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# (Re)Locating Pride: Borders, Space, and Policing at Los Angeles Pride

Helya Salarvand



**Abstract:** The most notorious queer uprising against police, referred to as the Stonewall Riots, has cemented its position at the forefront of queer collective memory in the form of an annual commemoration known as Gay Pride. Though it's widely accepted that the first Pride was a riot, the radical nature of Gay Pride has seemed to dissipate with the encroachment of heavy corporate involvement, high ticketed admission costs, physical borders, and welcomed police presences. In this paper, I utilize a spatial analysis to explore the multitudes of ways queer identity is policed in and through Gay Pride spaces, with specific reference to Los Angeles Pride's exclusive location in West Hollywood, the implications of its relocation, and the impacts of the conceptual relocation of Pride to an "All Black Lives Matter" march in June 2020. I also reference the relocation of Dyke Day LA in exemplification of a successful relocation model for a queer event, one that highlights the nuances of claiming queer public space with consideration to the needs of both queer and local communities.

**Keywords:** LGBT, Queer, Gay Pride, Los Angeles, Space

## 1. Introduction

While the history of queer U.S. identity and spaces deserves expansive and nuanced consideration, a brief overview of Stonewall, Pride, and the assimilation of queer identity into the national fabric of the U.S. is necessary and sufficient for the purpose of this paper before proceeding to my ethnographic-based spatial analysis of Los Angeles Pride. In the previous two decades, many queer scholars have argued that Gay Pride festivals have long evolved from their radical, riot-commemorating roots into mainstream events overwhelmed with corporate involvement (Ward 2003; Markwell and Waitt 2009; Chasin 2001; Haritaworn 2015). Gay Pride is an annual festival born to commemorate a spontaneous uprising by queer people, specifically Trans women of color,<sup>1</sup> against police violence at New York City's Stonewall Inn on June 28, 1969. Gay Pride festivals celebrate the resistance and survival of the LGBTQ community, rooted in its commemoration of Stonewall, while also making further demands for respect and protection from hegemonic heteropatriarchal forces. The festival, however, has a complex history of generating contradictory effects. Festivals in general have socio-political foundations in that they generate a place-based sense of belonging (Markwell and Waitt 2009, 146). Conversely and simultaneously, the spectacle element of festivals, frequently deployed by the social elite as a form of social control, works to conceal the ongoing marginalization of the socio-economically disadvantaged (Markwell and Waitt 2009, 146). According to anthropological scholar Ping-Ann Addo, "Where wide power differences exist in a society, spectacle may be constructed as integral to social processes of identity-making in ways that include recognition, and yet elision, of social difference" (Addo 2009, 219). Thus festivals are understood as performing two distinct yet concurrent functions: aiding in the creation of a communal sense of placement and belonging while also distracting from the ongoing marginalization of the socio-economically disadvantaged.

The assimilationist strategies of queer activism, seen as necessary for many of the community's legal advancements, relied on the

homogenization of queer identity. Queer assimilation aims to position queerness within close proximity to the nation's idealized heteropatriarchal white supremacist mold (Cohen 1997; Duggan 2003), excluding those unable to assimilate. Queer people who were Black and non-white, poor, Trans, houseless, or possessing any other identity deviating from the rigid confines of homogenized queerness, were marginalized by queer politics and spaces. Upon realization that the queer community, specifically white cisgendered homosexual men, possess communal capital significant enough to constitute the creation of the "gay consumer," corporations of all ranks and sizes began employing marketing strategies geared toward seducing gay and lesbian capital (Ward 2003, 12). The gay community's embrace of their newfound consumerist identity marked a shift toward "homonormativity," a term coined by historian Lisa Duggan and defined as, "the promotion of a lesbian and gay politics organized around the pursuit of rights traditionally granted to white, middle-class heterosexuals, such as privacy, domesticity, and consumption" (Ward 2003, 12). Naturally, homonormativity seeped not only into the lives of white gay and lesbian individuals, but also into the fabric of many queer organizations relying on corporate sponsorship for funding in exchange for access to loyal gay consumers (Chasin 2000, as cited in Ward 2003, 13). Gay Pride events across North America present an impressively long list of corporate sponsors each year, with LA Pride touting financial support from corporations like Bud Light, Citi Bank, Gilead, and Johnson & Johnson to military organizations like the California Army National Guard.<sup>2</sup>

The visible display and celebrated presence of military and police organizations at Pride events is a notable point of contention between Pride organizers and attendees. Homonormative trends internalized by the queer community have involved the development of a unique relationship between white, cisgender queers and police. Sylvia Rivera's speech at the 1973 New York City Pride provides a chilling account of her experiences with police violence as she exclaims at the booing, majority cisgendered white homosexual crowd,

I've been trying to get up here all day, for your gay brothers and your gay sisters in jail! They're writing me every motherfuckin' week and ask for your help, and you all don't do a god damn thing for them. Have you ever been beaten up and raped in jail? Now think about it!

Rivera's speech highlights not only the casual attitudes of cisgendered, white gay and lesbian Pride organizers and attendees towards policing, only four years removed from Stonewall, but also the degrading, exclusionary attitudes of the queer community towards Trans and gender-nonconforming individuals (Serpe and Nadal 2017, 292). The internal hierarchy within the LGBTQ community positions cisgender, white, gay men as the public image for queer existence. As white gays took to task crafting the form and location of Pride, it is unshocking to note strains of dominant modes of advertising and consumption within the event's structure. Alexandra Chasin notes:

Advertising to gay men and lesbians has played on ideas about national identity in two significant ways. First, such advertising has often appealed to gays on the basis of their identification as Americans. Second, advertising to gay men and lesbians has often promised that full inclusion in the national community of Americans is available through personal consumption.

According to Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages*, "Chasin's astute analysis of the role of U.S. nationalism in the creation and maintenance of the gay and lesbian marketing demographic is especially relevant to current homonormative imaginative geographies" (Puar 2007, 63). In the context of Los Angeles Pride, homonationalism is evident in the welcomed presence of police and also in the financial sponsorship of the event by military entities, such as the California Army National Guard — the same entity that patrolled neighborhoods in military gear amidst Black Lives Matter demonstrations during June of the 2020 Covid-19

pandemic.<sup>3</sup> Given this remarkable parallel between dominant marketing strategies toward gay consumers and the structure of Pride, one can see how Pride became an extension of gay marketing and consumerism; encouraging queer assimilation through the promotion of queer-friendly relations with police and consumerism.

An analysis of how queer identity is formed, policed, and erased in and through space is the underpinning methodology of this paper. I have conducted my research with careful consideration to queer regenerations, or the ways in which “certain queer bodies become a lovely sight in the shadow of racialized others” (Haritaworn 2015, 4). During this process, the queer individual, as a formerly undesirable subject, finds newfound value and vitality through queer regeneration within the proximity of the prison, police state, and other sites of social death containing the biggest symbolic and material resources (Haritaworn 2015). The spatial concepts and methodology that underpin my work are derived from the theory that space is not a naturally occurring phenomenon but a social production influenced by capital and capitalism (Lefebvre 1974). I will employ this theory in analyzing the space of Pride as homogenous space for capital, noting that queer claims to public space are legitimized by corporatization — which instructs space to function as a vessel for the funneling of capital. In this sense, queer space is inextricably tied to the corporate infrastructure that legitimizes their claim and the police infrastructure that protects corporate capital. My primary method in conducting the research for this paper involved a qualitative queer intersectional analysis of the reach and accessibility of Pride through secondary data and independent interviews. My qualitative queer intersectional analysis refers to an ethnographic-based spatial examination of the location of Los Angeles Pride, its potential relocation, and Dyke Day with a specific focus on intersecting race, gender, class, and sexuality geographies. I conducted three interviews over email with Christopher Street West’s operational manager, Dara Nai, and two Dyke Day organizers, Sparrow Fox and Pony Lee. In this paper, I argue that queer identity is policed in and through queer claims for public space, namely Los Angeles Pride — a claim to space aided by its construction as gay, male, white, cis, and

capitalist. The corporatization and militarization<sup>4</sup> of queer public space grants further legitimacy to those claims as whiteness and maleness are formally recognized within capitalist productions of public space. Ironically, the corporatization and militarization of queer public space also delegitimizes the authentic and bodied queerness of that space as it limits accessibility to non-white, poor, and Trans Queer individuals in favor of non-gay consumers.

## 2. From Stonewall to Los Angeles Pride

The commemoration of the Stonewall Riots in the form of an annual march and parade cemented the significance and success of the uprising in queer history and memory. The anti-police, anti-establishment, pro-Trans nature of the events at Stonewall highlights the radicality of what is known to be the “birth of the gay rights movement,” starkly contrasting contemporary assimilationist LGBTQ movements associated with the right to marriage equality, pro-carceral hate crime legislation advocacy, and military inclusion (Spade 2015, 30). Leading the tide toward queer assimilation is Stonewall’s annual commemorative event, Pride, as the originally politically-charged march has manifested itself as a large-scale party presenting queers as the ideal neoliberal niche.

The Stonewall Inn was raided by police after midnight on June 28, 1969, under suspicion that the bar was serving alcohol without a license (New York alcohol commission would not give licenses to gay bars) (Bruce 2016, 39). The patrons who frequented Stonewall included drag queens, gay and Trans sex workers, houseless queers, and butch lesbians of color — all of whom are denied space within mainstream gay respectability politics (Armstrong and Crago 2006, 737). The scripted nature of bar raids and the nearly expected, routine, monthly police raids of the Stonewall Inn in particular lent hands to preparation for a resistance on the part of Stonewall patrons: a resistance that was unexpected by police. Instead of dispersing to avoid arrest, a crowd of ejected patrons, queer locals, and passersby began to gather outside the bar. As police loaded their van with

arrestees (assaulting them in the process), the crowd began throwing loose change at the police, eventually followed by glass bottles, rocks, and bricks (Armstrong and Cragge 2006, 737). Transgender women of color were explicitly acknowledged as occupying a key presence within the riot in many first-hand accounts of the evening, even leading chants like, “We are the Stonewall girls / We wear our hair in curls / We wear no underwear / We show our pubic hair / We wear our dungarees / Above our nelly knees!” (Bruce 2016, 39). The events at Stonewall, as well as prior riots and demonstrations at the Compton Cafeteria<sup>5</sup> and Black Cat Tavern,<sup>6</sup> marked a union between Gay liberation and left-wing radicalism that leaned towards the impulse to challenge the “system” or establishment, similar to racial justice, radical feminist, and anti-war movements of the time. According to John D’Emilio, the Gay Liberation Front, which was the first queer organization formed post-Stonewall, took its name from the National Liberation Front in Vietnam, which protested American imperialism in Southeast Asia.

Leading up to the one-year anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, New York activists used media, organizational mailings, phone calls, and flyers to call for a national event commemorating the riots. After Los Angeles-based gay activist Morris Knight received a call from a New York activist informing him of their efforts, Knight gathered a group of LA gay activists to form what would become the Christopher Street West Association. Their task was to organize a commemorative parade march in solidarity with New York’s efforts to nationalize Stonewall’s commemoration. This inevitably involved a request for an official parade permit and police protection of the event. After severe legal challenges and resistance from the Los Angeles Police department, the California Superior Court issued an order in the favor of Christopher Street West Association. The first Los Angeles Pride took place on June 28, 1970, with approximately 1,000 marchers and 20,000 spectators. Though formed as a commemoration of queer rioting against police, the event was the first instance of queer performance and space sanctioned by both New York City, Los Angeles, and reluctantly, their police (Armstrong and Cragge 2006, 741).



In 1970, public displays of queerness and the claiming of public queer space were radical demands for political inclusion. Since then, fifty years removed from the first Pride, the arrival of June in Los Angeles transforms the city into a queer oasis of parties, parades, festivals, shows, and events appealing to queers and allies alike. During Pride month, limited-edition, rainbow-donning, glitter-bombed products dominate the shelves and websites of every company tuned in to the value of the gay consumer. The gay season of June provides brands and organizations with the opportunity to claim *the* gay mouthwash, *the* gay beer, or even *the* gay military entity.<sup>7</sup> Gay Pride was conceived as an event in which the socio-political status quo could be successfully challenged; yet, increasing corporatization and militarization bind attendees into falling prey to the dynamics of identity commodification and homonationalism, which ultimately deprives Pride of its subversive potential (Ammaturo 2016, 19).

### 3. West Hollywood

The history and evolution of West Hollywood holds great relevance in understanding the exclusionary spatial features of Los Angeles Pride. The popular sentiment that West Hollywood is a gay “Boys Town” (Ward 2008, 54, 72) is rooted in the actualized history of the city’s incorporation and development. Known as Los Angeles’ famous and trendy gay neighborhood, West Hollywood was officially founded in 1984 with a majority gay male city council (Ward 2003; as cited in Doan and Higgins 2011, 8). During the campaign to officiate and incorporate West Hollywood, the gay press presented an idealized gay city embodying gay male characteristics, such as “creativity, aesthetic sensibility, an orientation toward entertainment or consumption, progressiveness, responsibility, maturity, and centrality” (Forest 1995). The homonormative undertones of West Hollywood’s gay male characteristics favored assimilation as it sought to “bring [gays] closer to the symbolic ‘center’ of US society” (Forest 1995). West Hollywood, originally falling “outside the reach of the

hyper-vigilant LAPD and inside the jurisdiction of the relatively lax L.A. County Sheriff's Department" (Pener 2017) initially served as a relatively safe space for gays and lesbians fleeing discrimination elsewhere.

Despite its offbeat history dating back to the Prohibition era, the incorporation of West Hollywood in 1984, coupled with the capital impact of multi-wave gentrifiers and the development of the city, led to an increased stream of both queer and non-queer migration. This heightened demand for property "resulted in steep rises in rents, frequent conversion of rental properties to condominiums, and competition for commercial space, which [makes] it difficult for less affluent LGBT people and businesses targeted to the community to remain in the neighborhoods" (Doan and Higgins 2011, 6). Secondary producers of space, such as real estate developers, large business owners, and city officials, have high stakes in West Hollywood's continued gentrification and growing exclusivity — this supports Henri Lefebvre's theory which situates the production of public space as a homogenous space for capital. The racialized structure of West Hollywood is characterized by its overwhelmingly white population which constitutes just over 80 percent of the residents in the city (U.S. Census Bureau 2019). With a median household income of \$74,044 (U.S. Census Bureau 2019), the racial and classist terms of West Hollywood residency conflate with the racial and classist terms for Pride's attendance. Queer bodies that disrupt the race and class structures of the city are increasingly limited in their access to Pride festivities, especially as parking and public transportation is limited and freeway access to West Hollywood is nonexistent. When one considers the spatiality of West Hollywood as pivoting on consumption, inaccessibility to outsiders, and an overwhelmingly white and moneyed demographic, the parallels between the city and its inaccessible, corporatized, and policed Pride become more defined. In essence, the exclusionary geography of Pride is a microcosm of the conceptual and constructed space of West Hollywood.

#### 4. Borders, Space, and Policing at Pride

The establishment of borders and the enforcement of policing in maintaining those borders is a tactic embraced by Los Angeles Pride in effort to secure their space and the corporate value embedded in it. Henri Lefebvre posits the argument that any social existence failing to produce its own space is at risk of extinction (Lefebvre 1974, 53). It can thus be understood that the forging of queer public space is essential to the development and ultimate thriving of gay and lesbian identity. Though Gay Pride parades often subvert the spatial organization of heterosexual public space so that it is temporarily “queered” (Ammaturo 2016, 23), the violent exclusionary practices that accompany the declaration and maintenance of public space remain intact. The circumscription of space by means of barriers is a highly visible exclusionary tactic at Los Angeles Pride as fenced barriers are placed along the itinerary, serving not only security purposes but also to separate participants from onlookers; those who have paid for entrance from those who have not. Though some may argue in favor of boundaries in keeping out “unwanted others, what sometimes happens is that the boundary of ‘unwantedness’ gets redrawn, so that in opening up to (non-gay-identified) consumers, the spaces push out what we might call the ‘queer unwanted’” (Binnie 2004; as cited in Bell & Binnie 2004, 1810). As LA Pride draws sponsorship from corporations interested in courting the pink dollar, the event also attracts performers like Kehlani, Demi Lovato, and Tove Lo who have headlined Pride’s ticketed festival. Pride’s borders serve as additional security and policing in the presence of high-profile artists and celebrities in addition to protecting the property interests of the event’s corporate sponsors. When Kehlani performed at Los Angeles Pride in 2018, the event was booked beyond capacity and hundreds of individuals hoping to purchase admission as well as excess prepaid ticket holders were denied entry into the event (Staff 2018). After Fire Marshalls alerted officials that the festival was overcapacity, the West Hollywood Sheriff’s department began dispersing crowds through the use of officers clad in riot-gear and police helicopters (Bollinger 2018). It is no coincidence that attendance

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for LA Pride shattered records the year of Kehlani's performance — ticket sales had tripled from that of the previous year and the infrastructure of Los Angeles Pride proved barely feasible for the 30,000 guests.

Though Kehlani is openly queer, it is worth examining how her presence at Los Angeles Pride impacts the population in attendance (and those unable to attend). In examining tweets containing the hashtag #LAPride from 2018, an overwhelming number of Twitter users mentioned Pride with specific reference to Kehlani. Fans began planning their attendance as early as March,<sup>8</sup> three months prior to the event. Their tweets expressed excitement over Kehlani's presence at Pride<sup>9</sup> as well as frustration and disappointment when tickets had sold out.<sup>10</sup> Though not all 2018 Pride attendees purchased tickets in hopes of seeing Kehlani, one can assume based on countless tweets,<sup>11</sup> media coverage, and record ticket sales that Kehlani's presence drew interest from fans of the artist who may have not attended Pride otherwise. Kehlani's Pride performance fractured LGBT individuals' access to their own festival while also subjecting hopeful attendees to unpleasant or traumatic police encounters. According to Twitter user @DistortedLens,

#lapride you guys created an extremely dangerous environment. Besides paying for bracelets at the table and seconds later be denied entry at the metal detectors (due to "over capacity"), you mfs did not protect anyone from the treatment ppl received outside of these gates.

Another Twitter user, @Tenani, wrote:

Yo @WeHoCity and @lapride y'all made a huge mess here. Way over capacity, easily the worst, most uncomfortable, dangerous Pride I've ever been to. There's a literal helicopter flying around telling people to go home at 9:45pm! Flop. #LAPride

Images of police at Pride “reveal degrees of ‘normalization’ of queer identities through the presence of military personnel” and the “incorporation of queer identities into the fabric of the nation” i.e. homonationalism (Ammaturo 2016, 28). While police presence at Pride aids in the normalization of queer identities, it only does so as “a site to be continually policed and regulated” (Russell 2016), as signified by the aftermath of Kehlani’s performance. Pride provides police with a highly visible sector of public space in which they actively refine and reshape their image “by virtue of association with liberal values of equality, diversity and peace” (Russell 2016, 282). Los Angeles Pride can thus be understood as a site for the exchange of cultural capital between the police state and the LGBTQ community — police aid in the normalization of queerness through their promotion of homonationalism and homonormativity at Pride in exchange for free pro-police gay PR through their seemingly benign visibility at the event.

Two years after the encounters between police and hopeful Pride attendees in 2018, the organizers of Los Angeles Pride came under fire again for their intimate relationship with law enforcement. The police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and countless other Black individuals spurred a month-long series of demonstrations, protests, and riots across America and the globe (Westerman 2020). Though demonstrations were largely non-violent, protestors were met with “excessive force with batons and rubber bullets, prolonged handcuffing, and improper conditions of confinement” (Braslow 2020). After Mayor Eric Garcetti requested aid from the National Guard, the streets of LA were filled with troops in combat gear toting M-4 rifles (Zahnizer 2020). Humvees and military trucks populated streets and freeways and official curfews were enacted across the city.

It was amidst this turbulence that the organizers of Los Angeles Pride, Christopher Street West Association, announced that LA Pride would be reshaped as a march against racism, injustice, and oppression (Martin 2020). CSW cited Stonewall participants Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera in their statement, noting that it is their “moral imperative to honor [their] legacy” and stand “in solidarity with the Black community

against systemic racism and joining the fight for meaningful and long-lasting reform” (Martin 2020). Social media praise for this decision was short-lived as further investigation into plans for the march indicated that CSW did not contact Black Lives Matter representatives but did extend communication to law enforcement in a request for their presence and involvement in the march. CSW’s letter to the LAPD is saturated with a devotion to preserving a sense of goodness in reference to police despite several pledges to confront and combat police brutality.<sup>12</sup> The irony and dissonance of their statement, such as their embracing of two radical, anti-police, Trans women of color whose activist careers were spent preserving space for queer people deemed “degenerate” by white, cisgender queers and police, was cause for outrage on social media. After Christopher Street West Association eventually apologized for their missteps and allegedly stepped down from organizing the march, an “All Black Lives Matter” march rose from the ashes of the former event, void of police involvement and conceptualized by a team of all Black LGBTQ organizers (Martin 2020).

## 5. Relocating Pride

The conceptual relocation of LA Pride to an All Black Lives Matter march in 2020 intimately influenced the subsequent physical relocation of the event. Efforts to relocate Los Angeles Pride due to the inaccessibility and exclusivity of West Hollywood, dating to at least ten years ago (Ward 2008, 72), have been regarded apathetically until the sudden announcement by Christopher Street West in 2020 that Los Angeles Pride would relocate out of West Hollywood. Despite this conceptual and physical relocation, the uncertainty in the contemporary moral, social, and political function of Pride remains evident, even in CSW’s reasoning regarding the impetus behind their conceptual relocation. Though the initial media release of the Black Lives Matter solidarity march clearly linked it with CSW’s organization, email exchanges between Dara Nai,

the operations manager at Christopher Street West, and I made clear that the All Black Lives Matter march was distinct and unaffiliated with Christopher Street West and LA Pride. In response to the claim that LA Pride was conceptually relocated as a solidarity march with Black Lives Matter, Dara Nai responded,

LA Pride 2020 was not “conceptually relocated” as an [All Black Lives Matter] march. When COVID hit, [CSW] had to quickly pivot away from live events to a new concept and LA Pride 2020 became an all-virtual event broadcast on ABC7. Regarding the [All Black Lives Matter] march, we encouraged board members and LA Pride fans to attend the event. Thousands of LGBTQ+ folks showed up and many seemed to treat it as a Pride event even though that’s not what it was. Maybe that’s where the confusion is coming from? (Nai 2021)

Christopher Street West’s condescending and hands-off approach concerning their affiliation with the All Black Lives Matter march would have been unremarkable given the expected nature of an organization attempting to distance themselves from their missteps. However, having announced just four weeks after the All Black Lives Matter March that LA Pride will be physically relocating out of WeHo next year, the close timing between the conceptual relocation of Pride and its physical relocation begs for comparison. CSW’s citing of “the changing demographics of Greater Los Angeles, commitment to being responsive to the LGBTQIA+ community’s needs, and allyship and collaboration with other movements for social change” (Haring 2020) as reasons for their physical relocation seems to ethically and ideologically parallel CSW’s inception of the solidarity march which was intended to stand “in solidarity with the Black community against systemic racism and the fight for meaningful and long-lasting reform” (Martin 2020). Given that the announcement of LA Pride’s relocation was made only four weeks after the All Black Lives Matter march, it is quite conceivable that CSW’s mention of an

“allyship and collaboration with other movements for social change” is a subtle reference to their most recent allyship and collaboration with All Black Lives Matter. Another element suggesting the All Black Lives Matter march may have impacted CSW’s decision to relocate Los Angeles Pride is the discontent of West Hollywood city council members for their conceiving of the solidarity march. Councilmember John Duran called the march “reckless’ because it hadn’t consulted in advance with the City of West Hollywood, which has helped underwrite the Pride parades and festivals that take place in June each year” and Councilmember John D’Amico suggested the city accept proposals from other vendors to host Pride the following year (Scott 2020). The suggestion made by West Hollywood’s city council to remove Christopher Street West as the host of Pride in WeHo implies that regardless of which organizational entity formally took over the All Black Lives Matter march, its impacts on LA Pride and CSW were significant and tangible even without their admission.

CSW’s “commitment to being responsive to the LGBTQIA+ community’s needs” poses the question of whether there will be any formal shift in LA Pride’s mission statement and goals in tandem with their relocation. According to Dara Nai, “While LA Pride intends to evolve and grow with our community’s needs, there is no formal shift afoot” (Nai 2021). CSW claiming a commitment to being responsive to the LGBTQ community’s needs and an allyship with movements for social change as a contributing factor to their relocation, while simultaneously stating that there would be “no formal shift afoot,” seems contradictory at best.

While it is unclear where LA Pride may be relocated, media speculation (Scott 2020; Martin 2020) as well as prior discourse on the matter (Ward 2008, 72) have indicated that Pride’s new location may eventually be in Downtown Los Angeles. The Downtown Los Angeles area is characterized partially by its luxury sky-rise apartments, hotels, offices, and partially by its 50-block Skid Row district frequented by approximately 15,000 houseless residents (70 percent of whom are Black) (Dozier 2019, 179). The relocation of Los Angeles Pride to Downtown LA is a potential



form of *queer regeneration*, described by Jin Haritaworn as “encounters of formerly undesirable subjects with formerly undesirable spaces and the bodies that linger there” (Haritaworn 2015, 5). Queer people, as formerly undesirable subjects, are linked by gay assimilation, homonormativity, and the homogenization of queer identities to gentrification and the homogenization of inner-city spaces, or formerly undesirable spaces (Haritaworn 2015, 31). According to Haritaworn’s definition of queer regeneration, one can envision LA Pride in Downtown LA as a queerly regenerating space whose recovery demands the further containment or outright displacement of the neighborhood’s houseless community. The expulsion of poor racialized bodies is a familiar process at Pride regardless of location, as ticketed entrances, fenced borders, and police presence prevents infiltration of the event from undesirable figures deemed too poor or too Black. Conceptualizing the location of Los Angeles Pride in Downtown LA without any commitment to excluding police involvement would inevitably lead to increased surveillance and policing of the Skid Row houseless communities. Skid Row residents are already considered “the most highly policed community” (Dahmann 2012; as cited in Dozier 2019) as hundreds of private security guards work to assist public police officers in surveilling the area and its population in service of nearby elite corporate and investment interests (Reese 2010, 316). The establishment of a large-scale Pride festival within close proximity to Downtown LA’s houseless residents would similarly cause a massive surge in police patrolling as the event’s dozens of large corporate partners require assurance that their sponsored festival remains undisturbed by unwanted others who pose a threat to their tidy corporate image of queerness. If Christopher Street West aims to proceed with true responsiveness to the community’s needs as well as an allyship with other movements for social change, their relocated Pride event must be significantly altered in order to prevent the same glaring moral contradictions of their solidarity march.

## 6. Dyke Day

The relocation ethics model provided by Dyke Day LA's move from Debs Park to Elysian Park provides a guideline for the relocation of LA Pride that centers cross-community needs. Dyke Day looks consciously different from Pride in providing a free alternative to these "increasingly expensive, consumption led, and apolitical spectacle" events (Bruce 2016, 7; Brown 2007, 2691), lacking corporate sponsorship and relying on funds solely raised by the community.<sup>13</sup> In 2017, Dyke Day LA was held at Ernest E. Debs Regional Park in Montecito Hills, a large public park operated by the Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation.<sup>14</sup> The park is situated within close proximity to the neighborhoods of Highland Park, Cypress Park, El Sereno, and Lincoln Heights — all either plagued with rapid gentrification efforts or containing displaced residents of nearby gentrified neighborhoods. According to firsthand accounts by Dyke Day organizers Sparrow Fox and Pony Lee, several confrontations and tensions between local park-goers and Dyke Day organizers led to the event's permanent relocation out of Debs Park to Elysian Park. Whether these confrontations (which included physical intimidation and the use of homophobic slurs) were symptomatic of the recent spatial impact of gentrification, which is inseparable from the spatial dynamics of Dyke Day's claim on Ernest E. Debs Park as queer people are central to a wave of liberal gentrification that's completely transformed traditionally ethnic neighborhoods and spaces, or whether they were part of a larger and dated effort of maintaining the spatial supremacy of heterosexuality is unclear.

Dyke Day LA's refusal to rely on exclusionary measures such as fenced borders, ticketed admission, police presence, and corporate sponsorship makes the event's claim on the public space of Ernest E. Debs Park vulnerable. Though the event is more inclusive and arguably more "authentically" queer due to these commitments, their claim on public space is subject to contestation for the same reason. While LA Pride's solidity, security, and success is in the interest of their massive corporate sponsors, Dyke Day LA lacks the corporate and security infrastructure

to cement their claim on any particular space or park. According to Pony Lee, these confrontations were “the deciding factor in returning to Leo Poletti in Elysian Park. It’s secluded and a bit easier to monitor interlopers” (Lee 2021). Though it may seem that monitoring interlopers is an exercise in exclusions, the reality is that queer people, specifically queer, lesbian, and Trans women of color are vulnerable to verbal and physical violence when publicly unadhering to heteropatriarchal and cisnormative behavioral standards. Acts of violence against queer people, such as the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida, live at the forefront of queer collective memory, fear, and trauma. The creation and maintenance of a safe and inclusive event for dykes, queers, and their allies requires a community-oriented and community-led structure of protection that does not rely on police involvement or private security. This may take the shape of relocating to a different public park space — one that is accessible to the queer community but does not push out locals from using public space. Though an argument can be made in favor of a decision to remain at Ernest E. Debs Park despite the tensions in an effort to resist the heteropatriarchal supremacy of public space, Dyke Day LA’s decision to relocate must be complimented as it prioritized the safety of Dyke Day attendees while also extending some level of understanding to the importance of Ernest E. Debs Park’s accessibility to the locals of neighboring communities.

## 7. Conclusion

Los Angeles Pride, an event commemorating the most notorious uprising by queer people against police, evolved to erect physical borders aimed to police and expel “undesirable” members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community in a homogenizing effort to relocate Pride around homonormative and homonationalist ideals. This was achieved through the festival’s bolstering of consumer identity, nurturing of queer-friendly relations with police, and employment of anti-homeless, anti-Trans, anti-poor, racist, and ableist exclusionary

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features. Los Angeles Pride's exclusionary geographies mirror the exclusivity of West Hollywood's conceptual and constructed spatiality that pivots on inaccessibility, consumption, and whiteness. Though efforts to relocate Los Angeles Pride date back to at least a decade ago (Ward 2008), the conceptual relocation of Pride as an "All Black Lives Matter" march in 2020 may have served as a catalyst for Christopher Street West's formal decision to relocate the event out of West Hollywood. This is evidenced by disgruntled public comments from West Hollywood City Council members condemning the abrupt march and threatening to accept proposals from alternative organizations to host Pride, as well as Christopher Street West's explicit mentioning of an "allyship and collaboration with other movements for social change" as the reason behind their relocation. Even without the assumption that the All Black Lives Matter march may have impacted Christopher Street West's decision to relocate Pride, this shift provides a massive scope of opportunity to reimagine Pride in other ways that may further increase the reach and accessibility of the event.

My purpose in reflecting on the spatial arguments at Dyke Day LA in 2017 is to provide a relevant example of a successful relocation process for a queer event, one that highlights the nuances of claiming queer public space with consideration to the needs of both the queer and local communities. In order for Los Angeles Pride to proceed in their relocating efforts without repeating the same missteps which garnered mass boycotts throughout the years, most recently during their 2020 reshaping of Pride as an All Black Lives Matter march, Christopher Street West must respond to the needs of both the LGBTQ community and the needs of communities local to the neighborhoods they are entering. These needs may include but are not limited to eliminating ticketed admission costs, resisting corporate sponsorships, rejecting police involvement or presence, increasing access of the event to non-able bodied individuals, and relocating to an area accessible to the queer community of greater Los Angeles without posing a threat of displacement to local communities.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See Max Nicolai Appenroth's "The cis-washing of the Stonewall Riots-Why trans\* activists can't be heroes." 2015.

<sup>2</sup> See Los Angeles Pride Parade and Festival sponsorship archive. <https://lapride.org/sponsor/>

<sup>3</sup> See "National Guard To Begin Leaving California Cities" by Associated Press. <https://apnews.com/article/22d94ff9538bc542944a5c5317096701>

<sup>4</sup> Militarization of queer space refers to the invitation of and sponsorship by police, private security corporations, and military entities.

<sup>5</sup> The Compton Cafeteria Riot took place in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco which is frequented by sex workers and transgender individuals. The escalation began when police grabbed the arm of a transgender individual, to which they responded by throwing their coffee in the police's face. With that, "cups, saucers, and trays began flying around the place and all directed at the police" (Armstrong and Crago 2006, 733). Police ended up retreating outside until reinforcements arrived and Compton's management ordered the place closed with patrons still inside. The patrons responded by breaking the windows of the cafeteria and fighting with police as they attempted to grab and arrest them. This proved no easy task as, "Gays began hitting them 'below the belt' and drag queens [started] smashing them in the face with extremely heavy purses" (Armstrong and Crago 2006, 733). The next day, drag queens and queer individuals joined in picketing the Compton cafeteria, which would not allow queer patrons back in (Armstrong and Crago 2006, 733).

<sup>6</sup> Police violently assaulted patrons and employees of the Black Cat Tavern and the New Faces bar. Though there was no riot at either bar, these events sparked a series of demonstrations and uprising against police which involved Queer individuals, Black people, Mexicans, and Sunset

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Strip youths, motivated by a shared resentment against LAPD (Armstrong and Cragg 2006, 734).

<sup>7</sup> See Listerine's Pride antiseptic, Budweiser's 2019 Pride advertising, and California Army National Guard's sponsoring of LA Pride 2019.

<sup>8</sup> LA Pride. [@LAPride]. (2018, March 12). *We are soooooo excited to announce that two very fierce women, Kehlani and @ToveLo, will be headlining the 2018 LA Pride Festival!* <http://ow.ly/K3NI50gOVUk> #JUSTBE #LAPride #Pride2018. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/lapride/status/973224267713339397>

<sup>9</sup> RW. [@RickyWrightJr]. (2018, June 10). *I went to #LAPride today with the girls to see Kehlani and I had an awesome experience during her performance but also at the festival as well!!! Shoutsout to the LGBTQ community for being so awesome dawg I generally had a great time!!!* Twitter. <https://twitter.com/RickyWrightJr/status/1005769765061709824>

<sup>10</sup> Ari. [@arigoggles]. (2018, June 9). *fattest tea is: the straight locals have taken over LA Pride because of Kehlani to the point that today was SOLD! OUT! mess....* Twitter. <https://twitter.com/arigoggles/status/1005671340311867392>

<sup>11</sup> See tweets containing the words “#lapride” and “Kehlani” posted from March 1, 2018, until July 7, 2018.

[https://twitter.com/search?q=%23lapride%20kehlani%20until%3A2018-07-01%20since%3A2018-03-01&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23lapride%20kehlani%20until%3A2018-07-01%20since%3A2018-03-01&src=typed_query)

<sup>12</sup> Fran Tirado. [@fransquishco]. *I've been informed @LAPride is, in fact, working with police for their so-called “Black solidarity” march. Attached is a screenshot of an event producer's letter to the LAPD underscoring “a strong and unified partnership with law enforcement.” Homos, this is not it.* Twitter. <https://twitter.com/fransquishco/status/1268746878838956032>

<sup>13</sup> See Dyke Day LA's official website. <https://www.dykedayla.org>

<sup>14</sup> See Ernest E. Debs Regional Park in the county's list of public parks. <https://www.laparks.org/parks>

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