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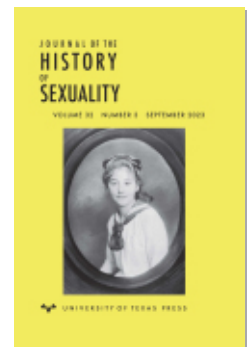
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*Living Queer History: Remembrance and Belonging in a Southern City* by Gregory Samantha Rosenthal (review)

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intimate freedom, *Intimate States* reminds us that constraints on sex, gender, and sexuality are far from the outer political traces of so-called culture wars. They are windows into the very heart of our legal and political order.

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*Living Queer History: Remembrance and Belonging in a Southern City.* By GREGORY SAMANTHA ROSENTHAL. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021. Pp. 288. \$95.00 (cloth); \$29.95 (paperback); \$24.99 (e-book).

G. Samantha Rosenthal's *Living Queer History* is a love letter to the queer and trans community in the small city of Roanoke, Virginia, where she lives and works as a public historian.<sup>1</sup> Rosenthal's book begins as a memoir. She explores how her gender and sexuality have been informed by their activist work with the multigenerational, community-based Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project, which Rosenthal cofounded in 2015. This embodied knowledge is critical to her central questions about history and how "we make it, shape it, alter it, fight for it, and sometimes forget it" (10). Weaving together memoir with historical analysis and theory, Rosenthal argues that LGBTQ history matters not only to our collective understanding of the past but also to queer and trans lives in the present.

Rosenthal's approach draws heavily on her oral history work and multiple public history practices, informed by her experiences in grassroots organizing. Using the analytic framework of geography, her book explores how Rosenthal and the folks involved with her organization have collectively endeavored to reclaim historically queer spaces and make queer histories legible in Roanoke, a small southern city not far from Appalachia that is more well-known for conservatism and Confederate monuments than for LGBTQ+ history and culture. Because queer and trans people are denied so much of our cultural knowledge of the past, it was in large part through placing her own body in queer historical spaces and conducting over forty oral histories with community elders, especially trans women, that Rosenthal's own present and future were shaped as she came to understand herself as a queer trans woman. This exchange is illustrative of a nonlinear mosaic of queer time and space that holds the potential to generate possibilities for our present and future and as such is necessary to queer public history activism.

Rosenthal traces how power operates in the crafting of narratives about historical places and community spaces, emphasizing that history is both a

<sup>1</sup> In this review, I refer to G. Samantha Rosenthal with she/they pronouns, as they use both interchangeably.

process and a practice. Her first chapter explores how the forces of urban development and gentrification work to make invisible any undesirable queer and trans individuals who do not fit in with boosterish assertions of safety and homogeneity that politicians and private interests often employ as part of rebranding a city for investment. Challenging this erasure, Rosenthal traces the interrelationship between urban planning and policing of queer and trans sex workers and gay cruisers to offer a new history of Roanoke that expertly demonstrates how public sex and sex work shaped the downtown urban economy. In subsequent chapters, Rosenthal analyzes the power dynamics within the Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project in terms of its public history endeavors, historical reclamations, and community work. She details the project's community events such as walking tours, story circles, and historical reenactments as important methods of queer world-building that, despite good intentions, do not always effectively engage the public across racial lines. Rosenthal also evaluates these setbacks to figure out new ways to bridge such divides within the LGBTQ community.

Joining the calls of other scholars, Rosenthal consistently advocates for historians to challenge the dominance of whiteness in queer and trans narratives. In chapter 5, "The Whiteness of Queerness," Rosenthal brings this issue home as she wrestles with rectifying their project's lack of diversity in its leadership, archival documentation, and public outreach. Any queer reclamation project would be incomplete without the inclusion of Black queer and trans histories. With a population that is one-third Black, Roanoke certainly has a queer Black past that needs to be documented and preserved. Yet Rosenthal recognizes her positionality as a white trans woman and understandably expresses concerns of doing this work in a way that harms or further alienates the community she seeks to include. In my own work, I have listened as members of marginalized communities express resentment toward academics who come into their neighborhoods and treat them like exhibits only to pick up and leave after they have collected whatever data they were seeking. As more academics across different fields look to mining community knowledge to enhance their research and writing, Rosenthal's intervention into this elitist form of pillaging is critical. In particular, their chapter provides a predominantly white public history field with important guidance on ways to forge a racial praxis that is self-reflexive and intentional about leveraging power as both white academics and public history practitioners. It is an activist approach that Rosenthal cultivated in her days spent in labor unions and the Occupy Movement and that she argues is necessary to doing the work of preserving queer and trans lives past, present, and future.

Rosenthal's book is a valuable contribution to the fields of American history, public history, urban history, and women's and gender studies. By combining her personal story with her public history work and theoretical frameworks, she expertly shows how important it is for LGBTQ

communities to collectively organize, engage in storytelling, and make spaces that are informed by our history yet enable our present and future. Their last chapter moves the reader forward in time to ask questions about how technology is changing the queer urban landscape. Although there are scholars who have lamented the loss of queer spaces, pointing to social apps for the decline in public cruising, queer bookstores, bars, and clubs, others have asserted that digital spaces are supplemental to material space and have facilitated queer and trans activism, historical knowledge, and resource sharing. Yes, the digital has had an impact on the queer urban landscape; however, Rosenthal argues that queer digital space is often a conduit to physical encounters, and, therefore, materiality still matters even to this new generation of born-digital queers. Historical projects, then, should continue to create opportunities for in-person public engagement as a means to enable queer reclamations of public space. Throughout Rosenthal's book, she has demonstrated that when queer and trans folks explore forgotten queer and trans spaces together, they get to materialize, celebrate, and, most importantly, live their history.

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