the framework behind queer of color actions, such as the blockage of the Stonewall Columbus Pride March by the Black Pride 4, that re-situate discussions of LGBT politics within the context of racialization.

¹¹¹ "BQIC." May 30th, 2018.

¹¹² Ferguson, Roderick A. "Queer of Color Critique." Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature. March 21, 2018

The Case: June 17th, 2017

The Black Pride 4 case explores questions of gentrification, mainstreaming, assimilation, marginalization in the larger LGBT movement that is represented by their antagonist, Stonewall Columbus Pride. The blockage of Pride as a political action itself is not as important as the repercussions of said action. The large media attention that it garnered, the way the different actions and their political positions were represented, and what the act created are the most important aspects of this case. The Black Pride 4 created a counter-discourse to mainstream LGBT discourse of equality and community, led to a fragmentation of the LGBT movement in Columbus, and led to the creation of an organization in direct conflict with Stonewall Columbus Pride and their own LGBT Pride March as a ‘boycott’ of Stonewall Columbus Pride .

Columbus, Ohio has historically been fraught by racial tensions and police violence. In 2016, a police officer commented that the suicide of a black lives matter activist was a ‘happy ending.’¹¹³ That same year, Tyre King¹¹⁴, a 13-year-old boy, and Henry Green¹¹⁵, were killed by police officers who were not indicted. Put Columbus in context with the whole of the United States, where in 2017 almost a thousand people were killed by police, a disproportionate amount being people of color.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Wang, Yanan. "Ohio Police Officer Fired after Calling Black Lives Matter Activist's Suicide a 'happy Ending'." The Washington Post. March 08, 2016.

¹¹⁴ "13-year-old Who 'pulled a Gun from His Waistband' Is Killed by Police." NBCNews.com.

¹¹⁵ Fuddy, John. "Police Officers Not Indicted in Fatal Shooting of Henry Green." The Columbus Dispatch. March 25, 2017.

¹¹⁶ "Police Shootings 2017 Database." The Washington Post.

On June 16th, 2017 the police officer who killed Philando Castile in Minnesota at a traffic stop was acquitted.¹¹⁷ This acquittal followed a long line of high-profile police shootings of black men that were not punished, such as Freddie Gray, Michael Brown, Alton Sterling, Tamir Rice, and Eric Garner.¹¹⁸ Policing of Pride parades in the U.S. in 2017 had increased after a heightened fear of targeted terrorism after the Pulse massacre, as well as targeted truck attacks and bombings.¹¹⁹ The week before Stonewall Columbus Pride, the parade itself faced a bomb threat.¹²⁰ Facing threats of violence such as this, Stonewall Columbus Pride and the Columbus Police have worked very closely in an attempt to make the Pride Parade a safe place.¹²¹ This fear surrounding terrorism has been at the forefront of nationalist imaginings since 9/11 and is reflected by white gay men. Returning to Jasbir Puar's understanding of 'homonationalism,' where LGBT people are nationalist actors assimilated into a police state that targets POC, the increased police presence at the Pride March 'protected' white gays at the expense of QPOC.

On June 17th, 2017, following the verdict surrounding the Philando Castile case, the Black Pride 4 stopped the Stonewall Columbus Pride Parade. This action was supposedly anticipated by the Stonewall Columbus organization that executed the parade and had also been tipped off to the police.¹²² What happened next has been largely contested—either the police were attacked and injured by violent protesters¹²³, or the peaceful protesters were charged with a disproportionate amount of violence by the police.¹²⁴

¹¹⁷ Associated Press in St Paul, Minnesota. "Police Officer Who Shot Dead Philando Castile Acquitted of All Charges." *The Guardian*. June 16, 2017.

¹¹⁸ "14 High-profile Police-related Deaths of U.S. Blacks | CBC News." *CBCnews*. December 08, 2017.

¹¹⁹ "Stonewall Columbus Pride Coordinator Resigns." *OUTLOOK OHIO MAGAZINE*. June 23, 2017.

¹²⁰ Bollinger, Alex. "Police Investigate Terror Threat Made against Stonewall Columbus Pride ." *LGBTQ Nation*. June 16, 2017.

¹²¹ "Stonewall Columbus Pride Coordinator Resigns." *OUTLOOK OHIO MAGAZINE*. June 23, 2017.

¹²² *Ibid.*,

¹²³ Knighton, Tom. "Black Lives Matter Disrupts Another Pride Parade, Several Police Officers Injured This Time." *Lifestyle*.

¹²⁴ "TransOhio Statement regarding Incident and Arrests at Stonewall Columbus Pride Parade."

The protest lasted less than a minute.¹²⁵ Police rode in on bicycles and surrounded the protesters. A dozen more followed on horses.¹²⁶ Trained by the Israeli Defense Forces, the Police Chief, reportedly a lesbian,¹²⁷ engaged in tactics that have been used to block Palestinian activists.¹²⁸ Four officers were injured—one tore an ACL and was rushed to the hospital.¹²⁹ Of the nine protesters, only the black protesters were arrested.¹³⁰ The four QPOC accosted were arrested with the following:¹³¹

1. Kendall Denton—disorderly content and resisting arrest. They were accused of grabbing a policemen's bicycle and fighting arrest.
2. Ashley Braxton—similarly charged with disorderly content, resisting arrest, and failure to comply. She was accused of injuring a policewoman, by tripping both of them.
3. Wriply Bennett—Similar charges, and accused of harming a police officer.
4. Deandre Mills—charged with aggravated robbery, resisting arrest, failure to comply, and disorderly conduct. They are accused of attacking an officer and attempting to disarm them.

The Black Pride 4 reached national fame and received support and declarations of allyship from Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), Jewish Voice for Peace, GetEQUAL, J20, No Justice No Pride, BRAVO, Socialist Worker, and BQIC. However, media coverage has varied—in some representations, the Black Pride 4 are described as overly-sensitive trouble makers who mismanaged their critique of Pride, while in others they are heralded as the true heirs of Stonewall, courageous martyrs who have successfully drawn attention to police violence and the silencing of QPOC voices. In this chapter, I shall explore the following questions surrounding the Black Pride 4 and their larger context:

¹²⁵ "Police Riot at Stonewall Parade." The Columbus Freepress.

¹²⁶ "Why Did the Police Attack at Stonewall Columbus Pride ?" SocialistWorker.org. May 26, 1970.

¹²⁷ "Police Riot at Stonewall Parade." The Columbus Freepress.

¹²⁸ "Jewish Voice for Peace Central Ohio Stands in Solidarity with the #BlackPride4!" The Columbus Freepress.

¹²⁹ Gribble, Rachel. "Four Protesters Arrested during Pride Parade after Confrontation with Officers." WCMH. June 18, 2017.

¹³⁰ "Police Riot at Stonewall Parade." The Columbus Freepress.

¹³¹ Gribble, Rachel. "Four Protesters Arrested during Pride Parade after Confrontation with Officers." WCMH. June 18, 2017.

1. How have the Black Pride 4 been represented by various media outlets? Are they described as violent or as peaceful and what political positionality are behind these representations?
2. What is the legacy of the Stonewall Riots in this tension? Who is represented as acting as the 'legacy' of Stonewall?
3. How has the relationship between the Black Pride 4 and Stonewall Columbus changed throughout their contestation?
4. How do different organizations and actors envision the role of police in Pride?

Representations of the Black Pride 4

The representations of the actors involved in the action are important, because representations are inherently political. Representations are a way to understand power. As Foucault explains, the representation, or 'appearance' of objects/subjects affect the 'codes' that they are given and changed the treatment they receive in social relations, or 'daily practice,' as well as in law and institutions.¹³² These objects/subjects "are shaped by measures of discrimination and repression" which is both affected by and affects said representations.¹³³ When researching discourse, one can begin to uncover how the codes that are used to describe objects/subjects are constructed through larger webs of power that affect social relations, institutional and legal practice, and larger currents of repression.

The Black Pride 4 in early discourse are described as antagonistic and violent. Their criticisms of gentrification and marginalization are actively ignored or challenged. The political implication of Black Pride 4 being viewed as illegitimate actors that are not acting in Stonewall's image. These representations are affected by larger codes relating to race and Warner's respectability politics.¹³⁴ These representations illustrate the unequal power relations between white gays and QPOC and the unequal social/cultural/political standing that each group holds in the larger societal context.

¹³² Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1969, 32-33

¹³³ Ibid., 33

¹³⁴ Warner, Michael. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

It has been reported that the crowd at Stonewall Columbus cheered as the police doubled down on the Black Pride 4 protesters.¹³⁵ On sites like Reddit, visitors have described the Black Pride 4 as ineffective disrupters who “want a ‘coloreds only’ space,” and don’t understand the gravity of the situation.¹³⁶ NBC4, a local news network, described the protesters as violent and disorderly Black Lives Matter protesters.¹³⁷ PJ media, a conservative media source, represented the protesters as “violent” and “totalitarian,” actively attempting to fragment the LGBT movement by drinking the “intersectionalism Kool-Aid” and playing in the “oppression Olympics.”¹³⁸ In these representations, the Black Pride 4 threaten the LGBT movement, are inherently antagonistic actors, and are painted as violent Black Lives Matter protesters who have no right to protest Pride.

Supporters on the Black Pride 4, however, have described the police response of the protest as “vicious, unnecessary, [and] unprovoked.”¹³⁹ In these representations, the Black Pride 4 take on the characteristics of martyrs and are represented as peaceful protesters who rightfully drew attention to problems within and facing the LGBT movement.¹⁴⁰ TransOhio described the scene the following way:

On Saturday, during the Pride festival a group of peaceful people, including some from the transgender community, began a protest of standing silently to remind everyone of this history and this violence and the violence against people of color in this country and need for more inclusion of these voices in Pride celebrations. Their actions were peaceful- but they were quickly and violently shut down and they were maced and arrested for their peaceful protest.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ "Protest, Arrests at Pride Parade Highlight Racism, Transphobia in LGBTQ Community." ColumbusUnderground.com. February 13, 2018.

¹³⁶ "R/Columbus - Why Is Stonewall Supporting the People Who Were Arrested for Trying to Stop Their Parade?" Reddit.

¹³⁷ Gribble, Rachel. "Four Protesters Arrested during Pride Parade after Confrontation with Officers." WCMH. June 18, 2017.

¹³⁸ Knighton, Tom. "Black Lives Matter Disrupts Another Pride Parade, Several Police Officers Injured This Time." Lifestyle.

¹³⁹ "Police Riot at Stonewall Parade." The Columbus Freepress.

¹⁴⁰ TransOhio Statement regarding Incident and Arrests at Stonewall Columbus Pride Parade."

¹⁴¹ Ibid.,

Stonewall Columbus is also criticized for their described inaction in this conflict. The Columbus Free Press described them as “tepid,”¹⁴² while BQIC contends that Stonewall Columbus had decided that “saving face and their public image” is more important than doing the right thing and supporting the Black Pride 4.¹⁴³

Representations in support of the Black Pride 4 often invoke the symbolic image of the Stonewall Riots. Stonewall is used to legitimize the Black Pride 4’s protest tactics and challenge Stonewall Columbus’ claim to use ‘Stonewall’ in their name. Wish Cleveland contends that “there is no Pride without protest.” BRAVO also harkens back to Stonewall, explaining that “the LGBTQI community has a long history of fighting against hate and bias violence, interpersonal violence, and targeted state violence, such as the Compton’s Cafeteria riot...and the Stonewall riot...”¹⁴⁴ Jewish Voice for Peace continues this representation of the Black Pride 4, contending that they follow in the footsteps of not only Stonewall, but activists such as Marsha P. Johnson and Miss Major Griffin-Gracy.¹⁴⁵

In this understanding of the Stonewall *Riots*¹⁴⁶, it is portrayed as a political action that targeted the police, was led by QPOC, and was inherently leftist. This is in complete tension with Stonewall Columbus’ understanding of the Stonewall *Uprising*¹⁴⁷ and its legacy, which they see as a fight for visibility, security, and celebration. Stonewall Columbus fights for LGBT civil rights and security from threats “at home and abroad,”¹⁴⁸ a homonationalist dog-whistle,

¹⁴² "Police Riot at Stonewall Parade." The Columbus Freepress.

¹⁴³ "BQIC."

¹⁴⁴ "Bulletins." Bravo Ohio.

¹⁴⁵ "Jewish Voice for Peace Central Ohio Stands in Solidarity with the #BlackPride4!" The Columbus Freepress.

¹⁴⁶ Njnp. "Free the #BlackPride4: State Repression and the Fight for Liberation in LGBT Spaces."

¹⁴⁷ "Stonewall Uprising." Stonewall Columbus.

¹⁴⁸ "About Us." Stonewall Columbus.

while the Black Pride 4 fights for survival where they see Stonewall Columbus itself as a threat to QPOC.¹⁴⁹

Legitimizing the Black Pride 4's action as bringing the LGBT movement back to its' roots, places Stonewall Columbus Pride into the position of the 'oppressor.' Wish Cleveland contends that "the LGBTQ movement has moved away from its roots of radical protest in co-signing state-sanctioned violence on Black bodies."¹⁵⁰ SURJ describes that Stonewall Columbus' decision to remain silent means that they "have chosen the side of the oppressor."¹⁵¹ In these accounts, Stonewall Columbus is represented an extension of the oppressor, an antagonistic actor, instead of an ally to QPOC. The Harvard Crimson explains that "the inclusion of 'Stonewall' in the name as a homage to the original protests in New York only adds to the upsetting irony," and that if Stonewall Columbus continues to support the Columbus Police instead of the Black Pride 4, they should be stripped of their title.¹⁵²

The differing representations of the Black Pride 4, Stonewall Columbus, and the place of protest in Pride represent a tension between an assimilationist and liberationist LGBT movement. The invocation of Stonewall compounds this—who is acting in its image, who is bring the LGBT movement back to its roots, and who is legitimate? Queer of color help unpack these questions by questioning who the "implicit subject" is behind the rhetoric offered by Stonewall Columbus?¹⁵³ Simply, the subject visualized is white, male, and middle class. This conflict is a microcosm that represents similar questions facing the national LGBT movement in the United States.

¹⁴⁹ "BQIC." May 30th, 2018.

¹⁵⁰ "There Is No Pride without Protest." WISH Cleveland. June 25, 2017.

¹⁵¹ Krakoff, Tynan. "SURJ Statement In Solidarity With the #BlackPride4." SURJ Columbus. June 24, 2017.

¹⁵² "Pride and Prejudice | Opinion." The Harvard Crimson.

¹⁵³ Ferguson, Roderick A. "Queer of Color Critique." Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature. March 21, 2018.

Stonewall Columbus, the Black Pride 4, and the Columbus Police

From this point on, the Black Pride began receiving letters of support and allies from the national LGBT liberation community. BQIC, an organization founded by actors connected to the Black Pride 4, became a main facilitator between the Black Pride 4 and its adversaries, such as media actors, Stonewall Columbus, and the Columbus Police. BQIC represents the beginning of a visible fragmentation in the Columbus LGBT movement. The Black Pride 4's action at the Stonewall Columbus Pride Parade was a call for greater inclusion within the movement. However, the abandonment of the Black Pride 4 by Stonewall Columbus led to a movement in direct contestation with Stonewall Columbus and its image of Pride. In a statement from BQIC to Stonewall Columbus including a list of demands, the following grievances were voiced:

We write you today concerning your lack of concrete actions with regards to condemning the atrocities the #BlackPride4 experienced at the hands of the CPD at your Stonewall Columbus Pride Parade on Saturday, June 17. In the About Section of your website, one finds the promise you've made to your community: "We're here to uplift our LGBTQ community so that ALL of us thrive." It may come to a surprise to you that LGBTQIA+ people of color, and even Black trans folks, are assumed to be included under this "ALL" umbrella.¹⁵⁴

In this statement, BQIC and the Black Pride 4 contend that "Stonewall Columbus lie[d] and [broke] promise[s]." ¹⁵⁵ Though in this statement they released a list of demands, none were actively met. From this point on, Stonewall Columbus became a passive actor and BQIC, the Black Pride 4, and their supporters were the dominant creators discourse, as Stonewall Columbus, LGBT writers who were not supporters of the Black Pride 4, and conservative news

¹⁵⁴ "BQIC." June 23rd, 2017.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.,.

networks began to ignore the Black Pride 4. Negative statement and articles were no longer released, and the Black Pride 4's representation in discourse changed dramatically. They were in charge of their own portrayal and actively constructed their own narrative, which lead to greater support and social/financial capital.

The week after the arrest of the Black Pride 4, Lori Gum, the Pride Festival Coordinator of Stonewall Columbus, resigned.¹⁵⁶ In her resignation speech, she stated that she was disillusioned with Stonewall Columbus' lack of response to and support of the Black Pride 4. She contended that, "It is at this fault line of race and privilege upon which this community divide has no widened."¹⁵⁷ She suddenly saw herself and the organization that she represented as part of the problem, not solution, and acted.

The day after her resignation, Stonewall Columbus came out with a response to the arrests of the Black Pride 4.¹⁵⁸ In their statement, they highlighted their fight against injustices and acceptance of inclusivity and diversity. They explained that they had "requested a formal review by the Columbus Police" and that they were in dialogue with other "community partners."¹⁵⁹ However, they did not come out and condemn the arrests or offer financial or social support for the Black Pride 4.

This lack of support surprised the Black Pride 4 and their advocates, who had been attempting to reach out to the organization since the arrests. BQIC explains that their multiple attempts to meet with Stonewall Columbus since the incident were cancelled, that their 'dialogue' had been coopted and demands ignored, and that their "voices had been silenced."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ "Stonewall Columbus Pride Coordinator Resigns." OUTLOOK OHIO MAGAZINE. June 23, 2017.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁵⁸ "Statement From Stonewall Columbus." OUTLOOK OHIO MAGAZINE. June 24, 2017.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁶⁰ "BQIC." June 23rd, 2017.

Despite Stonewall Columbus' promises to financially and socially support the Black Pride 4, they did not fulfil their promises, argues BQIC.¹⁶¹

On July 17th, a month after the Black Pride 4 were arrested, and after multiple cancelled meetings between supporters and members of the Black Pride 4 and Stonewall Columbus, protesters in support of the Black Pride 4 and actors from BQIC took over a community meeting organized by Stonewall Columbus targeting homophobia and racism. Protesters were reported by the Columbus Underground as 'swarming' outside, 'bursting' the doors open, and crowding inside chanting, "Stonewall should have done more. Drop the charges on the BlackPride4."¹⁶²

It was reported that the community dialogue was 'hijacked' and Stonewall Columbus was "accused, rendered ineffective, [and] out of touch."¹⁶³ The Black Pride 4, and 100 other protesters, 'commandeered' the space to call for the resignation of key board members of Stonewall Columbus, the public condemnation of the Columbus police by Stonewall Columbus, a public apology by Stonewall Columbus, and call by Stonewall Columbus for the charges against the Black Pride 4 to be dropped.¹⁶⁴

Stonewall Columbus responded by threatening that the activists "were violating the fire code and that the police would be called," but the police were never called.¹⁶⁵ It was a fear tactic. Stonewall Columbus leaders remained quiet throughout the affair, but did not fold to the demands of the Black Pride 4 and their supporters. This failed dialogue between the Black Pride 4 and Stonewall Columbus during this affair made the activists realize that "they wouldn't have that ally in their own community," reported the Columbus Underground.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ BQIC." June 23rd, 2017.

¹⁶² "BlackPride4 Take Over Stonewall Community Conversation, Reject Organization Leadership." ColumbusUnderground.com. July 19, 2017.

¹⁶³ Ibid.,.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.,.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.,.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.,.

Stonewall Columbus was expected by the Black Pride 4 to take on the role as a “middle man” between the Columbus Police and the Black Pride 4, but instead Stonewall Columbus remained a silent supporter of the Columbus Police.¹⁶⁷ At that point, reports the Columbus Underground, the Black Pride 4 “turned from [Stonewall Columbus] altogether.”¹⁶⁸ They no longer worked with the organization, but split completely from it, began a boycott of the organization, and worked to start their own LGBT QPOC movement that encompassed the marginalized.

A week later, Stonewall came out with another statement highlighting its dedication to inclusion and continued conversation with the Columbus Police, but it did not include the demands from the Black Pride 4.¹⁶⁹ Instead, Stonewall Columbus contended that it would ‘attract’ POC on the board, reach out to marginalized LGBT people through outreach programs, begin ‘cultural competency trainings’ and expand resources for trans folk.¹⁷⁰ No one resigned, no demands from the charges to be dropped were mentioned, and no apology was made.

In response, BQIC and the Black Pride 4 created their own community discussion, which specifically focused “on the needs and wishes of LGBTQIA+ people of color and condemn[ed] police brutality on our communities,”¹⁷¹ abandoned communications with Stonewall Columbus, and called for continued ‘disruption.’¹⁷² During the community discussion, calls for a return to grassroots organizing, instead of corporate sponsorship of NGOS, a critique of the police brutality and capitalism, and support for the Black Pride 4 were made.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ "BlackPride4 Take Over Stonewall Community Conversation, Reject Organization Leadership." ColumbusUnderground.com. July 19, 2017.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.,.

¹⁶⁹ "7/24/2017 Statement." Stonewall Columbus.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.,.

¹⁷¹ "Back to Our Roots: Building a Community Pride." ColumbusUnderground.com. November 08, 2017.

¹⁷² "BlackPride4 Moves Forward after Community Dialogue: "We Must Disrupt"." ColumbusUnderground.com. July 26, 2017.

¹⁷³ Ibid.,.

The dual community dialogues represent the official fragmentation between Stonewall Columbus and the Black Pride 4. The Black Pride 4 expected to re-organize Stonewall Columbus into a more intersectional organization that prioritized the inclusion of QPOC and critiqued the Columbus Police department. However, after the silence of Stonewall Columbus, the Black Pride 4 decided to abandon their plan on changing the organization from within to starting their own movement. BQIC was born from this vision—an antiracist organization run by and for QPOC. From this point on, Stonewall Columbus was no longer a potential ally, but an antagonistic actor in conflict with BQIC and the Black Pride 4. Stonewall Columbus represented from now on out a system that actively worked to oppress and marginalize QPOC. Stonewall Columbus' unwavering allyship with the Columbus police represent support of said threat to(Q)POC—as described by Columbus Free Press, “Columbus is considered a gay friendly city—if you’re white.”¹⁷⁴

Queer of color critique offers a way to understand, challenge, and dismantle the “political and cultural formation as locations for imagining alternatives to the social arrangements prescribed and authorized by state and capital” on a macro-level and racialization, color-blindness, and the prioritization of white needs at a meso-level.¹⁷⁵ Stonewall Columbus can be understood as actively reproducing these ‘social arrangements’ through how they engaged with the Black Pride 4. Stonewall Columbus did not challenge the systems that they benefited off of but supported it in its criminalization of QPOC. The Black Pride 4 represent a LGBT politics building a queer of color critique. They question how “racialized gender and sexuality are constitutive” and explore ‘alternatives’ to these systems that impose gender, racial, and social norms.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ "Police Riot at Stonewall Parade." The Columbus Freepress.

¹⁷⁵ Ferguson, Roderick A. "Queer of Color Critique." Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature. March 21, 2018.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.,

The Trial

The trial for the Black Pride 4 lasted between February and March of 2018. Organizations such as BQIC, GetEqual, and No Justice No Pride were loud supporters of the Black Pride 4 during the trial. These groups organized rallies during jury selection, organized donations funds for lawyer's costs, remained in dialogue with media actors, and continued the conversation on police violence and the marginalization of QPOC in the LGBT movement.¹⁷⁷ During the trial, these groups also continued to question the legitimacy, abandonment, and even betrayal by Stonewall Columbus of the Black Pride 4.

The Black Pride 4 were found guilty on 6 out of 8 accounts, and Deandre Miles, who was tried separately, faces a felony charge that will be decided on in the future.¹⁷⁸ The other three found guilty were sentenced to community service and probation.¹⁷⁹ This chapter will explore the following questions:

1. How were the Black Pride 4 and Stonewall Columbus represented during this process?
2. What actors were involved in conversations surrounding the trial and what actions did they engage in?
3. How did the trial affect larger questions about racial tensions in the national LGBT movement?

¹⁷⁷ Downing, Andy. "Pride Protesters Found Guilty on Six of Eight Charges." Columbus Alive. February 13, 2018.

¹⁷⁸"QPOC Protesters of Stonewall Columbus Pride Found Guilty on 6 of 8 Misdemeanor Counts for Blocking Parade." Back2Stonewall. February 13, 2018.

¹⁷⁹Kovac, Marc. "Pride Parade Protesters Sentenced to Community Service, Probation." The Columbus Dispatch. March 13, 2018.

Representations During the Trial

During the trial, the discourse surrounding the Black Pride 4 became almost ubiquitously positive, while Stonewall Columbus and the Columbus Police became represented as antagonistic actors that have gentrified the LGBT movement. The Black Pride 4 and their supporters became the primary creators of discourse, as other actors and organizations dropped out of the discussion. The Black Pride 4 became recognized as bringing the movement back to the 'roots,' while Stonewall Columbus as a symbol had become an illegitimate actor that was no longer acting in Stonewall's image. It became to be described as an oppressive organization that actively marginalized QPOC. Criticisms of assimilation, mainstreaming, and gentrification targeted Stonewall Columbus. Though the Black Pride 4 were being charged, the ones who lost seemed to be the city of Columbus, the Columbus Police, and Stonewall Columbus.

A group of supporters and activists flooded the hallway at the Franklin County Courthouse on February 5th, during the jury selection for the trial. In NBC4's account, rhetoric of pain, freedom, incarceration, isolation, tension, and community were echoed by the participants.¹⁸⁰ "None of us are free until we're all free... we aren't going to let them stand alone..."¹⁸¹ These statements allude to many of the tensions explored earlier—what is the LGBT community and what are its boundaries, what form of LGBT activism is the best way to achieve equality, and which actors are viewed as allies and which are viewed as extensions of the oppressor?

The trial lasted 5 days and was covered by the Columbus Free Press.¹⁸² Tom McCartney, the chair of the Stonewall Columbus Board of Trustees, spoke during the

¹⁸⁰Lanier, Shawn. "Supporters Rally for Black Pride Four as Jury Selection Begins." WCMH. February 06, 2018.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.,

¹⁸² "Day Four - #BlackPride4 Trial." The Columbus Freepress.

prosecution and was seen by many as actively testifying against the Black Pride 4.¹⁸³ During McCartney's testimony, he alluded that the Black Pride 4 could be considered a hate group. As reported by the Columbus Free Press:

McCartney sated that people who want to march in the Parade must sign up for the Parade in advance. He stated that Stonewall does not accept hate groups, and groups that march must have non-discrimination policies.¹⁸⁴

This obviously led to heightened tensions between Stonewall Columbus and the Black Pride 4 supporters.¹⁸⁵ After the verdict of the Black Pride 4, Stonewall Columbus came out with a statement of indignation:

This experience has shined a light on divisions within our entire community. As we look toward the future, Stonewall Columbus will continue to work toward healing these divisions through greater collaboration and engagement.¹⁸⁶

However, as reported by Columbus Alive, commenters on their post questioned the authenticity of said statement and critiqued the organization for not doing enough.¹⁸⁷

This critique is reflected in an article published in Columbus Alive, which describes Stonewall Columbus' response as "disappointing." This article contended that Stonewall Columbus "turned its back on the Black Pride 4," and "opted to take the corporate route, choosing to protect the bottom line..."¹⁸⁸ During the trial, Stonewall Columbus became envisioned as the main antagonistic actor, and was critiqued similarly to the Columbus Police.

¹⁸³ Njnp. "Free the #BlackPride4: State Repression and the Fight for Liberation in LGBT Spaces." Home. March 30, 2018.

¹⁸⁴ "Day Four - #BlackPride4 Trial." The Columbus Freepress.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.,.

¹⁸⁶ Downing, Andy. "Pride Protesters Found Guilty on Six of Eight Charges." Columbus Alive. February 13, 2018.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.,.

¹⁸⁸ Scott, Cameron. "Rainbow Rant: In Defense of the Black Pride 4." Columbus Alive. February 21, 2018.

As the same commenter put it, "...Stonewall has blood on its hands, too."¹⁸⁹ An article in *Feministing* echoes this sentiment by saying that Stonewall Columbus' response has been "disturbing" and has helped "criminalize black queer and trans people for demanding action from their so-called community."¹⁹⁰

These representations of Stonewall Columbus imagine the organization as 'selling out' and as being outside the 'community' that is created around the Black Pride 4. In *Feministing*, they are described as another example of "white cis gay people's warped understanding of Pride as being about marriage equality or rainbow cop cars."¹⁹¹ This statement critiques Stonewall Columbus and its vision of equality and activism as "warped" and sides with the Black Pride 4 as better representing what the LGBT movement *should* be.¹⁹²

During the times of these critiques, the director of Stonewall Columbus resigned. However, she did not cite the case of the Black Pride 4 or their demands for her resignation as the inspiration. Instead, she framed her resignation as part of a "family plan" and retirement.¹⁹³ Despite this, the Black Pride 4 and Black, Queer and Intersectional Columbus heralded her resignation as a success.¹⁹⁴

The trial was described ubiquitously as a dualism between an actor with an illegitimate claim to represent the LGBT movement, Stonewall Columbus, and courageous actors who represent both the future of the LGBT movement, as well as a return to the roots of the movement, the Black Pride 4. At this point, the contention between these two actors were no longer face-to-face, but one of meaning and authenticity. Support of Stonewall Columbus

¹⁸⁹Scott, Cameron. "Rainbow Rant: In Defense of the Black Pride 4." Columbus Alive. February 21, 2018.

¹⁹⁰ Fournier, Jess. "Mainstream LGBTQ Group Helped Convict Black Queer ..."

¹⁹¹ Ibid.,

¹⁹² Ibid.,

¹⁹³ Wilhelm, Jim. "Controversial Director of Stonewall Columbus Announces Her Retirement." The Columbus Dispatch. March 02, 2018.

¹⁹⁴Thompson, Erica. "Black Pride 4, Community Respond to Stonewall Director's Retirement." Columbus Alive. March 02, 2018.

began to erode as its legitimacy was questioned. During this time, it became abandoned by other social justice and LGBT organizations, who moved to support the Black Pride 4. It has yet to be seen whether these criticisms have affected its fundraising or its Pride turnout in 2018.

Representations After the Sentencing: Larger Implications

After the trial, Stonewall Columbus and the Columbus Police were viewed as oppressive structures that had made an example of the Black Pride 4 by supporters of the Black Pride 4 who were now in charge of the discourse. Stonewall Columbus was described as appropriating a movement founded by QPOC, assimilating into a system that marginalized QPOC, and co-conspiring with a violent criminal justice system. It became criticized for working as a universal movement that prioritized gayness and whiteness over complex identities, experiences, and oppressions. Stonewall Columbus became viewed as a branch of the oppressor.

After the sentencing, there was no longer any contestation of the representations of the Black Pride 4—they were no longer ‘disrupters,’ they were heralded as “freedom fighters.”¹⁹⁵ They had been “assaulted” by the Columbus Police department and abandoned by Stonewall Columbus, “consistently refused to create space”¹⁹⁶ for QPOC and “repeatedly evaded accountability.”¹⁹⁷ Even on boards like Reddit, which are not known for their empathy, the comments were all positive, with most commenters recognizing privilege, intersectionality, and compounded oppressions¹⁹⁸ In news network coverage, Columbus itself became described as a “sick city” that “made an example” of the Black Pride 4,” alluding to the idea that the trial

¹⁹⁵ "'Columbus Is Guilty!' Say Black Pride 4 in Ohio." *Workers World*. March 17, 2018.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*.

¹⁹⁷ Woods, Jim. "Critics of Stonewall Columbus Rally on Eve of #BlackPride4 Sentencings." *The Columbus Dispatch*. March 13, 2018.

¹⁹⁸ "Black Pride 4 Verdicts in • R/Columbus." Reddit.

was an ideological and unfair one.¹⁹⁹ Columbus itself was emphasized as being guilty, inverting the roles and sentencing of the Black Pride 4 and the city itself.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Woods, Jim. "Critics of Stonewall Columbus Rally on Eve of #BlackPride4 Sentencings." The Columbus Dispatch. March 13, 2018.

²⁰⁰ "'Columbus Is Guilty!' Say Black Pride 4 in Ohio." Workers World. March 17, 2018.

The National Political Ramifications of the Black Pride 4: Community Pride

In 1999, Cathy Cohen hypothesized that a LGBT movement that focused on gaining equality through assimilation and conformity would lead to fragmentation, branch and counter-movements, and new organizations founded by those that it has “excluded and alienated.”²⁰¹ She contended that a movement based on a “liberal politics of inclusion” would not lead to the end of “race, class, gender, national, and sexual warfare being waged against the most vulnerable,” but actually perpetuate this marginalization.²⁰²

After being abandoned by Stonewall Columbus, BQIC representing the Black Pride 4 and their supporters, called for a boycott of the 2018 Stonewall Columbus Pride March. Instead of protesting exclusion again in 2018 in a hope to create a more inclusive LGBT movement in Columbus, they founded their own Pride March named Community Pride. Community Pride represented a LGBT Pride that is built around QPOC, refuses corporate sponsorship, and challenge policy brutality. It is not a branch of Stonewall Columbus’ Pride, but a movement outside of it and in tension with it. A movement that has been heralded as going back ‘to the roots.’

BQIC and Stonewall Columbus represent two different visions of the world, the best way to fight for equality, and what LGBT politics should be. BQIC is built around a politics of liberation, a politics that is built around intersectionality and the marginalized. It encompasses

²⁰¹ Cohen, Cathy. "What Is This Movement Doing to My Politics?" *Social Text* 61 (1999): 117.

²⁰² Ibid, 114.

complex identities and lived experience with no one identity prioritized over others. It contends that it represents a 'return' to the politics that inspired the Stonewall riots and is acting in Stonewall's legacy. Stonewall Columbus sees itself as also the legitimate heir to the Stonewall Riots but has been criticized as representing a gentrified LGBT movement that actively marginalizes QPOC. It sees gay as an identity that can unify an otherwise disconnected movement and fights for equal access to social and financial privileges through tactics of assimilation.

What are the repercussions of this? Well, for Cathy Cohen, this may be the queer politics in practice that she called for in 1997. BQIC, the Black Pride 4, and their Community Pride represents a movement created around intersectional and queer of color politics.²⁰³ It promises liberation, welcomes all, focuses on the marginalized, and fights against a gentrified LGBT politics that is represented by Stonewall Columbus. It imagines a Pride and LGBT politics that is for all.

This case may be focused on one city, but organizations like BQIC, activists such as the Black Pride 4, and movements based on black queer politics and intersectionality are popping up all over the US, challenging mainstream organizations and their legitimacy, and calling for a different kind of LGBT politics. Most of these cases are giving up on the mainstream movement itself and creating their own movement in direct contention with LGBT organizations and politics based on assimilation. Though these groups are separating from the main movement, they are not secluding themselves. Their politics are based on direct confrontation and transformative social justice.

What does this mean for the mainstream LGBT movement and the future of LGBT politics? It is hard to say. It could lead to new radical politics that are embraced by the

²⁰³ Cohen, Cathy. 1997. "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" GLQ 3: 437–465.

mainstream movement. It could lead to the withering of the mainstream movement and a loss of social and financial capital and bargaining power that the LGBT movement once had. It could create a vacuum that is filled by new, creative politics based on liberation or a backsliding that leads to the rise of the far right and a greater influence of anti-gay conservative politics.

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