THE WWII AMERICAN HOMEFRONT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODERN LGBT MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES: A CASE STUDY IN USING THEMATIC AND PLACE-BASED METHODOLOGIES IN HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION FOR THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE (NPS)

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Concurrent thematic and place-based approaches improve our ability to interpret and interact with the history of the WWII home front. In conversation with NPS historians, Dr. Basso’s research team developed themes that would shed new light on the World War II home front experience and thereby lead to a richer understanding of the complexities of the period. These themes include the history of sexuality, the environment, disability, and gender, as well as Native American, Filipino American, Chinese American, Mexican American, and Latine communities. By selecting these themes before conducting source searches, we were able to ensure comprehensive and inclusive representation of relevant topics and demographics in our research. We found that a place-based approach, which was critical for our NPS goals, worked well with a thematic approach. Place-based approaches are well received by the public. They further their understanding of the past’s relevance to the present in a highly contextual setting. Our team researched the home front history of every state and territory focusing on sites in each place that revealed the new histories the NPS tasked us to illuminate. In the case of the relationship between the WWII home front and the modern LGBT movement in the United States, place-based history shows the importance of sites such as gay bars all over the country.
and how the war prompted migrations of individuals coupled with an American wartime ideology of freedom, which all too often did not apply to minority communities, shaped the practices and the geographic dispersion of the modern LGBT community.