

Kent State University: Ohio LGBTQ Neighborhoods Project

The LGBTQ Neighborhoods Project is a multi-year, multi-pronged research project that will analyze LGBTQ populations in Ohio's seven major cities (Akron, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown). The project will focus on qualitative and quantitative analyses of LGBTQ urban populations and oral history interviews with former and current residents of Ohio's gay neighborhoods. We seek to document LGBTQ neighborhood gentrification in these individual metropolitan areas, the economic and demographic impact of this gentrification, and the rise of LGBTQ culture and community, as well as to collect, catalogue and share stories of LGBTQ lives.

Our project will be the first of its kind to research and document LGBTQ populations in an entire state. While social scientists and other scholars have explored such neighborhoods in major cities such as New York and San Francisco, smaller cities, especially in the Midwest, have been neglected. Additionally, few repositories maintain concentrated archival collections related to LGBTQ communities. Our project will establish a unique primary source collection that will eventually be accessible worldwide.

This project has three primary goals. We plan to: (1) research issues associated with urban LGBTQ populations, including their socioeconomic impact and the challenges faced by LGBTQ pioneers in gentrifying neighborhoods; (2) create archival collections that will be made available to scholars; and (3) involve students in all phases of the research, which will provide significant learning opportunities and data for research on how students benefit from such projects.

The first phase of the project will focus on filming interviews with LGBTQ individuals who were instrumental in redeveloping and improving their current neighborhoods. Akron interviews are scheduled for spring 2013. Our oral history interviews will be on display in Akron and Cleveland at the 2014 Gay Games. Publicly sharing interview excerpts at Gay Games venues as well as on our project's website will garner interest and support for this statewide project as we move forward.

We will analyze the oral history interviews we collect in conjunction with quantitative analyses of Census data and other publically available databases that will yield indices of neighborhood quality and progress including median household income, housing values, home ownership rates, changes in small

business development, and foreclosure data. In doing so, this project will provide insight into conflicts and boundaries concerning the intersections of sexual orientation, social class, gender, race, and cultural capital.

Because graduate and undergraduate students will conduct interviews, analyze qualitative and quantitative data, and assist in the collection and analysis of archival materials, students will receive invaluable experience through directed research and engaged learning. Therefore, this project serves to encourage a collaboration of faculty-student scholarship. In addition, we plan to publish on the pedagogical and educational pieces of this project in the emerging area of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

The other end goals of this multi-year and multi-faceted research project will be the LGBT Archives containing the oral history interviews, a book-length manuscript, and a broadcast documentary. We are also planning to sustain local partnerships that will allow for ongoing collection of interviews to be added to the archival collection in the future.

The key project leaders are all members of the LGBT Studies faculty. They are: Molly Merryman (Associate Professor, Sociology, and co-coordinator of LGBT Studies), David Purcell (Assistant Professor, Sociology), Cara Gilgenbach (Associate Professor, University Libraries, and head of Special Collections), and Lauren Vachon (Graduate Assistant, English MFA program).

Kent State University's mission is to discover, create, apply, and share knowledge, as well as to foster ethical and humanitarian values in the service of Ohio and the global community. As an eight-campus educational system, KSU offers a broad array of academic programs to engage students in diverse learning environments that educate them to think critically and to expand their intellectual horizons while attaining the knowledge and skills necessary for responsible citizenship and productive careers. KSU was founded in 1910, and in 2001, its LGBT Studies program was established as the first in Ohio. KSU has non-discrimination and inclusive policies and protections for LGBTQ students, faculty and staff, including domestic partner benefits.