

L2011.13
Vertez Burks
Collection, 1979-2017

FINDING AID AUTHOR

Gabrielle Garcia

ACQUISITION INFORMATION

Vertez Burks donated these materials to Lambda Archives of San Diego in 2011.

PROCESSING INFORMATION

This collection was processed by Gabrielle Garcia as part of the 2020 CSL Project. This project was guided by an overarching anti-racist framework that informs archival practice in all aspects at Lambda Archives. Therefore, along with processing the collections specified in the original narrative, we intentionally prioritize the collections of BIPOC and Transgender members of the community to preserve and disseminate their narratives, which have been historically ignored and suppressed in archives across the U.S.

This framework promotes transparency and accountability in our responsibility to those in the LGBTQ+ community that have been historically underrepresented, misrepresented and/or trivialized in archives. Our goals are to (a) gain or rebuild trust with BIPOC members of the community; (b) more fully reflect the community's diversity; (c) outwardly recognize the contributions that BIPOC have made which have enabled the community, as a whole, to flourish; and (d) improve the discoverability of these under-acknowledged histories to increase their engagement for varying purposes within the community and for research and public knowledge.

EXTENT

Number of containers: 3

Linear feet of shelf space: 3

ABSTRACT

BIOGRAPHY OR HISTORY

“Vertez Regina Burks grew up in Brooklyn, New York and was inspired to do volunteer work by watching her great-grandmother do work for her community: “When she walked into a room, everyone respected her. I wanted to be like that.” Vertez’s first experience with coming out was when she came out to herself as a lesbian when she was 10 years

old. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from Bethune-Cookman College and a master's degree in Special Education from New York University. Vertez also served as a volunteer for the Peace Corps for a time, where she worked as an elementary school teacher while stationed in Liberia, West Africa. After her time in the Peace Corps, Vertez moved to St. Croix in the Virgin Islands where she continued teaching elementary school and special education classes from 1969 to 1980. Vertez quit her teaching job in 1980 and from 1980 to 1985, she worked at a "low-power television station" as a videotape editor while taking classes to pursue her passion for videography. In 1985, she embarked on a planned vacation to San Diego, California to see a friend and never left.

This major turning point in Vertez's life came after deciding that she would come out to others while in San Diego at the age of 43. By that point, she was practically "clawing at the door to get out" of the closet. After deciding to stay in San Diego, Vertez finally came out to family and friends who all accepted her without question. She then began attending church services at the Metropolitan Community Church and "the rest is history." One day, she walked into The Center — which was then located behind the Brass Rail — and "was welcomed with open arms" and was very much needed. Burks soon became heavily involved in San Diego's LGBT community as a volunteer, leader and representative: "I wanted to see all there was to see in the gay world. That's just who I am." The first organization Vertez got involved with was Slightly Older Lesbians (SOL), which was "about the only women's group around at the time." She was thrilled to have a place where she could be an out lesbian around other out women. SOL met once a month on a Friday for a discussion group and would go out to a bar near Mission Gorge afterward to have fun. This group enabled her to be her most authentic self in a fully supportive environment. Up until this time, Vertez had only known the dominant cultural idea of what lesbians did, which was basically just having sex — but through these experiences with other lesbian women, she discovered true lesbian culture through literature, music and art. Vertez states in an interview with Lambda Archives that the years from 1985 to 1990 were a "changeover" period for lesbian women; since the men were struggling with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, more women were able to take leadership positions in community organizations and volunteer for just about everything.

In 1988, Burks volunteered for the Name's Project's national tour of the AIDS Memorial Quilt stop in San Diego and in 1989, took part in the founding of Lesbians and Gays of African Descent United (LAGADU) alongside Marti Corrine Mackey, John Guinn, and others. LAGADU was a women's and men's group and as such, the men met once a month on their own, the women did the same; these gender-divided groups acted as support groups, whereas the collective meeting was an arena for discussing organization business, fundraising, events, and other matters that involved all members. Vertez states that she "blossomed" during her time with LAGADU; she was volunteering for everything, meeting more people like herself, and establishing a place for herself within the LGBT community. According to Vertez, LAGADU was formed at a time when more African American LGBT people were arriving in San Diego ("going West") and searching for a community. Around the same time, she worked the door and emceed at Shirtails, which started out as a coffeehouse and evolved into a lesbian dance and performance venue.

LAGADU was founded at the same time that other groups for LGBT people of color were emerging, such as Gay and Lesbian Asian/Pacific Islander Social Support (GLASS) founded by Jim Cua and Nations of the Four Directions founded in 1989 by Karen Vigneault, Tom Lidot, Travis Anderson and Bobby Rubio. Because all of these organizations existed at the same time, leaders felt the need to coordinate with one another and formed SPECTRUM, a place for delegates from all of the groups for people of color to gather and update one another with what was going on in their respective organizations and how they could help one another. It also lessened the sense of isolation people of color felt within the predominantly white gay community. SPECTRUM put on yearly programs at The Center, which featured food from all represented nations (catered by Jess Jessop), workshops on people of color and AIDS, and workshops on women's issues. Even though SPECTRUM functioned for a few years, Vertez claimed that "it lasted as long as it was needed."

In August of 1990, Vertez went to Vancouver, Canada to volunteer for Gay Games III, where she worked hard as a bartender. Being at an event of that nature, seeing the Virgin Islands contingent, and feeling the sense of community pride "brought tears to [her] eyes...we came so far." 1990 was also the year that her friend Christine "Chris" Kehoe sponsored her to be on the San Diego Lesbian and Gay Pride Committee, though Vertez was nervous about participating as she was not out at work. During her time on the committee, she worked with other notable LGBT San Diegans including Toni Atkins, Jeri Dilno, Scott Fulkerson, and Doug Moore. After working on the Pride Committee, she was elected co-chair and served with co-chair Larry Baza from 1991-93. One year after marching at the front of the parade next to Baza, a coworker mentioned to her in the hallway that he had seen her on TV, to which she replied, "Yeah! At Gay and Lesbian Pride!" Coming out at work was "freedom" for her, stating that "once you come out, there are no more fears." On August 3, 1991, Vertez, Renee Richetts, and Erika Shatz hosted a safe-sex workshop titled "Hot, Healthy, and Safe: Lesbian Sex for the '90s" on behalf of The Center's Lesbian Health Project. The main program focused on presenting information on the transmission of STDs and HIV between two women, erogenous zone health care, and hygienic use of sex toys in a safe and supportive atmosphere. In August 1993, The Center's then-Executive Director Scott Fulkerson announced that Vertez would be The Center's representative for the LIFE AIDS Lobby with Doug Case as her alternate. LIFE AIDS Lobby was an organization (established in 1986) that aimed to create a "statewide advocacy network" that could be organized into a Sacramento lobby presence representing the LGBT community and those affected by HIV and AIDS. In July 1994, Vertez was awarded San Diego Pride's Community Service Award in recognition of her dedication to the community. In September 1994, Vertez served on then-Mayor Susan Golding's Gay and Lesbian Advisory Board where she and other LGBT leaders chose community issues such as AIDS, anti-LGBT discrimination, youth issues, and lesbian health concerns to put in front of the mayor so that appropriate action could be taken. Others on the advisory board included Dr. Michael Clark, Leslie Horn, Dr. Garrett Dettling, Cynthia Lawrence-Wallace, Nicole Murray-Ramirez and Tony Zampella.

On July 8, 2000, “hundreds of women who love women” and their supportive friends attended the third Dykes and Friends March and Rally. Dykes and Friends was the new name given to the original Dyke March, which took place in 1997; there was a two-year gap between the first and second march which took place in June 1999. The march went through Hillcrest and ended at the rally, which was held in The Center’s parking lot. Vertez spoke about her experience as a lesbian woman at the 1999 and 2000 rallies; other speakers included Toni Atkins, Bonnie Zimmerman, and Teresa Oyos. Vertez’s years of endless dedication to San Diego’s LGBT community was recognized at the 2005 Nicky Awards, where she was honored with the Board of Governors’ Lifetime Achievement Award. Vertez continues to lend a hand in the community when she is needed and employs her proficient videography skills in filming Pride’s official videos.”

Dana Wiegand, “Vertez Burks,” *LGBTQ San Diego County News*, June 4, 2020, <https://lgbtqsd.news/vertex-burks/>.

COLLECTION SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection consists of three boxes containing a large variety of materials pertaining to Black LGBTQ organizations, LGBTQ organizations of color, other LGBTQ-related organizations (HIV/AIDS, social services, lesbian-specific), San Diego Pride, Ebony Pride, San Diego based LGBTQ choruses, local theatrical and literary arts, publications (mostly pertaining to the LGBTQ community), and other subject matter such as healthcare, HIV/AIDS, marriage, religion, San Diego neighborhoods, and more. The folders contained scripts, flyers, newsletters, event programs, clippings, play bills, meeting minutes and agendas, transcripts, press releases, reports, schedules, pamphlets, brochures, lists, financial statements, invitations, letters, certificates, booklets, voter guides, lyrics, timelines, emails, directories, guides, manuals, business cards, stickers, notes, maps, souvenir programs, surveys, questionnaires, photos, forms, catalogues, poetry, articles, newspapers, magazines, and journals. The collection spans from 1979-2017, but the bulk of the items are from 1989-2005.

ARRANGEMENT

This collection consists of 3 boxes divided into 4 series with 11 sub-series.

- Series I: Organizations and Groups [Box 1-Box 2]
 - Sub Series I: Black/African American Organizations and Groups
 - Sub-Series II: People of Color Organizations and Groups
 - Sub-Series III: Fundraising Organizations
 - Sub-Series IV: Political Organizations and Groups
 - Sub-Series V: Women’s Organizations and Groups
 - Sub-Series VI: Health-Related Organizations and Groups
 - Sub-Series VII: Social Services and Community Organizations
 - Sub-Series VIII: Other Organizations and Conferences
 - Sub-Series IX: Prides and Other Events

- Series II: Arts [Box 2]
- Series III: Periodicals and Publications [Box 3]
 - Sub-Series I: Newspapers
 - Sub-Series II: Magazines and Journals
- Series IV: Miscellany [Box 3]

SEPARATED MATERIAL

In this field, list any materials that have been removed from the collection and transferred to another collection, department (e.g., the library), or institution.

1. Flat files [Q0717-Q0727]

SUBJECTS

Vertez Burks, San Diego Pride, Karibu, Lesbians and Gays of African Descent United (LAGADU), Black Men's Wellness Coalition, Shades of Color, Spectrum, African American Gay Women's Association (AAGWA), The Collective Voice of San Diego, Sistahz, City College African Student Union, Asian Pacific Islander Community AIDS Project (APICAP), Imperial Court de San Diego, San Diego Democratic Club (SDDC), Gay and Lesbian Advisory Board, Lesbian Gay Bisexual Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, Take Back the Night Coalition, Shirtails, Vibrant Activist Girls Invoking National Attention (V.A.G.I.N.A.), Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, United Way/CHAD, Life AIDS Lobby, The Center, Alternative Community Services, National Black Gay and Lesbian Conference, Ebony Pride, San Diego Women's Chorus, Lavender Light Gospel Choir, Labrys Productions, Lesbian Community Cultural Arts (LCCA), Gay and Lesbian Times, Gay & Lesbian Nation, Bravo Newsmagazine, Update, BLK Magazine, Outword, The Lavender, Dyke Review, Woman of Power, Womancare, AIDS/HIV, Literature, Performing Arts, Visual Arts, Awards/Commendations, Politics, Board Meetings, Religious, Christianity, City Government, Civil Rights Laws, Death, Democratic Party, Same Sex Marriage, Gay/Lesbian Weddings, Domestic Partnership, Drag, Education, African Americans, People of Color, Feminism, Film/Movie, Fundraising, Gentrification, Hate Crimes, Health, Women's Health Issues, Housing, Kwanzaa, Lesbians, Media, Magazines, Newspapers, Medical/Science, Organizations, Periodicals, Seniors, Aging, Sexual Behavior, Sex Toys, Social Events, Recreation, Women's Caucus

CONDITIONS GOVERNING ACCESS

Example:

This collection is open and available for research use. Copyright restrictions apply.

PREFERRED CITATION

The suggested citation for the collection is:

[Item Description]
Vertez Burks Collection, 1979-2017
Lambda Archives of San Diego
San Diego, California

RELATED MATERIAL

L2007.12, L2010.17

LOCATION NOTE

C.2.1.3

LANGUAGES

English

CONTAINER LIST

Box	Folder	Description	Date(s)	
1	1	Lesbians and Gays of African Descent (LAGADU), 1990-1992	1990-1992	
1	2	Karibu, 1996-1999	1996-1999	
1	3	Black Men's Wellness Coalition, 1999	1999	
1	4	Other Black-Specific Organizations and Groups, 1989-2002	1989-2002	
1	5	Other Black-Specific Documents		
1	6	Malcolm X Library Events, 2000-2002	2000-2002	
1	7	Spectrum 1998-1999	1998-1999	
1	8	Asian Pacific Islander Community AIDS Project (APICAP), 2003-2006	2003-2006	
1	9	Foundation for Change, 2004-2005	2004-2005	
1	10	Imperial Court de San Diego, 1996-2017	1996-2017	
1	11	San Diego Democratic Club (SDDC), 1993-2006	1993-2006	
1	12	Gay and Lesbian Advisory Board for Mayor Susan Golding, 1994-1997	1994-1997	
1	13	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, 1992-2004	1992-2004	
1	14	Take Back the Night Coalition, 1991-1994	1991-1994	
1	15	Shirtails, 1991-1992	1991-1992	
1	16	Vibrant Activist Girls Invoking National Attention (V.A.G.I.N.A.), 2001-2004	2001-2004	

1	17	Other Lesbian and Women-specific Papers, 1988-2008	1988-2008	
1	18	Old Lesbians Organizing for Change and Seniors with a Purpose, 2008-2010	2008-2010	
1	19	United Way/CHAD, 1992-1998	1992-1998	
1	20	Life AIDS Lobby, 1992-1995	1992-1995	
1	21	Life AIDS Lobby Delegate Meetings 1993-1994	1993-1994	
1	22	The Center, 1990-2007	1990-2007	
1	23	Alternative Community Services, 2005	2005	
1	24	Lambda Archives of San Diego, 2007-2012	2007-2012	
1	25	Other Organizations, 1997-2004	1997-2004	
1	26	Black and People of Color Conferences, 1989-2003	1989-2003	
1	27	Rainbow Summit, 1999	1999	
2	1	Gay and Lesbian Times Issues, 1993-1996	1993-1996	
2	2	Gay & Lesbian Nation Issues, 1989-1990	1989-1990	
2	3	Bravo Newsmagazine Issues, 1989-1993	1989-1993	
2	4	Update Issues, 1992-1999	1992-1999	
2	5	Other Newspaper Issues, 1989-2005	1989-2005	
2	6	BLK Magazine and Affiliated Publications, 1989-1991	1989-1991	
2	7	Outword Magazine, 1996	1996	
2	8	Lesbian Magazines and Journals, 1993-2010	1993-2010	
2	9	Women's Magazines and Journals, 1988-1994	1988-1994	
2	10	Other Magazines, 1989-2010	1989-2010	
2	11	Health and Healthcare (mainly Women's Health), 1993-2008	1993-2008	
2	12	HIV/AIDS Healthcare and Organizing, 1987-2002	1987-2002	
2	13	Memorial Objects, 1977-2005	1977-2005	
2	14	Film and TV, 1984-2003	1984-2003	
3	1	Gay and Lesbian Times Issues, 1993-1996	1993-1996	
3	2	Gay & Lesbian Nation Issues, 1989-1990	1989-1990	
3	3	Bravo Newsmagazine Issues, 1989-1993	1989-1993	
3	4	Update Issues, 1992-1999	1992-1999	
3	5	Other Newspaper Issues, 1989-2005	1989-2005	
3	6	BLK Magazine and Affiliated Publications, 1989-1991	1989-1991	
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3	10	Other Magazines, 1989-2010	1989-2010	
3	11	Health and Healthcare (mainly Women's Health), 1993-2008	1993-2008	
3	12	HIV/AIDS Healthcare and Organizing, 1987-2002	1987-2002	
3	13	Memorial Objects, 1977-2005	1977-2005	
3	14	Marriage, 1996-2008	1996-2008	
3	15	Discrimination, Hate Crimes, Violence, Homophobia, 1992-2000	1992-2000	
3	16	Religion, 1990-1995	1990-1995	
3	17	Sports, 1990	1990	
3	18	San Diego Neighborhoods, 1995-2004	1995-2004	
3	19	Personal Birthdays, Letters, Invites, 1996-2001	1996-2001	
3	20	Cubic Defense Systems, 1995-2007	1995-2007	
3	21	Heterosexual Questionnaire		
3	22	Memorabilia, 1996	1996	
3	23	Miscellany, 1987-2000	1987-2000	