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### AIDS, ACT UP, and Activism Within The Albany Community

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Kimberly Easlick

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### AIDS, ACT UP, and Activism Within The Albany Community

In the late 1980's and early 1990's, activists across America fervently worked to combat the misinformation surrounding the AIDS crisis.<sup>1</sup> Questions of what AIDS was, who it affected, and possible policies to help combat increasing homophobic violence began to surface. Activists and organizations such as ACT UP took on the role of providing correct information and aid to those affected.<sup>2</sup> ACT UP was a national organization that worked to dismiss false information surrounding AIDS and spread awareness.<sup>3</sup> The primary epicenter of ACT UP's organization was in NYC.<sup>4</sup> Because New York City was so close to Albany, however, the NYC chapter was also highly instrumental in engaging the work of Albany's chapter and promoting activism.<sup>5</sup>

Albany, NY was a region of lesser-known activists who were momentous in civil rights for the LGBTQ+ community. One of these activists, Michelle Crone (originally Michelle DeMarco), devoted much of her life to the fight for Gay and women's rights in the Capital Region.<sup>6</sup> Crone first became involved in activism work in the 1970's, joining the Lesbians for Liberation group in Albany.<sup>7</sup> With the emerging AIDS crisis in the 1980's, Crone primarily became focused in ending the systemic oppression and discrimination against the LGBTQ+

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<sup>1</sup>For Albany's LGBTQ+ history see Benton, Ashley-Hopkins, "LGBTQ History: Social History," New York State Museum." Provides a brief explanation as to how activism in Albany and all of NY state began.

<sup>2</sup>"Why We Fight: Remembering AIDS Activism," The New York Public Library. Goes into detail about the origin of AIDS and NYC being an epicenter for the disease and activism that began there.

<sup>3</sup>*IBID.*, d. "Why We Fight."

<sup>4</sup>*IBID.*, d. "Why We Fight."

<sup>5</sup>Due to a lack of Albany's government intervention, AIDS cases grew, disproportionately affecting the local Gay community *IBID.*, d. "LGBTQ History: Social History."

<sup>6</sup>*IBID.*, d. "LGBTQ History: Social History."

<sup>7</sup>Michelle Crone Papers, 1927-2000, Undated, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York. The Background and Context page of Michelle Crone through the SUNY Albany Archive Website provides a brief history of Michelle Crone, which includes her early adult life.

community. Her work, and the work of various Gay/Lesbian organizations, left an indelible influence on the LGBTQ+ community in the Albany region and all of New York.

AIDS, as described in an informational booklet circulating in the 1980's, stands for "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. AIDS is a condition that leaves the body's immune or 'defense' system unable to defend itself from various infections... AIDS first appeared in this country in 1979... The AIDS epidemic has affected gay and bisexual men the most in this country."<sup>8</sup> With the epidemic profoundly targeting gay and bisexual men, misinformation and discrimination increased at a rapid pace. For example, in an interview with former SUNY Albany professor Harlow Robinson, he stated "AIDS had made more people scared of gay people, worsening the preexistent stigma. They identified it with the gay community."<sup>9</sup> AIDS was something that began to be associated with the gay community, in particular gay men. This is also further examined in the informational booklet, as a common question was "Is AIDS just a medical problem?" Although yes indeed it started as a medical crisis, it was inadvertently political, as it called attention to systemic inequalities in the gay community. "Screaming headlines and sensationalized coverage in the media have whipped up fear, confusion, and bigotry rather than provide much needed facts about the epidemic. Fear and hysteria about AIDS has unfortunately led to a wave of discrimination against people with AIDS, as well as against gay men and others. Attacks on lesbian and gay rights and right-wing bigotry threatens the rights of everyone."<sup>10</sup> The circulation of misinformation introduced a wave of fear among members of the LGBTQ+ community.

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<sup>8</sup>"AIDS: Questions and Answers." Activism, Box 1, Folder 71, Michelle Crone Papers, 1927-2000, Undated, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

<sup>9</sup>Harlow Robinson, (former SUNY Albany professor), in discussion with the author, October 2020.

<sup>10</sup>*IBID.*, d. "AIDS: Questions and Answers."

Therefore, various organizations such as ACT UP were created to combat the lack of government intervention in protecting the community and halting the promulgation of falsified information. Several other organizations, such as the AIDS Action Council, were formed with comparable goals in mind. For example, in a memo from the AIDS Action Council, funding would be available to “mount nationwide public education, prevention and risk-reduction programs; implement rational medical, legal and social policies; and study and address psychological aspects of the disease.”<sup>11</sup> Such funding goals became necessary as these AIDS-centered organizations took the responsibility of addressing the epidemic. ACT UP was developed in 1987, with Larry Kramer recognized as a founder. The very first ACT UP protest occurred on March 24th on New York City’s Wall Street, as pharmaceutical drugs to help treat AIDS were being profiteered.<sup>12</sup>

Michelle Crone and organizations as ACT UP began to address discriminatory practices and treatment of homosexuals began to be addressed. However, the existence of hate-based crimes in the 1980’s and 1990’s (despite activist effort) were still transpiring, leaving gays and lesbians throughout the Capital Region often unprotected. Various incidents were recorded in newspapers such as *The Times Union* and *The New York Times*.<sup>13</sup> It wasn’t uncommon to read about the harassment, threats, and homophobic violence on a daily basis. Although such incidents were occurring across the nation, Albany, NY had numerous cases of their own. For example, an article was written in 1988 by Tom Precious for *The Times Union* newspaper, which

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<sup>11</sup>“AIDS Action Council.” Activism, Box 1, Folder 72, Michelle Crone Papers, 1927-2000, 1987, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

<sup>12</sup>The Act Up Historical Archive. ACT UP Capsule History 1987. <https://actupny.org/documents/cron-87.html>.

<sup>13</sup>Precious, Tom, “Victims Hide their Disease on the Job,” In *The Times Union Newspaper*, Albany Activism, Box 1, Folder 71, Michelle Crone Papers, 1927-2000, 1988, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

spoke of homophobic discrimination at the workplace.<sup>14</sup> Those who chose to disclose their positive status faced social and economic implications for their decision. Although the names of the individuals in this 1988 article are left anonymous, one person referred to as “Richard” in the article discusses his treatment after disclosing his status to his supervisor.<sup>15</sup> From doing medical work in a local hospital, Richard became restricted to paperwork in an office. His boss was concerned that if patients knew workers such as “Richard” were AIDS-positive, the hospital would lose business.<sup>16</sup>

His experience, although seemingly extreme, was not uncommon during the peak of the AIDS crisis. The article goes on to describe similar experiences, receiving threatening phone calls, being fired from workplaces, and general workplace discrimination. Although there were laws in place to prevent these incidents, they rampantly continued. Those who were positive wanted to share their status, yet couldn’t because of fear of such discrimination. Having to remain silent about one’s status led to more complications and as the article describes, “mental anguish.”<sup>17</sup> Precious continues to speak about how these acts of discrimination happen, primarily through continued spread of misinformation.<sup>18</sup> National polls that were conducted explained that many feared sharing public spaces, such as cafeterias or bathrooms. However, the article continues with positive statistics, 80% in the Capital Region said they would help AIDS-positive co-workers with difficulties in their job, others saying they wouldn’t be bothered by co-workers who were positive.<sup>19</sup> Yet these seemingly optimistic statistics were countered with the frequent discrimination in Albany that was arising, as most people didn’t understand the mechanisms of transmission.

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<sup>14</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Victims Hide their Disease on the Job.”

<sup>15</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Victims Hide their Disease on the Job.”

<sup>16</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Victims Hide their Disease on the Job.”

<sup>17</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Victims Hide their Disease on the Job.”

<sup>18</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Victims Hide their Disease on the Job.”

<sup>19</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Victims Hide their Disease on the Job.”

As workplace discrimination like this shows, the lack of protection for LGBTQ+ community members and those who were AIDS-positive was visible. These occurrences were largely due to misinformation given to the general public. An action alert addressed to Michelle Crone from a member of GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), for example, expressed concern over a holiday special to be aired on NBC.<sup>20</sup> The television special involved a bisexual man who carelessly was spreading AIDS, eventually infecting a woman.<sup>21</sup> The woman then planned to seek revenge by murdering the man.<sup>22</sup> There was profound distress in the LGBTQ+ community about this, particularly from activists such as Crone who worked persistently to denounce such stereotypes. The mere idea that a AIDS-positive bisexual man was acting impetuously was exceedingly harmful, as it reinforced the notion that the gay community lacked proper response to the epidemic. Activists such as Crone also feared that an episode as this would appeal to those who believed violence was a proper response to gay individuals or those AIDS-positive.<sup>23</sup> In the Telepost, the Executive Director for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), stated “If broadcast, this show will tell all of America that the gay community has responded irresponsibly to AIDS. That’s a lie.”<sup>24</sup> Although this example was on the national level, it would still affect those in the Albany community and was brought to the attention of local activists.

With misinformation circulating Crone and activists alike looked to Albany officials for assistance in protecting LGBTQ+ individuals. For example, community organizers proposed an “Anti-Bias” bill to Albany officials to stop the recurrent hate crimes. This was clearly seen in a

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<sup>20</sup>GLAAD Telepost Action Alert, Activism, Box 1, Folder 105, Michelle Crone Papers, 1927-2000, Undated, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

<sup>21</sup>*IBID.*, d. GLAAD Telepost Action Alert.

<sup>22</sup>*IBID.*, d. GLAAD Telepost Action Alert.

<sup>23</sup>*IBID.*, d. GLAAD Telepost Action Alert.

<sup>24</sup>*IBID.*, d. GLAAD Telepost Action Alert.

graphic released from The Gay and Lesbian Antiviolence Project, showing a 31% increase in homophobic punching/hitting/kicking violence, an 18% increase in vandalism, 15% increase in attacks with weaponry, and an 8% increase in sexual assault cases.<sup>25</sup> Yet the Albany gay community and activists were left with unaddressed, apathetic responses to their concerns. Albany officials were quick to shut-down the bill, ultimately because of their own bias. Their rejection of this bill was written about in *The New York Times* newspaper, by Philip S. Gutis titled “Anti-Bias Bill is Killed in Albany.”<sup>26</sup> The primary discussion in this article was Republican Senate resistance to protect Albany’s gay community.<sup>27</sup> The governor of the time, Mario M. Cuomo, strongly supported the efforts of activists in pushing this bill. However, Cuomo acknowledged that some Republican-Senate members don’t allow a vote to happen on the bill because “it specifically includes sexual orientation as a protected category.”<sup>28</sup> The members who refused this bill to pass believed it was specially protecting LGBTQ+ community members, which struck them as unfair.<sup>29</sup>

Ralph J. Marino, a Republican senate member of the time, stated “there should be no special protection for some segments of our society.”<sup>30</sup> However, violence against gays/lesbians had increased over 50% between the years 1987-1988.<sup>31</sup> It seemed that many members of this Senate refused to acknowledge the effect misinformation surrounding AIDS had on the violence against the gay community. The article ended with a quote from co-chairwoman of the State

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<sup>25</sup>Gay and Lesbian Antiviolence Project, “What Kind of Violence?” Albany Activism, Box 1, Folder 11, Michelle Crone Papers, 1927-2000, 1989. M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

<sup>26</sup>Gutis, Philip S. “Anti-Bias Bill Is Killed in Albany,” In *The New York Times Newspaper*. Albany Activism, Box 1, Folder 62, Michelle Crone Papers, 1927-2000, 1989. M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

<sup>27</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Anti-Bias Bill Is Killed in Albany.”

<sup>28</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Anti-Bias Bill Is Killed in Albany.”

<sup>29</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Anti-Bias Bill Is Killed in Albany.”

<sup>30</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Anti-Bias Bill Is Killed in Albany.”

<sup>31</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Anti-Bias Bill Is Killed in Albany.”

Lesbian and Gay Lobby, Libby Post. She was also a significant lesbian/feminist activist in the Albany area of this time. Post states: “The issue is not going away. We are not going away. Sooner or later they are going to have to pass the bill. They might as well do it sooner rather than later, before more people get killed.”<sup>32</sup> The LGBTQ+ community and activists such as Post and Crone were pleading for leaders to take affirmative action in the AIDS epidemic. Yet Albany authority wouldn’t listen, which allowed for the continued violence against homosexuals and those AIDS-positive.

Another example of a call for gay protection was an ordinance proposal drafted by Albany activists. This call for an ordinance was a plea for donations (for those interested), for an ad to be published in the Albany Times Union Newspaper. The gay and lesbian community in Albany wanted a resolution from the Albany Common Council on an ordinance that would grant civil rights to Albany’s LGBTQ+ community. However, Albany Mayor Thomas Whalen stated that “Albany is not ready for such an ordinance.”<sup>33</sup>

Due to the lack of action on the part of the Albany government, local organizers were asking for donations for an ad to be published in a local newspaper. An ordinance against LGBTQ+ violence was already in place, yet did not include the words “sexual orientation,” therefore not providing legal agency to the gay community.<sup>34</sup> Due to the absence of these words, gay people had lesser access to housing as well lack of protection in workplace homophobia/discrimination. The ad went on to express how this bill would benefit gays and lesbians by ensuring protection within the workplace and for housing.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Anti-Bias Bill Is Killed in Albany.”

<sup>33</sup>“We Are Ready for a Lesbian Gay Civil Rights Ordinance in Albany,” Albany Activism, Box 1, Folder 14, Michelle Crone Papers, 1927-2000, 1987, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

<sup>34</sup>*IBID.*, d. “We Are Ready for a Lesbian Gay Civil Rights Ordinance in Albany.”

<sup>35</sup>*IBID.*, d. “We Are Ready for a Lesbian Gay Civil Rights Ordinance in Albany.”



Such discrimination against gay individuals, as the ad voices, was a “waste of energy and loss of human potential that is created by discrimination is a cost that is borne by the entire population.”<sup>36</sup> Discrimination against one group based upon prejudices is essentially a disruption to everyone.<sup>37</sup> The ad follows with more detail about activism being done to push for this ordinance (and protections similar) in New York already.<sup>38</sup> It states “A long and growing list of National organizations, corporations, and religious denominations advocate civil rights legislation for gays and lesbians as an important resource to arbitrary discrimination. Over 50 cities including New York City, Buffalo, Ithaca, and Troy, NY have passed civil rights ordinances.”<sup>39</sup> Yet Albany mayor believed that Albany, NY wasn’t ready for such a civil rights ordinance.

Such calls for basic human rights further signified the lack of intervention by Albany’s officials. Even with statistics clearly emphasizing the overall increase in violence against gays and lesbians, Albany’s local government lacked proper intercession. This led to growing homophobic violence, the psychological distress on LGBTQ+ people, and thousands dead at the hands of AIDS and lack of sufficient resources.<sup>40</sup>

ACT UP and activists similar to Crone continued local assembly in Albany’s community, taking responsibility for the acknowledgement of AIDS and bringing correct information to the general public. Although ACT UP went on to become an international organization, Albany’s chapter was beneficiary in the fight against AIDS. ACT UP began as a method to obstruct the national government's clear disregard of LGBTQ+ and AIDS-positive lives. Therefore Albany, being in such close proximity to NYC where the organization started, was monumental in

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<sup>36</sup>*IBID.*, d. “We Are Ready for a Lesbian Gay Civil Rights Ordinance in Albany.”

<sup>37</sup>*IBID.*, d. “We Are Ready for a Lesbian Gay Civil Rights Ordinance in Albany.”

<sup>38</sup>*IBID.*, d. “We Are Ready for a Lesbian Gay Civil Rights Ordinance in Albany.”

<sup>39</sup>*IBID.*, d. “We Are Ready for a Lesbian Gay Civil Rights Ordinance in Albany.”

<sup>40</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Victims Hide their Disease on the Job.”

providing better resources and information. ACT UP created events, hotlines, and protests to bring awareness that the Albany (and national) government wouldn't. For example, the Albany ACT UP chapter had a flyer for an event that was to happen on June 16, 1989. The flyer was titled "Wake Up, Speak Up, Act Up."<sup>41</sup> The exact date of the creation of this flyer and the author are unknown. The event mentioned is to honor those who have passed in the LGBTQ+ community who have passed due to AIDS. The flyer thereafter introduces and explains the nature of the event. Following this, there is a discussion of how the community continues to be affected: there is "misinformation spread by the government, lack of access to medication due to price inflation, and overall lack of treatment."<sup>42</sup>

The flyer explores the length of the event, as well as asking those who have been affected to attend and relay their thoughts.<sup>43</sup> The final portion then includes the specific activities to occur at the event, such as planting a tree to memorialize those lost and a candlelight service.<sup>44</sup> Finally, there is a quick section at the end that briefly summarizes the priorities of ACT UP, as well as the Albany chapter meeting location and address.<sup>45</sup> Albany in the late 1980's and early 1990's held hundreds of events (many conducted by ACT UP), to highlight what AIDS was doing to the LGBTQ+ community. Although a flyer seems rather ordinary, now in 2020 we underestimate how events such as this needed to be posted around to attain public attention.

At the time, local activists had to post these flyers around the city, as it was much more inconvenient for event information to travel around. Seeing this in an age of rapid-transfer of information makes one rather grateful for how easily accessible protest/activist information is.

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<sup>41</sup>ACT UP, "Wake up, Speak up, Act up," Albany Activism, Box 1, Folder 35, Michelle Crone Papers, 1927-2000, 1989, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

<sup>42</sup>*IBID.*, d. "Wake up, Speak up, Act up."

<sup>43</sup>*IBID.*, d. "Wake up, Speak up, Act up."

<sup>44</sup>*IBID.*, d. "Wake up, Speak up, Act up."

<sup>45</sup>*IBID.*, d. "Wake up, Speak up, Act up."

Activists at this time in the late 1980's/early 1990's had to work twice as much in their efforts to fight misinformation, seeing as how people didn't have the ease of access to fact-check major news outlets/government reports. Not only this, but they had to also physically put flyers up themselves, rather than being able to post it in less than one second.

Aside from this flyer, specific projects were also organized to aid the LGBTQ+ community facing the violence from AIDS inaccuracies. A prime example of this is a project known as the Gay and Lesbian Antiviolence Project (GALAP), organized in Albany in the 1980's. A few of the documents were general overviews of the goals of this anti-violence project and needs of Albany's gay and lesbian community. The first memo, titled "Gay and Lesbian Antiviolence Project (GALAP)," is a proposal for inclusion of sexuality in crime reports, but excluding the victims name. The text is then broken into two parts, why sexual orientation (as its written "gay" and "lesbian") should be mentioned, then why the victim's name shouldn't be mentioned in crime reports.<sup>46</sup>

In the first portion of why sexuality should be included, the first three reasons were: "the Capital District, in general, is unaware of the size of the local homosexual population and the extent to which gay people are victims of crime and harrassment;" "gays and lesbians themselves need to become more aware of these crimes so that they will take appropriate protective measures;" and "opponents of bias crime legislation (which would raise the penalties for crimes motivated by prejudice toward gays and lesbians, among other groups) claim that these crimes are not occurring or are rare."<sup>47</sup> The commonality among many of the reasons why sexuality should be mentioned is so attention is brought to the Albany community of the frequency of

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<sup>46</sup>"Gay and Antiviolence Project" Activism, Box 1, Folder 11, Michelle Crone Papers, 1927-2000, 1987-1988. M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

<sup>47</sup>*IBID.*, d. "Gay and Antiviolence Project."

hate-based crimes. Many individuals and government officials simply didn't believe these crimes were occurring, therefore didn't understand the need for extra protection of the LGBTQ+ community.

In the second portion of why identity shouldn't be included, the first three reasons were: "gay and lesbian citizens have a right to sexual privacy, even when their sexuality was a motivating factor in the crime;" "gays and lesbians may be legally discriminated against by employers, landlords, hotels, restaurants, etc. in many area communities, including the City of Albany;" and "most insurance companies will not issue a life or accident & health insurance policy to any male that they can determine may be gay (an AIDS high-risk group)."<sup>48</sup> The section highlights how discrimination was prevalent in the Albany community, even though there were laws to prevent it.<sup>49</sup> LGBTQ+ community members, if out publicly, could face increased hate-based crime/discrimination without much, if at all, protection from government officials or police. Therefore, LGBTQ+ protection and sexual-orientation being written into specific laws was a necessary step.

An additional source from the Gay and Lesbian Antiviolence Project discusses the primary goals for their group. This memo, printed by GALAP (The Gay and Lesbian Antiviolence Project) is broken into three portions. The initial stage of the organization, the purpose, and funding needs.<sup>50</sup> Under the first portion, the initial stage involves an issuance of a survey (which is attached to the memo) that asks of the frequency and type of violence that has transpired in Albany towards the gay/lesbian community. The results of these surveys, once

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<sup>48</sup>*IBID.*, d. "Gay and Antiviolence Project."

<sup>49</sup>*IBID.*, d. "Gay and Antiviolence Project."

<sup>50</sup>"Gay and Antiviolence Project (GALAP)," Activism, Box 1, Folder 11, Michelle Crone Papers, 1927-2000, 1987-1988, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

collected, will be directed to the police and press to demonstrate that this violence is occurring despite disbelief.

A second section, Purposes, it is broken down into 4 subsections labeled “a, b, c, and d.”<sup>51</sup> The four subsections are the primary purposes of the GALAP project. The first purpose is so GALAP can fix relations between the gay community and police. Therefore, victims of hate-based crimes would feel more comfortable voicing their concerns to the police. The next step is to make sure that these victims are provided with proper legal counsel. The third purpose is identified as “to bring a sense of self-awareness and also self defense to the community.”<sup>52</sup> This would reinforce positive ideas of LGBTQ+ members to Albany’s community. Lastly, the fourth purpose of GALAP is to ensure that those who commit hate-crimes against LGBTQ+ members will indeed be punished accordingly by the law.<sup>53</sup>

Finally, the third section titled “Funding needs” addresses where money contributed to GALAP will go: outreach, (postage, posters, and pamphlets), and a hotline to further gather violence-data and to help direct hate-crime victims.<sup>54</sup> Lastly, funding will go towards NGLTF (National Gay/Lesbian Task Force, now known as LGBTQ Task Force) publication-ordering.<sup>55</sup> Such an organization as GALAP and their mission statements is relevant to how spikes in LGBTQ+ hate crimes were being handled during the peak of AIDS. As it appears, not much was done by local police or government so organizations like GALAP often took matters into their own hands. The very existence of GALAP highlights how little local police/government were willing to intervene in these matters. Donations for organizations as GALAP was crucial, as it was money being brought right back to Albany’s LGBTQ+ members.

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<sup>51</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Gay and Antiviolence Proejct (GALAP).”

<sup>52</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Gay and Antiviolence Proejct (GALAP).”

<sup>53</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Gay and Antiviolence Proejct (GALAP).”

<sup>54</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Gay and Antiviolence Proejct (GALAP).”

<sup>55</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Gay and Antiviolence Proejct (GALAP).”

However, it is also critical to understand the side of police and Albany's local government in these matters. As noted above, some of Albany's government officials believed "there should be no special protection for some segments of our society."<sup>56</sup> This is a fair concern to draw, without necessarily looking at the data that spoke to exponential increases in homophobic language, violence, and threats. There were a variety of marginalized communities at this time that most likely needed government intervention/aid as well, besides the LGBTQ+ community. Also, despite the claims of activists at this time, some police officers within Albany were in contact with these activists to further help the gay and lesbian population. For example, in a correspondence between the activist Michelle Crone and Albany's Deputy Chief John Dale, Michelle Crone states "I wanted to take this opportunity before too much more time passes to thank you for meeting with the Albany Anti-Violence/Harassment Project... Regarding the police liaison to the lesbian and gay community, we appreciate your offer to be available to us when the need arises... We very much appreciate your offer to assign a police officer for us to work with in developing an outreach campaign to our community."<sup>57</sup>

As it's clear from Crone's words, the police staff of Albany offered their services and aid to the local activists attempting to combat AIDS-related violence. The police met with Crone, offering to be available, and went as far to assign a police officer for an outreach campaign being designed. So although it would appear that higher officials in Albany did nothing, they did indeed offer their time and services to the gay and lesbian community.

However, if they actually did so is another question. Words as Deputy Chief John Dale's were rather empty as activists and Albany groups pleaded for support as violence was still

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<sup>56</sup>Gutis, Philip S, "Anti-Bias Bill Is Killed in Albany," In *The New York Times Newspaper*, Albany Activism, Box 1, Folder 62, Michelle Crone Papers, 1927-2000, 1989, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

<sup>57</sup>"Dear Chief Dale Correspondence," Albany Activism, Box 1, Folder 11, Michelle Crone Papers, 1927-2000, 1987 M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

occurring. The very existence of ACT UP and GALAP were clear indicators of the absence of needed government and police assistance. Many queer people within the city also didn't necessarily trust the police, particularly if they were AIDS-positive. News of their identity and status could possibly become public. Also, after national events as Stonewall, where police raided gay and lesbian spaces, police and LGBTQ+ relations were already rather strained.<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, the work of activists such as Crone, ACT UP, and GALAP eventually began to be recognized by the Albany community. The pleas for a proper address of the AIDS crisis and correct information were starting to be heard. The first steps to this can be seen in an AIDS- educational outline for Albany's public K-12 education system. This educational outline, although undated, is suspected to have been created between 1989-1992. This seemed to have been implemented by the City School District of Albany, but possibly written by the Bureau of Health and Physical Education department. There is a step by step set of lessons for grades K-12.<sup>59</sup>

The lessons for each grade seemingly seem to get more detailed and specific. Kindergarten education focusing on "Practice of Good Health Habits," First grade education also focuses on the same.<sup>60</sup> Then, with Grade two, there are more added lessons, such as "Show an appreciation of one's uniqueness and the uniqueness of others."<sup>61</sup> Third grade education then becomes more complex as the children become older. For example, the first lesson in their plan is "Distinguish between communicable and non-communicable diseases."<sup>62</sup> Fourth grade

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<sup>58</sup>Walsh, Colleen, "Stonewall then and now," World, *The Harvard Gazette*, 06/27/2019.

<sup>59</sup>City School District of Albany: Bureau of Health and Physical Education, "AIDS Curriculum Lesson: AIDS Education," Box 1, Folder 3, Act Up Albany (N.Y.) Chapter Records, 1983-1992, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York (hereafter referred to as the Act Up Albany (N.Y.) Chapter Records).

<sup>60</sup>*IBID.*, d. "AIDS Curriculum Lesson: AIDS Education."

<sup>61</sup>*IBID.*, d. "AIDS Curriculum Lesson: AIDS Education."

<sup>62</sup>*IBID.*, d. "AIDS Curriculum Lesson: AIDS Education."

education then delves into the specificity of AIDS, such as lesson plans titled “Know ways AIDS cannot be transmitted,” and “How you get AIDS (Methods of Transmission).”<sup>63</sup>

Grades five and six have the same lesson plans of how AIDS can be transmitted, as well as a focus of personal health, community, and abstinence. Seven and eight education again reiterate the ways AIDS can/cannot be transmitted. However, grade seven emphasizes that even if a person may seem healthy, they could still have AIDS.<sup>64</sup> Both continue to focus on abstaining from shared drug use and sexual abstinence. Grades nine through eleven also reiterate the same points from previous lesson plans, of “delaying sexual activity,” transmission methods, effective communication, and then one’s individual rights.<sup>65</sup> Grade twelve includes all the same points that are mentioned throughout nine-eleven. The lesson plan goes grade by grade, examining what is appropriate to teach young students about the crisis. However, this system is effective because it introduces correct information to children starting when they’re young and expands the knowledge as the grade increases.

With the labor of activist Michelle Crone and those similar, there was a higher demand for proper information to be implemented to better understand AIDS. Albany’s ACT UP Chapter was influential in improving the local community’s sexual-health education. Having a plan to teach K-12 students highlights that activists were being listened to. More effective applications of AIDS and Queer-health began to take shape across the nation due to consistent demands. The very idea of this implementation in Albany’s K-12 school illustrated how influential these activists were in making positive reforms. Following this action in the 1990’s, additional representation, equality, and action throughout NY advanced for the LGBTQ+ community. By recognizing AIDS as serious enough to address in K-12 instruction, NY also further recognized

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<sup>63</sup>*IBID.*, d. “AIDS Curriculum Lesson: AIDS Education.”

<sup>64</sup>*IBID.*, d. “AIDS Curriculum Lesson: AIDS Education.”

<sup>65</sup>*IBID.*, d. “AIDS Curriculum Lesson: AIDS Education.”



the needs and rights of the gay population. Although these changes came much later in the 1990's/early 2000's, the continuous activism of ACT UP and groups similar were finally able to receive justice. Albany officials, as well as other state governments were beginning to enact protections that were specifically written into law. For example, in 2002, "NYC expands the definition of "gender" to include protections for transgender and gender non-conforming people in employment, housing, and public accommodations in the NYC Human Rights Law."<sup>66</sup>

The need for direct mention of gender and sexual orientation to be clearly written into law was something Albany activists as Crone fought for. Their dedication to the cause of gay and lesbian equality was finally being put into law after several years. Similarly in 2003, "The U.S. Supreme Court overturns sodomy laws, proclaiming rights to privacy and decriminalizing 'homosexual' behavior."<sup>67</sup> Not just Albany law, but the nation was beginning to seriously acknowledge the inequities faced by the community, taking strides towards equality. Albany, NY has since become an enriched, welcoming city for LGBTQ+ members. The protests, marches, vigils, ordinances, and projects of Queer organizations as ACT UP have given gay people a platform to be fully expressive of their true selves without fear of consequence from their city's governments or their workplaces. Yet there are still more subtle concerns that lie in the community.

It may appear that the LGBTQ+ individuals today should have little concern over their equality in society. However there are numerous instances of attacks on gay and lesbian livelihood still existant today. An important question for young activists and existing organizations today is what else can be done to promote the well-being of gay people, not just locally but across the world. Michelle Crone, although a seemingly unknown activist, dedicated

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<sup>66</sup>GLSEN "LGBTQ History Timeline Reference," Page Three, <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/LGBTQ-History-Timeline-References.pdf>.

<sup>67</sup>*IBID.*, d. "LGBTQ History Timeline Reference."

her life for the equal rights of gay individuals. I believe she is someone to aspire to in the realm of activist work, because all people should care about the protection of marginalized members of society. The needs of LGBTQ+ people should be considered with every political decision being made, as not doing such results in a “waste of energy and loss of human potential that is created by discrimination is a cost that is borne by the entire population.”<sup>68</sup> Crone and ACT UP were attempting to directly demonstrate the loss of human potential created by discriminatory practices against the LGBTQ+ community. Crone was “engaged in gay politics, not just in Albany but on a statewide basis. She did a lot to make the Gay community more visible.”<sup>69</sup> Crone’s and activists’ similar dedication and drive for justice in the Albany region have seen lasting effects, such as AIDS K-12 curriculum and unprecedented laws protecting Queer people. It’s crucial to be thankful for their work, but to also take initiative from it, as there is still much left to do in the fight for gay rights. As former SUNY Albany professor Harlow Robinson stated, “We have to defend the things we’ve gained.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>*IBID.*, d. “Anti-Bias Bill Is Killed in Albany.”

<sup>69</sup>*IBID.*, d. Robinson, Harlow, in discussion with the author.

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