

Author searches for hidden history of gay New Orleans

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This scene is from the late 1920s play *Submerged*, used as an example in historian Alecia Long's lecture about the hidden gay community in New Orleans. The play, written by two New Orleans teenagers (Clay LeVergne Shaw and Stuart Cottman), has a subtext of same-sex desire that Long explores in her research. (Photo provided by Alecia Long)

Author and historian Alecia Long delved into a fascinating and tumultuous time period in the city's history in her lecture for the Fridays at Newcomb Series, speaking on the topic, "Submerged: Salvaging the Hidden History of Gay New

Orleans 1920-1940.”

Long, an associate professor at Louisiana State University, discussed material from her current research project, an upcoming book called *Crimes Against Nature: New Orleans, Sexuality and the Search for Conspirators in the Assassination of JFK*. Her interest in these topics came from historical accusations that Lee Harvey Oswald, an allegedly gay New Orleanian, conspired with other gay men in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

To investigate these accusations, Long had to cultivate an understanding of life as a gay man in 1920s-1940s New Orleans. During the lecture, she presented pieces of oral and visual history, including a map of gay bars during Prohibition, advertisements from a sporting paper and biographical accounts of those considered prominent members of the gay community.

One quote from a local resident summarized New Orleans' history as a haven of sorts for homosexuals: “Youngsters who develop homosexual tendencies are put on a train and sent to New Orleans.” Long noted that despite this environment in the city, homosexuality in general was considered wrong by mainstream society. Therefore, she added, “there were always things happening that are hard to see.”

After Prohibition, many gay bars were forced to go underground as the state passed ordinances on cross-dressing, prostitution and “crimes against nature,” all as part of a new state code that “was trying to deal with the increasingly visible “problem” of homosexuality in an effective legal manner.”

Long spoke on Friday (Sept. 18) in the series sponsored by the [Newcomb College Institute](#).