



11 LGBTQ+ Facts From AR History

Did you know that the CALS EOA has many entries on LGBTQ+ issues, celebrities, laws, books, and more?



The Encyclopedia of Arkansas launched in 2006 with 700 entries and 900 pieces of media.

In 2019 we switched platforms from the original proprietary site to a newly designed WordPress site.

And then in August 2022 we undertook a further redesign of the homepage, search function, and user experience features.

You can stop by the EOA for tidbits like THIS DAY IN ARKANSAS HISTORY and PHOTO OF THE DAY...

As well as trending entries and or to see what's been newly updated. (And here's a hint, we are updating all the time.)

[ALL ENTRIES](#)
[FLOOD OF 1927](#)

≈7,600 entries

Flood of 1927

AKA: Great Flood of 1927
AKA: Mississippi River Flood of 1927
AKA: 1927 Flood

The Flood of 1927 was the most destructive and costly flood in Arkansas history and one of the worst in the history of the nation. It afflicted Arkansas with a greater amount of devastation, both human and monetary, than the other affected states in the **Mississippi River** Valley. It had social and political ramifications which changed the way Arkansas, as well as the nation, viewed relief from natural disasters and the responsibility of government in aiding the victims, echoing the **Hurricane Katrina** disaster in the present day.

In largely agrarian Arkansas, the Flood of 1927 covered about 6,600 square miles, with thirty-six out of seventy-five Arkansas counties under water up to thirty feet deep in places. In Arkansas, more people were affected by the floodwaters (over 350,000), more farmland inundated (over two million acres), more Red Cross camps were needed (eighty of the 154 total), and more families received relief than any other state (41,243). In Arkansas, almost 100 people died, more than any state except Mississippi. In monetary terms, the losses in Arkansas (totaling over \$1 million in 1927 dollars for relief and recovery) surpassed any other affected state.

The Flood of 1927 had its origins both in nature and in man. In the late 1920s, technological advances kept pace with the growing economy. Heavy machinery enabled the construction of a vast system of **levees** to hold back rivers that tended to overrun their banks. Drainage projects opened up new, low-lying lands that had once been forests but had been left bare by the **timber industry**.

ENTRY

Flood of 1927

TIME PERIOD

Early Twentieth Century (1901 - 1940)

CATEGORY

Environment / Land and Resources / Natural Disasters

TYPE

Event

LESSON PLANS

1927 Flood (Grades 5-8)

Arkansas's Top Ten Events (Grades 6-12)

Hard Times (Grades 7-12)

Mucket Mania (Grades 6-12)

Rollin' on the River (Grades 5-12)

Southern Flood Blues (Grades 9-12)

We currently have about 7,600 entries online.

We are often compared to Wikipedia but we are not crowd-edited.

All our content is peer-reviewed and staff edited. That means you can use the CALS EOA knowing it has the same accuracy and legitimacy as a published book or article.

Anyone can write for the EOA but all entries are reviewed by other scholars, fact checked, and edited for grammar and spelling.

- 
- **EVERY** incorporated community
 - **Government officials**
 - **Civil rights organizations from NAACP to CLOB**
 - **EVERY** military action including the smallest skirmishes
 - **Wildlife, flowers, plants**

WE HAVE ENTRIES ON ...

Every incorporated community and hundreds of unincorporated ones, and are always seeking more.

ENTRIES ON

Government officials, from those who served in Congress, to Arkansas constitutional officers, to individual state legislators, and even significant sheriffs, mayors, and county judges.

Civil rights organizations from the national level, such as the NAACP, to the local level, such as CLOB (Council for Liberation of Blacks).

Military events from the Civil War, ranging from major battles (Pea Ridge) down to small local skirmishes; if someone in blue and someone in gray met in the woods between 1861 and 1865 we probably have an entry documenting it.

AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT - birds, fish, mammals, reptiles, and insects but also fungi, lichens, ferns, jellyfishes, slime molds YOU NAME IT!

AND WE ARE ALWAYS DEVELOPING MORE...

Developing entries on every film set or filmed in Arkansas, as well as every book, television show, and even individual episodes set in the state (Search: X-Files).



Produced by a public library

Users in 230 countries

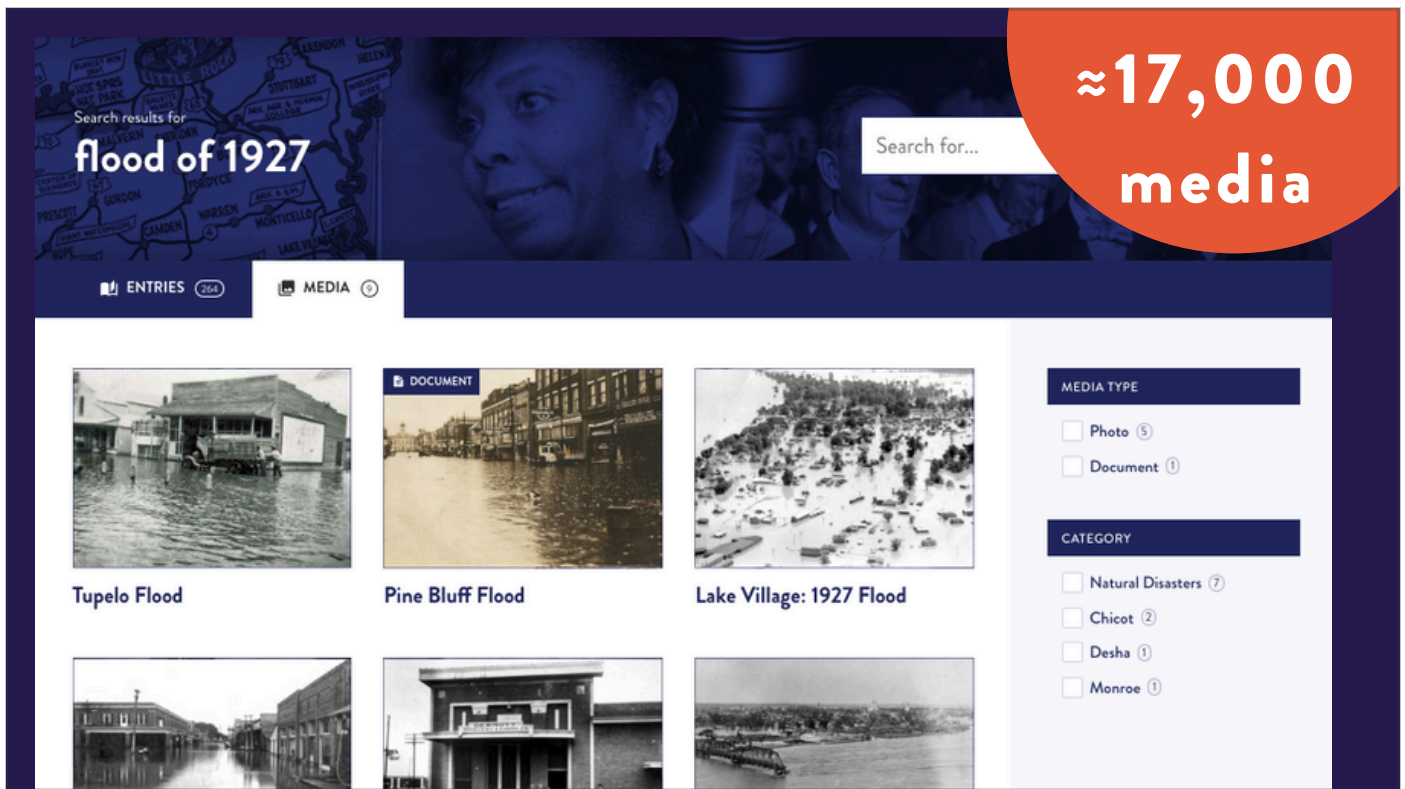
EVERY continent

We are unique in that we are produced by a public library.

Our site is used by government agencies and officials, students, media, genealogists, journalists, historians (local and national).

Users have come from every continent (including Antarctica) and more than 230 countries.

This year so far we've averaged approximately 194,000 users per month.



AND DO WE HAVE MEDIA...

We currently have about 17,000 pieces of media published on the site.

We have worked with archives, libraries, museums, and universities around the state and the country to make sure that the EOA has visual images to illustrate our entries.

BUT THERE IS ALWAYS MORE TO FIND...

We accept submissions from everyday citizens of any photos you've taken we can pair with an entry. For example we love photos of water towers from small towns.



11 LGBTQ+ Facts From AR History



Let's dive into some LGBTQ+ history.

Item 1

The LGBTQ+ Movement

If you want to learn more about the LGBTQ+ experience in Arkansas, a great place to start is our overview entry.

The social movement in Arkansas in support of rights for LGBTQ+ people (an umbrella term that covers lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and more; LGBT was also used in the past) has historically been represented by such legal organizations as Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), Lambda Legal, and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). This was followed by an increasing organization of LGBTQ+ people in Arkansas, primarily in the emergence of student groups at the University of Arkansas (UA) in Fayetteville (Washington County) and other institutions of higher education. Despite statewide and nationwide strides toward equality under the law, LGBTQ+ Arkansans still face ongoing discrimination—and the fight for rights, safety, and acceptance is far from over.



This is a photo of Randy McCain at a press conference at the Arkansas State Capitol, during which the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund announced its lawsuit against the state's sodomy law; January 1998.



Item 2

Jegley v. Picado

Larry Jegley v. Elena Picado, et al. was a 2002 decision by the Arkansas Supreme Court that struck down Arkansas's sodomy law, which criminalized homosexual behavior. It was the first time that the Supreme Court removed a legal prohibition against homosexual relationships, and the decision was cited many times in the next dozen years by state and federal courts in several states that invalidated such laws.

Sodomy laws preceded American independence. The colonies criminalized homosexual acts, which were often death-penalty offenses. Sodomy was a felony in every state until 1962, when states began to liberalize the laws.



This is a photo of Annabelle Clinton Imber Tuck, the first woman elected justice of the Arkansas Supreme Court.

The U.S. Supreme Court had found in 1986 (*Bowers v. Hardwick*) that state laws making homosexuality a crime did not violate those guarantees in the federal Constitution. Justice Annabelle Imber wrote the 2002 majority opinion striking down the statute; her opinion was widely praised for its clarity and thoroughness.



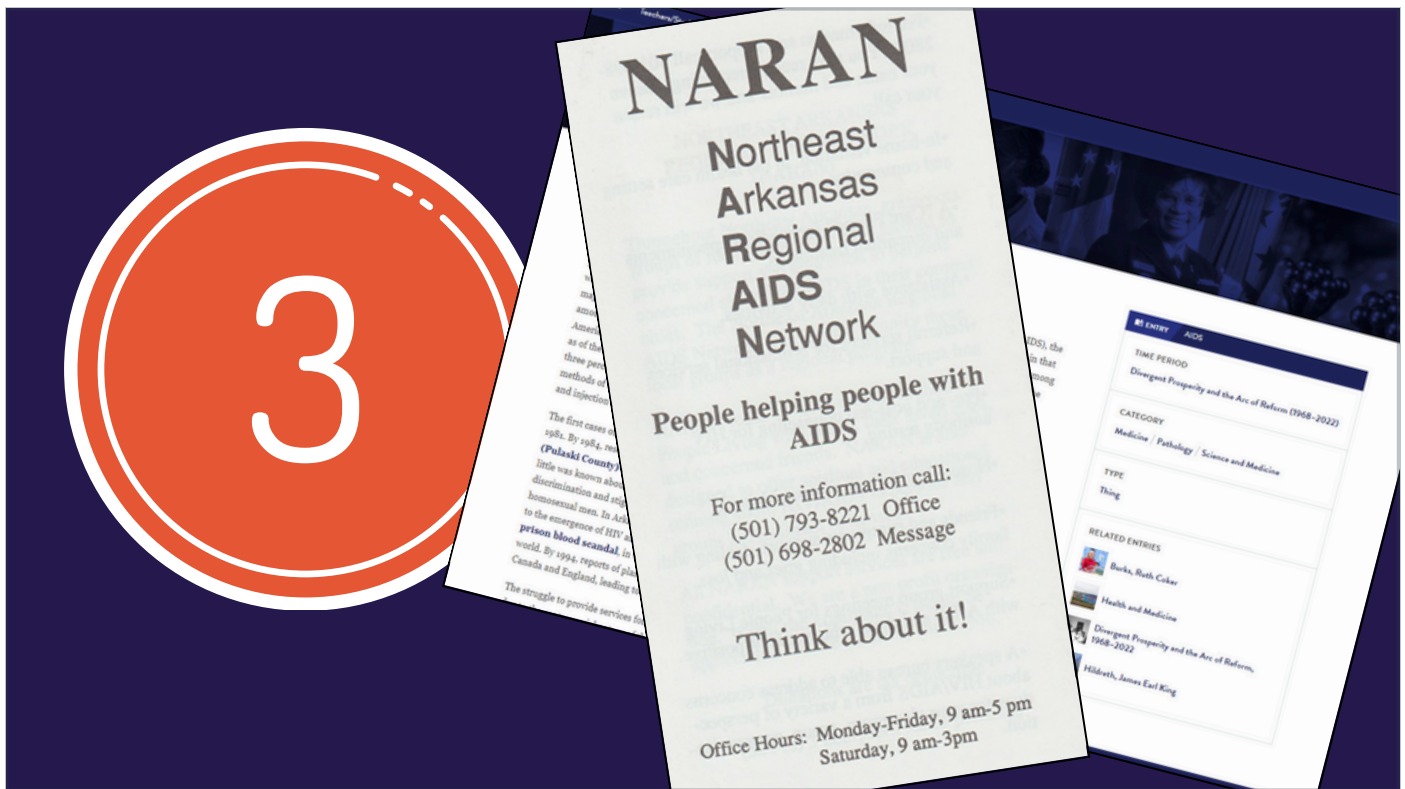
Item 3

The AIDS Crisis and Backlash

The first cases of AIDS in the United States were identified by clinical investigators in New York and California in 1981. By 1984, researchers were able to identify HIV as the cause of AIDS. In 1983, a Little Rock man in his early twenties became the first Arkansan to die of AIDS-related pneumonia. Because little was known about HIV and AIDS in the early days of the disease, public reaction to the epidemic included discrimination and stigma against the populations who were at risk for the disease—namely bisexual and homosexual men. In Arkansas, the gay rights movement suffered a major setback in the mid-1980s largely due to the emergence of HIV and AIDS.

By 2007, a cumulative 4,119 Arkansans had been diagnosed with Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), the disease caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), with 196 of those cases being newly diagnosed that year. Of all cases diagnosed in Arkansas, more than eighty percent were among men, fifty-seven percent were among whites, and forty percent were among African Americans.

Of those 4,119 diagnosed with AIDS, more than 2,000 were people living with AIDS at the end of 2007. A total of 1,834 people with AIDS in Arkansas had died by the end of 2007. The majority (fifty-three percent) of AIDS cases in Arkansas were most likely transmitted through male-to-male sexual conduct. Other methods of transmission that presented themselves among a large number of those cases were heterosexual contact and injection drug use.



This is a picture of the cover of a Northeast Arkansas Regional AIDS Network membership brochure.

If you think discrimination surrounding HIV/AIDS is a thing of the past, realize that as late as 2014 the FDA had a lifelong ban against sexually active gay and bisexual men donating blood. In 2015 they updated this policy to say that gay and bisexual men who wished to donate blood had to abstain from sexual contact with another man for 12 months. Then, in 2020, they shortened that to three months. Most recently, in May 2023, the FDA finalized guidance around blood donation eligibility based on a set of questions about the potential donor's sexual activity.



Item 4

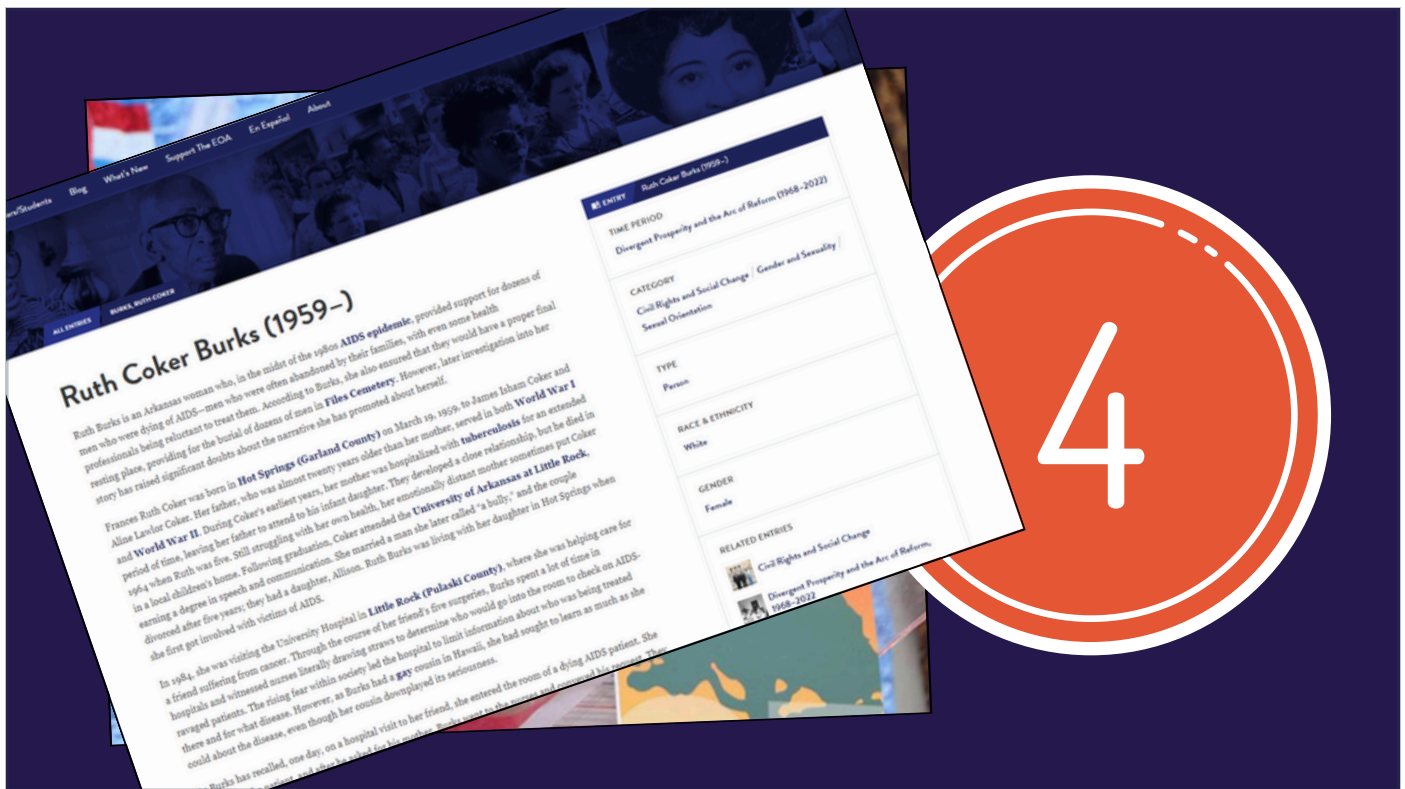
Ruth Coker Burks (1959–)

This is a photo of Ruth Coker Burks. Burks is an Arkansas woman who, in the midst of the 1980s AIDS epidemic, provided support for dozens of men who were dying of AIDS—men who were often abandoned by their families, with even some health professionals being reluctant to treat them.

As Burks recalled, she entered the room of a dying AIDS patient. She spoke with the patient, and after he asked for his mother, Burks went to the nurses and conveyed his request. They dismissed it, saying that his mother would not come, introducing Burks to the family abandonment that was so often a part of the dying men's experiences.

As word of her efforts—the willingness to engage with dying patients, the calls to families on their behalf—spread, she became the go-to person in Arkansas for the care and comfort of dying AIDS patients. She was known as the AIDS Angel and the Cemetery Angel.

When Bill Clinton was elected president, Burks served as a White House consultant on AIDS education. Burks suffered a stroke in 2010 but she remained an outspoken advocate for better understanding of HIV and AIDS.



Her reputation was tarnished when a GoFundMe campaign--intended to create a memorial at Files Cemetery for the gay men who died--resulted in no memorial. Burks admitted to spending some of the money on her own medical expenses.



Item 5

George Takei (1937–)

George Hosato Takei, who was held in an Arkansas internment camp at Rohwer as a boy during WWII, gained international fame as Lieutenant Sulu in the original Star Trek television series and movies.

5

Japanese American Relocation Camps

After Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, and America's subsequent declaration of war and entry into World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the War Relocation Authority (WRA), which selected ten sites to incarcerate more than 110,000 Japanese Americans (sixty-four percent of whom were American citizens). They had been forcibly removed from the West Coast, where over eighty percent of Japanese Americans lived. Two internment camps were selected and built in the **Arkansas Delta**, one at **Rohwer** in **Desha County** and the other at **Jerome** in sections of **Chicot** and **Drew** counties. Operating from October 1942 to November 1945, both camps eventually incarcerated nearly 16,000 Japanese Americans. This was the largest influx and incarceration of any racial or ethnic group in the state's history. One of the sites, Rohwer, is on the National Register of Historic Places.

After Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and America's entry into World War II, many Americans, especially those living on the West Coast, feared an eventual invasion by the empire of Japan. Over eighty percent of the Japanese American population living in the United States at the time lived along the coast in the states of Washington, Oregon, and California. Many West Coast citizens viewed the concentrated Japanese American communities as potential enclaves for espionage and "fifth-column" activities. Fueled by war hysteria, reinforced by decades of racial hatred, and citing the "doctrine of military necessity," President Roosevelt on February 19, 1942, signed Executive Order 9066, giving the secretary of war the power to designate military areas from which "any or all persons may be excluded" and authorized military commanders to initiate orders they deemed advisable to enforce such action.

On March 18, Roosevelt created the WRA for the "relocation, maintenance, and supervision" of the Japanese American population. The search for sites for America's first Japanese American "relocation center," as they were euphemistically labeled by the WRA, was limited to federally owned lands suitable enough to house from five to eight thousand people and located, as the War Department required, "a safe distance from strategic works." By June

After graduating from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1960, he began making guest appearances in theater arts at UCLA, which he received

ENTRY Japanese American Relocation Camps

TIME PERIOD

World War II through the Fushus Era (1941 - 1967)

CATEGORY

Civil Rights and Social Change / Government and Politics
National / Projects / Race / World War II to Fushus Era

TYPE

Place

RACE & ETHNICITY

Asian American

LESSON PLANS

Japanese Americans and the Rohwer Relocation Camp
(Grades 5-8)

Under one Flag (Grades 4-12)



In 2005, Takei announced that he is gay and had been with his partner, Brad Altman, for eighteen years. In 2008, he and Altman were married in the wake of the California Supreme Court's ruling legalizing same-sex marriages.

An outspoken proponent of gay rights, Takei received the Equality Award from the Human Rights Campaign in 2007 and the American Humanist Association's LGBT Humanist Award in 2012.

The phrase "It's okay to be gay" got a makeover in 2011, amidst proposed school restrictions and even laws insisting to students and citizens "Don't say Gay." George suggested to fans that they could use his name instead: "It's okay to be Takei."

His 2014 documentary was titled "To Be Takei."



In 2013, the World War II Japanese Internment Museum opened in McGehee (Desha County) to document the history of the two Japanese American internment camps in Rohwer and Jerome, Arkansas.

A self-guided audio tour of the museum was narrated by actor and activist George Takei. Takei, who had taken a special interest in the project, spoke at the opening. He returned to participate in the fifth anniversary of the opening and again for the ten-year observance in 2023.



Item 6

Alice French aka Octave Thanet (1850-1934)

Alice French was a leading writer of local color stories and journalistic essays under the pseudonym Octave Thanet. She later claimed that she chose "Octave" because it was gender-neutral.



She published stories and essays in such national periodicals as the Atlantic Monthly, Harper's, Scribner's Magazine, and Century Magazine. These were often republished in book-length collections. She also published several novels and a work about photography.

In the 1890s, French published ten books. Between 1896 and 1900, fifty of her stories were published, and four different publishers collected five volumes for reprinting.

A resurgent interest in American local color in the late twentieth century revived Thanet's work. Some have read her stories as coded treatments of lesbian women.

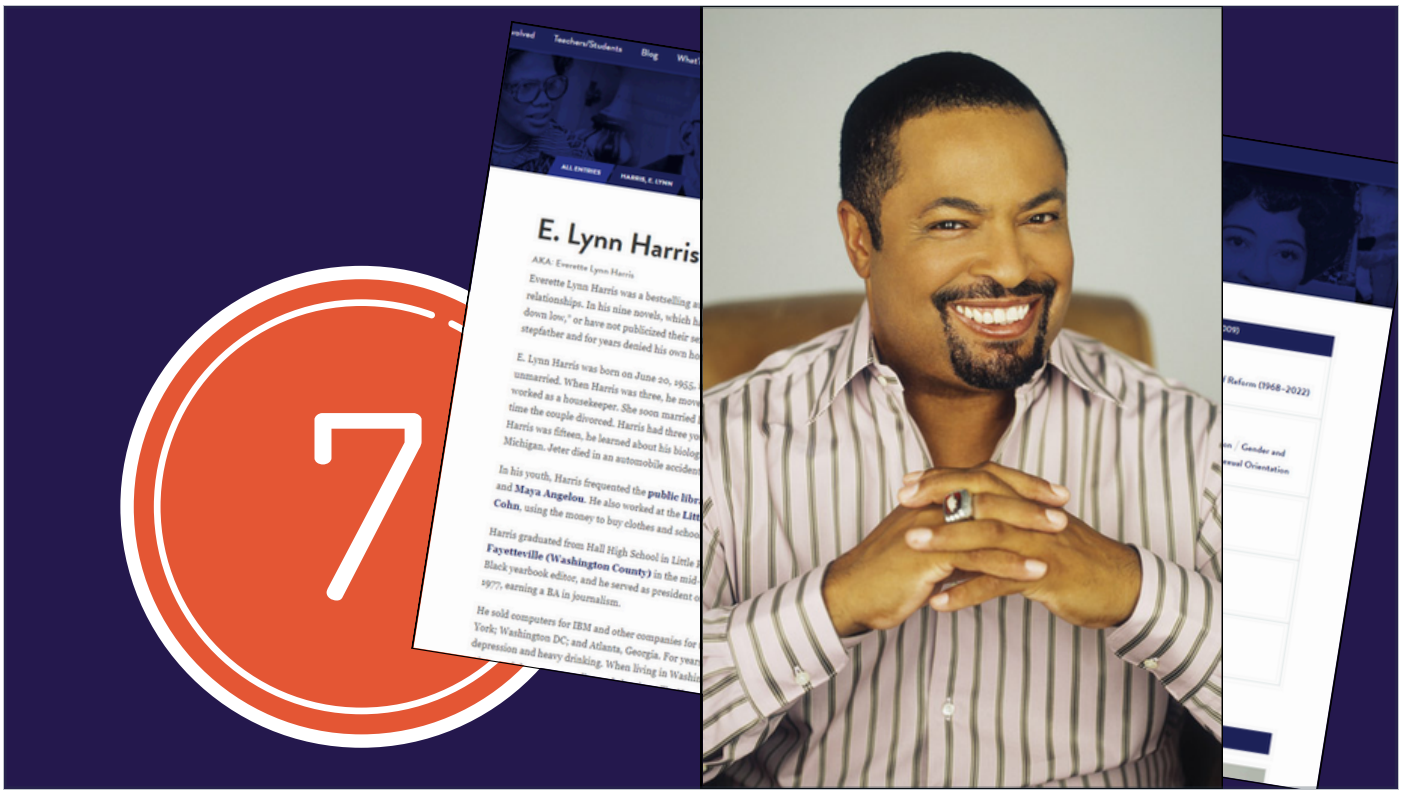
She and her lifelong partner, Jane Allen Crawford, split their declining years between their homes in Davenport, Iowa, and Lawrence County, Arkansas.



Item 7

E. Lynn Harris (1955–2009)

E. Lynn Harris was a bestselling author of novels about African American men in gay and bisexual relationships. In his nine novels, which have sold more than three million copies, the gay characters are “on the down low,” or have not publicized their sexuality. His books tell ultimately optimistic stories that explore friendship, careers, romance, sexuality, and race.



Harris, a Black man, endured years of abuse at the hands of his stepfather and for years denied his own homosexuality.

Harris graduated from Hall High School in Little Rock in 1973 and attended the University of Arkansas (UA) in Fayetteville (Washington County) in the mid-1970s. He was the school's first Black male cheerleader and first Black yearbook editor, and he served as president of his fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha. He graduated with honors in 1977, earning a BA in journalism.

Harris self-published "Invisible Life" in 1991. This novel caught the eye of a Doubleday sales representative, who bought a copy and sent it to the publishing house. Eventually, Harris made a presentation to company officials, who signed him to a three-book deal. Anchor Books, an imprint of Doubleday, published the book in trade paperback in 1994.

Just As I Am, Any Way the Wind Blows, and A Love of My Own all won Novel of the Year designations by the Blackboard African American Bestsellers Inc. In 1997, If This World Were Mine won the James Baldwin Award for Literary Excellence. His memoir, What Becomes of the Brokenhearted, which he wrote over a period of seven years, was published in 2003.

In 1999, Harris's alma mater, UA, honored him with a Citation of Distinguished Alumni for outstanding professional achievement. In 2000, he was inducted into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame. Other honors include the Sprague Todes Literary Award, the Harvey Milk Honorary Diploma, and the Silas Hunt Legacy Award for Outstanding Achievement from UA.

As a lecturer, Harris spoke at colleges across the country. He also wrote articles for Sports Illustrated, Essence, The Washington Post Sunday Magazine, The New York Times Book Review, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, and The Advocate.

Item 8

Peter Gregory McGehee (1955–1991)

Gay Arkansas-born novelist Peter Gregory McGehee was praised by reviewers for his outrageous comedies of Southern manners, in particular the sly humor with which he explores what he saw as a hypocritical society that easily rationalizes its own moral lapses even as it enforces a narrow, judgmental morality upon others.

Peter McGehee was born in **Pine Bluff (Jefferson County)** on October 6, 1955, to Frank T. and Julia Ann May McGehee. The middle of three children, he was six years old when the family moved to **Little Rock (Pulaski County)**, where he attended Forest Park Elementary School and, in 1973, graduated from Parkview High School. Shortly before he would have completed a BFA degree at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, he moved to San Francisco, California, where he worked at various odd jobs while writing plays. There, he performed in a satirical musical review titled, *The Quinlan Sisters*, for which he wrote the lyrics. The musical toured in cities in Oregon and western Canada. While in San Francisco, he met Doug Wilson (1950–1992), a visiting Canadian gay rights activist, with whom McGehee would be closely allied for the remainder of his life.

In 1980, McGehee immigrated to Canada to be with Wilson, living initially in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and—apart from a period spent in New York City for immigration purposes—in Toronto from 1983 onward. He wrote and performed in a one-man play (expanded and later published as the novella *Beyond Happiness*, 1983) that toured central Canada, New York, and San Francisco. He continued to perform in and write new material for *The Quinlan Sisters* as well as for a two-person revue, *The Fabulous Sirs*.

In the fall of 1988, McGehee was diagnosed to be HIV-positive. The progression of his HIV infection into full-blown **AIDS** in the spring of 1991 left him little time to enjoy the success that followed the publication of his first novel, *Boys Like Us* (1991), which was praised in the *New York Times* and elsewhere for its comic vitality and witty yet natural-sounding dialogue. McGehee was able to complete a second novel, *Sueverheart* (1992), and a collection of short stories, *The Soft-Spoken Man*, before his death; both were released posthumously, the latter only a week after his death.

ENTRY Peter Gregory McGehee (1955–1991)

TIME PERIOD
Divergent Prosperity and the Arc of Reform (1968–2022)

CATEGORY
Civil Rights and Social Change / Fiction / Gender and Sexuality / Literature and Authors / Sexual Orientation

TYPE
Person

RACE & ETHNICITY
White

GENDER
Male

RELATED MEDIA

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Item 9

Danielle Bunten Berry (1949–1998)

AKA: Daniel Bunten

Danielle (Dani) Berry was a revolutionary computer game designer who specialized in multi-player games at a time when few in the industry were interested in the idea. She is also remembered for breaking gender boundaries in the industry, having been assigned male at birth but undergoing gender transition late in her career. Berry's 1983 game *M.U.L.E.* was listed third on *Computer Gaming World's* 1996 list of the best games of all time, and Will Wright, the designer of *Sim City*, once said, "Ask most game designers what their favorite computer game of all time is, and you'll get *M.U.L.E.* as an answer more often than any other title." She was a major influence upon the likes of Wright and Civilization designer Sid Meier. She once said of her career, "When I was a kid, the only times my family spent together that weren't totally dysfunctional were when we were playing games. Consequently, I believe games are a wonderful way to socialize."

Danielle Berry was born Daniel Paul Bunten on February 19, 1949, in St. Louis, Missouri, the oldest of six children. The family moved to **Little Rock (Pulaski County)** in 1965, and Bunten lived in and around Little Rock until the last years of her life, when she moved to Palo Alto, California. The family occasionally experienced hard times, and Bunten worked at a drugstore and as an assistant scoutmaster for a Boy Scout troop to provide extra money. Bunten graduated from **Catholic High School for Boys**.

In 1975, Bunten opened a bicycle shop, the Highroller Cyclerie, near the **University of Arkansas (UA)** in **Fayetteville (Washington County)** and received a degree in industrial engineering from UA in 1974. Bunten's first job involved doing mathematical modeling of urban systems for the National Science Foundation, which Bunten said "was the closest thing to building games I could find." In 1978, Bunten's first computer game, *Wheeler Dealers* for the Apple II, was published by Speakeasy Software; one of the first multiplayer games in an era before networking, it was sold with a custom controller to allow multiple players. *Wheeler Dealers* only sold about fifty copies, but it was followed by three titles for SSI, an early computer game publisher: *Computer Quarterback* (1978), *Castle & Countess* (1980), and *Outpost Masters* (1980).

ENTRY Danielle Bunten Berry (1949–1998)

TIME PERIOD
Divergent Prosperity and the Arc of Reform (1968–2022)

CATEGORY
Math and Computer Science / Science and Medicine / Science and Technology

TYPE
Person

RACE & ETHNICITY
White

GENDER
Female

RELATED ENTRIES
LGBTQ+ Movement
Divergent Prosperity and the Arc of Reform, 1968–2022

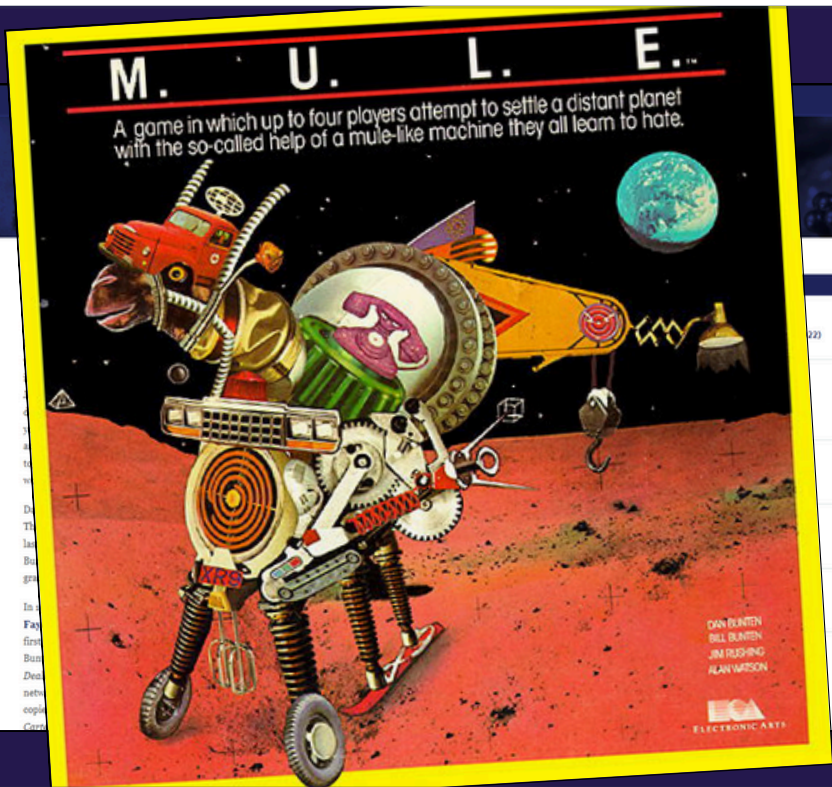
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9

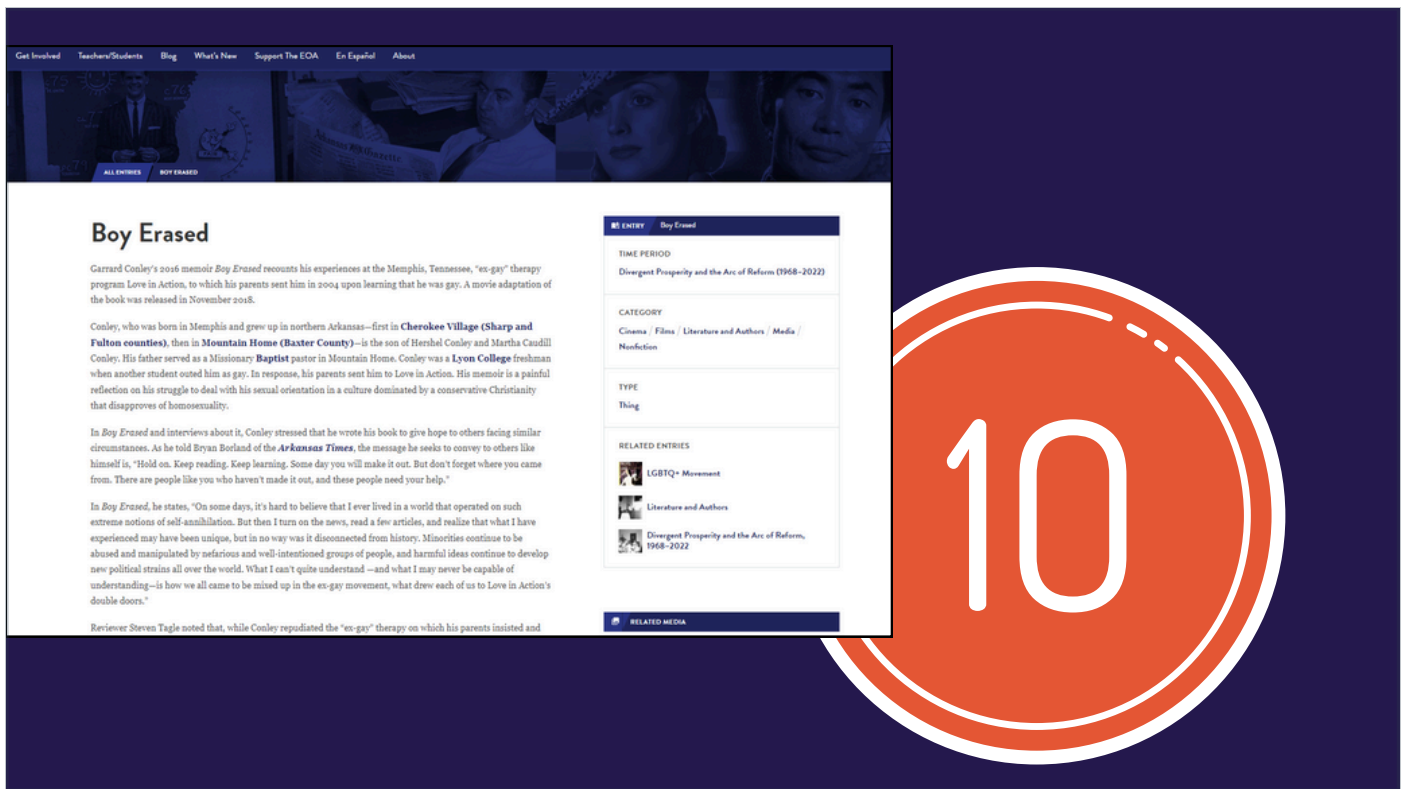


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In the early 1980s, Bunten founded Ozark Softscape in Little Rock as a venue for game development efforts. In 1982, Bunten was selected by Electronic Arts (EA), a recently founded company, as one of a handful of "electronic artists" it published, and Ozark developed five games for EA over the next few years. Bunten's most well-known game is probably M.U.L.E. (1983).

Bunten was married three times and had two sons and one daughter. In 1992, after the end of Bunten's third marriage, Bunten informed friends, coworkers, and family that she was embarking on the process of gender transition, adopting the name Danielle Bunten Berry (Berry being her mother's maiden name). Berry underwent medical aspects of gender transition in November 1992. For the next several years, as a transgender woman, Berry withdrew from the game industry to concentrate on her transition.

In May 1998, shortly before her death, she received an award for lifetime achievement from the Computer Game Developers Association. Berry died of lung cancer on July 3, 1998. In 2007, she was named to the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences Hall of Fame.



Item 10

Boy Erased

Garrard Conley's 2016 memoir *Boy Erased* recounts his experiences at the Memphis, Tennessee, "ex-gay" therapy program Love in Action, to which his parents sent him in 2004 upon learning that he was gay. A movie adaptation of the book was released in November 2018.

Conley grew up in northern Arkansas. His father served as a Missionary Baptist pastor. Conley was a Lyon College freshman when another student outed him as gay. In response, his parents sent him to Love in Action. His memoir is a painful reflection on his struggle to deal with his sexual orientation in a culture dominated by a conservative Christianity that disapproves of homosexuality.

In *Boy Erased* and interviews about it, Conley stressed that he wrote his book to give hope to others facing similar circumstances. As he told Bryan Borland of the *Arkansas Times*, the message he seeks to convey to others like himself is, "Hold on. Keep reading. Keep learning. Some day you will make it out. But don't forget where you came from. There are people like you who haven't made it out, and these people need your help."

While Conley repudiated the "ex-gay" therapy on which his parents insisted and began living an openly gay life, he writes with sympathy for his parents, and, in particular, his mother, who supported his decision to leave Love in Action.



In 2008, Love in Action's director Jon Smid resigned and in 2016 married his partner Larry McQueen. In his memoir *Ex'd Out*, he states that, in his view, "ex-gay" therapy is ineffective.

The movie adaptation of *Boy Erased* premiered on September 1, 2018, at the Telluride Film Festival and was released in U.S. theaters on November 2, 2018.

Boy Erased grossed \$7.9 million at the box office. The film enjoyed strong critical reception, with critics praising the understated tone of the film and how each detail held resonant meaning. They also gave it high marks for helping to educate audiences about conversion therapy.

As a statement scrolling across the screen at the end of *Boy Erased* reminds viewers, thirty-six states, at the time the film was released, still permitted conversion therapy. As Conley indicated in a "Talks at Google" interview with Sanders Kleinfeld, before his memoir came out, "there hadn't been a real definitive account, or at least a definitive literary account, of this type of therapy." Kleinfeld noted that *Boy Erased* broke new ground in discussing the effects of conversion therapy in a detailed account not previously found in popular culture. As Conley stresses, the roots of this therapy run deep in the religious culture of some areas of the United States, including Arkansas.



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ALL ENTRIES COX, V. L.

V. L. Cox (1962–)

V. L. Cox is a painter and mixed media artist whose work has achieved national acclaim for confronting institutional racism and homophobia.

Vicki Lynette Cox was born on August 14, 1960, in Shreveport, Louisiana, to Lynn Cox and Mary Hardman Cox; she has one sister. Her father, an illustrator and engineer, was stationed at Barksdale Air Force Base in Bossier City, and following the end of his service, the family moved to **Arkadelphia (Clark County)**, where both he and his wife had been born and raised. When Cox was ten years old, her grandmother, Virginia Louise Pilkington Hardman, enrolled her in a children's summer art program at **Henderson State University**. Cox's great-grandmother, Virginia Louise Betts Pilkington of **Washington (Hempstead County)**, was also an artist, and her work is in the permanent collection of **Historic Arkansas Museum**.

Her mother developed a substance abuse problem while Cox was young. After her parents divorced, Cox was regularly abused by her mother until one day Cox fought back, and an uncle took her away from the house. Her grandmother Virginia Hardman then became her legal guardian.

Cox was a founding member of the girls' athletic program at Arkadelphia High School, graduating in 1980, and began studying at Henderson State University in 1981. She played volleyball for Coach Bettye Wallace and became a member of the prestigious "Bettye's Reddies." Cox transferred to **Arkansas Tech University in Russellville (Pope County)** in 1984 to study engineering but left the following year to work and focus her interests. In 1988, she reenrolled at Henderson and earned a BFA in computer graphics in 1991.

After college, she started doing marketing and advertising work in Dallas, Texas, as well as set design and construction for the Dallas Opera, the Dallas Ballet, and the Studios of Los Colinas before relocating to Memphis, Tennessee, after being hired by another firm. During this time, Cox had also been pursuing her own art, including designing and painting the theme and background for the National Civil Rights Humanities Awards in Memphis.

ENTRY V. L. Cox (1962–)

TIME PERIOD
Divergent Prosperity and the Arc of Reform (1968–2022)

CATEGORY
Arts / Painting / Sculpture / Visual Arts

TYPE
Person

RACE & ETHNICITY
White

GENDER
Female

RELATED ENTRIES
 Arts, Culture, and Entertainment
 Divergent Prosperity and the Arc of Reform, 1968–2022

Item 11

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V. L. Cox is a painter and mixed media artist whose work has achieved national acclaim for confronting institutional racism and homophobia.



Vicki Lynette Cox grew up in Arkadelphia. When Cox was ten, her grandmother, Virginia Louise Pilkington Hardman, enrolled her in a children's summer art program at Henderson State University. Later, after Cox's mother's substance abuse and physical abuse came to light, this grandmother became her legal guardian.

After enjoying athletic programs in high school and at Henderson, Cox attended Arkansas Tech University in Russellville before returning to Henderson.

Cox did marketing, advertising, set design, and construction for the Dallas Opera, the Dallas Ballet, and the Studios of Los Colinas.

She also designed and painted the theme and background for the National Civil Rights Humanities Awards in Memphis.

Cox returned to Arkansas to work for Alltel. In 1997, she quit her corporate work to devote herself to art. She originally sold her paintings under her full name but realized that using only "V. L." allowed the focus to be on the artwork rather than her gender; her sales also increased.

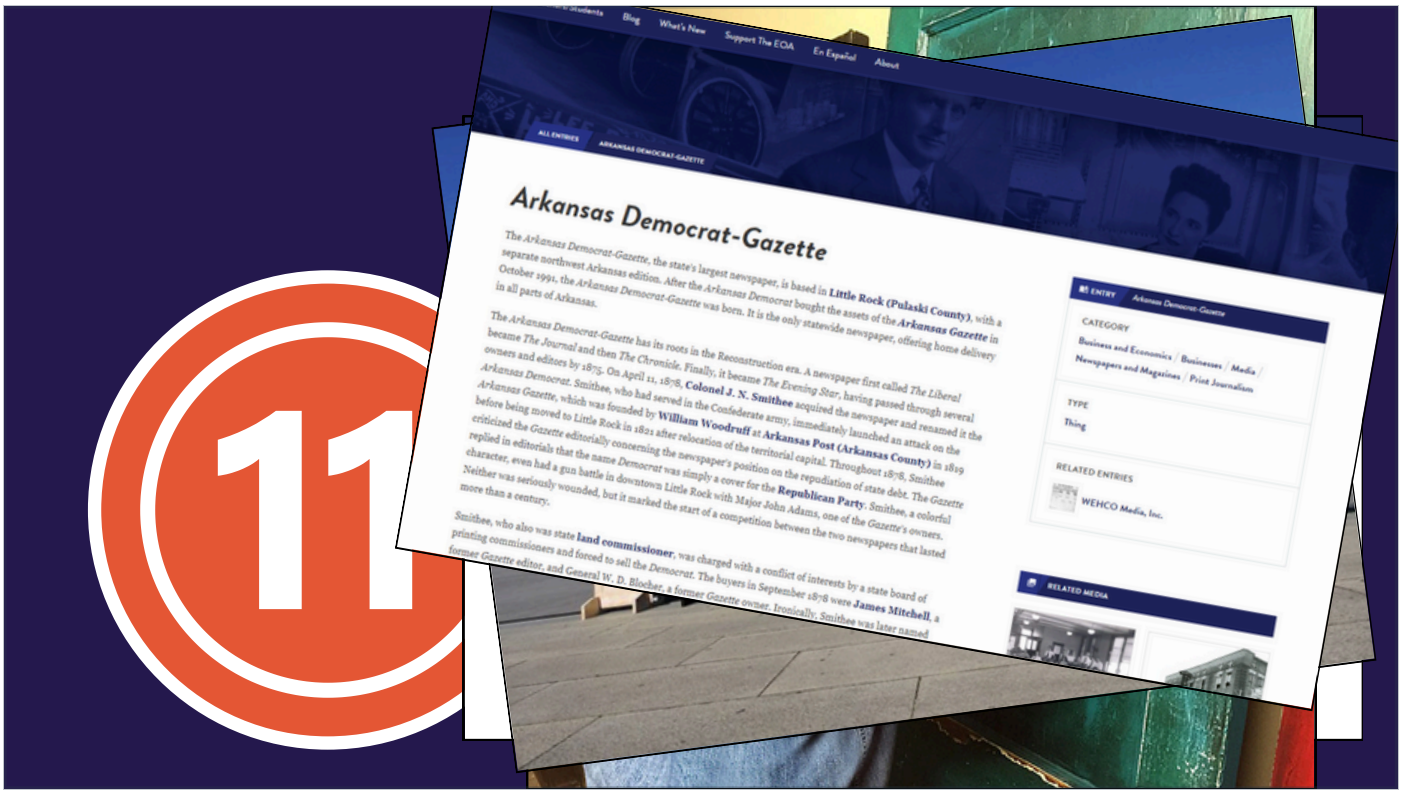


Cox's most publicized work has been a mixed media installation titled End Hate, which launched in 2015. The project was in response to the proposed Religious Freedom Restoration Act (Act 975 of 2015), which, as originally written, would have allowed discrimination against members of the LGBTQ+ community in Arkansas on the basis of religious beliefs. Governor Asa Hutchinson signed a modified version of the bill following national outrage.

The End Hate installation features a variety of different colored doors with labels on them such as "Colored Only" and "Whites Only" and "Veterans Only." The last door in the sequence, labeled "Human Beings," is wrapped in chains.

The doors were installed twice on the steps of the Arkansas State Capitol and then at the base of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC. Images of the doors went viral and attracted media attention nationally and internationally.

In 2018, after a national exhibition tour sponsored by the Longwood Center for the Visual Arts, the installation opened at the Rosa Parks Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, to coincide with the opening of the Equal Justice Initiative's National Memorial for Peace and Justice in that same city.



In an interview with the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, Cox described how the project “threw my whole personal life out there for everyone to see,” making her well-known as a lesbian artist.



QUESTIONS



This is just the tip of the iceberg. The Encyclopedia of Arkansas is a rabbit hole I encourage you to jump down. No matter what you are interested in, Arkansas has it--and the EOA is where you can start looking.