

*Closeted/Out in the Quadrangles:
A History of LGBTQ Life at the University of Chicago*

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #2

STEWART-WINTER, TIMOTHY (1979-) MA 2003 PhD 2009

At U of C: September 2002 – June 2009

Interviewed: 2012 (1 session)

Interviewer: Lauren Stokes

Transcript by: Lauren Stokes

Length: 01:02:16

**Interview (October 18, 2012) at the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality,
University of Chicago.**

[00:00:00]

LS: I'll start by just asking you about how did you end up at the University of Chicago. What brought you here in the first place?

TS: I came in 2002 to get a PhD in history. I came here because George Chauncey was here in the History Department, and I thought that I wanted to work on the history of sexuality in the U.S., and I thought that this was the department where I would be able to get the best advice about how to do that successfully.

LS: So that was because of Professor Chauncey.

TS: That was because of Professor Chauncey, yes.

LS: And so how had you originally been made aware that history of sexuality was what you wanted to pursue for graduate study? What had been the spark for that decision?

TS: I, oh! I attended the Future of the Queer Past conference here in September of 2000 as a senior in college at Swarthmore and that was where I first met George and a couple of his graduate students. That was a really big conference that brought people from all over the world and I got, my best friend and I got, money from Swarthmore to travel to the conference.

LS: So were you just attending as observers? Or were you giving a paper?

TS: Just as observers.

LS: You just thought, "this sounds like a great thing."

TS: Yeah, I was a History major, I was pretty sure I wanted to do some sort of LGBT studies project.

LS: Had you studied a lot of LGBT history beforehand?

TS: I was, I think that same semester, taking Professor Pieter Judson's undergraduate course on Sexuality and Society in Modern Europe. That was the only history of sexuality course I took in college but I also took other LGBT studies courses like on lesbian novels, illicit desires in literature, courses on women's history, and I was pretty out in college and involved in kind of queer activism.

LS: Was college the place where you were first out, or had you...

TS: Yes. I came out at the end of my first semester in college. December 1997.

LS: And where had you gone to high school?

TS: I went to high school in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

LS: Okay. And then you were out in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

TS: I was out in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. I went to this conference at the U of C and then I didn't go straight to grad school. I lived in New York for a year and worked at a history museum and during that year I applied to grad school.

LS: And you applied here, and you were accepted, and then, when you came here, were your expectations that it was going to be a good place to work on the history of sexuality fulfilled? How did that decision turn out for you?

TS: It turned out very well. You know, as well as I could have expected or wanted. Should I say more about that?

LS: I'd love to hear more about why you felt it was a good place to be doing... what were experiences that stuck with you about this being the best place to do that.

TS: I got advice... when I was applying to graduate school some people who I spoke to were concerned, thought it was risky to go to somewhere to study with a particular person, which I did end up doing, because you could always not get along with that person, or they could drop dead, or leave, or whatever.

LS: Right.

TS: And I found when I came as a prospective student that Chauncey's presence in the department meant that everyone else in the History Department knew queer history existed, took it seriously, thought it was a reasonable thing to write a seminar paper

about, you know, and frankly that would not have been the case some of the other places I might have gone. And George had essentially created, not just George, but George and other faculty, there seemed to be a significant number of faculty who worked in queer studies. Lauren Berlant, Cathy Cohen, Stuart Michaels, it felt like a place where there would be resources. Like there was this graduate fellowship in LGBT studies, or dissertation fellowship, and those kinds of things were important to me because research in LGBT studies historically, and even more then than now, is not something many institutions support.

LS: Sure, so you felt like it was taken seriously here and how did you end up, so you ended up writing a dissertation that was very much about gay history, queer history?

TS: I should also say, I also came here because I thought that Chicago was a place that I could happily live.

LS: Do you want to elaborate on that at all? You liked the city feel, you liked...

TS: I'm very much a city person. I was living in New York at the time happily, and I wouldn't have been as excited about moving somewhere that wasn't a really big city.

LS: I understand that.

TS: The dissertation.

LS: So I did want to know how you sort of ended up hitting on the topic of your dissertation, which ended up being a queer history of Chicago in a lot of ways. But then I'm also curious, since you say you came here in part because it was an urban center, and you felt like you were an urban kind of person, did that also pan out as you wanted it to? Where did you live while you were here? Were you in Hyde Park?

TS: Which one should I answer first?

LS: Let's go academics first. [Laughter] So how did you end up hitting on the topic of your dissertation?

[08:57]

TS: It's a great question. I initially, I almost wrote my dissertation on San Francisco, and specifically on the origins of the Castro district as a gay neighborhood. I was very interested in gay neighborhoods and urban political economy and geography, and I took courses, like I took an urban sociology course with Saskia Sassen, which had a big impact on me. The project on San Francisco had something to do with the fact that I was in a long-distance relationship with someone there. The project outlasted the relationship, but not by that much, and when I proposed my dissertation it was going to be about San Francisco and Chicago, which I had a somewhat convoluted justification for, and at that

point it had evolved to be not so much about gay neighborhoods, but about the relationship between gay men and lesbians, socially and especially politically.

I had also begun to move from social history towards political history. Bush being re-elected I think also played a role in my moving towards political history, feeling like politics mattered, and if I was going to be doing this graduate school thing instead of something more directly politically engaged, I wanted to at least kind of deal with social movements and electoral politics.

I remember at my dissertation defense hearing, or prospectus defense hearing, Amy Stanley, who was one of my committee members, thought it was really awkward to write about two cities, and she basically said look, I want you to consider, as you get to know the Chicago materials—which at that point I didn't know as well as the San Francisco materials—consider dropping San Francisco and only writing about Chicago, and I ended up doing that, and also kind of moving away from a study of gay men and lesbians and toward a study of the relationship between gay politics and black politics.

LS: And was there something that inspired the shift from a dissertation where it was very gender and sexuality dimension to race [and] sexuality as your sort of focal...

TS: I think that happened sort of organically as I got to know the Chicago sources and started to think more about... I'm not sure I can totally explain that?

LS: I understand working from the sources, as a historian, so yeah, no, that makes sense.

TS: I still had a chapter that was largely about relations between gay men and lesbians, but it's hard to look at the history of Chicago and not feel like its racially segregated nature is... it's kind of inescapable.

LS: So as San Francisco got dropped, race became a really, really central way that you were thinking about Chicago history, it sounds like.

TS: Yeah, that's right. I also got very interested in this alderman Cliff Kelley who was for fifteen years was the leading proponent of gay rights on the Chicago City Council and he was a black alderman from the South Side with no visible gay constituency and who didn't seem to stand to benefit at all from being vocally pro-gay, and I was sort of interested in how and why would that be, and so he and Harold Washington ended up being kind of key figures in the dissertation.

[13:50]

LS: I wanted to backtrack for a second because you said something interesting a few minutes ago about how Bush's reelection sort of helped inspire or accelerate your drift towards a more political history because you wanted to be involved in something directly that was having an impact, and I wanted to ask if you also had a history of activism around LGBTQ issues, if you were active at the time you were at the University.

TS: I had been involved in queer activism in college. Let's see... as soon as I moved here I got to know a fellow graduate student, Kathleen Fredrickson, who became one of my closest friends, and she was involved in an activist group called Queer to the Left, which no longer exists, but at the time in 2002 was focused on dealing with gentrification in Uptown, and I was drawn to the people who were active in Queer to the Left, several of whom were veterans of ACT UP and knew a ton about queer activist history and just seemed very smart and knowledgeable.

And then right before the 2004 election I participated in a program sponsored by NGLTF, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, where I went to Oregon for ten days and canvassed voters against the Measure 36, which was the ballot measure that resulted in passing a constitutional amendment there banning gay marriage. A bunch of states passed those in that election, and NGLTF decided that Oregon was the state where the movement had the best shot of defeating this amendment, so they sort of sent all their resources there, and I think it was, if you could get yourself there, they would find housing for you, and I was studying for my orals at the time, and I had been very focused on gay politics for most of that year, since I think in February of '04 President Bush had endorsed the Federal Marriage Amendment, and I remember seeing my advisor and his partner maybe the day after that happened at some sort of event on campus and I remember saying to, I think to Ron, his partner, "I have to tell you, I'm not sure I want to be in graduate school right now, because I feel like the current administration has declared war on gay people," and he basically said, that seems quite understandable, so because I was studying for orals, my time was unstructured, and I just knew I wasn't going to be doing studying in the lead up to the election, so I just said, you know, whatever.

I ended up writing an article about that experience canvassing, so that experience was, looking back, it happened at kind of a key moment in my movement toward political history and queer political history.

Also I was on the Provost's Advisory Committee on LGBT issues.

LS: That was here, at...

TS: Here.

LS: And what year was that?

TS: 2005.

LS: OK.

TS: And I think in the spring, but I'm not certain. Bill Michel...was vice-president, and sort of oversaw the process of putting together this report, which made a bunch of recommendations. My dear friend Thom Cantey, who was a medical student at U of C,

was also on that committee, and I remember feeling proud, because there was a sentence in the report that I felt personally responsible for having contributed, and it was a sentence that I later heard the provost approximately restate in some public remarks he made in the public reception later that fall.

LS: What was the sentence?

TS: I have the report somewhere, it was roughly, you know, “The University of Chicago has been ahead of the curve historically”—meaning particularly in adopting domestic partner benefits for partners of gay employees—but has since then fallen behind its peer institutions, particularly—I believe I named Harvard and other Ivy League schools that had adopted gender identity as part of their non-discrimination policies, which ended up being one of the key recommendations of the report. I felt like that language was the kind of language that works at this institution. [Laughter]

LS: And did it work, did they take your recommendations?

TS: Well, I mean, I would have to go back and look. Then I got involved in my dissertation. I didn’t follow up particularly with that, but I was glad to be asked to be on this committee, and I felt like the report was a good report.

LS: And then why were you asked to be on the committee, was there a specific, they were just aware of you as a person who was aware, part of the...

TS: I had been very... I had been pretty out. I had... how had I been out? You know, I’m not sure exactly who asked me, but I think it was Bill Michel. I think he knew that I was involved in queer politics on campus. Also my friend Moon Duchin [Interview #74] who’s now a math professor at Tufts was also, she I think wasn’t on that committee but she was sort of a visible out queer person, and she and I had, she had put together a panel or a discussion right after the ‘04 November election that was meant for LGBT undergrads to have a chance to talk about their feelings about the election. So Bill might have either gone to that discussion that I facilitated, or...

[22:35]

LS: So it sounds like you were really wrestling with this question of activist commitments and political commitments about gay rights and queer rights in this country, and also really invested in your academic work, and being a good historian of sexuality and starting to get your dissertation going, did you feel like there were a lot of other people... one, did you feel like your advisor and your committee were supportive of these multiple commitments, and two, did you feel like there were other students who were also multiply engaged like that while you were at Chicago?

TS: Honestly, I felt like the group of students who worked with George and a few other people in the history department, faculty members, were really unusual in having this sort of dilemma. I didn’t feel like the University of Chicago was a place that... I felt a little

bit out of place here in that I felt like the U of C's vision of what a scholar was supposed to be was more like, you disappear into the library and emerge, you know, alone, not in collaboration with anyone else, and you kind of emerge years later with your completed project, and so I definitely found that... I felt supported by my program, not so much by the university.

LS: And did you feel like there were other students who were juggling these things at the same time?

TS: Yes.

LS: A lot of them also working with Chauncey?

TS: Yes, or, Kathleen Fredrickson worked with Lauren Berlant, and I definitely felt identified with, and I had history department colleagues who were also Chauncey students, Alison Lefkowitz and Thomas Adams and Carl Nash [Interview #54] until he left the program who were sort of critical, maybe, of what I'm describing as this sort of UChicago disengaged vision of scholarship, but... so yes, I felt socially supported by my friends and that included friends across the University, but really the Center for Gender Studies was where I met many of them. It's where I met Kat Fredrickson, it's where I met a number of my closest friends, most of my closest friends from graduate school, not through my department.

LS: Sure. So then, as you moved to doing your dissertation, you're writing about Chicago now, and you're writing about the relationship between black urban politics and gay urban politics, was the process of researching that dissertation when you were able to be in collaboration and activism with groups outside of the university?

TS: I never really got that involved in activism outside the university in Chicago, actually, which is sort of funny, you know, I studied it, but I wouldn't say that I got involved as an activist particularly. Once Queer to the Left disbanded...

LS: When was that?

TS: I think around 2005. I also moved to the North Side in '04 and you know I was done with my coursework and sick of Hyde Park, and I really didn't do, other than that Provost's report thing, I didn't get involved in activism on campus until 2007 when I got very involved in trying to get what was then the Graduate School of Business, now the Booth School to rescind its invitation to General Peter Pace to serve as the keynote speaker at their annual management conference at a downtown hotel.

LS: What was the objection to Pace?

TS: Peter Pace was an MBA alum from the GSB and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and he had recently publicly declared that he opposed the repeal of Don't Ask,

Don't Tell because he believed that allowing gay people to serve openly in the military would mean endorsing immorality.

LS: So that was very much a queer-focused mobilization around, this guy shouldn't speak?

TS: A hundred percent queer-focused. And honestly, I was quite angry at the GSB and its Dean, who has since left, Ted Snyder, who I felt did not take our effort seriously. I started a petition that a huge number of people signed, including eventually a large number of [business] students, asking him, asking them to rescind the invitation, on the grounds first of all that free speech is distinct from extending a platform for speech, and second of all that this guy was advocating one of the few things—which is job discrimination based on sexual orientation—about which the university actually had an explicit stated opinion, right, so if they couldn't use that as a reason to rescind this invitation, then what would they stand up for, and that was a very frustrating and alienating experience.

LS: Was it a successful...

TS: Nope.

LS: No. So he came to speak.

TS: He came to speak at I think the Hyatt, and I didn't go, but queer activists from the community, from Chicago went and protested, but I didn't even go, I felt I had done what I wanted to do and I didn't need to hear him or have much to do...

LS: You'd made your stance known.

TS: I had tried and failed, tried to get the institution to budge, and I was angry that they hadn't.

LS: So you'd talked a little bit about Queer to the Left which you were involved in from about 2002 to 2005, right. Was that largely around the University, was that in Hyde Park?

TS: No.

LS: Did that have a location? Because I've heard a little bit about it, but...

TS: To the extent it had a location, it was Uptown and Andersonville. There were several U of C people involved in it. I wasn't super involved in it but I really admired some of the people who were. Debbie Gould was a PhD student here and was one of the key people in Queer to the Left, for example we had meetings in her apartment, and she was writing on ACT UP, and I definitely admired her kind of marriage of activism and scholarship, so I feel like there were U of C people involved but they almost all lived on the North Side.

LS: Which is where you moved in 2005, was it? 2004?

TS: 2004.

[32:05]

LS: And then, to go back to an earlier question, you came to Chicago in part because it was an urban center and you wanted to be in an urban center. Was your social life centered around the university? How did your life change when you moved from Hyde Park to the North Side? Where were you on the North Side, exactly?

TS: For two years I was near the corner of Foster and Clark in Andersonville and then for three years I was right on the corner of Broadway and Bryn Mawr at the sort of the opposite end of Andersonville. Let's see. My first year here I lived in Graduate Student Housing, and my second year I lived in a co-op, a grad student co-op on University between 56th and 57th between two fraternities. During that year my car was totaled when it was parked in front of the co-op by a drunk driver who had attended a frat party. I also just decided I didn't want to live in the co-op anymore for... basically I decided I wanted to move out of Hyde Park, and I had always had a car, which helped me have a social life on the North Side as well as in Hyde Park, and you know, I continued to sort of drift away from Hyde Park centered socializing over the years.

LS: Sure. So... did you feel like when you were in the North side, did you choose that at all because it was a queer center, or...

TS: Yes, absolutely.

LS: Definitely. [Laughter]

TS: I moved in with a roommate who is a lesbian who was a friend of a friend and a student at Northwestern Law School, that was my first apartment on the North side, and I wanted to live in Andersonville because it was more queer. I mean, that's definitely why I didn't want to live in Hyde Park. I also, I found Hyde Park to be insular, and I didn't like the relationship between the U of C and the sort of surrounding communities, at least on the west and the south. It felt just, like a bunker, as a neighborhood, but mostly I just wanted to be around more queer people, and I felt like everyone who was a U of C grad student who really wanted to be around queer things left Hyde Park which really reinforced my not wanting to be in Hyde Park [laughter], and so...

LS: So did you also know other grad students who were living in Andersonville in addition to you...

TS: Yeah, Andersonville or Boystown, some with cars, some without, and I ended up, you know, driving friends who didn't have cars back and forth.

LS: So it was just a matter of wanting to be involved in a sort of explicitly queer and queer-friendly community that inspired your move north.

TS: Yeah. Wanting to be in a neighborhood that had gay bars and visible gay life, you know, and also that just had more going on, more, that was more lively and less family-centered.

LS: [Laughter] As weird as that sounds to say about the U of C, because of course, there's like three thousand single kids from between the ages of eighteen to twenty two, but...

TS: Right. [Laughter] Yeah. I guess that didn't count.

LS: But no, I understand, I think that's a common impulse.

TS: Especially as I got older, right.

LS: Right, right.

TS: Certainly when I started TA -ing. And yes, there were queer student groups on campus, but they seemed completely led by undergrads.

LS: Were you involved in any of the queer student groups on campus as a grad student?

TS: I certainly got their e-mails.

LS: But you felt like they were undergrad-focused in terms of what they offered.

TS: Yep.

[37:27]

LS: And then, you mentioned, as you became a TA and later a teacher, did you teach LGBTQ subjects, did you teach in gender and sexuality?

TS: Yeah. I taught Problems in the Study of Sexuality, which I sometimes, I have to say, I make fun of the U of C a little bit, when I talk about that, because the two institutions I've taught at since leaving here, I have taught a course called introduction to LGBT studies which is basically the same course, and I felt like the U of C kind of universalizing it and calling it Problems in the Study of Sexuality... for me kind of reflected the institution's resistance to particularizing or identitarian or politically engaged scholarship.

So to answer the question, yes, I taught that course, and then I taught a course of my own design called War, Gender, and Sexuality in 20th Century America. There was a war on, so I thought, there was a gender studies, you could propose a course, and I thought that given the war, that there would be student interest, which there was, and I was too vain to kick anyone out of my class [laughter], which was a mistake, there were too many students. I didn't really, you know, I hadn't taught a course by myself before, so that was also queer-related, and then I was a TA for Amy Stanley in American Civ.

- LS: Okay. So you said you find it interesting that here it's called Problems in the Study of Sexuality and the same essential course, in terms of what you read and what you do, you've taught at institutions since then that were Introduction to LGBTQ studies. I find that interesting.
- TS: And in programs that are called Women's and Gender Studies, or Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, or LGBT Studies. Not Gender Studies or Gender and Sexuality Studies.
- LS: Oh, interesting. So you're saying that they sort of efface both the women intent of the first women's studies programs, right, and the sort of queer/gay intent of the first LGBT, interestingly enough...
- TS: Yeah. I felt like this university had skipped that stage. [Laughter]
- LS: And gone right into universalism. And you felt like your model as a scholar was, would you say identitarian, or would you say...
- TS: Well, I shouldn't overstate my frustration with the U of C. It also, you know, the history department had hired George Chauncey, which they were very proud of, deservedly, and to some extent, you know, he was my model of a scholar.

And while I was here, in my first year here, I remember he took a long time writing comments on our seminar papers over winter break, because he had been asked to contribute an amicus brief in the Lawrence v. Texas case. And that seemed like a good excuse, as excuses for being slow on commenting on our papers went, and then once the case was won, and won in large... and Justice Kennedy kind of very directly followed the logic of the historian's brief that George had put together, I think 12 consecutive paragraphs of the opinion just said what the historian's brief had said, once that happened I think the U of C became... then they did an article in the alumni magazine on George and his role in this. And I think that the scholarship that the Center for Gender Studies supported was extremely high quality, and that mattered.

- LS: And it seems like it was a place where you met a lot of people who you collaborated with and were really able to dialogue with as a scholar.
- TS: Yeah, definitely, definitely.

[42:17]

- LS: Did you feel as you were teaching and a TA that as an out gay man you fulfilled any kind of role model type role for your undergrad students? How did you feel teaching queer stuff here?
- TS: It's hard to answer that because I've, it's hard for me to look at it other than sort of in comparison to where I teach now.

LS: Well, that's your life history, so...

TS: I felt, I'm not sure I felt like a role model, but I'm not sure that I can give an account of why not.

LS: Well, where do you teach now?

TS: I teach at Rutgers University in Newark, and I feel like fewer of my queer students at Rutgers have had openly gay teachers before, so it feels more significant to me now to be teaching queer studies as a gay man than it did when I was here. I think, you know, in some ways George was really admired by all of the queer undergrads that I taught, as well as by my queer History Department colleagues and my straight History Department colleagues. George was someone who the U of C admired, his work was so good and so rigorous that there was sort of no question but that he was serious, which is kind of prized, I think, and that's not a bad thing, by this place.

Sorry, to come back to your question, I don't... I guess the one moment when I did feel role model-ish was when Moon [Duchin] and I held this discussion for undergrads after the 2004 election. She had done a lot more, she had coached women's rugby, and she had done more teaching than I had, and she definitely felt very concerned about queer undergrads and about how they might sort of feel in the aftermath of the election, but I was really following her lead in kind of thinking about that.

LS: Sure, sure. To go back to the point about where you work now, was that your first job? So what was your first job after you received your PhD in... 2009, right?

TS: Yes. And then I was a visiting lecturer at Yale for one year and Yale is where George had left the U of C for to go there in 2006, so I taught in LGBT studies at Yale and then started at Rutgers in 2010, so this is my third year there.

LS: And then, have you continued to stay in touch with people from your U of C days afterwards, I assume so...

TS: Yes. Very much so. I would say I had a small group of close colleagues from the History Department, one of whom now teaches at my department, who I've certainly stayed in close touch with and who I see at conferences. I've also stayed in very close touch with my four closest friends here who were a medical student, a Comp Lit PhD student, a math PhD student, and an English PhD student, and I'm close to all of them.

LS: To piggyback on that for a second and to change gear completely, it will seem like, you mentioned that your San Francisco project was at least a little bit motivated by a long-distance relationship you were having then, which ended at some point, did you have other romantic entanglements after that while you were at the U of C? Was this a significant institution for you at all in that sense, or was Andersonville and Boystown really where that occurred for you in terms of meeting partners?

TS: I dated people I met here, and I later kind of fell in with a group of mostly Northwestern grad students who mostly lived on the North side in my last year and a half, and I dated a Northwestern PhD student in Biology towards the end of my graduate career, so some of both.

[49:12]

LS: Some of both. Well, I think, I guess as maybe a last couple of questions, you haven't been out for that long, as a 2009 PhD, but even just sort of reflecting on...

TS: Oh, I thought you meant out of the closet.

LS: [Laughter] Well, I could have meant that, but I simply meant out of the U of C and I guess college in some sense and the graduate school experience. Do you think, when you're teaching now, 18 and 20 year olds, do you feel like there's a big generational difference between how you grew up as a gay man, and how they did, and how would you characterize that?

TS: Yes. It's huge. My gay students, 100 percent of them, for example, assume that they will have the right to marry, which when I was 18 I did not assume. Many more of them came out in high school. Now, when I came out, which was in my first year of college, I remember feeling like I was, you know, for the first time I had met a bunch of gay people my own age, and they had all come out in high school, and I remember feeling like I was the only, I was like the last person in the world to come out, and I went to the counseling center at Swarthmore, and I remember, I saw this therapist for only one session, but she said something that has stuck with me, which was, she said "Well, you do realize you're comparing yourself only to the people who have already come out and not to the people who haven't come out yet," and I sort of thought, "Oh. Interesting. Good point." But you know many more kids get to college already out and already having kind of gotten to a place of assuming that they can be out on campus.

LS: And in their families as well would you say?

TS: Often. Often, you know, not always, but certainly many more are out to their families than a decade ago or fifteen years ago. Far more.

LS: And what about in terms of, I know you went to Swarthmore, so these are all different institutional histories as well, right, but in terms of feeling about where the history of sexuality was and LGBTQ studies in general fifteen years ago when you were a college freshman versus now when you're teaching that class all the time to new college freshmen. What do you feel like the shift there has been?

TS: Fifteen years ago, you know, there was George Chauncey and a couple of other people, and that was it. [Laughter] George had, he had really affected the shape of the discipline as a whole in a way that only a few others had done. In some ways I don't think we've

come as far as I might have thought a couple years ago. Partly the, you know, the departments just aren't hiring, but I think there are very few departments that actively seek to hire people who study sexuality, very few history departments. I think of history as kind of in the middle of a spectrum of queer-friendliness, where I would put English on the more friendly end, I feel like it's very widely viewed as legitimate to study queer topics in most English departments, history, you know, is somewhere in the middle, and then in terms of social sciences, I would put political science and economics, I guess I have more contact with political scientists, and I feel like they are behind history in kind of taking sexuality seriously as a category. But I think there's definitely been significant movement in the right direction.

LS: Would you say that politically as well? I was struck by your feeling very under attack, very literally under attack, after the 2004 elections. How's 2012 looking for you?

TS: Ask me again in three weeks. [Laughter] You know, obviously President Obama has done far more for LGBT equality than any politician in the history of this country, I would say, and, by the way, he spoke at my U of C orientation in the Fall of 2002.

LS: Did you think he was going to be president?

TS: No, no, of course not. [Laughter] I didn't even really register who he was until he ran for Senate in '04. Someone said oh, you know he was that local politician who spoke at our orientation in Ida Noyes... I certainly think that, in 2004 it didn't seem clear... it seemed like we were in a moment of reaction, and it doesn't feel like that now, and it certainly feels like we're still not winning, I don't want to overstate how good things are now, but I do think that the bar has moved, and I guess what I would say is, many fewer people feel comfortably openly expressing sort of disgust—to use a concept that Martha Nussbaum has talked about in the context of sexuality—it's no longer as acceptable for a kind of visceral disgust at gay acts to motivate anti-gay political views. In some ways that's fulfilling, I think one of the goals that gay liberationists had when they coined the word homophobia, which was explicitly meant to say, you know, in the sort of aftermath of the removal of homosexuality from the DSM, was meant to say we're not the ones who have a problem, who have an illness, you're the ones who have an irrational fear or antipathy, and I think that this country seems to be moving towards including queer people certainly more than was true for much of the twentieth century.

[57:52]

LS: Anything else you'd like to tell us, or I've forgotten to ask?

TS: One other thing. My older brother, who is eleven years older than I am, was a U of C undergrad in the eighties, class of 1990, and he was here during, this is not a narrative so much as a suggestion of something that the project should look at, which is there was this very extreme anti gay series of incidents here in the eighties, I don't know if this is familiar? The Brotherhood of the Iron Fist.

LS: The Brotherhood of the Iron Fist. Yeah. We have a file of stuff. We have a file of the threatening notes they sent, in Special Collections.

TS: Oh wow. I had no idea.

LS: Yeah, which we're going to have to do something with, but need to know more about.

TS: Yeah, that got a lot of... I'm aware of it both from my brother, who is not gay, but who...

LS: Do you remember hearing about it when you were... I mean, you must have been eight at the time, I guess...

TS: I was, I was, but it's funny, I remember... my brother's roommate at the U of C, who he's still friends with, is gay, but wasn't out in college, but I remember my mother saying that my brother was upset by very intense homophobia on the U of C campus, and I assume that that was what that was...

LS: I mean, that would have been the most public manifestation of it, surely.

TS: But I don't really know, I should ask him...

LS: I'm curious, because I've looked at that file, and was really sickened and upset by it, and, your brother having been on campus at that time, when you came to the U of C, did you think about that at all, or did it not really occur to you, until...

TS: It didn't really occur to me. Yeah.

LS: While you were here, there weren't any similar incidents, you felt more attacked on a national political level?

TS: Yes. Absolutely. I'm trying to summon an anti-gay harassment incident on campus and I'm sure there were such, but nothing that's leaping to mind.

LS: Right. Nothing that attained the sort of...

TS: Right, and no, when I decided to come here, I didn't think about that, my brother was so much older that...

LS: One wouldn't expect you to, I mean you're a nine year old kid, but it's just interesting, because that was a really interesting moment, I think, in the U of C's history with this stuff.

TS: I think so too. I think there were a lot of similar incidents, not as extreme, frankly, at most schools, but I think that, you know, the AIDS crisis caused a real sort of spike in anti-gay violence and harassment.

LS: Even at Swarthmore, there's a couple of records of that happening around AIDS, as this crisis moment for...

TS: Yeah. There was a *New York Times* article in 1985 [Ed.: April 24, 1987] with a headline something like "Fear of AIDS creates new attacks on homosexuals," and it was reported from Chicago.

LS: Interesting. Well, thank you so much.

TS: Thank you, it was great.

[01:02:16]

End of Interview