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Anonymous Communion: Black Queer Communities and Antiblack Violence Within the HIV/AIDS Epidemic

Introduction

In 1986, Fabian Calvin Bridges, a 30-year-old Black AIDS-positive man, was profiled in the PBS documentary series *Frontlines*. The program titled *AIDS: A National Inquiry* centers Bridges as part of a public debate on the ways Americans should respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Originally, the program's production was slated to involve a number of individuals living with AIDS, however, the focus shifts to Bridges as a "noncompliant" AIDS-positive individual, which becomes a point to debate individual responsibility among infected populations during the early years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. News media and national LGBT¹ groups labeled Bridges as a deviant sexual predator, which leads to multiple confrontations with local public health officials, law enforcement, and LGBTQIA² communities who respond to the potential threat of an AIDS-positive person. While early portrayals of individuals suffering from the HIV/AIDS epidemic focused on victimization, Bridges' positive status as a sexual deviant highlights the social and institutional barriers that racialized gender and sexual minorities face, in particular Black communities, as he is surveilled and intervened upon based on what are perceived to be potential sexual transgressions (Esparza 2019). Bridges' portrayal on national television represents the mutually constitutive relationship between antiblackness and mainstream LGBTQIA communities' embrace of liberalism. For Black LGBTQIA communities, the HIV/AIDS epidemic constituted a punitive relationship while also providing mainstream LGBT communities an opportunity to articulate acceptable forms of sexual expression.

Despite Bridges' primetime portrayal as a sexual deviant, he is a marginal figure within scholarship on the HIV/AIDS epidemic, in particular, the epidemic's relationship to racialized gender and sexual minority communities. While the popular scholarly narrative of the HIV/AIDS epidemic highlights a lack of government response to the HIV virus, which leads to the activism of white identified gay men in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco (France 2016; Epstein 1996; Gould 2009), critical scholars

¹ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) is a historical use of the umbrella term before the wide circulation and institutionalization of queer during the mid to late 1980s.

² I use LGBTQIA not to impose singular categories on gender and sexuality but to approach the vastness of these relationships beyond the umbrella LGBTQIA term. In line with the social, theoretical, and political project of queer, my use of LGBTQIA calls into question easy gender and sexual affiliations while also critiquing gender and sexuality as the sole basis of group affiliations. Additionally, blackness and indigeneity always accompany the use of LGBTQIA and point to the racialized foundations of gender and sexuality, which are inseparable from queer. I use LGBTQIA with attention given to the diverse set of relationships that exceed easy categorizations. I do this to delink the common public health language of "men who has sex with men" (MSM), which dominates understandings of sexual practices within HIV/AIDS discourse and limits empirical realities that there are more than cis-men who are sleeping with other cis-men as a driver of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

have shown that in addition to white identified gay communities on the East and West coasts, Black LGBTQIA communities and the United States South have been central to the fight against the epidemic (Moseby 2017; Cohen 1999; Bailey et al 2019; Esparza 2019; Bost 2020; Roane 2019). Bridges' experiences demonstrate the historical centrality of knowledge produced and response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic which is built through negative portrayals of Black people who are at risk of HIV infection. Through Bridges, we can chart the ways that liberalism is articulated in sexual regulation during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which impacts the ways society understands the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality.

This chapter explores liberal investment in antiblack responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic to highlight barriers that Black LGBTQIA communities face with regard to sexual citizenship and Black sexual practices. The relationship between sexual citizenship and Black sexual practices is crucial given that the former leverages antiblack portrayals of Black sexuality in order for white identified sexual minorities to gain entry into normative sites of liberalism. Liberal investment in sexual expression frame preferred modes of sexual citizenship practices which limits diversity in LGBTQIA communities and forms the grounds from which activists must fight against. Therefore, in the mid to late 1980s, ACT-UP not only responds to government retrenchment of public health services but liberal investment in preferred sexual practices for gender and sexual minorities (Schulman 2021). Bridges' experiences as a sexual deviant provides an example of the ways mainstream LGBT communities leverage his actions as justification for the inclusion of their communities, through a connection to antiblack violence, which excludes Black communities. Liberal inclusion based on rights and recognition are part of what Andrew Sullivan called the "awkward acceptance" of white identified LGBT communities into liberalism which centered sexual freedom through the sexual regulation of Black and other gender and sexual minorities (Sullivan 1996). This takes place through the policing of Black gender and sexual minorities' sexual freedom as it is connected to state driven institutional response to poverty related to health care, housing, employment, and disability status. Stated another way, white identified mainstream LGBT communities find a reprieve from sexual violence through the institutional regulation of Black gender and sexual minorities, which aligns these communities with antiblack and white supremacist practices. Bridges' experiences and portrayal provides an example of the ways antiblackness impacts material and imagined community formations through LGBT communities' investments in liberalism, which inform differential forms of knowledge and response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Liberalism's investment in antiblackness during the HIV/AIDS epidemic structures the ways Black LGBTQIA communities respond to access around HIV prevention, rates of HIV infection, and health care access. Through an analysis of Bridges' experiences, I identify antiblack practices that Atlanta, Georgia based Black LGBTQIA community organizations must overcome to address disproportionate rates of infection among Black populations. I argue that Bridges' story not only speaks to the ways antiblackness prompts Black people to be stripped of access to their bodies and sexuality, but the ways that current organizations in Atlanta challenge barriers to community inclusion and sexual practices. By uncovering community-based organizations' contestations to antiblack practices –practices of difference making that

result in a greater propensity of Black people to be inclined towards premature death (Gilmore 2002) – this chapter expands Black geography scholarship through an engagement with queer of color critique.

This chapter employs a methodological framework connecting the past to the present of the HIV/AIDS epidemic through Bridges' story and Atlanta-based activists, which is based in geographic centered knowledge production. As a discipline that analyzes the relational production of space and time, geography is a system of knowledge production that considers difference as a primary mode and object of knowledge creation (Gregory 1994). From changing topographies of landscapes to local particularities of place, geography is situated around differential knowledge production. My approach combines geography with queer of color critique. Queer of color critique provides a theoretical and methodological approach to understand liberalism's investment in the HIV/AIDS epidemic through institutional responses to the HIV/AIDS at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. Queer of color critique and Geography highlight the ways antiblackness is central to Black LGBTQIA communities' experience of gender and sexual domination in place. The place-based convergence of race, gender and sexuality allow for the past to be connected to the present while also demonstrating the ways antiblackness – as a system that reduces Black people to an object - informs sexual citizenship and Black sexuality (Manalansan 2005; Konrad 2014; McGlotten 2014; Bailey 2014). I build from queer of color critique to show the ways that Bridges' experiences around sexuality, legibility and place provide a foundation to understand the barriers that Atlanta-based Black queer communities face during the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Queer of color critique exposes barriers within the United States investment in liberalism and the HIV/AIDS epidemic to show the intimacies of antiblackness which Black LGBTQIA communities' challenge. Black LGBTQIA communities' response to antiblack violence reveal a set of intimacies within the material landscapes of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Negative portrayals and regulation of Black sexuality limits access to HIV prevention resources or drug therapies for Black communities at risk or infected. Here, denying Black sexuality as part of antiblack practices provides a social currency for white identified groups to promote normative gender and sexual group formations. However, through the work of Black community-based organizations in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, mainstream LGBT communities' leveraging of antiblackness for normative inclusion into United States liberalisms are limited and not totalizing in scope. This is due to Black community-based organizations embracing Black sexuality regardless of negative portrayals. I focus on Atlanta-based LGBTQIA activists' response to sexual regulation to show the ways in which antiblackness functions, in part, as a result of intimacies developed through contestations to antiblack violence. What emerges from this consideration is the role of place as it structures sexual citizenship and Black sexual practices. Situated in a place, Black queer communities in Atlanta, Georgia engage in sexual practices, place making, and other forms of care, which address barriers associated with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. I argue that activists in Atlanta lay bare the contours of antiblackness through engaging the historical barriers that Bridges faced related to Black sexuality, displacement, and health care three decades prior.

To place Bridges' experiences in conversation with local Atlanta-based Black communities, this chapter first situates Bridges' sexual transgressions in conversation with material expressions of Black sexual autonomy during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Following this, I demonstrate the ways that liberalism's investment in the HIV/AIDS epidemic are built through the sexual citizenship practices of mainstream LGBTQIA communities and the regulation of Black sexuality. Bridges is instrumental to understanding the ways antiblackness is central to rights and recognition within a punitive logic that allows for white identified LGBTQIA communities to benefit from the domination of Black people. Third, I show the ways Atlanta-based Black activists' respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic through situated place-based community building and sexual practices. This builds from Black gay cultural producers who experienced exclusion from white identified gay communities. I take the experiences of Black gay men loving other Black gay men as a space of resistance and situate them in conversation with current Black queer community building in Atlanta.

Bridges' Story

In 1986, Frontline host Judy Woodruff cautions viewers that what they are about to witness is shocking and "not the typical story of someone living with AIDS and is rare" (Frontlines 1986). Fabian Bridges is in bed at Jefferson Davis Hospital's AIDS Ward in Houston, Texas, as Frontline begins their portrayal of him. Bridges' relationship to the HIV/AIDS virus is typical. While working for the county flood control unit, he fell ill and was hospitalized for what he then learned were AIDS-related complications. After three months in the hospital, Bridges is well enough to leave. Bridges, without a job or home, is given a one-way ticket to Indianapolis, Indiana, to live with family as it is assumed he will eventually pass away. In Indianapolis, Bridges' sister, having learned about his AIDS diagnosis, denies entry to her home claiming that with a new child, her family was uncertain that the disease would not spread to the rest of the family. Bridges moves around Indianapolis, between homeless shelters and the streets until he is jailed on charges of stealing a bicycle. Bridges' AIDS-positive status causes the jail system to isolate him from the general population, which places a burden on his physical and mental wellbeing. At his arraignment, a sympathetic judge dismisses Bridges' charges and collects funds to give Bridges a one-way ticket to Cleveland, Ohio to be with his mother and stepfather. Once there, we learn that Bridges' mother also denies him, and he is out on the streets again.

In Cleveland, Frontline reunites with Bridges, however, the narrator's tone makes a marked shift. The narrator of the Frontline episode crew states that Bridges "is no longer just a victim" (Frontline 1986). Frontline producers admit that they have started to give him money due to what they perceive to be his involvement in sex work. They pay for his room and board along with other amenities to keep him off the streets. Crucially, Bridges admits to producers that he has been sexually active. In a pivotal scene, Frontline producers confront Bridges to ask him about his sexual transgressions to which he replies, "I just don't give a damn...." In response to Bridges' admission, Frontline producers notify the Cleveland Public Health Department and the president of the Cleveland City Council about Bridges' sexual transgressions. In response to this

information, the Public Health Department and the City Council convene to figure out a plan to stop Bridges from having sex, with one council member likening Bridges to a “mass shooter” with the ability to infect an entire population. Esparza (2019) notes that this allows Frontline “panelist [to] compare HIV to a lethal weapon, branding Fabian a dangerous criminal – a biological terrorist – whose free movement threatened the general population of white middle America with a slow, painful death” (271).

In response to Frontlines’ revelations about Bridges’ sexual transgressions, activist Buck Harris, the state of Ohio appointee for gay health, proclaimed that Bridges is not part of this community and will harm him if found. Harris claims that the Cleveland LGBT community is on the lookout for Bridges in night clubs, bars, and other LGBT community places. To justify the surveillance, Harris reiterates to the camera that Bridges’ actions are irresponsible and out of line from the ways that the local LGBT community conducts itself. In an attempt to further distance himself and the local community from Bridges, Harris claims, if found, he would lynch Bridges. Although Bridges’ race is never stated as a factor in the PBS documentation, the racial undertones of Harris’ statement spoke to the Cleveland LGBT community’s liberal investment in antiblackness during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The threat of violence through lynching contributes to a white hostility against Bridges and places him as an “other” through material and imagined harms. This allows the Cleveland LGBT community to move away from Bridges as their hostility establishes a proper state regulatory response to deviant sexual practices. Harris’ statement establishes race as a factor in response to deviant sexual acts.

Eventually, Bridges was able to collect Social Security Disability that was previously withheld by his mother. This allows him to leave Cleveland and return to Houston, Texas. In Houston, during a follow-up health appointment at Jefferson Davis Hospital, Bridges is presented with a proclamation from the county public health department that states that he cannot engage in any sexual activity while he is in Houston. After Bridges receives the proclamation, local law enforcement follows Bridges hoping to entrap him in a potential sexual act. In what reads as a comedy of errors, seemingly heterosexual muscled mustached vice police officers pose as potential clients in order to arrests Bridges for prostitution. The Houston Police Department’s actions point to the extreme measures of local authorities to regulate deviant sexual acts. However, Bridges is never found to be soliciting sex. Local gay Houston activist Ray Hill takes Bridges under his watch where Fabian Bridges passes away four months later.

Bridges, in his depiction in this Frontlines special, is a symbol for all that can go wrong for someone living with a positive HIV diagnosis. Time Magazine and The Los Angeles Times depict his story as an example of a nomadic AIDS-positive person spreading the virus unbeknownst to the larger population. The Los Angeles Times article describes Fabian Bridges as “a gay man with AIDS, a miserable, wretched, uncaring victim-turned-victimizer who used his body as a lethal weapon” (Rosenberg 1986). Bridges’ portrayal creates a position from which to articulate irresponsible sexual acts, as his admission of sexual deviation becomes justification to regulate his sexual practices. This portrayal of deviance allows for a differentiation in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic by separating appropriate sexual acts from deviant sexual acts. For

example, the panel discussion between health and behavioral experts in the Frontline episode places Bridges outside of expected sexual practices and distances Bridges' actions from the larger LGBT community. Diego Lopez, an HIV-positive clinical psychologist and part of the Gay Men's Health Crisis in New York, was pressured into explaining why Bridges was so careless. In his response, Lopez creates a distance between the actions of Bridges and the mainstream gay community that, he claims, is not reflective of Bridges' actions. Through this distancing and othering, Bridges' sexuality becomes a site from which antiblack violence proliferates vis-a-vis the material practices of liberalism by mainstream LGBT communities as they regulate his sexuality due to perceived sexual deviances. The public disavowal of Bridges' sexual transgressions makes explicit the relationship between race and sexuality as experiences of racism are expressed through sexual regulation in favor of expanding white supremacy. In the case of Bridges, sexual regulation comes in the form of state surveillance, the unethical choice of Frontline producers to inform local authorities of Bridges sexual transgressions, and county health authorities preventing Bridges from having sex. Sexual regulation is connected to antiblackness and informs normative expectations of sexual intercourse during the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Additionally, Bridges' portrayal is an attempt to show the day-to-day life of someone who is living with HIV/AIDS. Bridges experiences several different forms of marginalization prior to his encounter with PBS. The contours of his marginalization are place based between Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Houston. Denied entry to both heterosexual and homosexual communities in several different cities makes Bridges' relationship to place fraught. The actions of PBS Frontline enroll Bridges into a number of antiblack acts, which expand our understanding of the heterogeneity of antiblackness. The potential, without visible confirmation, of sexual transgression invests Bridges into cycles of antiblack violence through surveillance, incarceration, and sexual violence, which are structured through antiblack relationships in place. Yet, Bridges' relationship to antiblack violence is situated through his imagined relationships to sexual actions, which makes the hidden and unknown ability to have sex a central driver of his experiences.

Black Sexuality and LGBTQIA Community Liberal Formations.

Bridges' story demonstrates the ways in which liberalism in the form of sexual citizenship aligns with antiblackness through the regulation of his supposed sexual "transgressions". HIV/AIDS criminalization laws (Gossett 2014), the lack of HIV/AIDS health care related resources (Sangaramoorthy 2012), the overproduction of Black sexual promiscuity (Thrasher 2018), Black men on the downlow (Snorton 2014), and the overrepresentation of heterosexual transmission among Black women (Gilbert and Wright 2003), demonstrate the ways in which Black sexuality has been pathologized, regulated, and is central to producing liberal forms of sexual citizenship during HIV/AIDS epidemic. Nero (2005) points to two factors that contribute to the use of sexual regulation. First are the middle-class aspirations of LGBTQIA communities to assimilate into the liberal project of mainstream sexual citizenship. Second are white hostilities towards Black communities. Proclamations of harm against and attempts to regulate Bridges' ability to have sex establishes Black sexuality as antagonistic to the

social landscapes of LGBTQIA community formations. The words of Buck Harris create borders between admissible and deviant sexual practices that define those who will be subject to policing practices, as Harris' invocation of lynching speaks to racial foundations within LGBTQIA communities. As such, LGBTQIA community formations are premised on an investment in antiblackness that are articulated through Black sexuality. Within these normative aspirations of white identified LGBTQIA communities and antiblack violence, community formations are built through the regulation of Black sexuality.

Bridges necessitates a consideration of the racial underpinnings of sexual citizenship in which his race and sexual transgressions form a basis for liberalism among mainstream white identified LGBTQIA communities. Sexual citizenship highlights expressions of freedom as sexual minorities seek formal rights and recognitions from the state. Part of the process of receiving recognition is to establish group boundaries that become the basis of internal policing in order to align the group formation with the punitive values of the state. Lamble (2013) establishes sexual citizenship as the emergence of a group politics based in belonging and recognition of legal and social rights that are produced through the state. In exchange for rights and recognition, white identified LGBTQIA subjects undertake the punitive elements of liberal notions of social and economic freedom. State enforcement of hate crimes and the increased use of the criminal justice system in turn prompts privileged gender and sexual minorities "to view police as LGBT protectors of sexual citizenship rather than enforcers of economic, political and racial hierarches..." (Lamble 2013 14). The goal is to seek protections from the state through policing Black sexual formations. Through Lamble's use of sexual citizenship, we recognize that part of the emergence of a political body is the recognition that a group is deserving of state protections through the antiblack policing and regulation of Black gender and sexual minorities. Sexual citizenship is racialized, regulating not only those who are deemed sexually transgressive, but also those who are outside of white identified LGBTQIA communities.

Black LGBTQIA communities must navigate liberalism's investment in race and sexuality which creates a situated experience where mainstream LGBT communities use of sexual regulation intersects with narratives of overcoming social, economic, and political determinants that defined the Black experience in the United States. Bridges' experiences, as both Black and gay, point to the need to center race as a key feature of sexual citizenship within gender and sexual minority communities. Ferguson (2004) situates race as a key factor in the ways group-based sexual affiliations are developed. Race, gender, and sexuality articulate with one another to center preferred forms of normative sexual practices that can then be brought into the favor of state protections in service of family and nation. Duggan (2012) points to the intersection of a state intervention on behalf of a limited understanding of sexuality as a LGBTQIA politics that "does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticizing gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan 50). Duggan names this apolitical position of certain sexual minorities as homonormativity, in which institutions in favor of capital are promoted through a demobilized, depoliticized LGBTQIA culture. Race is central in that the

grounds in which homonormativity can be articulated are through investments in whiteness and antiblack violence. For example, Harris' claim that our community "does not engage in those type of dangerous sexual actions" and his threats to lynch Bridges points to depoliticalized practices among sexual minority communities whose inclusion into state protections are made through antiblack violence. Through Black sexual regulation, race and sexuality articulate with one another to create a set of antiblack practices that define mainstream white identified LGBTQIA communities' affiliations. Sexual regulation within mainstream LGBTQIA communities along racial lines creates sites for state intervention against racialized deviant sexual practices. Practices of naming Black gender and sexual minorities as deviant allows for white identified LGBTQIA communities to be included into US economic and social freedoms through acceptable sexual practices, which eludes a thorough understanding of Black sexuality on its own terms. This illuminates the multiple forms of marginalization that Black gender and sexual minorities face internal to the Black community and external to mainstream LGBTQIA communities whose investment in liberal inclusion create barriers to authentic gender and sexual expressions.

While opposing Black sexuality forms the basis of group formation for mainstream white identified LGBTQIA communities, it also illuminates a space for intervention that Black gender and sexual minority communities engage in through expanding "queer" as a political project. On one hand, Black sexuality is articulated through antiblack racism. The violence that Bridges experiences creates non-normative subject positions within the Black LGBTQIA community that informs the normative subject positions of white identified LGBTQIA communities. However, on the other hand, the non-normative subject position of Black queers intersects with other state intimacies beyond sexuality and gender that create additional barriers to normative sites like housing, employment, and other parts of society, which if taken alongside gender and sexuality have the ability to expand queer as a site of political engagement. Cathy Cohen (2001) in *Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens* questions the social - political formation of queer as singularly against heterosexuality, given that Black queer communities exist not only outside heteronormativity but also other normative sites of United States liberalism. For example, Black women on welfare represent a non-normative subject position that expands queer as a political project. Cohen represents the limitations of queer subject formations against heterosexuality, contending that "a truly radical or transformative politics has not resulted from queer activism. In many instances, instead of destabilizing the assumed categories and binaries of sexual identity, queer politics has served to reinforce simple dichotomies between heterosexual and everything queer" (438). Cohen attaches race as another site of non-normative political action which complements gender and sexual marginalization to show that race is key to the experiences of Black LGBTQIA communities. Cohen establishes gender, sexuality, and race as non-normative subject positions that Black queer communities must address. An expansion of queerness or LGBTQIA group formations must include a consideration of the mutually constitutive relationship between gender, sexuality, and race.

To understand the ways Black sexuality expands queerness and addresses antiblack violence, I focus on queer Black spatial production as an extension of a black

sense of place. Bridges' movements between cities, forcefully or voluntary constitutes a form of Black spatial production at the intersections of race and sexuality. A focus on sexuality and race expands the ways antiblack violence is expressed and is contingent on historical and contested racialization and sexual practices in place. Building from a black sense of place which calls into question the ways antiblack violence "shape, but do not wholly define, black worlds" (McKittrick 2011 947), antiblack violence is articulated in and through sexuality in the form of sexual regulation and community neglect. My use of a black sense of place points to the ways Black communities make life under conditions of antiblack violence, through understandings of race and sexual space-making practices which inform a Black queer spatial production. If it is through gender and sexual violence that antiblackness finds its expression among Black people, then it is through the spatial production of Black gender and sexual minorities from which we can better understand a black sense of place. However, for Black gender and sexual minorities, Black queer spatial production illustrates the way visible antagonisms of antiblack violence coexists with hidden intimacies.

The volatility of Bridges' relationship to place highlights the role of hidden space as central to Black queer spatial production. My use of "hidden" to represent Black queer spatial production speaks to visible antagonisms of sexual regulation that coexist alongside the hidden intimacies of sexuality, which are central to Bridges' story. Bridges' relationship to state intimacies based in antiblack violence are premised in his hidden sexual transgressions. Although there is no official documentation of Bridges engaging in sexual acts, the hidden potentiality of sexual acts as a Black gay HIV positive cisgender man allows for interventions on his life at any time. The hidden potentiality of Bridges' sexuality and local government response "expose[s] how race, gender and sexuality are expressed and constituted in and through spatial landscapes, while highlighting the ways Black gender and sexual minorities' subjection to public ridicule and violence [are an] essential function in the overall erotic economy" (Bailey and Shabazz 2014 318). Yet, it is crucial to recognize that Bridges' spatial movements between places does not fully define his relationship to antiblackness, sexual regulation, and liberal investment in preferred sexual practices. The lack of visible documentation of Bridges' sexual transgressions underscores the reality that Black queer sexuality is largely outside of knowledge production. This unknown quality of Black queer sexuality allows for hidden sexual practices to emerge as sites to challenge the conditions that Black queer communities face under the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The hidden spaces of Bridges' potential sexual transgressions are sites through which sexual spaces of mainstream LGBTQIA communities are normalized and whitened. Rinaldo Walcott (2005) asserts that the hidden spaces of Black gay cultural production leave a lasting impact on white identified gay communities. The hidden spaces of Black sexuality, when made visible, are coded as white. For example, the hidden spaces of drag and gender bending Black and Latinx ballroom communities become visible as part of larger white identified LGBTQIA communities. Through mainstream consumption of voguing or other Black Queer cultural production, white LGBTQIA communities are able to appropriate Black queer cultural production as their own. Black queerness provides a social currency for these ends as cultural consumption becomes the basis for group formation. However, the Black queer people from which

that currency is appropriated are systemically hidden as mainstream appropriations of culture do not give credit to their origins (Walcott 2005). Therefore, Black queer spatial production includes both antiblack appropriations of blackness and sites of Black queer sexual practices. I consider Black queer spatial practices through the ways Bridges' experiences are situated in hidden intimacies tied to his imagined and material racial and sexual relationship to place. I argue that hidden sexual practices illustrate the ways place is central to making visible Black sexual practices and the ways community-based organizations respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The proliferation of antiblackness through sexual regulation of visible and hidden practices of Black sexuality misrepresents the ways Black sexuality takes place. Antiblackness is complicit in the regulation of Black sexuality as it is narrowly understood as promiscuous, hypersexual, and lacking community diversity. Countering this, Bailey (2020) argues that "sexual practices, spaces and situations in which Black gay men are engaged allow them to claim and enact sexual autonomy during this HIV crisis that disproportionately impacts them" (218). Bailey demonstrates that the actually existing sexual practices of Black gay men under the HIV/AIDS epidemic are sites to understand the ways that the larger Black LGBTQIA community can navigate potential HIV risks. In order to understand how Black sexuality itself connects to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, I analyze the ways Black sexuality is produced in place. I show that instead of addressing the particularities of disproportionate rates of HIV/AIDS infection, Black sexual practices are sites for Black gender and sexual minority communities to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In order to address the limitations of Black sexuality in the face of the ongoing HIV/AIDS epidemic it is necessary to understand the ways Black communities have always challenged flat depictions of sexuality through Black sexual practice. This could mean an increased focus on sexual practices like raw sex (Bailey 2019), loving one's culture as they engage in sexual practices (Jolivet 2016), or disrupting the common associations of men who have sex with men as the only communities that are sexually active and at-risk during the epidemic (Coleman et al. 2014). It is important to consider the ways that Black sexual and gender expressions proliferate alongside negative portrayals of Black sexuality. I turn to the sex positive actions of Black community-based organizations in Atlanta, Georgia, who have been promoting Black sexual practice as a way to intervene within the HIV/AIDS epidemic. From here, we can see the ways Black people challenge antiblack understandings of Black sexuality and liberalism during HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Black Queer Spatial Production: Expanding Queer Politics and Geographies of Black Sexuality

Black queer spatial production counters normative sexual citizenship practices and suppression of Black sexuality. Bridges' experiences provide one historical account of the ways white identified LGBTQIA communities articulate a form of liberalism based in sexual freedom through the regulation of his sexuality. Negative portrayals and policing of Black sexuality become a site from which to promote normative sexual expectations for gender and sexual minorities during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. However, the intersections between Black queer communities and their sexual and gender expressions illuminate the role of blackness, queerness, gender, and sexuality in shaping

sexual practices against antiblack violence, sexual citizenship, and the regulation of Black sexuality. Central to understanding Black queer sexuality is the role of hidden sexual acts among Black queer people. For Bridges, the hidden potential of sexual acts outweighed considerations of the ways he experienced intimacy. Similarly, antiblackness and liberal investment in sexual practices, limits the ways Black queer sexuality is lived, experienced, and understood. Therefore, the antiblack suppression of Black sexuality is accompanied by existing hidden intimacies of Black sexual practices. For Black queer communities, responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic are developed in these hidden situated experiences of sexual practices. Furthermore, accounting for hidden sexual intimacies requires articulating Black queer spatial production through place and an expansion of queer, as a political project beyond limited forms of sexual and gender expression. Atlanta, Georgia emerges as a place to understand the ways Black sexuality expands queerness within LGBTQIA communities through response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The presence of a large Black LGBTQIA population in Atlanta necessitates engaging the HIV/AIDS epidemic through Black sexuality, as this becomes a site to respond to disproportionate rates of infection. Atlanta, arguably, is simultaneously the current epicenter of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and a key site for Black sexual expression in the United States. In the Metro Atlanta area, the Black population is 32% of the population but suffers from disproportionate rates of infection. Within Atlanta, there are over 36,000 people living with HIV (AIDSVu 2017). Among this population, 70% are Black, 6% are Latinx and 18% are white (AIDSVu 2017). Further, 80% of those who are HIV positive identify as men. Additionally, Atlanta accounts for over half of HIV/AIDS related deaths in Georgia. Black men are 5 times and Black women are 15 times more likely than their white counterparts to have a positive HIV diagnosis (AIDSVu 2017). In the midst of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Atlanta, commonly referred to as the gay Black mecca of the United States, hosts the one of the largest Black Pride Events in the United States, along with LGBTQIA events at Homecoming (an event to celebrate Historical Black Colleges and Universities), and a number of Black LGBTQIA formal and informal sex industries.

Atlanta community-based organizations address disproportionate rates of HIV infection through exposing the ways Black sexuality takes place. Community groups are attentive to a wider spectrum of Black sexual practices among groups who are at-risk of an HIV infection. This response works to expand understandings of Black sexuality alongside other social justice movements, and to address other non-normative relationships that impact Black gender and sexual minorities. Fabian Bridges' experience around sexual regulation, for example, was also shaped by his impoverishment, a lack of housing and community, and health care. Atlanta community-based organizations expand Black sexuality by taking the social economic and political contexts of individuals and groups into consideration as reflective of the ways sexual practice is socially produced. The actions of Sister Love Inc. seek to make people aware of their risk for HIV/AIDS through their social sexual networks.

Founded in 1989 to address Black women's disproportionate rates of HIV infection, Sister Love establishes a foundation to understand Black sexuality on its own

terms by developing an intervention based on actual social sexual practices. The work of Sister Love situates Black sexuality within existing social formations rather than an assumed set of prescribed relationships based in proximity to HIV risk. Considering sexual social formations rather than relationship to risk provides a different point to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Although sexual identity does provide a general level intervention, what is often missing in these group formations are the actual ways sexual acts take place, influenced through class, gender, location and sexual identity. Sister Love implements one of the longest running HIV intervention strategies, the “Healthy Love” party. The “Healthy Love” party is a group based intervention that provides sexual education based on group sexual affiliation. By contrast, the Centers for Disease Control provides guidance to the formation of HIV risk groups and relies on risk group formation through sexual orientation rather than sexual practices. Rather than using Centers for Disease Control guidelines for risk groups based on sexual orientation, which have been found to mismatch existing sexual practices, Sister Love creates a bottom up understanding of sexual practice (Diallo et al 2010). Their intervention adapts safer sex strategies through the contexts in which sexual intercourse takes place and seeks to intervene in existing social groups within Black communities. Sexual groups could be Black lesbians over the age of 30 or Black men who sleep with men but do not identify as gay. Sister Love establishes that people’s relationships to the epidemic are contextualized within social formations, and that large sexual group formations, like men who have sex with men, does not fully approach the ways sex takes place. A key feature of Sister Love and other community-based organizations’ work is their attention to the role place plays in sexual practices.

Place is central for Atlanta Black LGBTQIA communities as physical locations inform sites from which Black sexuality practices can emerge. The movements of Bridges in response to various forms of spatial violence were based in sexual regulatory regimes operating in place. Challenging these regimes means establishing place based sexual practices that transform antiblack antagonistic space into sites that can be used for queer community building. Here we see a relationship between the deterministic movements of antiblackness and the cultural practices of Black queers that substantiate a Black queer spatial production. That is, antiblackness is not unassailable. Barriers in place can be worked with, not necessarily overcome, but are temporarily displaced. Black LGBTQIA communities respond to antiblackness through place based cultural practices, which create places to build alternative group formations and expand queerness. As a result, a younger generation of Black LGBTQIA communities are shaping LGBTQIA community formation in Atlanta.

Southern Fried Queer (SFQ) seeks to bring Southern Queer culture into political landscapes through strategic partnerships with local organizations and business establishments. SFQ is an intergenerational, trans positive, Black positive, and fat positive organization. Part of their work is creating visible spaces for political mobilization around queers in the South, in particular those in Atlanta who are transforming local communities. SFQ members host events, workshops, and other forms of cultural and community engagement that provide spaces to educate and mobilize for change in the South, especially at the intersections of being queer, Black, disabled, and low income. They produce a yearly festival in southwest Atlanta, which

brings workshops, film screenings, and community building to a historical underserved neighborhood in Atlanta.

Through this festival, SFQ has brought queer spatial production into spaces that were formally not queer, or even hostile to gender and sexual minorities. The festival takes place in an old industrial area south of the historic Black middleclass neighborhood, the West End and the famed Auburn Drive, and forming an L-shape intersection with Peoples Town to the east. Peoples Town was the first site of organized abandonment around public housing in Atlanta. Against the ecological gentrification around Atlanta's beltway and the introduction of craft breweries and bars, the Black and queer offerings of SFQ produce another relationship to the area. Although the site is not owned by SFQ, a DIY warehouse space has been the site for the festival which represents cultural production outside of capitalistic venue-based night life and the club culture of the city. This space is transformed to be Black and queer, similar to the transformation of night clubs into drag nights or community centers into ballroom performances. Here, there is a sense that for some amount of space and time, spaces that may be hostile to queer people can be transformed. The spatial acts of SFQ transform antiblack relationships through place making. SFQ activism shows that antiblackness operates as a non-totally. These spaces do not negate the ongoing violence but show how temporary transformations can take place. I take SFQ's actions as interventions within already existing systems of antiblackness that advance a Black queer spatial production. Through SFQ, we find an expansion of queerness which challenges the totality of antiblackness in these spaces.

Atlanta as a place of Black queer sexual production allows community-based organizations to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic by taking Black sexuality on its own terms. The terms of Black sexual engagement involve addressing antiblackness as a strategy to create pathways for Black sexuality to be embraced. Central to this work is the recognition that love in the face of hate and love for one another can be the basis of Black queer group formations, and that recognition of antiblack violence can provide a foundation. For example, Bridges is denied community connection based on his sexuality and blackness. Therefore, embracing negation as it is attached to being Black and queer in Atlanta creates alternative avenues for belonging and addressing Black sexual practices. The organizing of the Counter Narrative Project (CNP) speaks to the ways that antiblackness is central to finding alternative relationships. This embrace does not undo or prevent antiblack harm, but it establishes a relationship to harm that can be the basis of inclusion. The CNP's use of social media destigmatizes the harm that antiblackness carries through negative portrayals of blackness and homonormativity.

The Counter Narrative Project takes the Joseph Beam quote "black men loving black men is the revolutionary act..." as a model for programming and advocacy (Beam 1986). The organization builds power among Black gay men in solidarity with other social and racial justice movements. The CNP argues that storytelling is critical to social change and that by amplifying the voices of Black gay men, the public narrative of Black men can change. These politics build from the revolutionary cultural renaissance of Black gay cultural production which came together during the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Beam 1986; Hemphill [1991]2007). The goal of the organization is to center Black gay

men as a group with a situated experience from which they build a critical analytic for change. Key initiatives have been the Black gay vote, harm reduction strategies around methamphetamine use, PrEP advocacy and access, peer support, and various arts and culture programming. Part of their cultural change work is providing opinion pieces to local newspapers and artistic expression to challenge dominant antiblack narratives tied to black Sexuality. In another arena, the *Revolutionary Health* YouTube series works to provide up to date health and scientific information about the lives of Black gay communities. Here, we see how people navigate healthcare access among changing HIV prevention landscapes. The *Revolutionary Health* YouTube series provides a resource for Black gay men seeking resources and access to information. This is an approach to health that addresses antiblack practices around stigma that Black gay men face in Atlanta.

The work of the CNP to address antiblackness in the sexual health of Black gender and sexual minorities centers the everyday lives of Black queer communities. Their work addresses the harms that come from social sexual group formations, the places groups come together, and the ways liberal investment in sexual regulation produce harms. This approach to addressing the visible harms creates a space to move beyond antiblack practices of sexual regulation and limited understandings of Black sexuality. Black queer spatial production is intimately connected to addressing antiblack practices. It is from contestations to antiblack conditions that sites of Black queer spatial production emerge to embrace Black sexuality. This does not mean that Black sexuality detangles itself from antiblackness. Instead, Black spatial practices emerge with and beyond antiblackness. For example, Black queer spatial production counters the forces that reduce people to a number, where only their relation to harm can be seen, and instead pushes the lived experiences of Black LGBTQIA communities as the basis of change. This not only helps current Atlanta based Black LGBTQIA communities address barriers experienced within the HIV/AIDS epidemic but is central to understanding why Bridges' story is foundational to understanding the struggle Black LGBTQIA individuals and communities face today.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the ways that three Atlanta community-based organizations navigate liberal investments in sexual regulation by mainstream LGBTQIA communities and the HIV/AIDS epidemic through challenging antiblack practices of sexual citizenship and the regulation of Black sexuality. Through a historical approach using the experiences and portrayals of Fabian Bridges, I lay bare the punitive logics at the center of antiblackness and the HIV/AIDS epidemic and show how antiblack racism finds its meaning through sexual regulation. In the archetypes of Black sexual deviance that promote normative white and homonormative sensibilities, Bridges being “othered” from a (white) LGBTQIA community lynch mob, or the lack of space to call his own as he is moving between cities, speaks to antiblack intimacies based in his race and sexuality. Antiblackness is central for mainstream white identified LGBTQIA community groups to engage in sexual citizenship. Sexual citizenship defines which sexual acts are permissible through the policing of deviant sexual activities. White

identified marginalized sexualities come together as a political body deserving of recognition through the policing of racialized others.

Sexual citizenship helps define the role of antiblackness in liberalism that Black LGBTQIA communities must engage in order to find a place for Black sexual expression. Through community-based organizations like Sister Love Inc., the social sexual group formations of Black sexual practices become sites from which to contest antiblackness. Through Black gender and sexual minorities' sexual practices in Atlanta, Sister Love finds their HIV intervention's impact on social sexual group formations. Sister Love's work exposes the necessity of place-based struggles from which Black queer spatial practices based in sexual expression can emerge. Place is central to expanding what society knows about Black sexuality and queerness as a political project.

Black queer spatial production finds its meaning through embracing Black sexuality as it is articulated through place. The organization Southern Fried Queer (SFQ) addresses both the lack of material space and limited forms of Black sexual expression for Black queers in Atlanta. Through their yearly SFQ festival which transforms abandon and undervalued spaces into sites of Black queer spatial production, SFQ expands Black queerness through repurposing inconsiderate or even hostile non-queer spaces to the needs of the queer community. Antiblack violence is not being overcome, but rather, Black queer spatial production is emerging within these hidden spaces. What is born from Black queer spatial production is an embracing of Black sexuality, regardless of antiblack portrayals or violence against Black gender and sexual minorities.

Finally, the activism of the Counter Narrative Project displays the totalizing effects of antiblack queer violence through education and the embracing of Black sexual practices. Through work to promote self-love and community care, CNP challenges liberalism's investment in antiblackness while addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This response is found in CNP's focus on community building through breaking and revealing silences tied to Black sexuality as a praxis of survival. What is learned from the Atlanta-based groups is that race, gender, and sexuality are mutually constituted and articulated through antiblackness and Black queer spatial production. In Black LGBTQIA community attempts to address antiblackness, race, gender, and sexuality are sites to promote Black sexual practices. This demonstrates the ways antiblackness shadows but does not wholly determine the everyday lives of Black LGBTQIA communities.

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