we have always been banned

Callie Grober, Bailey McGarry, Bruce Noss, Trevor Pfeiff, & Edie Wortzman
WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN BANNED
Things are changing. Gay people are not invisible anymore; but then again, we never really were.

Gay Media Action with support from the Charles Street Universalist Church

We Have Always Been Here
by Edie Wortzman

As I was browsing through the archives a couple of weeks ago, I found this spectacular quote sponsored by Gay Media Action with support from the Charles Street Universalist Church. As a queer young adult, I find myself constantly searching for spaces where I feel collective community. Now, if you think about it, what places actively market their spaces towards queer folks, especially young adults? Off the top of my head, I cannot think of any. This is where the problem lies; this is how we feel invisible.

Have we always been invisible? I certainly feel as if I have, especially in the community I was raised in. As a closeted child, I never truly had a safe space to express myself to the fullest form. It was not until I was an adult, able to move to Chicago, where I could truly find myself. Even in Chicago, most queer safe spaces require you to be twenty one years or older, which can be frustrating at times.

Thankfully, through resources, classes, friends, and community, I have been able to navigate the world just a bit easier. If I were to pick one queer safe space, it would be Eli Tea Bar, located in Andersonville at 5507 N Clark St. This space has allowed me to find so much joy. I feel safe, comfortable, and welcome! As soon as you walk in the door, you are greeted with the kindest faces, and sometimes even the owner Eli will be working as well! This spot also hosts a wide variety of alcohol-free events for folks of all ages to attend. So even if you are not “of age,” feel free to stop by Eli’s for a delicious, refreshing, and fun time!
As I’ve worked on this project, I’ve really wanted to include not just my opinion, but those of other queer folks around me wanting to speak on queer joy. I believe that storytelling, especially from the source, can be so beneficial for these kinds of projects. Because queer joy is up to interpretation, I wanted them to honestly share responses to these two questions: “Which spaces bring you queer joy? Why is this so important to you?” Even after gaining three responses, I feel more connected to these folks, simply because they took time out of their day to be vulnerable.

Communication and storytelling are very important for Melanie Kerz, as they “don’t have any specific areas or locations because the spaces that bring [them] queer joy are the ones where [they] feel comfortable to talk freely about queerness: being queer, queer stories and characters, making light-hearted jokes, stuff like that,” so to them, community is most important! They are able to find comfort in spaces with “like-minded queer people,” so they know that they “are not alone in [their] experiences and interests,” which so many strive for in a community space.

So why are queer folks regularly being erased from media? And, truly, what does this mean for the future? Will we still remain invisible? To me, people like Melanie have a very beautiful outlook on queer joy, as they are creating their own spaces. That alone is an act of resistance and self-liberation. It is those who associate queerness with danger and disgust who try to destroy our spaces, but, as Melanie closes, “we’re not going anywhere.”

We must not let others take our experiences away! Queer liberation is here and always will be!
WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN BANNED: A Reading List
by Callie Grober

Queer literature has been suppressed and silenced for as long as it has existed. Even though the movement for LGBTQ+ rights has been making progress, queerness as whole, in all of its forms and expressions, is often not accepted. Trans and non-binary people, for example, face an onslaught of backlash and harassment while trying to simply live their lives. Likewise, literature by and about trans lives is often targeted by conservative book bans. To support these authors and ensure all our stories continue to be told, read these books.

Dear Senthuran by Akwaeke Emezi

Dear Senthuran is a memoir by prolific Nigerian writer Akwaeke Emezi that details their experiences with their gender and their identity as an ogbanje. Emezi’s story is essential in understanding that gender nonconformity exists across all cultures and comes in many different forms. In a series of vignettes framed as letters, Emezi explores both their childhood in Nigeria and their experiences living in the U.S. with beautiful, thoughtful prose that illustrates both the struggles and triumphs of their life.

Gender Queer: A Memoir by Maia Kobabe

One of the most banned books in the country, Gender Queer: A Memoir recounts the author’s life and experience with eir gender in a graphic novel form. With both humorous wit and poignant ruminations on identity, Kobabe’s memoir is a beautiful story of exploration and expression. Gender Queer is bursting with refreshing honesty, tackling topics like menstruation and masturbation that many authors shy away from.
**Nobody Needs to Know by Pidgeon Pagonis**  
This memoir details the heartbreaking story of Pagonis’ journey with their gender, culminating in their revelation that they were born intersex, but raised as a girl. Nobody Needs to Know offers a portrait of the trauma and confusion that intersex people often experience at the hands of their families and medical facilities that force them to live as just one gender. Because intersex people are so often forgotten in conversations about queerness, Pagonis’ memoir is an necessary piece of queer reading.

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**We Both Laughed in Pleasure by Lou Sullivan**  
A trailblazer for gay trans rights, Sullivan is considered to be one of the first trans men to publicly identify as gay. We Both Laughed in Pleasure is a collection of writings from his diary, detailing his youth, trans activism, and experience living with HIV. Sullivan also founded and wrote the FTM Newsletter, which was the first guidebook for trans men. In order to understand the current state of the queer community, it is essential to read the writings of formative activists such as Sullivan.
A Spotlight on Queer Activists
by Bailey McGarry

John D'Emilio’s 2020 book Queer Legacies: Stories from Chicago’s LGBTQ Archives illuminates a selection of queer history that has long been hidden from the public eye. It is based on extensive research and materials from the records at Gerber/Hart Library and Archives in Chicago. His efforts reflect an attempt to chronologize and document a history of queer activism at work in Chicago, giving platform to the voices who lit the flame of revolution during a time when the powers at large aimed to extinguish it.

Here are just a few of these trailblazers...

During a time when police attacks and bar raids were commonplace for the queer community, David Boyer firmly retained his position as manager of Carol’s Speakeasy, a popular gay bar in Chicago. This location was the target of more than one prolific police raid in May 1980, resulting in the evacuation of several hundred patrons and an ensuing conflict between cops and customers. This ultimately prompted Boyer, who doubled as an activist, to present a collection of papers which detailed and effectively exposed homophobic behavior and excess of force within the Chicago Police Department.

JANET SOULE
Janet Soule was a member of the lesbian-owned and run Metis Press during the 1970s. In the early 1980s, she committed herself to compiling and creating a comprehensive collection of lesbian “herstory,” which was completed in 1984 in the form of a calendar entitled Tracking Our Way through Time: A Lesbian Herstory Calendar/Journal (D'Emilio 115).
In the early 1990s, Melissa Ann Merry was a pioneer for bisexual activism, creating space for bisexuals in what had long been known as “the ‘gay and lesbian’ movement” (D’Emilio 146). She supported organizations establishing a presence in the wake of the 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation. Additionally, she acted as a co-founder for the Bisexual Political Action Committee (BiPAC) and was an active member of one of these grassroots organizations, BiNet US.

James Darby was an activist and eventual president of the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Veterans of America, an organization which advocated against bans on queer people serving in the military. He worked with the GLBVA to produce and circulate a newsletter, The Forward Observer, which focused on promoting the right of all people, regardless of sexual orientation, to enlist in the military.

Darby endorsed the vote for Bill Clinton after he promised to repeal these bans. Once Clinton was elected, however, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policies emerged. This forced queer individuals into the closet if they were to sustain or secure their position in the military. Darby condemned Clinton’s actions, calling them “nothing more than repackaged discrimination” (D’Emilio 166). Disappointed, yet still determined, he promptly returned to speaking out against these inequitable policies.
Queer Travel Guides
by Trevor Pfeiff

We have always been banned, but we have always been here.

This truth is exemplified by the need for queer spaces. This need for safe spaces – places where queer people need not fear harassment or belittlement based on their sexual identity, places where queer people may not be rejected patronage, places where queer people can simply meet other queer people – has always existed. No other pieces of literature we have found in the archives, I feel, demonstrate this need as much as the travel guides of the 1960s-90s. Before the Internet, a local queer scene was more than a simple Google search away. Places where queer people were accepted and wanted had to be compiled into easily transferrable and shareable pamphlets, booklets, and zines. Bars, restaurants, cafés, social spaces, libraries, and even churches were featured in these guides, of which hundreds were published. Some, like Bob Damron’s travel guides, covered the entirety of the US, while some others, like the pamphlet featured in our exhibition which boasts itself as Chicago’s First Gay Travel Guide, present detailed analyses of local scenes. These descriptions often include the type of patronage you might expect to find at a certain establishment. Is it lesbian friendly? Trans-queer friendly? Is it a popular cruising spot? Is it a hub for crisis care? Does it offer resources to queer people in need? Together, these guides form a unique roadmap of the United States, one that demonstrates that queer people and queer spaces are everywhere. These pamphlets and guides often needed to be circulated in underground spaces, passed around at bars or distributed at gatherings. Their secrecy was part of their draw. The need for discretion, in a place where identity can often be undermined by the transgressions of government, business, or society, means double for the queer community. Our community, which has always been banned from common spaces, from straight spaces. Our community, which has always been here.
Bless Your Little Queer Heart
By Bruce Noss

This ain’t the 80’s, 90’s, or even the early 2000’s. This is the 21st century, baby! And what better way to celebrate the times we live in than by bowing down to the queers that make our lives oh so much sweeter! Queers that inspire us with their work, the ones that remind us of the beauty and power that being queer bestows upon us, or maybe even just those that provide us with a little bit of entertainment from time to time.

Because if we’re being honest, where would we be without them? Probably wasting away, trapped in the boring humdrum that makes up the society of the cis-straight. I mean, really!

So Say It Loud, Say It Clear, Because…

THESE PEOPLE ARE QUEER!!!

Rina Sawayama
Chappell Roan
Ethel Cain
Salman Toor
Christina Quarles
Janelle Monáe
Miss Benny
Miss Universe 2023
Brian Michael Smith
Kim Petras
Elliot Page
My childhood youth pastor
Laverne Cox
Sophie (We love and miss you!)
MJ Rodriguez
Your Dad
Indya Moore
AN ODE TO MOTHER...

When I hear you say, “I want a hot dog real bad!”
It makes me so glad,

And knowing how much you thank the evil gays,
I will treasure you for the rest of my days.

With a voice as soft as rain and hair the color of gold,
You shine like no other
My Mother...

~XOXO, Bruce
FOR BJB & HMI;

DO SAY GAY!