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“AN INCREDIBLE PROJECT”: A HISTORY OF GRASSROOTS AIDS ACTIVISM IN
RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the history of grassroots LGBTQ+ activism in Riverside, California during the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s. Specifically, this research strives to answer the question of how Riverside's LGBTQ+ community survived and persisted in the conservative environment of the Inland Empire during the deadly AIDS epidemic. To investigate this question, this paper draws on oral histories with local LGBTQ+ community leaders from "A People's History of the IE" digital archive, archival materials in the Connie Confer and Kay Berryhill Smith LGBT activism collection at the UC Riverside library, and secondary sources from scholars examining the AIDS epidemic within the United States. Findings include local community history and the activism of the Inland AIDS Project as well as the Riverside Coalition Against Discrimination in battling to defend Riverside's 1987 AIDS Anti-Discrimination Ordinance. This paper also builds on knowledge of LGBTQ+ community activism in the fields of both public history and gender and sexuality studies. These findings are of importance today as they reveal the historical contingencies behind successful community-led grassroots organizing in traditionally conservative and hostile locales as well as providing historical context of potential value to today's LGBTQ+ community in Riverside.

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INTRODUCTION

This research paper examines the history of grassroots LGBTQ+ activism in Riverside, California during the initial decades of the AIDS epidemic. More specifically, this research strives to address how Riverside's LGBTQ+ community survived and persisted despite the Inland Empire's conservative and hostile environment during the tragic AIDS epidemic within the United States. To answer this question, my research focuses on three main historical organizations and events within local Riverside history, including: the work of the Inland AIDS Project, a grassroots service-based organization serving people with AIDS in the Riverside and San Bernardino areas from 1983 through the 2010s; the exhibition of the AIDS NAMES Project Quilt at the Riverside Convention Center in 1991, where I.E. community members contributed their own quilts; and the local ordinance battle involving Riverside's 1987 AIDS Anti-Discrimination Ordinance between the Riverside Coalition Against Discrimination and the conservative Riverside Citizens for Responsible Behavior.

Through a close examination of these three historical organizations and events key to Riverside AIDS history, the research concludes that grassroots LGBTQ+ organizations, activism, and community were key to the endurance of the local community during the deadly years of the epidemic. These findings are of importance today for two primary reasons. First, they build on existing knowledge of the Inland Empire, where LGBTQ+ history has been largely unexplored by scholars. Second, this research reveals the historical contingencies behind successful community-led grassroots organizing in traditionally conservative and hostile locales, outside of large established metropolitan areas such as San Francisco and New York, which have been the focus of much LGBTQ+ historical scholarship.

METHODOLOGY

The historical information and arguments presented in this paper are the results of archival research, oral histories, and secondary sources. The bulk of the archival research conducted for this project was undertaken over a two-year period from 2022 to 2024 at UC Riverside's Special Collections and University Archives. The researcher examined the Kay Berryhill Smith and Connie Confer LGBTQ+ Activism Collection housed in the UC Riverside Rivera Library to uncover primary materials relevant to the history examined. Materials included event flyers, organizational periodicals, hand-written notes, legal and governmental documents, and newspaper clippings from local, national and LGBTQ+ news sources, as well as other assorted primary materials. Supplemental primary source materials were also uncovered online via GALE's Archives of Gender and Sexuality database. Additionally, this research draws on oral histories conducted by A People's History of the I.E. digital archive, which strives to uplift marginalized voices in local history. These oral histories were by and large completed by Dr. Catherine Gudis, the faculty mentor for this project and a lead on A People's History of the I.E., as well as graduate student Jill Surdzial. Oral histories with key figures in local LGBTQ+ history provided greater context, understanding, and meaning to the primary materials provided by the archive. Lastly, this research also drew on secondary sources by historians and other scholars examining the AIDS epidemic.

BACKGROUND: AIDS EPIDEMIC IN THE UNITED STATES

September of 1982 marked the first time the CDC used the term “acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).” By that point, only 593 cases of AIDS had been identified in the United States, although that number would soon dramatically increase, with over 100,777 Americans dying from AIDS over the nine year span of 1981 to 1990.¹

First identified as gay-related immune deficiency syndrome or GRID, AIDS disproportionately impacted marginalized communities including queer men, intravenous drug users, and racial and ethnic minority groups. As a result, AIDS was notably dubbed the “4-H virus,” representing hemophiliacs, homosexuals, heroin users, and Haitians.² Amongst people of color, small immigrant communities including Haitians living on the East Coast of the U.S. were first impacted, due to the smaller nature of the communities and therefore higher viral transmission rates. In the following years, Black and Latino communities would be more disproportionately and broadly impacted, due to existing healthcare, economic, and racial inequalities in the United States. The population impacts of AIDS are important to note for two reasons. First, AIDS was and still is misrepresented as having exclusively impacted white gay men. While this population was predominantly impacted during the early years of the epidemic, it would later come to affect other communities, as previously noted.³ Second, the casting of impacted peoples as being “undesirables” whose lives were not valued by the US government manufactured consent for the lack of an initial response to the AIDS epidemic. President Ronald Reagan and the rise of the religious right movement, in particular, played a role in this. The

¹ “Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: MMWR.” Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, GA, U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, Public Health Service, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00001880.htm#:~:text=From%201981%20through%201990%2C%20100%2C777,deaths%20were%20reported%20during%201990.>

² Jack Lowery, *It Was Vulgar and It Was Beautiful: How AIDS Activists Used Art to Art to Right a Pandemic* (Bold Type Books, 2022), 20.

³ Sarah Schulman, *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1987-1993* (Picador, 2022), 16.

Christian right was, as it is today, fundamentally anti-gay, anti-drug, and white supremacist; their rise during this early period of the AIDS epidemic played a large role in fostering negative public sentiment. This made discussion of the virus a charged topic in the political landscape, contributing to deadly governmental mishandling.⁴

The advent of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s led to a steep decline in the social gains and legal rights that LGBTQ+ activists in the United States had worked long and hard to achieve in the 1960s and 1970s. That is, the epidemic effectively pushed back the LGBTQ+ movement by years if not decades. Although LGBTQ+ people were not the only population impacted by AIDS, as discussed above, the virus ravaged the close-knit community and was often represented in popular imagination as primarily impacting queer men. Early on, AIDS was regarded as a “gay disease.” LGBTQ+ people were blamed with burdening the nation’s economic and healthcare systems, and traditional homophobic arguments resurged, particularly those that posited queer people as diseased and dangerous to children. AIDS’ disproportionate impact on queer men often resulted in the pathologization of homosexuality, in which many blamed LGBTQ+ people for the existence of the virus, some citing the wrath of God, while others still simply blamed promiscuity and nonreproductive sex as the sole cause.⁵

Rising homophobia and the targeting of LGBTQ+ people during the epidemic was spurred on by state and federal governmental responses. President Reagan’s communication director at the time, Pat Buchanan, epitomized this with statements such as, “The poor homosexuals - they have declared war upon nature, and now nature is extracting an awful retribution.”⁶

⁴ Schulman, *Let the Record Show*, xiv.

⁵ Schulman, *Let the Record Show*, 18.

⁶ Lowery, *It Was Vulgar and It Was Beautiful*, 34.

It was during these years that a wide breadth of legislation targeting the LGBTQ+ community and people with AIDS (PWAs) emerged. In 1987, an amendment introduced by U.S. Senator Jesse Helms barred the immigration of PWAs and HIV-positive people.⁷ Threats of an inhumane and medically ineffective HIV quarantine were also proposed during these years, with U.S. Senator Jesse Helms once again leading such efforts alongside other conservative figures. In one disturbing example, Education Secretary William Bennett proposed that HIV-positive inmates be confined beyond their prison sentences.⁸ In 1985, a poll by the *L.A. Times* frighteningly found that a majority of Americans agreed with broad HIV-quarantine measures, although they thankfully would never come to fruition in the United States. William Buckley, a key figure in the conservative movement, published in March 1986 a *New York Times* op-ed arguing that PWAs be tattooed to “curb the spread.” Even more disturbingly, his suggestions for tattoo placement included the forearm and buttocks, to supposedly “protect” intravenous drug users and other homosexuals.⁹ To demonstrate the far-reaching impacts of stigmatization during the height of the epidemic, HIV-positive children were frequently denied access to public schools, and became points of contention in small communities.¹⁰

The LGBTQ+ community organized the first major responses to AIDS during the epidemic’s early years. When local, state, and federal governments refused to fund mitigations such as AIDS research, safer sex programs, and information regarding the virus, the gay community organized, distributed its own materials, and provided care for PWAs.¹¹ Most early forms of AIDS LGBTQ+ organizing were focused on this form of community care, providing

⁷ Cliff O’Neill, “Sullivan Strikes HIV Ban,” *Frontiers*, Dec. 1991. MS 363, Box 6, Folder 2, Kay Berryhill Smith and Connie Confer LGBT Activism Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, University of California Riverside (hereafter cited as Smith and Confer Collection, UCR).

⁸ Lowery, *It Was Vulgar and It Was Beautiful*, 66.

⁹ Lowery, *It Was Vulgar and It Was Beautiful*, 38.

¹⁰ Lowery, *It Was Vulgar and It Was Beautiful*, 33.

¹¹ Lowery, *It Was Vulgar and It Was Beautiful*, 31.

assistance for PWAs.¹² The first such organization was Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), founded in 1981 in New York, with AIDS Project Los Angeles formed in California the following year. Despite being service-based in nature, such organizations were highly political in asserting the value of PWAs' lives when local, state, and federal government inaction suggested otherwise.¹³ By the late 1980s, direct action-based AIDS organizations began to form. The most well-known of these groups was AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power or ACT UP, founded in 1987 in New York City. ACT UP was a key actor in combating government inaction on AIDS and demanding funding for AIDS research and treatments. The group utilized direct nonviolent action, art, and civil disobedience to force public, media, and governmental attention to the AIDS epidemic. As a demonstration of the organization's effectiveness, the federal government spent only a quarter billion on AIDS research from 1981-1986, despite the scope of the epidemic; by 1991, that number reached almost a billion per year, due largely to the pressure of ACT UP's actions. ACT UP had chapters across the nation, and other action-based forms of AIDS activism within the LGBTQ+ community emerged shortly after their formation. Following in the tradition of the 1963 March on Washington for Civil Rights, in 1987 LGBTQ+ people from across the nation participated in the National March for Lesbian and Gay Rights. With over 200,000 participants, it was during this event that LGBTQ+ people in the United States unified in their anger and pain over the AIDS epidemic and demanded better from their government, with many marchers returning to their home communities energized into further action. As a showcase of LGBTQ+ activism in the Inland Empire, about 50 individuals from Riverside and San Bernardino participated in this landmark historical event.¹⁴

¹² Benita Roth, *The Life and Death of ACT UP/LA* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 2.

¹³ Roth, *The Life and Death of ACT UP/LA*, 3.

¹⁴ Martin Salditch, "Capital Rally Draws Many From County," *Press Enterprise* (Riverside, CA), 1987. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

THE AIDS EPIDEMIC IN CALIFORNIA

Despite its popular image as a progressive state, California had its share of cultural and legal battles during the AIDS epidemic. California was in fact foundational to the growth of the Christian right movement, and heavily influenced by the conservative Reagan administration in the 1980s. In 1988 alone, more than 60 anti-gay bills were discussed in the California State Legislature.¹⁵ Even so-called liberal Democrats in California abandoned the LGBTQ+ community during the years of the epidemic. For instance, Governor Pete Wilson vetoed Assembly Bill 101 in September 1991 despite earlier promises to pass it, which would have prohibited discrimination against LGBTQ+ people. This action in particular generated great resentment and further distrust of politicians and state government in California's LGBTQ+ community. Organizations such as ACT UP LA and the AIDS Health Foundation saw this veto as yet another example of governmental complicity in covering up the AIDS epidemic, and on September 30th a riot erupted in San Francisco over Wilson's veto.¹⁶ Although the measure was passed the following year, the 1991 fiasco surrounding AB101 demonstrates the commonality of anti-AIDS sentiment and homophobia during the AIDS epidemic within California.

As was the case nationally, fears of mandatory HIV testing and an AIDS quarantine were well-founded within the state. In 1986, Lyndon LaRouche's Proposition 64 called for adding HIV to the list of communicable diseases in California, which would have required mandatory HIV testing and installed an AIDS quarantine, in addition to banning PWAs from job positions involving food service and children.¹⁷ Although Proposition 64 was defeated, a similar LaRouche measure returned to the ballot in 1988 before its defeat.¹⁸ A 1989 state law required mandatory

¹⁵ Mark Vandervelden, "New Threats Prompt New Tactics in California," *The Advocate*, January 1988, 10. Box 2, Folder 56, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁶ Flyer from ACT UP LA on Gov. Pete Wilson, 1991, Box 3, Folder 16, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁷ Roth, *The Life and Death of ACT UP/LA*, 177.

¹⁸ Vandervelden, "New Threats," 10.

HIV testing for convicted sex workers in California.¹⁹ If said sex workers tested positive, they could be tried for felony charges. The law was challenged by sex workers in a San Francisco appellate court in 1990, but their case was ultimately rejected. In a related example, L.A. District Attorney Ira Reiner attempted to prosecute a sex worker with AIDS for “attempted murder” in 1987.²⁰ In the same year, California Assemblyman Patrick Johnston, a democrat from Stockton, attempted to repeal the ban on insurance companies utilizing HIV-antibody tests for insurance eligibility. This would have forced PWAs onto Medi-Cal, or left those who continued to work without medical insurance.²¹ These legal cases, and others at the time, demonstrated to the California LGBTQ+ community that fears of mandatory HIV testing, an AIDS quarantine, and corresponding criminal penalties were real and pressing. In fact, the LGBTQ+ community in California often found itself divided over balancing the time, finances, and resources between legal battles, caring for PWAs, and combating the epidemic.²²

In California, as across the nation, the LGTBQ+ community organized the primary responses to the AIDS epidemic. In 1988, thousands marched on the State Capitol in Sacramento in response to the state's inaction on AIDS.²³ They demanded increased funding for AIDS research and services, and protested state and federal AIDS policy. Individuals from San Bernardino and Riverside participated in this march, illustrating the participation of LGBTQ+ Inland Empire AIDS organizers in the broader movement.²⁴

¹⁹ Keith Clark, “Court Upholds Mandatory HIV Testing of Prostitutes,” *Vanguard*, Jan. 25, 1990. Box 5, Folder 11, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

²⁰ Garland Richard Kyle, “The Year of Duplicity - Liberalism and AIDS,” *Frontiers*, 1987. Box 6, Folder 2, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

²¹ Don L. Volk, “Legislator Wants to Repeal AIDS Testing Ban,” *Frontiers*, 1987. Box 6, Folder 2, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

²² Mark Vandervelden, “New Threats,” 10.

²³ “Gay Activists March for AIDS Funding,” *San Bernardino County Sun*, May 8, 1988.

²⁴ Pat Rocco, “A Personal View: Emotions Pulse as 22,000 March on State Capitol,” *Update*, May 11, 1988, A-15. *Gale Archives of Sexuality and Gender* (hereafter cited as Gale).

LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY IN THE INLAND EMPIRE

Considering this paper's focus on grassroots LGBTQ+ AIDS activism in the Inland Empire, the politics of place, as utilized by Benita Roth in her study on ACT UP LA, is of particular relevance. According to Roth, "local histories and relationships among political actors condition social movement activism and mean that actors working in coalition situated in different physical spaces face different challenges."²⁵ Such a concept is of particular relevance here, as the LGBTQ+ community of the Inland Empire has a unique history and positionality tied to its location in a conservative outpost of the L.A. metropolitan area.

The LGBTQ+ community of the Inland Empire has historically been more conservative and divergent in needs than those of LGBTQ+ enclaves in larger Californian cities. Riverside in particular had a by and large conservative and assimilation-based LGBTQ+ culture, with most queer people seeking financial stability and basic acceptance rather than radical changes to society.²⁶ In the context of the conservative Christian-based and often homophobic Inland Empire, many queer and transgender people lived in the closet, as job discrimination, harassment, and social ostracization was commonly experienced by openly LGBTQ+ people. Despite these factors, LGBTQ+ people in the Inland Empire often found community and support in the form of local queer social organizations. An example of one such organization is the LGBTQ+ Professional Advisory Council (PAC), which formed in the early 1970s as a social group for primarily lesbians and gay men and had over 500 members.

As noted above, these community members faced a different political landscape than their peers in major metropolitan areas such as San Francisco. Of particular significance is the close geographical proximity of Riverside County to Orange County. Starting in the 1950s,

²⁵ Roth, *The Life and Death of ACT UP/LA*, 9.

²⁶ Steve Cooper, "Inland Empire Gays: A Life Apart," *San Bernardino County Sun*, Nov. 22, 1987. Box 5, Folder 10, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

Orange County was a central location in the conservative Christian movement. Scholars including Lisa McGirr have commented upon this history, arguing that Orange County “was a real center and symbol of American conservatism in the 1960s.”²⁷ It was partially from the efforts of conservative Orange County citizens that Ronald Reagan was elected as the governor of California in 1966, before gaining the presidency in 1980. To contextualize, following the downward slope of conservatism following the success of New Deal politics in the 1930s, conservatives in Orange County coalesced in church-based communities. These reactionary residents were brought together by common moral panics in response to the social gains of the Civil Rights, feminist, and gay rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. During the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s, these Christian right strongholds in Orange County would play a key role in anti-gay efforts in California, including within the nearby Inland Empire. This would have a tremendous influence on the political environment that Riverside’s LGBTQ+ community navigated.

Following the trends set by federal and state policies in the United States, the AIDS epidemic dealt a further blow to the already low acceptance of LGBTQ+ people in the Inland Empire. Just as before the virus, it was through local grassroots community organizing that LGBTQ+ people in Riverside persisted, despite their conservative and often hostile context. The adverse environment LGBTQ+ people faced in Riverside during the AIDS epidemic is demonstrated in examinations of local controversies regarding the city’s 1987 AIDS Anti-Discrimination Ordinance, which is a central focus of this paper. In addition, the traditionally more conservative nature of the I.E.’s LGBTQ+ community played a role in the forms of activism and action undertaken locally. That is, rather than aiming to fundamentally challenge the established powers at be - as was central to some queer organizations at the time

²⁷ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 4.

like ACT UP, Riverside's LGBTQ+ community instead sought legal and reform-oriented measures within the local governmental establishment. Local efforts during the AIDS epidemic were focused on the creation of service based organizations to combat the spread of HIV and provide resources, as well as anti-discrimination ordinances to protect PWAs, particularly through the work of the Inland AIDS Project (IAP), Political Action Coalition for Elections (PACE), and Riverside Coalition Against Discrimination (RCAD).

INLAND AIDS PROJECT

By 1990, there had been over 995 reported cases of AIDS and 703 AIDS-related deaths in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, a staggering number that in itself was likely an undercount.²⁸ With a looming mortality rate of over 73%, local LGBTQ+ community members responded by forming the Inland AIDS Project in 1984. IAP was the primary grassroots AIDS organization of the Inland Empire, and was central to the survival of Riverside's LGBTQ+ community during the years of the epidemic.

The IAP's mission statement was as follows: "The purpose of IAP is to support and maintain the best possible quality of life for people infected with HIV in San Bernardino and Riverside counties by providing and promoting human support services; to reduce the overall incidence of HIV infection by providing risk-reduction education and information for people infected by and/or at risk for exposure to HIV; to reduce the levels of fear and discrimination directed toward people infected with HIV and to enhance and preserve the dignity and self-respect of those people, by providing and promoting education to the general public, healthcare providers, educators, business and religious leaders, media, public officials, and other opinion leaders; and to ensure the ongoing support for delivery of needed services by facilitating, educating, and cooperating with a wide range of organizations and individuals in AIDS-related service provision."²⁹

The Inland AIDS Project serviced all of the San Bernardino and Riverside counties and provided essential services to PWAs. IAP was volunteer and grassroots-based, and provided a

²⁸ Clippings with Riverside and San Bernardino Counties AIDS statistics, 1991, Box 3, Folder 7, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

²⁹ AIDS Information Sourcebook (Directory of Organizations), 1991-1992. MS, Box 164, Folder 1, ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power: Series X. Published and near Print Material. New York Public Library. *Gale*.

wide breadth of services to PWAs and impacted communities. These services included medical resource assistance, emotional support, education, and legal case management.

Although IAP could not always offer direct medical care to PWAs, they did offer limited services and counted some medically-trained staff and volunteers among their cohort. One key service provided was free anonymous HIV testing to the community.³⁰ IAP also networked with local medical and health agencies, including hospice centers, to ensure that local PWAs received adequate medical care.

Another community service IAP offered was various forms of emotional support for PWAs. In one example, IAP sponsored support groups for men with AIDS-related medical conditions and also participated in the AIDS Buddy Program.³¹ The Buddy Program was started by the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) to provide volunteers, named "buddies," to support people with AIDS in their daily life needs as a mutual aid program in the queer community.³² IAP also co-sponsored an AIDS support group with the High Desert Mental Health Center in the underserved Victorville area.³³ IAP's role as a source of emotional support and as a gathering space for PWAs in the Inland Empire was vital to the community's survival and offset the terrible impact of AIDS. Grassroots LGBTQ+ service-based AIDS organizations often played a similar role throughout the country, providing community networks that offered strength and endurance in a time of mass death.

IAP also provided education on HIV/AIDS to the Inland Empire community. For instance, IAP hosted free educational seminars for locally impacted citizens. Two such seminars were offered on the latest HIV and AIDS research in 1991, in collaboration with the UC

³⁰ "Inland Counties/Pomona Valley," *The Lesbian News* (Torrance, CA), Oct. 1993, Vol. 19, Issue. 3. *Gale*.

³¹ *The Lesbian News*, Feb. 1989, Vol. 14, Issue. 7. *Gale*.

³² Schulman, *Let the Record Show*, 384.

³³ "Metro." *Update*, December 21, 1988, A-6. *Gale*.

Riverside Extension Center at the Inland AIDS Project's office.³⁴ Other seminars and classes offered by IAP touched on related information including AIDS treatments, HIV-related medical conditions, safer sex education, and nutritional guidance, as well as emotional education focusing on self-care and religion in conversation with AIDS.³⁵ General IAP meetings also tended to include subject matters relevant to AIDS education, with meetings focused on topics such as "The Latest Information on AIDS Research" which dispersed information on the latest in a rapidly-evolving field.³⁶ In a more specific example, IAP strived to provide services to women prisoners at the nearby Chino Institute for Women.³⁷ Kathy Guidon, former nurse and case manager for IAP, provided services to HIV-positive women at the institute.³⁸ Due to prison policy, however, IAP was unable to legally discuss safer sex practices or needle cleaning with prisoners, a factor that limited the effectiveness of their services. These efforts in particular connected IAP to larger activist struggles regarding the Chino Institute. ACT UP LA and ACT UP California were involved in these efforts, striving to improve the poor conditions HIV-positive women prisoners were subjected to.³⁹ In another example, IAP collaborated with the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health to distribute stickers with information detailing methods of AIDS transmission.⁴⁰ Annual AIDS Walks were another foundational aspect of IAP's educational outreach and awareness efforts. Such walks took place throughout the 1990s with the purpose of bringing the community together to show support for PWAs, as well as spread awareness to the general public about the local impact of AIDS. Often taking place in downtown Riverside, these walks also raised funds for IAP, with roughly \$100,000 raised in

³⁴ Susan Greene, "Locals Walk, Study to Conquer HIV," *The Daily Press* (Victorville, CA), Sept. 5, 1991. Box 5, Folder 11, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

³⁵ "AIDS Seminars Offered" *The Lesbian News*, July 1992, Vol. 17, Issue 12. *Gale*.

³⁶ "Southern California" *The Lesbian News*, April 1986, Vol. 11 Issue. 9. *Gale*.

³⁷ Pat Burke. "Women Left to Die in State Prison." *Update*, September 13, 1989, A-1+. *Gale*.

³⁸ Clipping "21 Heroes," Sept. 27 1988, Box 2, Folder 67, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

³⁹ Roth, *The Life and Death of ACT UP/LA*, 51.

⁴⁰ AIDS awareness sticker, Box 2, Folder 67, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

1995's 2,000-person walk alone.⁴¹ An AIDS walk was also a part of the weekend-long events centering on the visit of the AIDS NAMES Project Quilt to the Riverside Convention Center in 1991, a central effort that will be discussed further in this paper.⁴² These walks mirrored similar efforts across the nation, such as the annual AIDS Walk New York, which also brought attention to AIDS and raised funds for care organizations and research.⁴³ Participants recall that the IAP's AIDS walks were not only fundraising opportunities, but also sources of community bonding and support. Connie Confer, local lesbian activist and board member of IAP, reflected, "It was pretty cheery and we mostly just walked and got together, it was a way of getting together and our families and friends came."⁴⁴ IAP's educational efforts for HIV-positive people, their families, and the general public were of great importance, as misinformation about AIDS was incredibly common and contributed to the massive stigma and discrimination surrounding AIDS.

The Inland AIDS Project, like many AIDS service organizations, was also a strong supporter of safer sex efforts to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. In one example, IAP's safer sex practices can be seen in its involvement in the local controversy surrounding male cruising at Riverside's Fairmount Park. The popular cruising location became hostile in 1993 following accusations by some local residents that men cruising in the park were sexually abusing children.⁴⁵ Despite the claims lacking any evidence, violent and homophobic graffiti was sprayed

⁴¹ Tina Dirmann, "Walkers' Reminder: AIDS Kills: 2,000 Participate in Annual Event," *Press Enterprise*, Oct. 23, 1995. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

⁴² Janet Gilmore, "People Take AIDS Fight to the Streets," *Press Enterprise*, Sept. 9, 1991. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

⁴³ Lowery, *It Was Vulgar and It Was Beautiful*, 58.

⁴⁴ Connie Confer, interview by Jillian Surdzial, *A People's History of the I.E.*, Nov. 1, 2022.

⁴⁵ Phil Pitchford, "Gay Sex in Park Issue Dominates Meeting," *Press Enterprise*, July 15, 1993. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

in the park.⁴⁶ IAP staff and volunteers stepped in to communicate the dangers present, as well as provide safer sex materials and information on the spread of HIV to male cruisers.⁴⁷

IAP also offered legal case management to the local community. One service offered by the Inland AIDS Project in this area included assistance with the writing of wills. During the early years of the epidemic, most diagnosed with HIV/AIDS would die from the virus and therefore often needed support in setting their affairs in order.⁴⁸ IAP also offered guidance involving estate issues and discrimination cases. The organization was instrumental in ensuring the passage of Riverside's 1987 AIDS Anti-Discrimination Ordinance in presenting such cases of discrimination to the City of Riverside. IAP also assisted PWAs and their families in navigating financial affairs by providing support and counsel, as well as acting as representatives to creditors and banks after PWAs lost their jobs due to discrimination or illness. In this area Connie Confer, as local assistant to the Riverside district attorney, played a key role. As a lawyer with experience in the public legal sphere, Confer was able to lend PWAs seeking legal services advice and assistance. Confer also worked on behalf of IAP with the City of Riverside and elected officials on HIV/AIDS policy.

As a grassroots service-based organization, the Inland AIDS Project effectively networked with local health and LGBTQ+ service providers and organizations. Among the healthcare organizations IAP worked with, the American Cancer Society, St. Bernardine's Hospital, Health Systems Agency, local hospices, and other regional AIDS projects were included.⁴⁹ Alongside 17 other regional AIDS service organizations, IAP was also a part of

Southern California CARES, an educational campaign that publicized AIDS information in the

⁴⁶ Phil Pitchford, "Abuse-in-Park Stories Stir Skepticism," *Press Enterprise* (Riverside, CA), Aug. 8, 1993. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

⁴⁷ Phil Pitchford, "Capitol Cracked Down on Sex on Beach," *Press Enterprise*, Aug. 9, 1993. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

⁴⁸ Confer, interview.

⁴⁹ "Inland Empire," *The Lesbian News*, Sept. 1985, Vol. 11, Issue. 2. *Gale*.

gay press and maintained a toll-free hotline.⁵⁰ Furthermore, IAP was also a part of the California LIFE AIDS Lobby, a political organization that advocated for improvements in California state AIDS policy; the Lobby also included other regional service-based AIDS organizations such as Palm Springs' Desert AIDS Project and the Pomona-based Foothill AIDS Project.⁵¹

Publicization of IAP efforts were also vital to the project's success. The Inland AIDS Project often communicated its services and events to the local LGBTQ+ community via regional lesbian & gay periodicals, the local press, and its very own newsletter. The Riverside Press Enterprise was one of the key newspapers which collaborated with IAP for outreach. It was through the Enterprise that IAP could effectively communicate information regarding services available to the Riverside community. IAP utilized this outreach method primarily to share information on their services with the general public, including details regarding the dates of volunteer orientations, free anonymous HIV testing, and their educational AIDS seminars. It was in the gay press, such as *Update Magazine* and the *Lesbian News* of Torrance, California, that IAP's upcoming fundraisers, local events, and project needs were communicated.⁵² IAP would also print posters and flyers to be placed in local gay bars such as The Menagerie in downtown Riverside to inform LGBTQ+ community members of services and upcoming events. These outreach and communication methods are of note as they were essential to the effectiveness of IAP in the pre-internet era, when information needed to reach impacted community members through traditional paper-based sources. Posting in the gay and lesbian press ensured that HIV-positive LGBTQ+ people received IAP's information, while sharing in the local press did the same for the broader HIV-positive community which often included racial minorities and

⁵⁰ "Campaign." *Update*, May 27, 1987, A-6+. *Gale*.

⁵¹ "Members by Region," Series 10. Public Policy, 1987-1995. California Policy Groups and Activities, Life AIDS Lobby, Board of Directors, 1994-1995. MS Box 3, Folder 34, Asian/Pacific AIDS Coalition (APAC) Records, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Historical Society. *Gale*.

⁵² "Multiple Classified Advertisements." *The News* 1, No. 22, 1987, 17+. *Gale*.

intravenous drug users. Additionally, limiting most event postings to the gay press and flyers in gay bars ensured that outside instigators would not disrupt events intended for PWAs and LGBTQ+ people in the context of the conservative Inland Empire.

In its early years, the Inland AIDS Project was essentially grassroots-funded, relying on community fundraisers until 1987 when the project began to receive state funding.⁵³ The majority of these fundraisers took place within the Inland Empire community, and were often hosted at local LGBTQ+ bars, festivals, and events. Bar-based fundraising events often took place at local venues such as the Menagerie and VIP Club in Riverside as well as at the Skylark Bar in San Bernardino. The Menagerie, in particular, played a central role in fundraising events for IAP. In 1990, the Menagerie sponsored the Country Western Festival Benefit for the Inland AIDS Project at the local Pine Hill Farm in nearby Perris, California.⁵⁴ This proactive support was likely due in large part to the leadership of the Menagerie under Madeline Lee, who was a central figure in Riverside's LGBTQ+ community and often supported the efforts of local LGBTQ+ organizations. Under her guidance, the Menagerie became a central organizing base in the 1980s and 1990s when IAP was most active, and acted as a coordinating space for various organizational events, fundraising activities, and political actions.⁵⁵ In this aspect Riverside is similar to other cities in the United States at the time, wherein gay bars played a central role in LGBTQ+ community formation and networking. Philip Bailey, a local drag queen, reflected that drag often played an essential role in gay bar fundraisers, hosting shows in which the profits generated would be contributed to the Inland AIDS Project.⁵⁶ IAP also benefited from local LGBTQ+ events and activities constructed for the purpose of fundraising for AIDS services. For

⁵³ "Western Festival Helps Inland Project." *Update*, Sept. 26, 1990, A-6. *Gale*.

⁵⁴ "Multiple Classified Advertisements." *Patlar*, Oct. 1990, 18. *Gale*.

⁵⁵ Confer, interview.

⁵⁶ Philip Bailey, interview by Jillian Surdzial, *A People's History of the I.E.*, May 1, 2023.

several years IAP hosted an Annual Freedom Festival in July, which collaborated with other local LGBTQ+ organizations, including the Pomona and San Gabriel Valley Gay and Lesbian Coalition and the Valley AIDS Project of Pomona.⁵⁷⁵⁸ ACT UP LA attended one of these festivals in 1998, showcasing the dual purpose of these events in both fundraising for IAP and networking regional LGBTQ+ AIDS organizations.⁵⁹ In its later years, the Inland AIDS Project also hosted fundraising events at UC Riverside during an annual Inland Empire Pride Festival in July 1997 and 1998, wherein all profits raised benefited the local AIDS project.⁶⁰ The choice of a public university to host these events signified the growing integration of IAP and the broader LGBTQ+ community into the mainstream at a later date when AIDS was less stigmatized by the broader public. The Inland AIDS Project also worked with groups in the nearby Los Angeles area for fundraising purposes. For instance, IAP was one of several regional AIDS service organizations to benefit from large-scale fundraisers; among these were the 1991 Hollywood Stars Gala AIDS Benefit attended by several high-profile celebrities, a 1998 AIDS Cablethon, and an AIDS Cycle Challenge in 1998.⁶¹ IAP's inclusion in these L.A.-based fundraisers indicate a coordinated effort on the part of IAP's leadership to tap into the often greater resources and larger widespread support of LGBTQ+ people in the L.A. area. IAP's early fundraising events were primarily based within the LGBTQ+ community, as members described hesitation on the part of outsiders to financially contribute to the organization. This might have been due to the stigmas around AIDS within Riverside, as was true elsewhere in the Inland Empire. Fundraising from outside the community often proved more difficult when individuals and organizations did

⁵⁷ "Pomona Valley/Inland Empire" *The Lesbian News*, July 1987, Vol. 12, Issue. 12. *Gale*.

⁵⁸ Flyer for IAP Freedom Festival XI, July 1993, Box 2, Folder 46, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

⁵⁹ "Coming Up..." *ACT UP Los Angeles Records*, Farmington Hills, MI, 1988. *Gale*.

⁶⁰ "Announcements: 15th Annual Riverside/San Bernardino Gay/Lesbian Pride Festival" *The Lesbian News*, July 1997, Vol. 22, Issue. 12. *Gale*.

⁶¹ "AIDS Cycle Challenge." *Newsletter Men of All Colors Together of Los Angeles*, Mar. 1988. *Gale*; Richard Labonte. "\$1.5 to \$3 Million Goal: Koop Stars in Hollywood AIDS Benefit." *Update*, Feb. 3, 1988, A-10. *Gale*; "AIDS Cable-thon." *Update*, Dec. 4, 1991, A-14. *Gale*.

not want to be associated with an AIDS service organization: “They just weren't... as appealing as some victims.”⁶² With this hesitation arose challenges that organizers in more metropolitan areas did not necessarily have to face to the same extent. That is to say, in cities such as nearby Los Angeles and Palm Springs, popular fundraising for LGBTQ+ causes and AIDS was likely more commonplace and socially acceptable.

The Inland AIDS Project was largely volunteer based, although it did have a small number of salaried staff. Members were often a part of the LGBTQ+ community and/or impacted by AIDS. Oral histories revealed that many were inspired to act due to the devastating nature of the AIDS epidemic, and by the feeling that in contributing to the Inland AIDS Project, they could make a difference in positively impacting the lives of local PWAs and serve their community. Maggie Hawkins, local activist and educator, noted that “there were a lot of people that kind of gravitated from other kinds of work into that work, because at that point in time, it was literally devastating.”⁶³ During the early years of the epidemic, IAP was in many ways integrated into LGBTQ+ life in Riverside as a key player in pride festivals and other events, and most local community members were aware of the organization or were volunteers themselves. As Chani Beeman, a local activist and member of IAP stated, “you supported [IAP] and it felt like part of the LGBTQ community.”⁶⁴ In the context of massive loss within the closely-knit local LGBTQ+ community, working with the Inland AIDS Project provided meaning and emotional support for many community members.⁶⁵ As within many AIDS organizations across the nation, organizers often built on prior knowledge and experiences in activism and community building, including local work in the feminist and reproductive rights movements.⁶⁶ For this

⁶² Confer, interview.

⁶³ Maggie Hawkins, interview by Jillian Surdzial, *A People's History of the I.E.*, Feb. 24, 2022.

⁶⁴ Chani Beeman, interview by Catherine Gudis and Jillian Surdzial, *A People's History of the I.E.*, Mar. 24, 2023.

⁶⁵ Confer, interview.

⁶⁶ Hawkins, interview.

reason, lesbians and other women played key roles in IAP, mirroring trends across the nation in grassroots AIDS organizations.⁶⁷ Jane Carney, a local lawyer and political organizer at the time, recalled that it was perhaps easier for lesbians and other queer women to be on the frontline of IAP and other LGBTQ+ organizations during the epidemic, as much of the stigma surrounding AIDS was directed at gay and queer men.⁶⁸

As scholars have often discussed, the AIDS epidemic disproportionately impacted people of color, contrary to popular public imagination of the virus' sole victims being white gay men. Correspondingly, IAP did not just service gay men, but rather all HIV-positive persons in the Riverside and San Bernardino areas, as was common with AIDS service-based projects in the United States. In July 1991 alone, IAP cared for 613 PWAs, one sixth of which were women who had contracted HIV via injection-based drug use, a blood transfusion, or heterosexual sex.⁶⁹ IAP members, like many AIDS service organizations and activists, accredited the lack of governmental funding and public interest in AIDS due to the virus' primary victims being marginalized peoples whose lives were generally devalued by the state.⁷⁰

While the Inland AIDS Project made efforts to service all local PWAs, as an organization that consisted of primarily white members, they perhaps would have benefited from reaching out to locally impacted communities of color in order to provide the most effective care. Such a configuration was common across many AIDS organizations in the United States, with nearby ACT UP LA facing similar problems in attempting to address a virus disproportionately impacting communities of color while the majority of the group's members and leadership were white.⁷¹ The LGBTQ+ community in the United States by and large struggled with issues of

⁶⁷ Schulman, *Let the Record Show*, 22.

⁶⁸ Jane Carney, interview by Catherine Gudis, *A People's History of the I.E.*, July 5, 2023.

⁶⁹ Greene, "Locals walk."

⁷⁰ Confer, interview.

⁷¹ Roth, *The Life and Death of ACT UP/LA*, 101.

intersectionality, or rather a lack thereof, throughout its political movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and this trend continued through the early years of the epidemic. As was common across the nation, local communities of color often lacked access to AIDS resources, including treatment, healthcare, and basic information. Between 1983 and 1990, 17% of Riverside County and 40% of San Bernardino County AIDS cases were amongst people of color, particularly in the Latino and Black communities.⁷² Riverside's lower rates were attributed at the time, perhaps accurately, to the city's concentrated white gay population, with over 88% of the city's cases stemming from sex between men. To further illustrate this discrepancy, by 1991, 16% of PWAs in San Bernardino were Black despite being only 6% of the county's population.⁷³ At the time, *The Black Voice News* argued that local support for people of color with AIDS was lacking. They primarily attributed this discrepancy to AIDS' popular labeling as a "gay white disease." More research is needed to fully assess IAP's effectiveness in supporting locally impacted communities of color. However, given extensive case studies on AIDS projects in cities across the nation, it seems likely that IAP, as well as Riverside and San Bernardino's health departments, could have more effectively collaborated with communities of color. Such efforts would likely have improved outcomes for these impacted populations.

The Inland AIDS Project disbanded in the late 2010s. IAP had been formed as a direct community response to the urgency of the AIDS epidemic. However, as the local caseload of AIDS waned and effective treatments to the virus became available, the California state government withdrew financial support of the project, and the organization slowly faded. As Connie Confer notes: "It felt like we had done good work for years and we had helped a lot of

⁷² Clippings with Riverside and San Bernardino Counties AIDS statistics, 1991, Box 3, Folder 7, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

⁷³ "AIDS Project Not Meeting Needs of Minorities," *The Black Voice News* (San Bernardino, CA) Vol. 19, Issue 14., Apr. 1991. Box 5, Folder 2, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

people and we just couldn't keep it up, we couldn't keep going.”⁷⁴ In its place, TruEvolution exists in Riverside today, providing resources to PWAs and their communities.⁷⁵ Founded around the same time that IAP ended, TruEvolution provides many similar services while also expanding on IAP’s care range. TruEvolution provides housing and mental health services to the broader Riverside community, in addition to its HIV-services that have filled the gap left by the absence of the Inland AIDS Project today within Riverside.

⁷⁴ Confer, interview.

⁷⁵ TruEvolution: Health & Justice, <https://www.truevolution.org/about>.

AIDS NAMES PROJECT

In September 1991, the AIDS NAMES Project Quilt visited the Riverside Convention Center. As was true across the United States, the quilt was a core emblem of the local LGBTQ+ community's resilience and strength, despite the tragedies and widespread losses experienced during the early decades of the AIDS epidemic.

After the murder of gay San Francisco City Supervisor Harvey Milk, activist Cleve Jones formed the AIDS NAMES Quilt Project in 1987.⁷⁶ Jones felt that the LGBTQ+ community needed a form of artistic mourning to process the tremendous grief and loss of life experienced during the AIDS epidemic. As he aptly stated: "Let's take all of our individual experiences, and stitch them together to make something that has strength and beauty."⁷⁷ The Quilt contains thousands of three-by-six-foot panels, sewed together in groups of eight, to honor the lives of those lost to AIDS. The quilt was first displayed in San Francisco's Lesbian and Gay Freedom Day Parade, before its national debut at the Washington Mall during the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights in 1979. The Quilt was the largest on-going community arts project in America. It provided comfort to the community and family members, while also serving as a powerful symbol memorializing the immense loss of life.

Madeline Lee, the aforementioned owner of the Menagerie gay bar, became good friends with NAMES project founder Cleve Jones.⁷⁸ Through this connection, Lee was able to arrange for the Quilt to visit the Riverside Convention Center in 1987. The effort was further supported by the Inland AIDS Project and the Riverside Community Relations Commission.

Prior to the event, local residents sewed their own quilts to honor community members who had passed from AIDS. Fabric stores in Palm Springs assisted community members in

⁷⁶ Cindy Ruskin, *The Quilt: Stories from the Names Project* (Pocket Books, 1998).

⁷⁷ Ruskin, *The Quilt*, 9.

⁷⁸ Confer, interview.

making their quilts, allowing them to use their equipment and providing guidance on sewing techniques.⁷⁹ Benita Ramsey, local organizer with TrueEvolution today, described how the Divine Truth Unity Fellowship Church, a local LGBTQ+ friendly church which supported Christians with AIDS, also assisted and joined community members in creating quilts for loved ones and church members who had passed from the virus.⁸⁰ By the time of its exhibition, these efforts had ensured that the NAMES Project's Riverside visit featured the quilts of both national individuals and local residents among the thousands of panels displayed. The Quilt's visit to the Riverside Convention Center was a weekend-long event that took place from September 5-7 in 1991. It featured 1,400 of the 26,000 total quilt panels making up the NAMES Project, with 40 panels being added the weekend of the visit to honor the lives of local residents.⁸¹⁸² IAP hosted their third annual AIDS walk this same weekend, alongside several other local events to honor the Quilt's visit. Over 1,400 walkers trekked 12 kilometers from the Riverside Tyler Mall to the Convention Center where the Quilt lay.⁸³⁸⁴ IAP's walk successfully raised over \$40,000 for AIDS research.⁸⁵ The Riverside Art Museum also held a special exhibition to celebrate the Quilt's visit titled "Fabric of Life: A Celebration of Artists Affected by AIDS."⁸⁶ Further community events commemorating the NAMES Project Quilt's visit to Riverside included a candlelight vigil for AIDS at Riverside City Hall, several activities held at the nearby California Museum of Photography, and performances by local artists which raised donations for IAP.⁸⁷ At the time,

⁷⁹ Confer, interview.

⁸⁰ Benita Ramsey, interview by Jillian Surdzial, *A People's History of the I.E.*, May 3, 2023.

⁸¹ "Inland Counties/Pomona Valley."

⁸² Devorah L. Knaff, "AIDS Quilt Tells of Life and Death," *Press Enterprise*, Sept. 7, 1991. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

⁸³ Meeting Minutes of Riverside Community Relations Commission, Aug. 29, 1991, Box 1, Folder 1, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

⁸⁴ Greene, "Locals walk."

⁸⁵ Meeting Minutes of Riverside Community Relations Commission, Sept. 27, 1991, Box 1, Folder 14, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

⁸⁶ Greene, "Locals walk."

⁸⁷ "Inland Counties/Pomona Valley."

organizers had concerns that protestors might cause disruptions during the event, but thankfully this did not occur.⁸⁸ Throughout the event, staff monitors dressed in white unfolded and displayed the quilt panels, handing out tissues to community members and monitoring the event.

Local press aptly described the AIDS NAMES Project Quilt display in Riverside as “a powerful display, this curious quilt of celebration and grief.”⁸⁹ Indeed, the Quilt represented in many ways the duality of the crisis; the epidemic brought together the community and showcased its strength, even as tremendous loss and mourning took place. While the Quilt was a site of mourning, it was also a place of artistic celebration and commitment to memory in the face of loss: “People were very inventive and very creative in the way they represented their loved one's lives. It was a very, very touching experience to experience in Washington, even more so in Riverside... to see people who, you know, weren't family members, they were community members coming in to just look at it, to be there, to be present, to acknowledge the loss to the community.”⁹⁰ The NAMES Project Quilt's visit to Riverside in 1991 stands out as one of the key events in Riverside AIDS history that indicates how the local community maintained its strength and endurance, despite a conservative and often hostile environment.

⁸⁸ Confer, interview.

⁸⁹ Dan Bernstein, “The AIDS Quilt,” *Press Enterprise*, Sept. 10, 1991. Box 3, Folder 6, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

⁹⁰ Confer, interview.

RIVERSIDE AIDS ORDINANCE BATTLE

In 1987, the City of Riverside's Prohibition Against AIDS Discrimination Ordinance was passed. It was introduced by Councilman Jack Clarke Sr., after he was approached by the local lesbian and gay political action group, Political Action Coalition for Elections (PACE).⁹¹ The ordinance prohibited discrimination against PWAs and people perceived to have AIDS in employment, housing, and medical services, as well as in business establishments and city facilities. Discrimination was only legal in cases wherein evidence was provided that such actions were necessary to ensure public health and safety.⁹² At the time, Los Angeles had a similar anti-discrimination ordinance relating to AIDS, although it lacked the survivorship clause guaranteeing heirs the right to pursue legal cases of discrimination that Riverside's ordinance included.⁹³ PACE utilized both Los Angeles' as well as San Francisco's anti-discrimination ordinances as a basis for the proposal they provided to Councilman Jack Clarke Sr. The ordinance was supported by the Riverside County Health Department, Riverside County AIDS Advisory Council, UC Riverside's Standing Advising Committee on AIDS, as well as the Desert AIDS and Inland AIDS Projects, the latter of which provided testimony on the pressing need for the ordinance before the local Governmental Affairs Committee.^{94,95} In October of 1987, the Riverside City Council voted unanimously to approve the ordinance, with the Riverside County Board of Supervisors adopting it in December 1987 by another unanimous vote.^{96,97}

⁹¹ Corinne Lightweaver, "Riverside Bans AIDS Discrimination," *Frontiers*, 1987. Box 6, Folder 2, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

⁹² "AIDS Anti-Discrimination Ordinance Approved in Riverside." *The News*, no. 21, 1988, 3. *Gale*.

⁹³ Lightweaver, "Riverside Bans."

⁹⁴ Carl F. Ware to Riverside City Council and Mayor, 4 December 1987, Box 3, Folder 57, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

⁹⁵ "Riverside Adopts AIDS Ordinance," *Edge*, July 1988. Box 6, Folder 1, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

⁹⁶ Newspaper clipping titled "AIDS Anti-Bias Law OK'd by City Council," 1987, Box 2, Folder 75, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

⁹⁷ "Riverside Adopts."

The passage of the Riverside AIDS Anti-Discrimination Ordinance in 1987 signaled a tremendous victory for the local LGBTQ+ community and other local communities impacted by the virus. It stands out as a key testimony to the Riverside LGBTQ+ community's persistence during the epidemic due to the efforts of effective grassroots community organizing. As Sam Catalano of PACE noted at the time, "It shows that if we could pass this kind of ordinance in as conservative a community as Riverside, then it's possible just about anywhere."⁹⁸ Indeed, it was a tremendous accomplishment. While it is unsurprising that the more progressive cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco had passed similar measures, it stood out that Riverside passed their own at a time when fewer than ten California cities had such measures.⁹⁹

The Riverside AIDS Anti-Discrimination Ordinance had a tremendous positive impact on PWAs in the city. At the time, IAP reported that residents with AIDS often faced discrimination in their jobs, housing, and medical care.¹⁰⁰ Prior to the ordinance's passage, the Inland AIDS Project often had to assist PWAs after they were evicted from their housing upon appearing to be ill and gay: "people were often outed because they lived alone and then they got really sick and they lost a lot of weight, and so he must be gay, he's got AIDS. So there was discrimination based on being gay and having AIDS."¹⁰¹ In another example, a school district in Riverside County sought to pre-test job applicants for AIDS, intending to deny PWAs until discovering that such mandatory job testing was illegal in California.¹⁰² Such discrimination was commonplace throughout the United States, with many PWAs having lost their jobs, becoming impoverished,

⁹⁸ "California," *The Advocate*, Feb. 1988, 22. Box 2, Folder 56, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

⁹⁹ Daily report newspaper clipping titled "County Targeted by Group Fighting AIDS-Victim Bias," May 20 1988, Box 3, Folder 4, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁰⁰ Ron Morris, "Board Acts Against AIDS Bias," *Press Enterprise*, 1987. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁰¹ Confer, interview.

¹⁰² PACE Letter titled "Rationale for AIDS Anti-Discrimination Ordinance" written by Connie Confer, May 20 1988, Box 1, Folder 62, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

and losing their housing as a result of their HIV-positive status.¹⁰³ By May of the following year, spurred on by their victory, IAP and PACE hoped to bring a similar ordinance to San Bernardino County, but trouble loomed on the horizon.¹⁰⁴

Hoping to build on the AIDS Anti-Discrimination Ordinance's success, in February of 1989 City Councilman Jack Clarke Sr. proposed another ordinance, one that would more broadly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation.¹⁰⁵ While similar bans existed in the cities of San Francisco, Berkeley, and Los Angeles, California Governor Deukmejian had vetoed a similar statewide bill five years prior, in 1984.¹⁰⁶ Nationally, only two states and around 80 cities and counties had similar laws providing protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.¹⁰⁷ Cathedral City, a city in Riverside County with a large gay population, passed a similar anti-discrimination law in 1987, but it lacked enforcement powers.

Unlike the more quiet win of the AIDS Anti-Discrimination Ordinance two years before, this measure was largely publicized and spawned a large-scale battle within the city. The hostilities began when Riverside Police Chief, Linford L. Richardson, publicly opposed the ordinance and voiced his belief that homosexuality was wrong and should not be protected by the law.¹⁰⁸ Opposition was further mobilized following discussions of the ordinance in the Riverside Community Relations Commission in April. The Commission, composed of a panel of volunteers who advised the City Council on social issues, was split on the ordinance, with twelve

¹⁰³ Schulman, *Let the Record Show*, 7.

¹⁰⁴ "County Targeted by Group Fighting AIDS-Victim Bias."

¹⁰⁵ Agustin Gurza, "Gay Ordinance Supported by Divided Panel" *Press Enterprise*, Mar. 31 1989. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁰⁶ Joan Radovich, "Ordinance Urged to Prevent Bias Against Gays" *Press Enterprise*, Feb. 21 1989. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁰⁷ Agustin Gurza, "Riverside Not Alone in Furor over Gay Rights" *Press Enterprise*, 1989. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁰⁸ Agustin Gurza, "Police Chief Rapped for Remarks on Gays" *Press Enterprise*, Feb. 24 1989. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

voting in favor, three against, and five abstaining.¹⁰⁹ It was during this time that Commissioner Lillian Hernandez, who would go on to become a key organizer in opposition to the measure, began to publicly decry the ordinance, going so far as to make the homophobic claim that pedophiles would be protected under such a measure.¹¹⁰ Sensing the storm brewing, Councilman Jack Clarke Sr. decided to postpone the vote in July 1989, abandoning his LGBTQ+ constituents in favor of avoiding backlash in the upcoming election.¹¹¹ However, the dam had already broken. Opposition further escalated in August when local resident Dale Page Smith, who publicly equated homosexuality with bestiality, began to harass commissioners who had voted in favor of the ordinance at their the homes and workplaces. Targeted in particular was Commissioner Kay Smith, who was openly lesbian.¹¹²

The controversy soon attracted the attention of one Reverend Lou Sheldon by early 1990, and floodgates opened for a full-scale organized attack on the rights of LGBTQ+ people and PWAs.¹¹³ When Commissioner Kay Smith asked her fellow commissioner Lillian Hernandez to resign following her homophobic comments in relation to the proposed ordinance, Sheldon held a press conference to show support for Hernandez. At the time, Sheldon was the leader of the conservative Traditional Values Coalition based in Orange County, which included over 6,500 churches. He was a leading figure in the Christian right movement that was by and large centered in Orange County, had a strong foothold in the Inland Empire, and had worked against LGBTQ+ rights in Southern California during the AIDS epidemic. In 1989, he had successfully led an

¹⁰⁹ Gurza, “Gay Ordinance Supported.”

¹¹⁰ Agustin Gurza, “Panel Again Grapples with Gay Ordinance” *Press Enterprise*, Apr. 7 1989. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹¹¹ Agustin Gurza, “Gay Rights Proposal Disappears” *Press Enterprise*, July 29 1989. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹¹² Agustin Gurza, “Anti-Gay Lobbying Called Harassment” *Press Enterprise*, Aug. 23 1989. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹¹³ Raymond Smith, “Gay Rights Uproar Splits Panel” *Press Enterprise*, Mar. 20 1990. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

effort in the city of Irvine to remove gay and lesbian people from the list of protected groups from the city's Human Rights Ordinance.¹¹⁴ Preaching that homosexuality was a curable illness, Sheldon saw Riverside as his next target to spread the christian right movement in Southern California.

By November of 1990, spurred on by the actions of Hernandez and Sheldon, the Riverside Citizens for Responsible Behavior (RCRB) formed with the support of several local churches and the Traditional Values Coalition. Not only did the homophobic group oppose the recently proposed anti-discrimination ordinance focusing on sexual orientation, they also sought to pass their own initiative titled, "Citizen's Ordinance Pertaining to Homosexuality and AIDS."¹¹⁵ Their petition would not only overturn the existing AIDS Anti-Discrimination Ordinance passed in 1987, but it would also legally prevent the City of Riverside from acting in any way to support the local LGBTQ+ community in the future. The initiative measure would prohibit the city from passing legislation, protections, or funding for any effort that "promotes, encourages, endorses, legitimizes or justifies homosexuality."¹¹⁶ RCRB described both the proposed and existing anti-discrimination ordinances as "preferential treatment" for LGBTQ+ people and denied that freedom of sexual orientation was a human right.¹¹⁷ Their initiative further attacked LGBTQ+ people and PWAs, stating that "special rights cannot be granted to conduct which creates a public health crisis."¹¹⁸ It continued by stating that homosexuality caused not only AIDS but syphilis, hepatitis, and other infections, stating that the AIDS epidemic

¹¹⁴ Augstin Gurza, "Group Pushes Anti-Gay Ordinance via Petitions" *Press Enterprise*, Nov. 30 1990. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹¹⁵ Karen Dale Wolman, "Raising Hell in Riverside," *Frontiers*, Feb. 1991. Box 6, Folder 2, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹¹⁶ Bruce Mirken, "Bigots Plan Initiative Drive in Riverside," *ACT UP/LA News*, Feb. 1991. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹¹⁷ Donna Kennedy, "Drawing the Line," *Press Enterprise* (Riverside, CA), June 9 1991. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹¹⁸ "Outlook," *Frontiers*, Feb. 1991. Box 6, Folder 2, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

“results from unnatural, non-hygienic conduct” on the part of gay people, despite the scientific fact that AIDS, and the additional health conditions listed, were in no way exclusive to LGBTQ+ people.¹¹⁹

RCRB’s attack on LGBTQ+ rights was connected to a larger trend of the Christian right gaining immense support following the conservative presidency of Ronald Reagan and backlash to the AIDS epidemic. As previously discussed, by the 1990s the Christian right had a strong foothold in nearby Orange County, and had gained influence and support in the nearby Inland Empire. In the early 1990s, a wide number of states including Colorado, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington all introduced legislation similar to RCRB’s initiative that would prevent state and city governments from introducing laws to protect LGBTQ+ people.¹²⁰ This factor was highlighted in oral history, testifying to the relevance of the growing Christian right movement and its targeting of LGBTQ+ people at the time: “there were measures like this going on all over in Oregon and in Colorado and Florida... there was a big network of groups who were right-wing, somewhat affiliated with religion, who on the basis of their religious beliefs and their belief that homosexuality was wrong and that HIV was punishment for these terrible acts that gay people did.”¹²¹ In November 1989, the city of Concord, CA repealed their AIDS anti-discrimination ordinance by voter referendum with the support of Sheldon’s Coalition, an outcome RCRB hoped to replicate in Riverside.¹²² However, in nearby San Diego, a similar initiative effort had failed to garner enough signatures in 1990, providing hope for those gathering in opposition to RCRB’s initiative.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Mirken, “Bigots Plan Initiative Drive.”

¹²⁰ Suzanne Goldberg, “‘A Sack of Stones for Throwing’: Ballot Measures and the Right Wing Assault on Lesbian & Gay Civil Rights,” *The Lambda Update*, Fall 1993. Box 1, Folder 34, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹²¹ Confer, interview.

¹²² Gurza, “Group Pushes Anti-Gay Ordinance.”

¹²³ Gurza, “Riverside Not Alone.”

The LGBTQ+ community of Riverside would not sit idly by while RCRB and Reverend Lou Sheldon attacked their rights and those of PWAs. Activists in the local community quickly organized to form the Riverside Coalition Against Discrimination (RCAD) in 1990. Four hundred members and thirty allied organizations strong, RCAD's mission statement spoke of how they had "banded together to protect the rights of men, women, and children with AIDS, and to oppose discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation," declaring their intentions to counteract RCRB's initiative.¹²⁴ Membership was diverse, and included professionals such as university professors alongside college students, PWAs, and everyday LGBTQ+ community members.¹²⁵ These varying perspectives allowed RCAD to be effective and grassroots in nature, building a coalition with diverse experiences and viewpoints: "there was kind of a mix of folks in that, and so [in] the organizing, we did do a lot of great coalition building... that came from a lot of us that had more grassroots focused skills."

RCRB had 180 days to collect the 10,000 signatures their initiative needed to appear on the November 1991 ballot.¹²⁶ With a deadline slated for October 1990, they soon began their work, gathering signatures and publicizing their cause in the city of Riverside. In addition to receiving attention from the local Christian press, the group published their own newsletter detailing their effort, titled "Common Sense."¹²⁷ In it, they claimed that gay people, and gay men in particular, were promiscuous, practiced "unnatural" sex practices, and were dangerous.¹²⁸ In addition to claiming that the average gay man has had sex with over one thousand men, they also

¹²⁴ Riverside Coalition Against Discrimination (RCAD) to Members of the Community Relations Commission, Aug. 4 1991, Box 1, Folder 4, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹²⁵ Hawkins, interview.

¹²⁶ Mirken, "Bigots Plan Initiative Drive."

¹²⁷ Article in Southern California Christian Times by Warren Fain titled "Riverside Citizens in Petition Drive to Stop Homosexual Agenda," 1990, Box 1, Folder 16, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR; Quarterly titled Christian Ethics Ministry by Victoria Community Church, Aug. 1990, Box 2, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹²⁸ Newsletter for Riverside Citizens for Responsible Behavior *Common Sense*, 1990, Box 5, Folder 9, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

argued that the 1987 AIDS anti-discrimination ordinance forced taxpayers to support homosexuality. They further argued that the ordinance included “special rights” for gay people which would in turn cause “reverse discrimination against heterosexuals” as the “first step in a militant homosexual agenda.” The concept of a so-called “homosexual agenda” was apparent in many of RCRB’s arguments. RCRB members themselves argued that gay rights organizations in the area were a part of such an agenda, which involved the take-over of societal institutions.¹²⁹ In another outlandish example, in order to gain support for their cause, RCRB claimed that LGBTQ+ people practiced bestiality and sought to repeal age of consent laws.¹³⁰

Every step of the way, however, the newly formed Riverside Coalition Against Discrimination was willing and ready to counteract RCRB’s actions. For instance, in response to RCRB’s publications, RCAD ran a full-page ad in the *Press Enterprise* providing facts countering RCRB’s claims and stating that “Opposing Discrimination is Right!”¹³¹ RCAD asked signers of the initiative to rescind their signatures, directly questioning signers: “Do you know that you have signed a death sentence for people with AIDS?”¹³² In response to claims that the ordinances were part of a secretive gay agenda, RCAD challenged this idea in flyers, arguing that gay people in Riverside only wanted equal protections and the opportunity to live normal lives.¹³³ Supporters of RCAD also cited the highly relevant intersectional impacts of RCRB’s proposed initiative, noting that the majority of women and children with AIDS were Latino and Black. They continued to note that “this initiative is a slap in the face to those ethnic communities”

¹²⁹ Agustin Gurza, “Initiative Backers Cite Gay Agenda” *Press Enterprise*, June 9 1991. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹³⁰ Agustin Gurza, “Goals of Gay Rights Legislation at Issue” *Press Enterprise*, June 9 1991. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹³¹ Full page advertisement, Riverside Coalition Against Discrimination, “Opposing Discrimination is Right!” *Press Enterprise*, May 24 1991, B-5. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹³² Karen Dale Wolman, “Riverside Battle Reaches Crisis,” *Frontiers*, June 7 1991. Box 6, Folder 2, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹³³ Flyer from Riverside Coalition Against Discrimination titled “Do You Know What You Are Signing Today?” 1991, Box 2, Folder 10, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

aptly noting that “the President, Vice President and Pastor of the Riverside Citizens for Responsible Behavior are all Anglos.”¹³⁴ This argument was of particular relevance to everyday Riverside citizens, many of whom were Latino. Another counter-method RCAD employed was challenging RCRB’s signature gatherings. That is, when RCRB gathered initiative signatures in public spaces such as local shopping centers, RCAD would often appear at these same spaces, providing a counter narrative to would-be-signers and challenging RCRB’s homophobic and falsified fear mongering.¹³⁵ This strategy proved effective, although several confrontations arose, with Lillian Hernandez, now spokesperson and vice president of RCRB, being involved in several. One such incident took place in May 1991, when Hernandez chased resident Bruce Ratcliff through a Vons market store in Riverside, incorrectly claiming that he was a gay rights advocate and trying to photograph him.¹³⁶ In another incident one month prior to the Vons debacle, Hernandez harassed RCAD activist Maggie Hawkins, telling her to “go back into the closet” and making inflammatory barking noises at her while offering dog biscuits.¹³⁷ Hernandez notably also opposed the AIDS NAMES Project Quilt’s Riverside visit, claiming that the Quilt encouraged the spread of AIDS and cruelly questioned: “Would you spend \$400 to bring a blanket to Riverside that’s a memorial to people who died of V.D.?”¹³⁸ Hernandez claimed that RCAD was violent in such confrontations, although no evidence was ever provided for such claims, stating that “They threw paint on buildings and houses, Molotov Cocktails. It is the homosexual groups, it may be ACT UP.”¹³⁹ The reference to ACT UP stands out, as Riverside

¹³⁴ Letter to Riverside Community Relations Commission, 1990, Box 1, Folder 16, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹³⁵ Confer, interview.

¹³⁶ Agustin Gurza, “Bosic Quits Rights Panel, Blames Anti-Gay ‘Crusade’” *Press Enterprise*, Sept. 7 1991. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹³⁷ Riverside Office of Community Relations to Commissioner Lillian Hernandez, Sept. 26 1991, Box 1, Folder 10, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹³⁸ Christina Greutink and Ruth Halman to Patricia Gus, City Council, and Mayor Terry Frizzel, July 8 1991, Box 1, Folder 16, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹³⁹ Wolman, “Raising Hell in Riverside.”

AIDS activism during the epidemic never quite mirrored the organization's more radical approach, but it reveals the ways in which RCRB members equated all LGBTQ+ activism efforts as being one of the same, and part of the same nefarious "gay agenda." Rightly seeing Hernandez's anti-gay actions as in conflict with the tenets of the city's Community Relations Commission, Commissioner Kay Smith called for her resignation.¹⁴⁰ In turn, the Commission established an ad hoc committee to review Hernandez's problematic behavior and established a code of conduct for standards of public behavior by commissioners, issuing a formal reprimand to Hernandez in September 1991.¹⁴¹ Lillian Hernandez's key role in RCRB's homophobic actions and rhetoric is not surprising. In fact, the Christian right movement in Southern California often utilized gendered characterizations of women as protectors of children and the family, with conservative women playing key roles in their organizations and efforts.¹⁴² Conservative women and mothers were therefore often key to movements targeting LGBTQ+ people and PWAs during the early years of the epidemic, as they added cultural currency to arguments that gay people posed dangers to children and the community. This is a role Lillian Hernandez and other women in RCRB readily took on.

Further conflicts between RCRB and RCAD involved Irvin Howard, a professor of education at CSU San Bernardino who was a leader in the initiative's opposition. RCRB utilized age-old homophobic and false arguments that LGBTQ+ people were a threat to children. RCRB ran targeted ads against Howard, which included pictures of him alongside claims that "This man may be your child's worst enemy! He could be a pedophile or he could be an AIDS carrier."¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Gurza, "Bosic Quits Rights Panel."

¹⁴¹ Riverside Office of Community Relations to Commissioner Lillian Hernandez, Sept. 26 1991, Box 1, Folder 10, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁴² Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton University Press, 2012).

¹⁴³ Riverside Citizens for Responsible Behavior Flyer on Irv Howard, 1991, Box 2, Folder 10, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

As a professor of education, Howard ran teacher training sessions on bigotry at Riverside Middle Schools.¹⁴⁴ These locales soon became targets by RCRB, with members sitting in on such sessions and passing out notes to attendees which read “Stop Him Now! Keep Our Children Safe!” Such efforts inspired hateful and violent attacks, with Howard receiving phone calls threatening his death, finding his car tires slashed, and discovering vandalism at his home. Although RCRB claimed the group had not been involved in and did not condone such illegal actions, these incidents demonstrate the real danger of their rhetoric. It is clear upon reviewing Howard’s experiences that the LGBTQ+ community at the time faced tremendous threats and a dangerous environment during the years of the initiative battle, underlining RCAD’s efforts as essential to the community’s survival.

Riverside Coalition Against Discrimination faced a difficult uphill battle. As discussed, Riverside and the broader Inland Empire are traditionally more conservative and anti-gay areas, wherein the growing Christian right movement had found a foothold in the context of its close proximity to Orange County and the growth of homophobia during the AIDS epidemic. RCAD often worried about their reach and effectiveness, noting that the I.E. had over 15 Christian radio stations and a concentrated network of conservative churches with strong community ties.¹⁴⁵ RCAD did, however, receive support from a wide breadth of local leaders and organizations, including backing from UC Riverside Chancellor Rosemary S.J. Schraer, Director of Health for County of Riverside Edward J. Gallagher, the Inland AIDS Project Board of Directors, the Inland Empire Black Nurses’ Association, and the San Bernardino Department of Fair Employment and Housing administrator Earlene M. Hinton.¹⁴⁶ RCAD’s efforts also received support from regional

¹⁴⁴ Agustin Gurza, “Gay rights advocate tells of harassment, intimidation” *Press Enterprise*, Mar. 27 1991. Box 2, Folder 74, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁴⁵ Wolman, “Riverside Battle Reaches Crisis.”

¹⁴⁶ Commissioner Kay Smith to Community Relations Commission, letter packet of supporters, May 16 1991, Box 3, Folder 61, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR; Ron Morris, “Anti-Gay Rights Initiative Against Law, Official Says” *Press Enterprise*, Dec. 27 1991. Box 2, Folder 74, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

gay organizations including the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation Los Angeles and ACT UP LA.¹⁴⁷

In the end, Riverside Citizens for Responsible Behavior acquired the 10,000 required signatures and submitted them for petition on June 10, 1991.¹⁴⁸ However, the City Council soon refused to place the initiative on the ballot due to legal precedents. Six out of the seven council members argued that there were too many legal problems in RCRB's initiative, including its inconsistencies with state and federal law and possible unconstitutionality.¹⁴⁹ In particular, they argued that the initiative's prohibition of future actions by the Riverside City Council was invalid and that its encouragement of discrimination against PWAs and LGBTQ+ people was unconstitutional. The City of Riverside went on to seek a court ruling on the constitutionality of the initiative before it could be brought to voters and added to the November ballot. Additionally, the city sought legal advice on the constitutionality of the initiative from the state, contacting the District Administrator for the Department of Fair Employment & Housing, Earlene M. Hinton, who found many legal issues with the initiative.¹⁵⁰

Thus began the several court battles regarding the 1987 AIDS Anti-Discrimination Ordinance and RCRB's initiative. RCRB was represented in these cases by local attorney and group member Robert T. Anderson Jr.¹⁵¹ Meanwhile, RCAD gained legal assistance from the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund and the ACLU Foundation of Southern California.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ "Trouble in River City," *GLAAD/LA Reports*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Jan. 1991. Box 2, Folder 74, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR; Mirken, "Bigots Plan Initiative Drive."

¹⁴⁸ Agustin Gurza, "Anti-Gay Rights Drive Petitions Submitted" *Press Enterprise*, June 11 1991. Box 2, Folder 74, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁴⁹ Agustin Gurza, "Precedents Prevent Vote on Initiative" *Press Enterprise*, July 30 1991. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁵⁰ Earlene M. Hinton, Department of Fair Employment & Housing San Bernardino to Community Relations Commission Subcommittee, May 16 1991, Box 1, Folder 17, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁵¹ Phil Pitchford, "No Appeal Over Anti-Gay Measure Seen" *Press Enterprise*, June 1991. Box 2, Folder 74, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁵² Mary Newcombe, Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund Inc. to Riverside Coalition Against Discrimination, April 22 1992, Box 3, Folder 60, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR; "ACLU Joins Fight Against

In August 1991, Riverside Superior Court Judge Charles D. Field found the RCRB initiative to be discriminatory and refused to issue a writ of mandate to force the Riverside City Council to place the initiative on the ballot.¹⁵³ Citing the 15th Amendment of the United States Constitution and California Constitutional Article 1 Section 7, Judge Field ruled that LGBTQ+ people and PWAs had the right to equal protective provisions. He additionally found that the initiative's provision to prevent future actions by the city council was legally invalid, as it was an illegitimate attempt to amend the City Charter, which could not be done by voter initiative. Field further found that the ordinance would encourage discrimination against LGBTQ+ people and PWAs.¹⁵⁴

RCRB was not satisfied with this outcome, and brought the case before the 4th District Court of Appeal, Division Two.¹⁵⁵ Once again, however, the appeals court found the initiative unlawful. In December 1991, *Citizens for Responsible Behavior v. Superior Court of Riverside County* ruled the initiative as unconstitutional, citing that the initiative was too broad, vague, and denied the Equal Protection clauses for LGBTQ+ people and PWAs under state and federal law.¹⁵⁶ In a last ditch effort, RCRB asked the California Supreme Court to review the case in January 1992.¹⁵⁷ However, the Court voted 6-1 to deny the initiative group's request to take on the case in March 1992. After three court defeats, RCRB decided to not take the case to the US Supreme Court, and the legal battle ended.

Riverside AIDS Ordinance,” *American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California Newsletter*, Vol. 67, No. 10, Oct. 1991. Box 3, Folder 4, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁵³ Agustin Gurza, “Judge Slaps Down Riverside Anti-Gay Initiative” *Press Enterprise*, Aug. 10 1991. Box 5, Folder 8, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁵⁴ “ACLU Joins Fight Against Riverside AIDS Ordinance.”

¹⁵⁵ “Appeals Court Blocks Anti-Gay Riverside Initiative,” *Frontiers*, Dec. 20 1991. Box 6, Folder 2, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁵⁶ Dick Goldberg, “Justices Block Anti-Gay Vote in Riverside” *Daily Journal* (Los Angeles, CA), Nov. 29 1991. Box 2, Folder 65, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁵⁷ Gurza, “Judge Slaps Down.”

Riverside never did establish a local ordinance barring discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. California Governor Pete Wilson's recent veto of a similar state-wide bill in 1991, as well as the looming election and local battle with RCRB, likely discouraged Councilman Jack Clarke Sr. from ever following up on Riverside's initiative. However, after much civil disobedience and protest throughout the state following Wilson's veto, a statewide anti-discrimination proposal to protect LGBTQ+ people was brought forward by Willie Brown in Civil Rights Bill AB3825.¹⁵⁸ The assembly bill passed in March 1992.

Following their historic local win for LGBTQ+ rights, RCAD disbanded in April 1992. The organization distributed their remaining funds to Lambda Legal and the ACLU for their assistance in the case, as well as to local LGBTQ+ and related service organizations including IAP, PACE, the Youth Service Center of Riverside, Alternatives to Domestic Violence, and Riverside/San Bernardino Gay and Lesbian Center.¹⁵⁹ Through their committed grassroots organizing, they had ensured a safer future for local PWAs and LGBTQ+ people. The hostile and homophobic climate, which had demanded that LGBTQ+ people go "back into the closet" and that PWAs suffer discrimination were successfully combated for the time being, and Riverside's LGBTQ+ and HIV-positive communities had much to celebrate.

¹⁵⁸ Joan Radovich, "Anti-Gay Rights Measure Backers Lose Court Round" *Press Enterprise*, Mar. 13 1992. Box 2, Folder 74b, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

¹⁵⁹ "Making a Difference: Bravo!" *Press Enterprise*, May 31 1992. Box 2, Folder 74b, Smith and Confer Collection, UCR.

CONCLUSION

Despite the existence of medications to effectively manage HIV and AIDS today, the impact of the AIDS virus in the United States is far from over. As of 2019, more than 700,000 people have died of AIDS in the United States, with 16,350 passing from the virus in 2017 alone.¹⁶⁰ Today, those who die of AIDS are primarily impoverished, with medications to manage the condition being high-cost and inaccessible for many Americans. As writer and AIDS historian Sarah Schulman notes, by the 2000s, “AIDS was only over for white males who could access the standard of care, in a nation with no logical health system.”¹⁶¹ Almost one third of new HIV infections are contracted through heterosexual sex, with the impoverished and people of color being disproportionately impacted.¹⁶² Today, Black and Latino gay men are at the highest risk for HIV, and are some of the least likely to have health insurance in the United States.

The AIDS epidemic is far from over, but it was grassroots LGBTQ+ organizing that ensured the Riverside community’s survival during the epidemic’s peak years of the 1980s and 1990s. As this research paper has demonstrated, the work of the Inland AIDS Project, the visit of the AIDS NAMES Project Quilt, and Riverside Coalition Against Discrimination were three key factors exemplifying the Riverside LGBTQ+ community’s endurance in early decades of the AIDS epidemic. Despite an often hostile and conservative environment, as is epitomized by the battle over Riverside’s AIDS Anti-Discrimination Ordinance, it was through the work of committed community members that the terrible impact of AIDS and correlated homophobia were mitigated.

In Riverside today, the legacy of grassroots community care continues in the form of TruEvolution. TruEvolution is a local grassroots organization which strives to provide HIV

¹⁶⁰ Schulman, *Let the Record Show*, note to readers.

¹⁶¹ Schulman, *Let the Record Show*, xxii.

¹⁶² Roth, *The Life and Death of ACT UP/LA*, 199.

services, emergency housing, community programs, and mental health support to the region.¹⁶³ Their Project Legacy, opened in 2023, has also partnered with the Housing Authority of the County of Riverside to provide transitional supportive housing and all-inclusive services in one location. It is through TruEvolution that the grassroots spirit of community organizing that was essential to Riverside's LGBTQ+ community's survival during the early years of the AIDS epidemic lives on.

In examining three events and organizations in Riverside AIDS history, I have argued that grassroots community organizing was essential to the local LGBTQ+ community's survival in the 1980s and 1990s. It is my hope that in uncovering this history, I have provided the basis for future scholarship into LGBTQ+ Riverside history, in which a rich history of community organizing exists. This research is of tremendous importance in revealing the historical contingencies behind marginalized communities' survival in hostile and traditionally conservative locales; these have often been traditionally excluded from scholarship, given the tendency to instead focus on liberal metropolitan cities. It is also my hope that the history examined provides understanding, meaning, and hope to today's LGBTQ+ community, who despite living in a period of conservative trends, might take inspiration from earlier activism and utilize grassroots community-based organizing and coalition building to ensure community survival and endurance.

¹⁶³ TruEvolution: Health & Justice, <https://www.truevolution.org/about>.

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