

**ANNIVERSARY ISSUE:** Celebrating 14 Years

our lives



Disability Pride

20



28

Cedric Johnson



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Caracas Empanadas

# SUMMER 2021

Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

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July/August 2021

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PUBLISHER'S LETTER PATRICK FARABAUGH



FIVE YEARS & A CROSSROADS

**FIVE YEARS AGO** I introduced our first POC-centered Pride issue, as a vision of what our community could be: Radically inclusive, inspirational, recognizing and elevating leadership through equity.



July/August 2017

As we slowly return to what we considered normal pre-pandemic, we are positioned to adapt and change what normal means. I believe this issue shows us what that can look like, and is a celebration of what we can be. From **Cedric Johnson's** analysis on what equity in action looks like, to **Lidia Sharapova's** beautiful photo series sharing vulnerable stories and lives of QTBIPOC folx around Milwaukee. From the second Pride march centering Black Lives Matter, to **Michail Takach** helping us learn that Stonewall for Wisconsin happened years before the infamous LGBTQ uprising in NYC. Josie Carter, a gender non-conforming Black "queen" is Wisconsin's own version of Marsha P. Johnson.



We also can't look forward without recognizing where we've been. Twenty-five years ago Madison lost it's geographic heart when a fire took the Hotel Washington complex from us. From the trendy NewBar and Café Palms, to the more debaucherously fun Rod's, the Hotel Washington was a destination for connecting to Madison's queer community and culture. Again, **Michail Takach** helps us reminisce on what we lost, and explores the Madison that came after. ■

CONTRIBUTORS



**T. S. BANKS** is a community organizer, disability justice and mental wellness advocate, poet, and playwright from Madison. He is the Founder of Loud 'N UnChained Theater Company, which is also home to LNU Black Theater Festival that premiered in April 2021. As a Black, trans, and queer person with multiple disabilities, T believes the movements for liberation must be intersectional and deeply connected to the struggle to end patriarchy and ableism specifically as it manifests as violence against Black, trans, and disabled folks. His work also addresses visioning for Black power, a critique of the medical-industrial complex, psychiatric violence, sanism, queer justice, trans justice, disability justice, and cross-movement solidarity.

**RAE SENARIGHI** aka Transpainter is your average non-binary cancer survivor inspiring self-compassion, activism, and gender resilience via unapologetic portraiture and typography. Currently residing in Madison, Rae champions storytelling through art, working to create accurate and celebratory representation of the transgender and non-binary community in the fine art world and beyond. He is on a mission to spread self-acceptance and love, as is evident in his portraiture, typography, and speaking engagements. Rae believes that trust and self-love are vital to the journey of understanding and accepting his own identity, hoping to remind others to not only love themselves, but to celebrate and lift up their respective communities. Rae's work has been featured internationally through media and news outlets, including Netflix and GLAAD, DNA India, and more. He has toured with his art to 10 states and 17 different locations and counting.

**MICHAIL TAKACH** is a historian, author, reporter, and communications professional living in Los Angeles. He earned his master's in communications and history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. As a fifth-generation Milwaukeean, he supported various non-profit organizations over the past two decades, including Historic Milwaukee, the Milwaukee County Historical Society, the Walker's Point Association, the Brady Street Association, United Performing Arts Fund, and Milwaukee Pride, where he was communications director for 10 years. Michail is currently the curator of the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project, a not-for-profit, all-volunteer, independent organization devoted to connecting local LGBTQ people with their hidden history and heritage. He is currently working on his second book, *The Golden Age of Milwaukee Drag*, an exploration of nearly 140 years of drag performances, with co-author Bjorn Nasett.

T.S. BANKS PHOTO BY DUPREE ARMON.

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## SunShine Raynebow

My pronouns are she/her, they/them, Queen, and Goddess. I'm a poet, artist activist, and drag queen. I want to change the world by spreading love and kindness to myself and others. I want to inspire others to be themselves, to be proud of themselves, to love themselves, to be kind to themselves. My activism started in high school. I saw that the system wasn't benefiting me as a queer person of color. My goal in life is to just be myself as a Black, queer, transwoman and change the system so people who look like me can benefit, too. I am fighting so that the youth won't have the same fight that I'm having right now. Remember to always love yourself, be kind to yourself, and be who you are. Always shine your bright light like the star you are. ■



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## Proud Adaptations

With the pandemic restrictions somewhat lifted but real health concerns remaining, Pride celebrations continue to adapt and find ways to build community in challenging times.

PRIDE PANDEMIC IN-PERSON EVENTS

**WHEN PRIDEFEST IN MILWAUKEE** was cancelled for the second year in a row due to pandemic safety concerns, Cormac Kehoe and Sarah Tybring knew it was important to provide a safe way for the community to have options for showing their pride.

Kehoe and Tybring are two of the organizers behind Ride With Pride, the annual roll-out of LGBTQ+ motorcyclists in Milwaukee. After calling off last year's event, and seeing vaccination rates going up this year, it seemed high time to get back in the saddle. They agree the ride, held June 5, provided a much-needed way for celebration and visibility.

"I hope that the Pride Ride continues to bring

together motorcycle enthusiasts, our LGBTQ+ community, and our supportive community as well," Tybring said. "I hope we continue to show what a positive culture we can be."

"This year PrideFest and the parade are both canceled, so we decided this ride needs to happen," Kehoe said. "Back when we first announced the ride, when we searched online for 'pride events Milwaukee,' you'd see our motorcycle ride, followed by a drag show for cats. We roared along the old Pride parade route, past all the landmarks of our community, flying pride flags. I really felt like the city needed that right now, more than ever."



**AS A CHILD IN COLORADO**, Sarah Tybring started riding dirt bikes with her father and brother. It wasn't long before she realized she liked speed more than jumps, so she traded in the dirt bike for a street bike.

On Saturday, June 5, Sarah was one of 200 riders on the third Ride with Pride, the world's largest LGBTQ-themed motorcycle event, as it ventured through Milwaukee County on a 40-mile run.

The Ride with Pride began in 2018 as an outreach partnership between Cormac Kehoe, motorcycle advocate, and Milwaukee Pride. Kehoe sought a way to bring the spirit of PrideFest outside the festival gates and into the streets of Milwaukee. Having arranged various themed and costumed rides over the years, ranging from an Evel Knievel Ride to a James Bond Ride to a Nuns with Guns Ride, Kehoe felt that pride was an extremely important message to extend.

"It started as one of those wild ideas," he said, "and then I brought together friends from entirely different circles to make it happen. As a straight man, I wasn't sure that the synergy would work. And then, suddenly, we were launching the motorcycle event of the season!"

In its second year, the Ride attracted a record-setting 300 riders and expanded its route and duration. After a mandated one-year break, the ride roared back with 200 riders from across the region.

"I would have been happy with five riders," said Kehoe. "So I was thrilled with the turnout, and moreover, the enthusiasm every rider brought. It's more than just a ride. It's an expression of who we are."

"As a female rider, I have been fortunate to receive nothing but respect and support from fellow motorcyclists," said Tybring, who has been an LGBTQ community activist since moving to Milwaukee 20 years ago. She met Kehoe while working at PrideFest several years ago. After taking part in the 2018 ride, she's been part of the planning committee ever since.

"Keeping LGBTQ spirit alive and visible is really important in a year without a pride festival," she said. "The Ride is a great placeholder to remind each other how important it is to be seen. It showcases a wide spectrum of humans of every possible definition, with a shared love for the ride and each other."

What about that old, intimidating image of the big, mean, maybe not-so-accepting motorcycle rider? Kehoe insists that biker never existed in the first place.

"If you look back throughout Harley-Davidson history, it's always been about inclusion," he said. "Every rider is respected and supported, period. There is no right or wrong way to get into motorcycles. All you need to get on a bike is passion and determination."

Tybring agreed. "The Ride breaks down the stereotypes. It removes the invisible barriers between the queer community and the riding community. It reinforces the reality that the riding community, as a whole, is accepting and welcoming. My fellow organizers are tireless and relentless in creating this experience for Milwaukee, and that energy is so essential for keeping our LGBTQ community engaged."

After spending the last 15 months on the pandemic rollercoaster, Kehoe said the ride was a phenomenal experience. "I felt like I was shot out of a cannon. Everything went from zero to 100 so fast."

"As we'd roar past bystanders, they'd often be so surprised to see us, their jaws hit the ground. I don't know what surprised them most: the size of our group, the energy of our group, or the explosion of colorful visuals that we unleashed upon them. Nothing has ever been this much fun."

"It was so amazing this year, to see the turnout, to hear the excited comments, to feel the energy of people ready for a great time," said Tybring. "It was easy to become introverted and isolated with the COVID pandemic, especially for LGBTQ people who may need support outside their family units. This big, beautiful ride really helped bring back a sense of social community and togetherness."

"The Ride with Pride blends bad-assery with belonging. I can't think of a better kickoff to summer!" ■

Since then, other individuals and businesses have also stepped in to help fill the gap left by large-scale Pride celebrations. George Schneider and the crew at Milwaukee's This Is It! put together an impressive slate of drag shows and other Pride-related events at the historic downtown bar, running the entire month of June.

Across the state, smaller towns and cities got back to in-person Pride events, including Steven's Point, Eau Claire, Aniwa, Fond du Lac, and others that held picnics and gatherings with DJs, vendors, and entertainment.

In Madison, Freedom, Inc. held a Pride Brunch at Aldo Leopold Park, bringing Pride to the city's south side and centering Madison's Black and Southeast Asian LGBTQ communities. Teens Like Us, the LGBTQ program of Briarpatch Youth Services, held a Pride Prom at its headquarters on June 26.

Looking ahead, OutReach LGBT Center will keep its Magic Pride Fest virtual for the second year in a row, with the online event scheduled for August 22 from 1:00 to 6:00 p.m. and featuring a wide array of entertainment, speakers, and other attractions. Local DJ and promoter Sarah Akawa (aka Saint Saunter) has brought back the Hot Summer Gays series, with upcoming outdoor dance parties on July 23 and August 13 at Robinia Courtyard.

Other local events have also moved outside Pride month, hedging on better vaccination rates and more time to plan for August and after: Kenosha Pride is scheduled for August 22 at Veterans Memorial Park, La Crosse will hold its Pride on September 11 at Riverside Park, and Viroqua Area Pride will celebrate on September 25.

#### BACK TO PRIDE'S ROOTS

Between the challenges of holding in-person events during a still-churning pandemic and the heightened awareness of and focus on political and social issues that disproportionately impact minoritized communities, Pride in the era of COVID has, in many ways, returned to its political protest foundations.

In Milwaukee, the second annual March With Pride for Black Lives Matter took over downtown streets on June 13, not with floats and corporate sponsors, but through sheer people power.

Organized by a coalition of local activists and performers, including Montell Infiniti Ross, Elle Halo, Kat Klawes, and Angel Vega, the march is meant to show solidarity with the BLM movement and how Black and LGBTQ liberation have been inextricably intertwined since their beginnings.

"I feel so amazing seeing our community coming out and supporting the cause," Ross said in an interview with the local CBS station. Ross emphasized the hope that such events will galvanize people to continue their support for marginalized communities, even as news cycles change.

"Make sure to keep the movement alive," Ross said. "And the movement currently needs to move within systemic change, systemic change with a lot of policies and procedures that affect marginalized populations as well as our Black and brown communities."

#### WHAT OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST PRIDE FESTIVAL?

The loss of PrideFest in Milwaukee is still keenly felt by many who wonder how Milwaukee Pride, the non-profit that runs the event, will bounce back after two years without its marquee event. Still others have openly complained at what they see as a lack of community support or engagement by the group.

The loss of PrideFest in Milwaukee is still keenly felt by many who wonder how Milwaukee Pride, the non-profit that runs the event, will bounce back after two years without its marquee event.

Wes Shaver, president of Milwaukee Pride since 2017, has been busy making sure the Pride is still front and center in the city, even as the Summerfest grounds remain quiet for now. He also said the organization itself is on solid financial footing, despite the lack of revenue since its 2019 event. Shaver pushed back on the notion that the organization has been idle, too.

"It was really important...to remain relevant and be connected to the community for the last two seasons," Shaver said. "The first thing that I did was take on this project to create this digital health and wellness space...that's live 365 days a year and is fully responsive and free. I really wanted to show that the festival is more than just the festival and that this public service component still lived throughout the year. The good news was that we have something now that lives forever."

Shaver went on to list the other events he and Milwaukee Pride have supported this year, including a collaboration with 88.9FM Milwaukee and DJ Shawna for a dance party and light show at the Hoan Bridge.

"The whole street was blocked and there were thousands of people down there, safely, dancing to the live stream of the DJ set," said Shaver. "They're dressed in their Pride outfits, they're celebrating Pride. That's what was really important for us to do, was still

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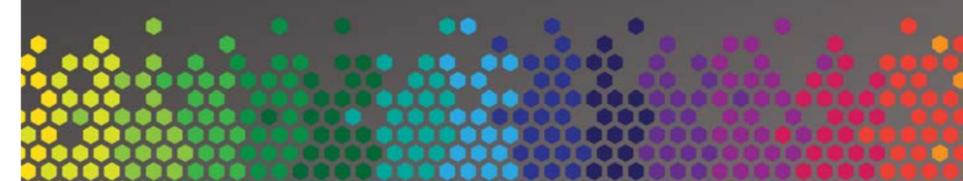
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create affirming and safe spaces for people to celebrate however they celebrate and do it this year even without the festival.”

The group also worked with the Milwaukee County Transit Authority and Milwaukee Downtown to have a bus and streetcar wrapped in artwork celebrating Pride and the LGBTQ community. Shaver said he was invited to work

behind the scenes to support the March With Pride for Black Lives Matter, acting more in his individual capacity, but noting that Milwaukee Pride is in full support of the movement and the people behind it.

“I hope that the BLM march becomes a part of the Pride weekend in Milwaukee, in some capacity, forever,” he said. ■

**JUNE 13 Milwaukee's March with Pride for Black Lives Matter**



**NEWS BRIEFS**

WRITTEN BY STACY HARBAUGH

**EVERS SIGNS ORDER BANNING USE OF STATE OR FEDERAL FUNDS FOR CONVERSION THERAPY**

**ON JUNE 1, GOVERNOR TONY EVERS** issued Executive Order #122 to ban the use of state or federal funds to be used for so-called “conversion therapy,” or any kind of practice or treatment that seeks to promote heterosexuality by pressuring individuals (particularly youth) to change their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**BRIAN CHANEY NAMED FIRST BLACK POLICE CHIEF OF THE CITY OF MONONA**

**ON JUNE 1 BRIAN CHANEY** became the first Black police chief of the City of Monona. Chaney, who is Black and gay, was sworn into the role by Dane County Circuit Court Judge Mario C. White, who himself is Black and gay. Both Chaney and White are among the first Black leaders to serve in their roles.

Before taking the leadership role in Monona, Chaney served in several leadership roles as a City of Madison police officer, including Captain of Police in



Traffic and Specialized Services, Lieutenant of Police—Central District, Sergeant of Madison Police Department Gang Unit, and a Sergeant of Patrol Services.

The order outlines the Governor’s reasons for the ban, including the administration’s commitment to the health and wellness of LGBTQ+ youth and why the use of state and federal funds should be used for ethical and evidence-based practices. The order also cites professional mental health advocacy organizations such as the American Medical Association that oppose conversion therapy.

Wisconsin’s LGBTQ+ advocacy group, Fair Wisconsin, shared the news on June 1 with a statement that they were proud to have worked with Evers on the order. The order was signed on the same day that the Governor raised a rainbow flag over the state Capitol building for the third year.

**CHRIS WALKER NAMED DIRECTOR OF UW'S DIVISION OF THE ARTS**

**CHRIS WALKER**, professor of Dance at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, was appointed as the new director of UW’s Division of the Arts by Provost Karl Scholz.



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According to a news release from the university, Walker describes himself as “a ‘multi-hyphenate contemporary dance and performance artist,’ and his work draws upon the danced rituals, carnival mas traditions, and embodied performance history of the African diaspora.” The hiring search committee selected Walker due to his vision for the arts program and his commitment to diversity and community inclusion.



After studying dance in Jamaica and New York, Walker joined the University of Wisconsin–Madison’s Dance department in 2006 and served as the artistic director of the First Wave Hip Hop Theatre Ensemble. Walker was also featured on the cover of the September 2020 issue of *Our Lives* magazine.

### DELTA BEER LAB RELEASE TO SUPPORT LOCAL ANTI-RACISM ORGANIZATIONS

**DELTA BEER LAB** will release a second Black is Beautiful beer this year in support of local anti-racism organizations. All of the proceeds will be shared with Nehemiah and the Justified Anger initiative which works to eliminate racial disparities in the greater Madison area by developing relationships, solutions, and systems. The brewery’s 2021 goal is to raise \$10,000.

### CHIPPEWA FALLS RECRUIT AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION TO HELP ADDRESS PERSISTENT RACISM, SEXISM, AND HOMOPHOBIA

**IN EARLY JUNE** students in the Chippewa Falls Area Unified School District filed an administrative complaint with the district to request an investigation into their experience of a chronic failure to meaningfully address pervasive racism, sexism, and homophobia.

The students formed an alliance they call the Cultivative Coalition, and they filed the complaint with the support of the American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin. Supporting the process is Elisabeth Lambert, a two-year Equal Justice Works fellow who is dedicated to working on school discrimination and equity issues in Wisconsin.

Lambert described how the students have both a similarity in their experience of feeling harassed and targeted at school, while also having differences in their unique experiences of racism, sexism, and homophobia.

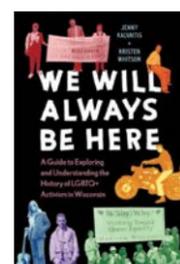
“What’s powerful about these students is that despite those differences, they are clear about the intersectionality of their efforts

and the solidarity they have,” said Lambert. “They are united in the sense of wanting the power structure in Chippewa Falls to pay attention to voices that haven’t been heard, and to have the district—in a systemic way—think about how to change its culture to provide more support. Instead of thinking of themselves as categories, they think of themselves as a coalition.”

The complaint process is a part of Wisconsin’s state administrative code and is intended to be a non-adversarial process to request an investigation. The ACLU expects the district to finish the investigative process and issue a statement in 90 days. While there have been some negative responses from the community—which Lambert points to as more evidence of a toxic environment the students are calling out—most of the community’s response has been positive and supportive, and more students are coming forward to share their experiences.

### WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY RELEASES FIRST BOOK FOR TEEN READERS ON LGBTQ+ HISTORY

**THE WISCONSIN HISTORICAL** Society Press has released its first book for teen readers on LGBTQ+ history, *We Will Always Be Here: A Guide to Exploring and Understanding the History of LGBTQ+ Activism in Wisconsin* by Jenny Kalvaitis and Kristen Whitson. The book presents examples of LGBTQ+ activism throughout Wisconsin’s history for



young people to explore and discuss. Inspired by the history presented in R. Richard Wagner’s two-volume Society Press series on gay history in Wisconsin, *We Will Always Be Here* draws from a rich collection of primary sources—including diary entries, love letters, zines, advertisements, oral histories, and more—to provide a jumping-off point for readers who are interested in learning more about LGBTQ+ history and activism.

*We Will Always Be Here* shines a light on powerful and often untold stories, featuring individuals across a wide spectrum of identities and from all corners of the state. Featured LGBTQ+ people, allies, and activists changed their world by taking steps that young people can take today—by educating themselves, telling their own stories, being true to themselves, and building communities. ■



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**Annia Leonard (they/them)** is a queer, non-binary femme from Milwaukee. They are an event coordinator, model, community connector, teacher, and youth organizer with Uplifting Black Liberation and Community, or UBLAC. This year they decided to enter a pageant for Miss Wisconsin USA 2021 to raise money for a local organization Brave Green Wave Trybe.



**Taylor Staples (she/her) & Noel Johnson (they/them).** Taylor and Noel met in passing at Pridefest in 2019. Later that year, they reconnected through a mutual friend at a local music festival. They immediately were drawn to one another and have been inseparable since. The couple lives in Bayview with their beloved pets. They love to spend their time exploring Wisconsin's beautiful outdoors, doing DIY projects, and enjoying live music. Taylor works as a family services coordinator for a Head Start program. Noel is a ride-share driver along with working on other freelance projects.



**Elle Halo (she/her)** is a Black trans activist. She is a writer, community leader, organizer, and LGBTQ health equity advocate.



**Alex (they/them) & David (he/him)** were photographed in their backyard. Alex is a non-binary/genderqueer person, who grew up in a family of Jehovah's Witnesses. They are an artist and a model. David grew up in a rural area and currently works in the IT industry.



**Anna (Ladi London) (she/her)** is a transwoman. She is a community leader, activist, and co-founder of the Black Rose Initiative. Anna is a survivor of hate crime violence.

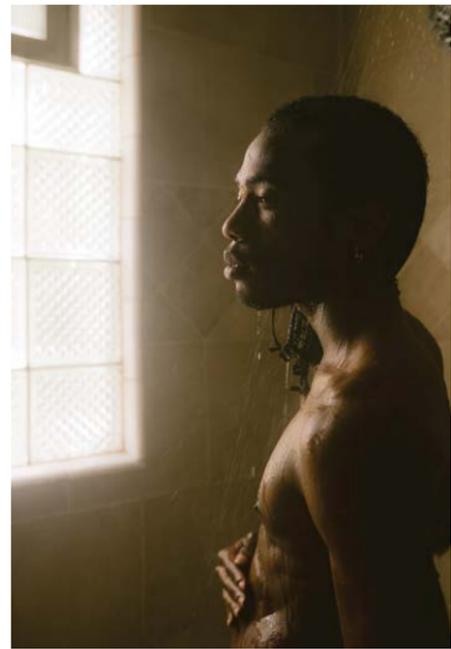
QTBIPOC PHOTOGRAPHY COMMUNITY

## As We Are

Photographer **Lidia Sharapova** turns her lens on Milwaukee's queer community to shine light on their shared humanity and struggle.

**I GREW UP IN RUSSIA** where being LGBTQ is illegal. This community is denied basic human rights, and it is dangerous for them to be who they are openly, let alone photographed as such. And while there has been social progress made in America, there is still much room for improvement. And the stories of those I have photographed bear witness to this fact.

Photographing LGBTQ people, giving them voice and visibility, I am trying to push back on gender norms that were put on me. I also hope to break the stereotypes and stigmas that have surrounded the community for far too long. ■



**Madyun Wilson (they/them)** is a dancer, choreographer, and visual artist. They live in Milwaukee and teach ballet.



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QTBIPOC | DISABILITY | GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING | COVID

## The Queer Future is Disabled

**Disability Pride** takes a look at the movement for disability justice, its role in queer justice, and why accessibility has to be a basic human right.

**DISABILITY PRIDE MADISON** is a grassroots organization founded in 2013. Its creation was inspired by local activists Karen Milstein, Sara Karon (who was involved in the nation's first Disability Pride Parade in Boston in 1990) and Jason Glozier (Disability Rights and Services Program Specialist at City of Madison). They wanted to bring the fierceness and joy of disability pride celebrations happening in other, larger U.S. cities to Madison. Madison's focus was to host a yearly festival in late July to coincide with the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act on July 26, 1990. The festival is an opportunity to bring the disability community together to celebrate and honor one another, build our communities, learn about local resources, buy goods from disabled creatives, and to enjoy food, beverages, and entertainment created by the disabled community, for the disabled community. The festival,

just like other disability pride celebrations, is an opportunity for disabled folks to show up as their entire selves: something that is usually not possible in abled spaces and events with limited, if any, consideration of accessibility.

### INTERSECTIONS WITHIN INTERSECTIONS

As we have learned from groups such as Sins Invalid, in addition to making our festival for disabled folks as accessible as possible, we must also consider the diversity that exists within the disability community and how societal factors impact access. For example, while the pride in Disability Pride Madison does not specifically refer to LGBTQ+ Pride, some of the founders of Disability Pride Madison and the majority of the current Disability Pride Board members are LGBTQ+. This is consistent with recent research by the Movement Advancement Project finding that LGBTQ+

people are more likely to have a disability than cisgender and heterosexual people. In other words: Disability is an LGBTQ+ issue. And considering overlapping identities within the disability community and the LGBTQ+ community, it is easy to see how the definitions of access and accessibility need to take into account the social barriers that exist due to compounding social prejudices.

We recognize that our disabled community is diverse not only on the axis of disability, but also that disability impacts people differently depending on other factors of social stratification such as race, gender, sexuality, class, education, immigration status, education, incarceration, etc. Disability Pride Madison is rooted in an ethic of disability justice incorporating an intersectional lens on disability.

### A PIVOT AND A LOOK WITHIN

With 2020 marking the 30th anniversary of the ADA, we were excited to make this historic milestone the focus of the 2020 Disability Pride Festival. We were in the midst of planning the 2020 festival, as well as other community advocacy opportunities, when in March the widespread impact of COVID-19 reached Madison. With lockdowns instituted and safety of primary concern, we made the decision to cancel the in-person Disability Pride Festival.

Then, in May of 2020, the brutal murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis Police Officer was captured on video and the nation, and world, erupted in protest. Disability Pride Madison took a critical internal look at the makeup of our majority white board and membership. We cared deeply about intersectional disability justice, but realized we were not using our platform to advocate for racial justice.

With the in-person festival put on hold and Covid severely impacting disabled communities, we decided to use funding earmarked for the 2020 Festival to fund a virtual showcase for Black and disabled creators. The showcase is a way we can center the voices, art, needs, experiences, and lives of Black people, and Black disabled people and communities, in Madison and beyond. We currently have 26 participants, including Madison based creators Jerome L. Glenn, Michael Ward, Dyshaunn Simmons, T. S. Banks, Tiffany Lee, Felicia F. Clark, and Kiah Garnet. Our other artists hail from as near as Milwaukee and as far as London: Nychelle Paige, Sunny Brettman, Taylor Goethe, Vicente Valentino, Basil Wright, Takeela (Kiki) Traner,

Kosmo Parker, Ashanti Fortson, Dr. Marcia Denis, Shawn Bethea, Mary Russell, Rif Mincie, Mwuangi, Kaya, Josiah Oyawale, Matt Maxey, Tahnee Jones, David Player, and Caffeyne Luv. Each creator received a \$250 stipend, and provided a bio, photos, and links to shops and social media for us to feature on our website. We are hoping to keep the showcase running and add more creators to it every year. We will be doing a "rerun" feature of participants on our Facebook and Twitter this July.

### PRESENT

We are not able to host a festival for 2021, but on July 31 we are inviting folks to come to Tenney Park from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. for a small, casual, minimalist, socially distanced and masked Disability Pride Madison Summertime Gathering! While Dane County has lifted all COVID-19 restrictions and the CDC no longer recommends masks for vaccinated people, we recognize that the best practices of public health do not always reflect what is safe and just for disabled people and communities. The situation with Covid is still developing and we recognize that for many people the pandemic is not over. We are strongly opposed to putting anyone at risk, including our friends and family who are still cautious about potential exposure. At the same time, we recognize that for many, especially in the disabled community, the past year has been traumatic and isolating, and that many of us will benefit from being together in community while observing safety protocols.

On July 31 we are inviting folks to come to Tenney Park from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. for a small, casual, minimalist, socially distanced and masked Disability Pride Madison Summertime Gathering!

This Covid year has been devastating to the disabled community in many ways. We were subjected to eugenic rhetoric in careless debate on who was worth saving in the midst of a global pandemic. We saw the world become accessible in ways that we have long been advocating for, yet the emergency funding that was provided to corporations, organizations, and individuals was not to create more access for disabled folks. Rather, this funding was used to make the world more accessible for abled folks to continue to operate by "business as usual." Disabled folks were actively deprioritized at the height of the pandemic, and we've been deprioritized again as those who are ready to be done with the global pandemic are pressuring us all to go back to the pre-Covid normal. But now that many of us in the disabled community have experienced greater access in the last year, it is

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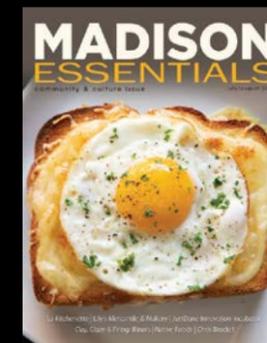


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inhumane to expect us not to fight for the same level of access that abled folks were granted in the past year, as well as to fight for greater access for all disabled folks.

With these factors in mind we are planning to host several virtual events this summer and into the future. We are working with Sky Cubacub of Rebirth Garments for a virtual event in early August, with whom we had previously planned to host a QueerCrip Fashion Performance in early 2020, so we're very excited for the chance to work with them again. We will be hosting a series of writing workshops with the Arts and Literature Laboratory this summer and into the fall. We've also received funding from the New Harvest foundation to host a lecture series with queer and disabled People

## Disability Pride Info

**Board Members:** T.S. Banks, Jess Draws, Jason Glozier (not pictured), Rachel DL, Sashe Mishur, Kate Moran, Jill Nagler, and Cecil Leigh Wilson.

**Email:** [disabilitypridemadison@gmail.com](mailto:disabilitypridemadison@gmail.com)

**Website:** <https://www.disabilitypridemadison.org>  
[disabilitypridemadison.org/BlackDisabledVirtualShowcase](https://www.disabilitypridemadison.org/BlackDisabledVirtualShowcase)

**Facebook:** Disability Pride Madison

**Twitter:** [twitter.com/dsbltpridemad](https://twitter.com/dsbltpridemad)

of Color that we plan to host later this year/early next year. Stay tuned to our Facebook and Twitter pages for more information as we work out all of the details!

### FUTURE

"The queer future is disabled" means that it is necessary that queer spaces become accessible and that abled queer folks prioritize ensuring that disabled queer folks have the same access to queer events as abled queer folks. We—not only Disability Pride Madison but all queer disabled folks—deserve to have our basic human right of connection affirmed through access to the same spaces as abled folks. We emphasize access to the same quality of spaces and opportunities to exist in the community that abled folks have access to, so that we are able to connect and have the same inclusive experiences as abled folks.

We need access to be prioritized locally, and we are demanding that the LGBTQ+ community do better to make sure that spaces, places, events, committees, access to our shared community is truly shared. This means that we need to be intentional in creating accessible spaces by working with and compensating the disabled community (a broad demographic of the disability community, not just white disabled folks), by learning about and implement-

ing universal design, and by making substantive efforts to identify and remove barriers to access in the community. As Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha writes in their book *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, in an essay titled "Making Space Accessible is an Act of Love for Our Communities," "I think that crip solidarity, and solidarity between crips and non(yet)-crips is a powerful act of love and I-got-your-back." (2018, pg 75). This sentiment is amplified and echoed by the Access is Love project that aims to help build a world where accessibility is understood as an act of love, founded in 2019 by Asian American disability justice advocates Mia Mingus, Alice Wong, and Sandy Ho. Can we as a community consider what barriers to access would be

removed if accessibility was considered an act of love instead of a nuisance or hindrance?

In the same year that Disability Pride Madison was founded (2013), Elisha Lim, a non-disabled, mixed-race, Asian, gender-queer artist created an

event/action on Facebook titled "Why would I come to a party if my friends are barred?" This event was inspired by Lim's friendship with white, queer, disabled activist Loree Erickson; Lim realized that they had been lying to Erickson about parties they had attended because they knew Erickson would not be able to attend due to inaccessibility. Lim pledged not to attend any events that were inaccessible for a year. While there was pushback from the community, the online space that Lim and Erickson created fostered deeper connections across multiply marginalized disabled and non-disabled communities that worked to create spaces of greater access for all in the community. And it was effective.

We need the same level of dedication to access in Madison that Lim and Erickson cultivated in Toronto, and we know it is possible. We have seen how creative solutions can come together to create accessible digital spaces quickly and effectively, so what are our barriers for continuing to offer accessible spaces on digital platforms as well as accessible in-person spaces? What have we learned in these Covid times that can help us integrate access needs into our lives? And if you are a local organizer or working in activist movements, how are you integrating disability justice into your activism? ■

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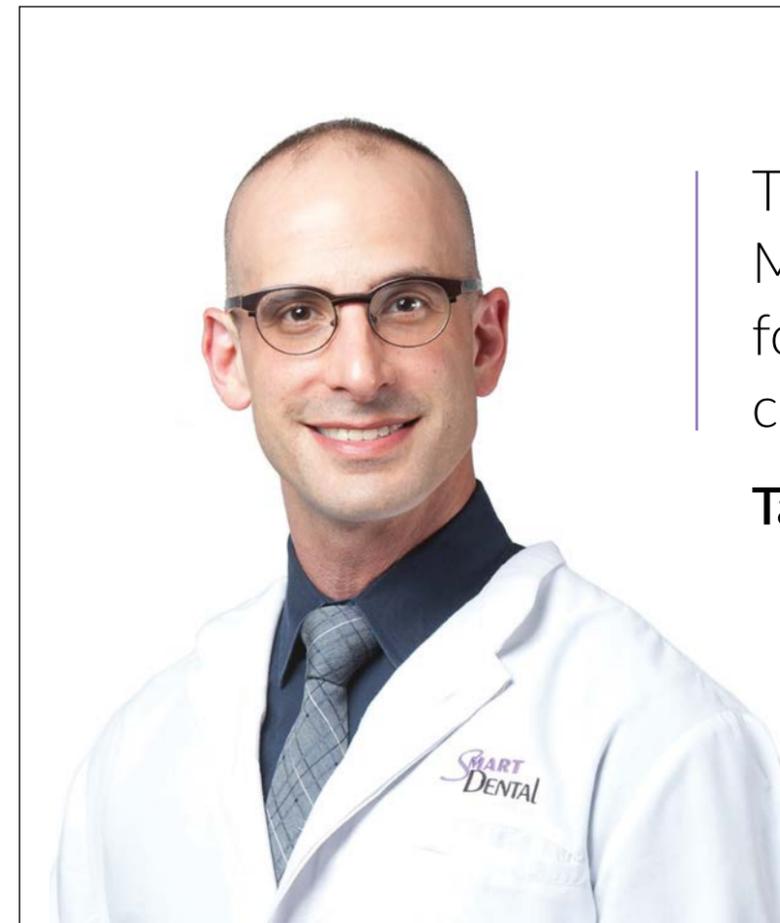
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QTBIPOC POETRY WRITING

## Truth-Telling

Author and poet **T. S. Banks** interviews **R. B. Simon** about her debut poetry collection, *The Good Truth*.



**TELL ME A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF. WHERE DID YOU GROW UP?**

I grew up in the state line area, mostly Beloit, then I flew out of there at 19. I came here, dropped out of college, and have been here ever since.

**SO, WHEN DID YOU START WRITING POETRY?**

I have been writing bad poetry since I was 11, and I have been writing good poetry, I think, for about the last three years.

I remember taking the poetry units in school. I loved it from the moment I was exposed to it. [I] loved looking at vocabulary and new words and figuring out what [writers] were saying. Just enthralled with the whole concept...It was not a leap that I would start writing my own. But back then, I had to follow forms: I had to rhyme and make cute limerick-type poems. Very full of drama and angst of the young child I was. I remember trying to get very deep by writing metaphors of fairies and dragons.

**SPEED UP TO THREE YEARS AGO, WHAT HAPPENED? WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO CONNECT TO THE PAGE IN THIS WAY AGAIN?**

You know there were many years of my life that were spent in oblivion, sadly. I struggled with mental health, I struggled with self-loathing, I struggled with addiction. Then I entered what I consider my recovery from all of this about four years ago, and I started trying to do new things and reclaim old things that I had loved. So, I started going out to things like poetry readings, open mics, and things like that.

My very first open mic I went to, I bravely got up and read two of my older poems I wrote for a class I had taken at UW. And after I got done reading, a journal editor came up to me and said, "You really should submit your poems for publication."

I was astonished. That had been the last thing on my mind, but it certainly became the first.

**OH MY GOODNESS, SO YOU'VE BEEN WRITING, AND SUBMITTING, AND NOW WE ARE HERE WITH THE GOOD TRUTH. NOW IS YOUR TIME. WHEN DID YOU START WRITING IT? WHERE ARE YOU PUBLISHED?**

So this collection spans some time. It includes one of the poems that I read at that open mic, which is also a poem I read for the Loud 'N UnChained Black Theater Festival.

**WHICH ONE IS THAT?**

"Heritage." About two years ago, I started to notice that I write a lot about identity. Those things are all revolving around a central pillar. What does it mean to be me? A queer, Black, fat, woman with mental health and addiction. What does it mean to be who I am? And why does it matter that I am all those things?"

I had an English course at Madison College where my professor was also a published poet, and I asked her if she would do an honors project with me.

We designed the manuscript together, and picked and chose which poems [of mine] to be included. It went through a few iterations before it was finally chosen by Finishing Line Press.

It was a dream come true, and I am still not done. You know, there is still more I wanna say. So, I'm working on my second manuscript. But I am proud of the work I put out with *The Good Truth*. I think it speaks eloquently to where I was when I wrote the book.

**YOU SAID THAT IDENTITY WAS A MAJOR ROLE THAT SHAPED THE BOOK. CAN YOU SAY MORE?**

I identify as a woman of color, bisexual, queer. I identify as so many things, including as a mom. I think that's a huge part of my identity. More than that, I identify as a mama—a mama is a person who mothers other people. I tend to be a community mama. I have that motherly energy. To scoop everyone up and create a community.

**WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE, OR WHOM DID YOU WRITE THE BOOK FOR?**

It would be easy to say I was writing the book for someone just like me, but I wrote the book for anyone who has ever felt othered. I think you can see through my poems that feeling of being the odd one out, feeling like not belonging, and then you can also see

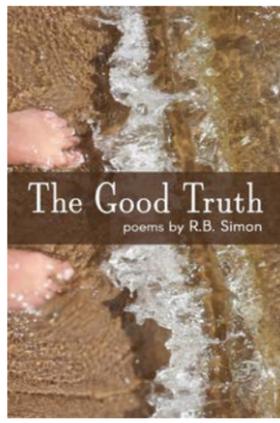
a transformation in the book to be accepting of who I am. Not the odd one out—I have a place—and I hope I am giving this to readers.

**WHAT ARE YOUR TOP THREE POEMS IN THE BOOK?**

"Indelible" is one of the poems I wrote for my partner who passed away from overdose—that really pulled me out of a dark space, it was a pivotal turning point in my life.

"Schools;" I put a huge part of my childhood into that poem.

"The Good Truth" is a subtle, quiet poem. It really is a triumph. It's a piece about finding peace.



**TO THE WRITERS TAKING A LEAP FOR PUBLICATION, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO THEM?**

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# Door Buster

**Cedric Johnson** isn't just interested in sharing resources with those who need them most, he wants to ensure the barriers they face to accessing those resources are removed as well.

EQUITY QTBIPOC ACCESS

**BY NOW I THINK WE'VE ALL SEEN** the image making the distinction between equity and equality. Three people of color are standing on the outskirts of a baseball field, ostensibly peering over a fence to enjoy the game. Yours truly wouldn't make half the effort to watch live sports, but I digress. This image was part of a discussion at a training in Phoenix for public participation professionals years ago, and when I asked the group to consider the ways this depiction might be problematic I got a couple sighs from two other attendees. After the session, the other people of color in the room approached me and we talked about what had just happened; we all knew who made the sighs. But those two individuals weren't as important as the fact that the trainer followed up to let me know that she was revising this portion of the presentation for trainings moving forward. I was meant to be in that space to speak up about how the training materials might be problematic. Leveraging my access to certain spaces to level the proverbial playing field is how equity has shown up in my personal and professional lives.

How might my position of relative privilege and access to resources shift the power dynamic for Black people, queer people, the differently abled, and others to the point where these voices are in the room when policy and practice are crafted?

Coming of age, I was never told I couldn't or shouldn't be in certain spaces; that I had to "stay in my lane." I was at once on ski trips with my prep school and also playing with my cousins in the "projects." One day I was at a drop-in center for LGBTQ+ teens and another at a gala hosted by and for the Black community in Rockford. Growing up around people from all backgrounds and experiences opened my eyes to the furthest horizons of what my life could be. However, for someone struggling to be comfortable in his own skin, being present in a range of spaces both foreign and familiar was often challenging. Sometimes I shrank myself in order to be invisible. Other times, I acted prematurely and had to face the consequences. Thankfully the lessons weren't lost, and over time I recognized that my ability to adapt to many environments gave me the opportunity to leverage resources others might not have. As I moved into adulthood and gained confidence, this ability to access resources sparked a passion in me to work toward sharing resources for people who looked like me and who face barriers of all kinds.

Every step of my career has given me the opportunity to develop a personal mission around equity. At the core of which is to not just share resources with folks who need or can disseminate them, but to remove the hinges from the door that was left open for me. In my role at Madison Gas & Electric, this is what guides the work around the burdens faced by our low-income customers. It drives me to ask hard questions within the company and throughout the community. It also forces me to strike a

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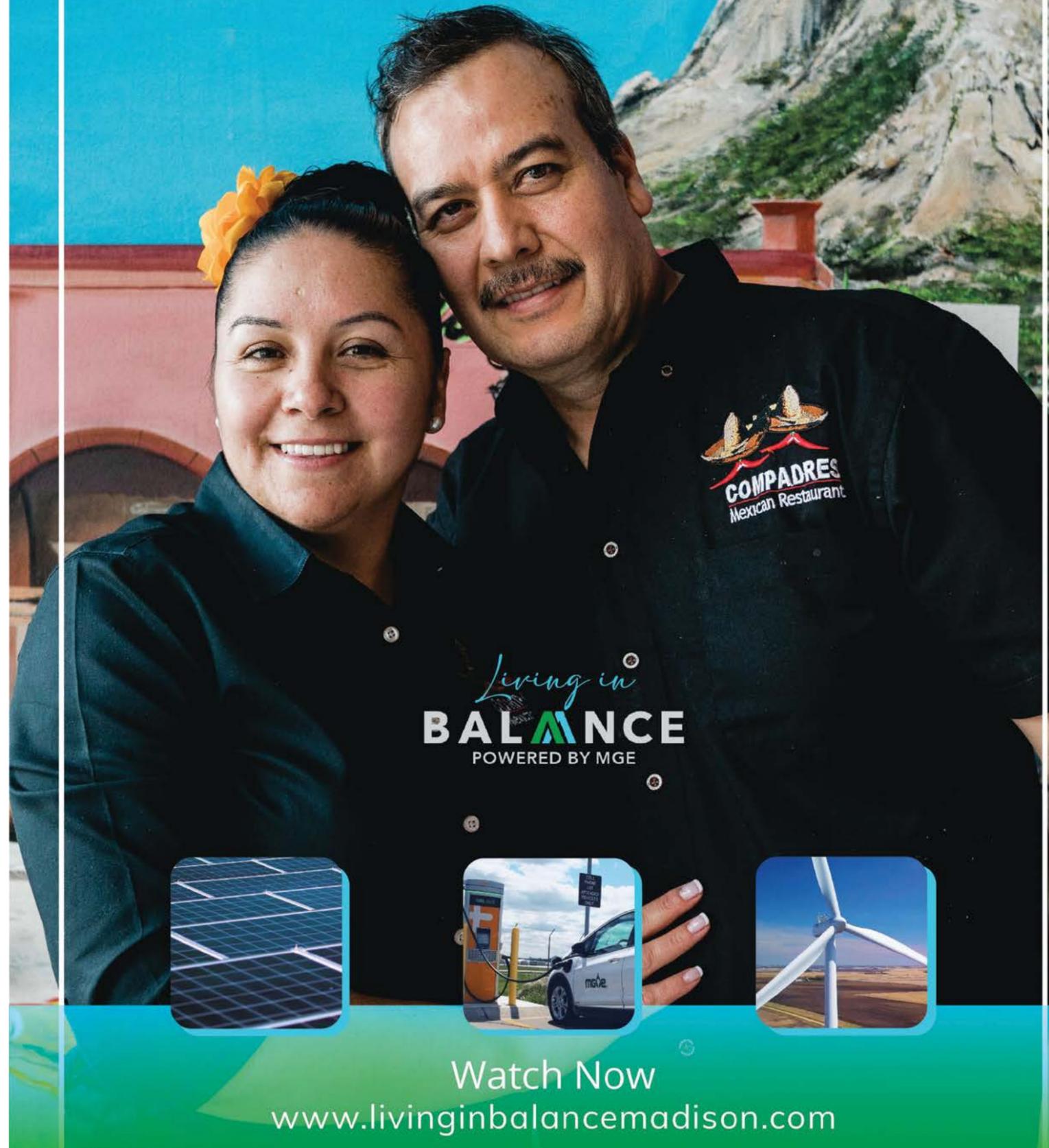
balance between making myself as accessible as possible while holding space to rest and restore, because we all know this work is for the long haul. When an MGE customer reaches out to me through Facebook Messenger with a problem because they see me as a trusted liaison to the company, I make sure I see it through to a resolution. If that means reaching across departments to ask questions and pull some of my rock-star colleagues in to help, then that's what I do. When we learn how many customers are burdened by their utility bills, then it's time to reimagine what relief is available and our role in how that system works. Thankfully, equity has become part of the conversation at many companies.

But there's still a lot of work to do, so on the personal level I ask myself: How might my position of relative privilege and access to resources shift the power dynamic for Black people, queer people, the differently abled, and others to the point where these voices are in the room when policy and practice are crafted? This is why you see me as vice-chair of Wisconsin Partnership Program's Oversight and Advisory Committee. This body reviews funding from a \$400 million endowment for statewide projects that advance health equity. It is why I welcomed the opportunity to join Madison Community Foundations' Grant Making Committee. It's why I'll pursue any opportunity to redistribute resources from dollars to access to social capital to the folks and institutions that are best equipped to dictate solutions for problems that create barriers to thriving in this community because they are closest to them.

I am not a trained Diversity, Equity, Inclusion practitioner, nor am I interested in pursuing that role. What I will offer is that on the path forward, I won't allow my skin to be a credential for institutions to use for public relations or as a reason to pat themselves on the back. It is my voice, talent, skills, and experience that I offer up as one instrument to advance equity. And while I encounter many hurdles on the way, I make sure to pause and pour into myself with meditation or quiet days and then bounce back even more determined. I'll also take this opportunity to offer a book recommendation that has helped my mission continue to evolve. *Decolonizing Wealth* by Edgar Villanueva challenged a lot of the notions I internalized about change making, power dynamics, and resource allocation to marginalized communities. Check it out. If you have recommendations for me, then send them my way!

Lastly, if you're in the room where resources are being allocated, check in with yourself. Consider how you take up space. Do you make yourself smaller so as to not rock the boat? How are you showing up? What's your motivating factor? For me, it's simple. I take up space on behalf of the Black women who helped mold me; it is for the young, Black men who're trying to step into their full identity but might be held back by the people and institutions who tell them they need to be someone else; it's for historically marginalized folks who don't trust systems or institutions (and for good reason). For me, equity should be at the core of every decision that affects the material success of all these people. Keep this in mind if I'm on your list of prospective board or committee members. ■

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# 2017-2021

CELEBRATING WISCONSIN'S LGBTQ COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Our Lives magazine's annual Pride in Color feature allows us to see the faces of queer and trans people of color across Wisconsin, many of whom are doing the essential labor of keeping our communities afloat. The faces displayed in these pages remind us that our community is still here, always has been here, and is a source of both power and hope. Each face is a person who is living their life as a queer or trans person of color in a time when such identities are increasingly under attack, when our lives feel precarious in multiple ways. Yet, we are still here.

If you are reading this, you matter. This community matters. So we are grateful for each and every name and face on these pages. Take heart, friends, and have a look at the beautiful QTBIPOC faces who are surviving, like you're surviving, and thriving all over our state. —Sami Schalk



## The Influencer

**Ladi London** is a brown-skinned, femme trans Milwaukee native who produces videos and other content to effect change and cultivate community.

**BEING A PHOTO/VIDEO PRODUCER** and social media entertainment influencer/content creator has become the main avenue for supporting Ladi's life's work: to cultivate community and to influence change in a way that is revolutionary and inspiring.

During the pandemic and throughout all of the uprisings around the nation, many womxn like Ladi and the ladies of Sister's Helping Each Other Battle Adversity (SHEBA) were living lives of discomfort and vulnerability, mainly due to the conditions we normally face as Black trans womxn being significantly and increasingly more impactful, due to stigma and fascist idealism attached to a heightened sense of fear that came along with the world's Covid-19 crisis. They understood the significance in all of these things that were occurring inside and outside of ourselves. So with that knowledge came duty, and with that came urgency and action.



In August of last year, Ladi was invited by The National Black Trans Liberation Movement to attend The March on Washington hosted by Rev Al Sharpton. After much planning and discussion, The Black Rose Initiative was conceived, and they raised close to \$8,000 from generous donations that went toward mutual aid for the community and toward funding the expenses of the trip to Washington as well as benefiting community members who weren't able to attend.

This year for International Trans visibility day, The Black Rose Initiative created a week's worth of events tailored to the celebration of Black/Brown trans bodies and lives. The events were made possible by our diverse community and local LGBT and health organizations fighting alongside our Black trans community. Support for this also included individual cisgender allies and LGBT community members of the city of Milwaukee.

Being able to lead alongside co-organizer Elle Halo uplift Black/Brown transness has been a goal of Ladi's since the beginning of the creation of their coalition of Black trans power. The Black Rose Initiative is growing and expounding upon new ideas for future programming that will allow them to move forward toward the betterment of all trans lives including Black trans and non-binary folks. To help contribute to the success of The Black Rose Initiative and future programming, you can contribute to the cash app \$BlackRoseInitiative. ■



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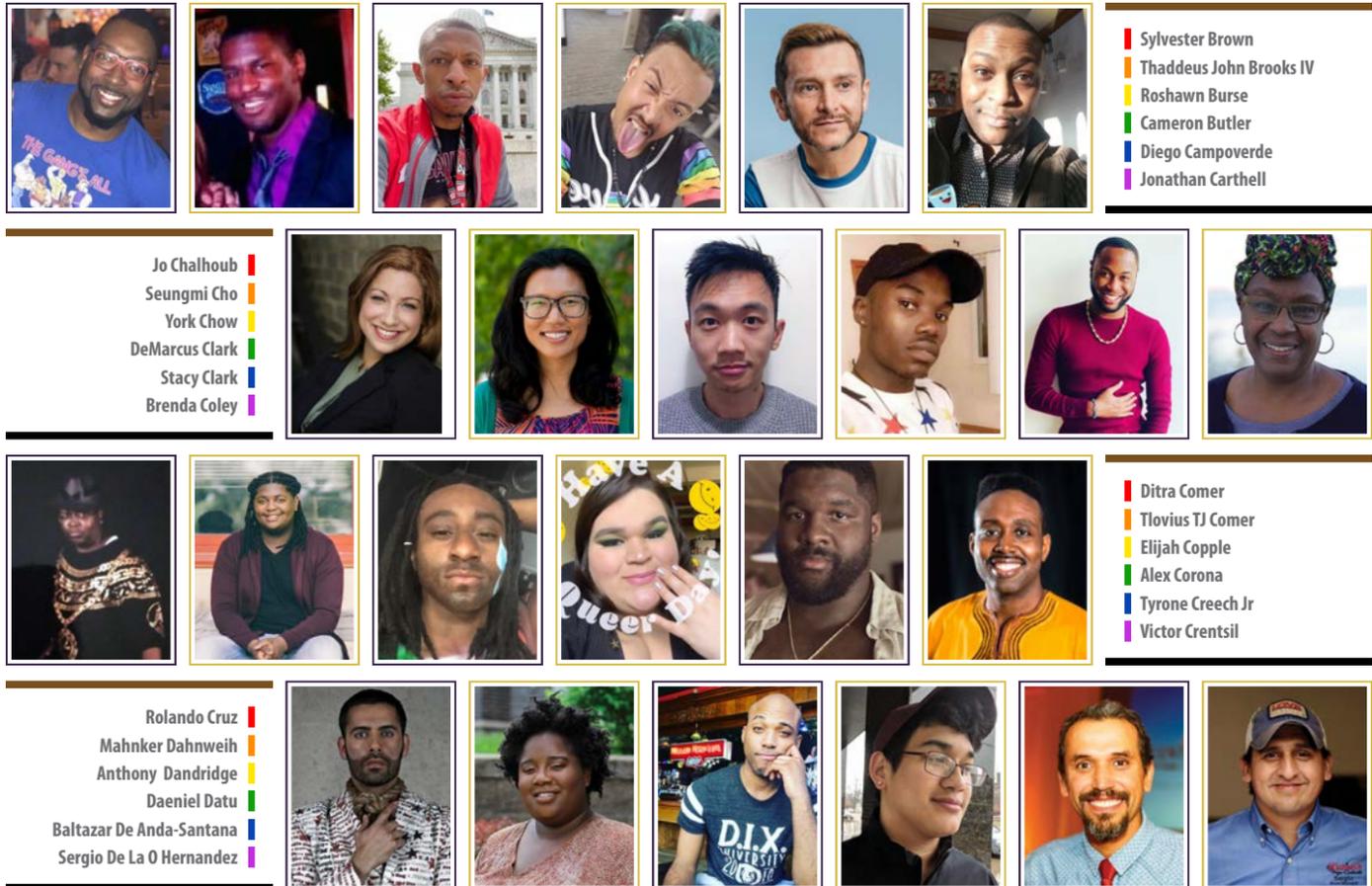
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- Baltazar De Anda-Santana
- Sergio De La O Hernandez



**The Artist**  
**nibiwakamigkwe** is a two-spirit Indigenous artist, activist, and organizer interested in healing and visibility.

**"AANIIN, BOOZHOO** ndinawemaaganidog. Nibiwakamigkwe ndizhinikaaz. Niizh manidoowag ndayaan. Waabizheshi ndoodem. Gaa-sagaskwaajimekaag ndoonjibaa, gaye oodena-aandakiide-wiinibiigoo-akiig ndaa. Miigwech bizindawiyeg // Hello relatives. My name is nibiwakamigkwe, which translates to watery ground or wet earth femme person. I have two spirits and use they/them pronouns. I'm marten clan from the Leech Lake Band of Minnesota Ojibwe, I sit in the bear clan of the Oneida Indian Nation, and am a Métis descendant of the Red River settlement in Manitoba. I live in Teejop, also called Madison, Wisconsin, which doesn't have a name in Anishinaabemowin, the language of the Ojibwe people in which I introduce myself. I have loosely translated it to 'a town elsewhere on Ho Chunk Land.' I then thanked you for listening."  
 nibiwakamigkwe says introductions are important in Native communities. In them, they disclose their family and their community, and acknowledge the land on which they live and who shares it with them. It is their way of explaining who they are. This method of understanding themselves and sexuality in relation to themselves and their community. They use the term Two-Spirit, a Native-exclusive term for those who fulfill multi-gendered roles in their communities. They are marten clan,



warriors and hunters, and bear clan, medicine keepers.  
 When nibiwakamigkwe moved to Teejop to study at the UW, they were unsure how to fulfill their clan duties. Where was the need for warriors or medicines in the city? They learned there was plenty: While they still appreciate these roles in the traditional sense, they recognize that people can commit to their clans in other ways.  
 Art and community-based organizing are nibiwakamigkwe's ways of protecting and nourishing their peoples. They work in traditional Indigenous arts, utilizing materials directly gained from growing, gathering, and hunting from the land. These traditional Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee lifeways sustain them and others and act as a continued connection to those who've gone before and those who will come after.  
 Advocacy through art has lead nibiwakamigkwe to work with UW School of Human Ecology, Arts+Lit Lab, Communication Madison, *Our Lives* magazine, Sovereign Bodies Institutie, Indigenous Climate Action, Milwaukee Art Museum, Madison New Music Festival, City of Madison, Web of Virtual Kin, as well as supporting school curricula and private consulting from subjects of cultural appropriation and preservation, Indigenous climate understandings, and combating the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples crisis. ■

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**The Professor**  
Victor M. Macías-González is Professor of History and Race, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at UW-La Crosse.

VÍCTOR M. MACÍAS-GONZÁLEZ is a Mexican American from El Paso, Texas—a conservative, family-oriented town that's more 85% Mexican. He didn't come out until he was 23 because El Paso was a bad place to be queer. Gay men led sad lives of isolation, drugs, alcohol, and depression. His family harassed him to date and marry a woman "from a good family," and his grandfather wanted him to be a diplomat. He ended up becoming a college professor married to a handsome Scandinavian third-grade teacher from rural Minnesota, Scott T. Sweden.

At UW-La Crosse, Victor teaches Latin American history, trains future school teachers, researches LGBTQ history, and has developed diversity initiatives. He also developed award-winning mentoring programs for high-achieving minority undergraduates in the liberal arts (Eagle Mentoring Program), African American males (Hekima Scholars), and a bilingual outreach program to teach Latino immigrant parents about the college-going process so they can advocate for their children (Parent College).

For two years, Victor served on the governing board of the American Historical Association's Committee on LGBT History. With support from Yale and UT-Austin, he is working on a book about how U.S. homophile activists influenced middle-class gay culture in Mexico City in the 1940s to 1960s. In the last five years, Victor has explored Midwestern queer history through his classes, and has collaborated with colleague Ariel Beaujot to design a gay history tour in La Crosse. He identified 30 gay bars that operated in La Crosse since 1967, learned about the community they fostered, and discovered how they became sites of resistance. ■



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### The Table Shaker

**Yanté Turner** is an openly trans and queer Black change agent working as an Inclusion and Equity Coordinator as well as a doula.

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**YANTÉ IS A MILWAUKEE-**born table-shaker. Rooted in justice and beloved community, he navigates the world in an openly Black trans and queer body. With his background in community care and trans liberation work, Yanté serves to uplift, support, and advocate for the diaspora of Black trans people. His passion leads him to wear many hats and have a role in the world as fluid and open as he is. His many roles and hats include the Inclusion and Equity Coordinator for Diverse & Resilient, working as a Full Spectrum Doula for queer and trans BIPOC, providing labor support care, abortion advocacy, community defense and safety task force curator, and a facilitator of all the things trans, Black, healing, joyful and challenging! Creating affirming spaces that also foster continuous learning are important factors in Yanté's work, as the fight to decolonize, strip white supremacy from our communities, and love radically stand at the forefront of his work and life. ■

**\$1,000 Donation to SHEBA**  
**Rae Senarighi**, the artist who painted the cover of this issue as well as the portraits of our Pride in Color leadership profiles, has volunteered to waive 100% of their fee so that *Our Lives* magazine can donate it to **SHEBA: Sisters Helping Each other Battle Adversity**. SHEBA is a group by and for Black transwomen that meets biweekly for leadership development, health care promotion, self care, resources, education advocacy and more. *Our Lives* will be sending SHEBA a check for \$1,000 in Rae's name.

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**The First**  
**Ankita Bharadwaj** is a lawyer, advocate, and trail blazer who knows the journey upward is often isolating, but that it is worth it.

**ANKITA HAS BEEN MANY "firsts."** First woman lawyer (with three law degrees from two countries) in their family. First person in their family to get educated out of their own country on a full scholarship. And first Indian non-citizen woman to be in a public position in Madison with an understanding of queer issues in America. Ankita currently serves on the Police Civilian Oversight Board and has served as Chair of Equitable Hiring Tool Taskforce to find Madison's first Independent Monitor. They have served on the board of the Madison Community Co-op and North American Students Of Cooperation. They also served as Vice President of Middle Eastern Law Students Association in 2016-17, and were the only research-based Masters in Law student and Indian in that association.



Coming from a multi-religious background and upbringing and having spent considerable time in India, Kenya, and the U.S., Ankita has a global perspective on social justice and brings that to every table they sit at. "My time as Chair of Equitable Hiring Tool Taskforce and as a member of Police Civilian Oversight Board of Madison has empowered me to bring a specific perspective to issues in our community which can be unique at times. I look at a problem from the lens of an Asian and Desi woman, as a person with understanding of queer folks and surrounded by queer community, as a brown person in America and a non-citizen. I then use my global experience and education to navigate those issues," they said.

"I hope to pave the way for other Asian and Desi women in the direction of liberation and representation. One day Desis won't be the wrong kind of brown because our community doesn't understand race beyond the binary. One day non-binary pronouns won't be the wrong kind of pronouns because we refuse to look at gender beyond the binary as well," they said. "I tell myself each day: 'Eyes on the prize! It's all gonna be worth it one day.' ■

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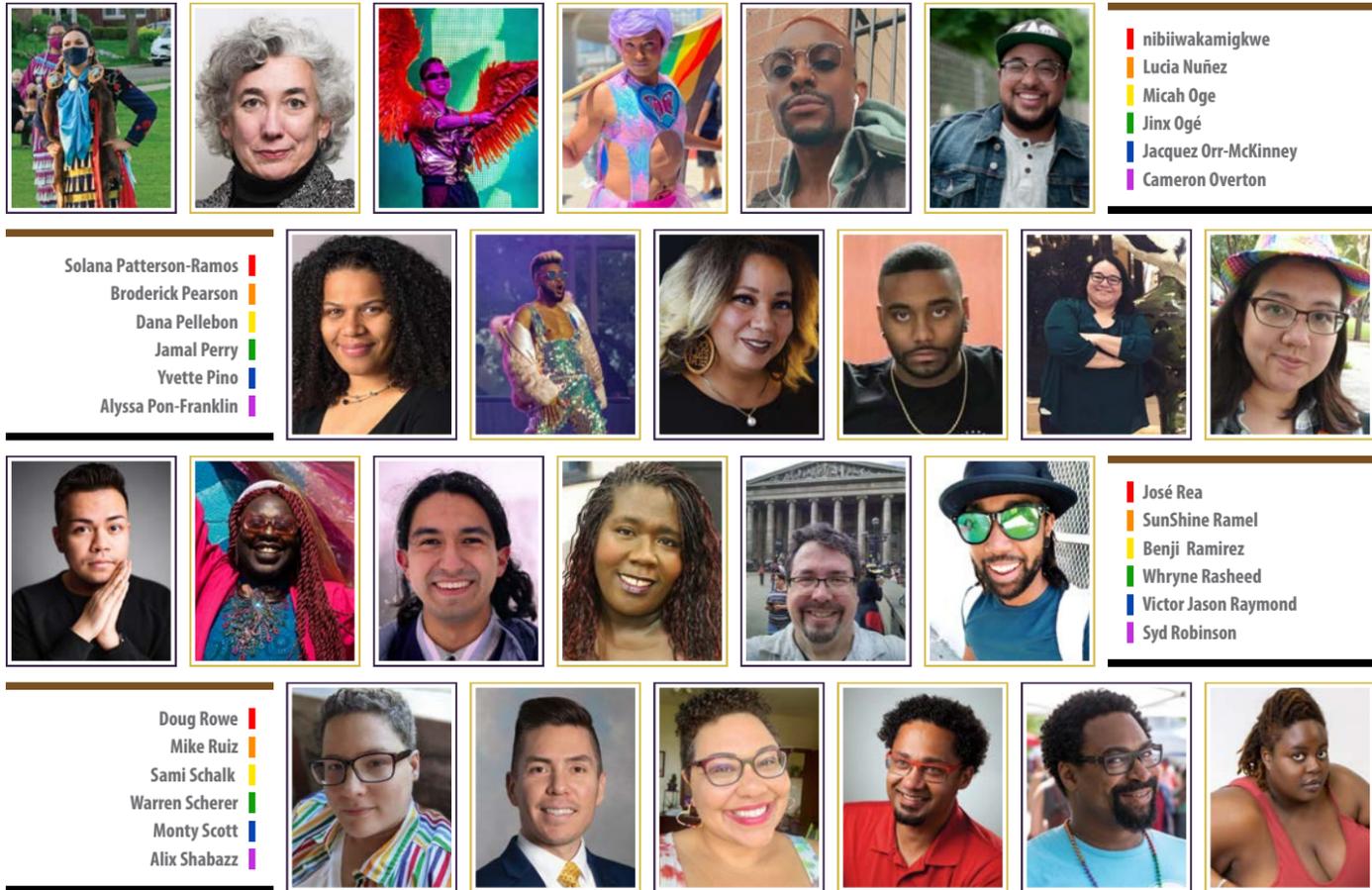
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**The Founder**  
**Rick Banks** is co-founder of MKE Black, Inc. which connects Black Milwaukeeans to Black culture, events, and Black-owned businesses.

**RICK BANKS ATTRIBUTES** his passion for working to improve his community to his background and parents. "My mother has worked extremely hard as a housekeeper for over 30 years. A lot of my drive in my early years was just to work hard so I could afford to do something like buy her a house or a car one day."



Rick recalls a specific quote during high school that really sparked his appreciation for Black people and culture. "My karate teacher said to us: Know your history, and you will know your greatness. This really stuck with me and from there I went on to study as much Black history as I could. It was eye opening. Learning about so much more than slavery and the Civil Rights movement instilled so much pride."

As a teen/young man Rick struggled with accepting his sexuality until finally coming out in his college years. "My college experience had a great influence on me finally accepting myself wholly. Being around so many different people, including people who proudly identified as LGBT, showed me that it really was going to be okay."

After college Rick worked as a community organizer, but has always had projects going on the side, including working with others to attempt to start a credit union and a community land trust and serving on several non-profit boards. It was then that he defined his personal mission as the political and economic development of Black people.

In pursuit of this, Rick co-founded MKE Black Inc., a non-profit dedicated to promoting Black culture and Black-owned businesses in the city of Milwaukee, in 2019. "We noticed a gap in that there really wasn't one spot to go to learn about the great things happening in Black Milwaukee, so we created it."

Starting on social media, MKE Black's Instagram and Facebook pages shared local news relative to Black-owned businesses and Black neighborhoods. In 2020, they launched the MKE Black Mobile app as a database of Black-owned businesses and community events. Since then the group has grown to plan events, provide connections to resources, and launch an internship program.

"I just want to give back to the community that made me and make it a great place for those that come after me, so that they don't have the same struggles that we did," he said. ■

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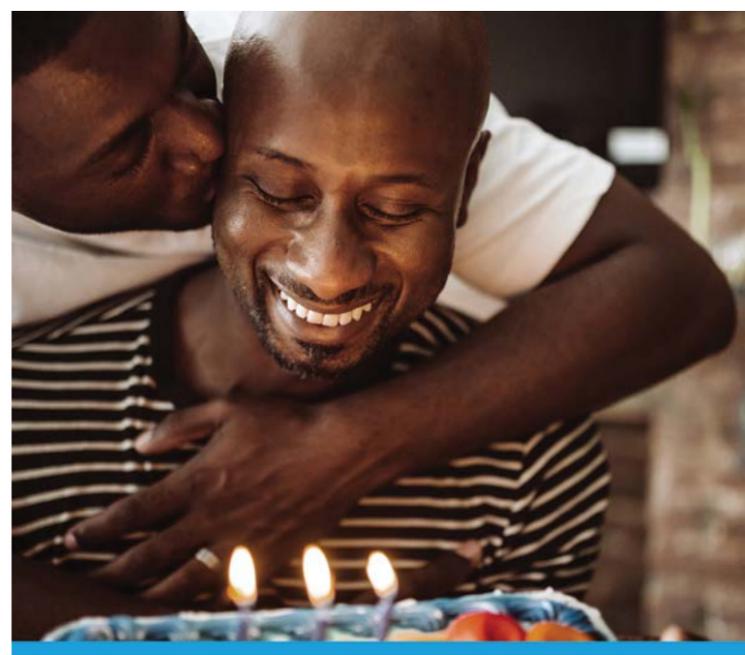
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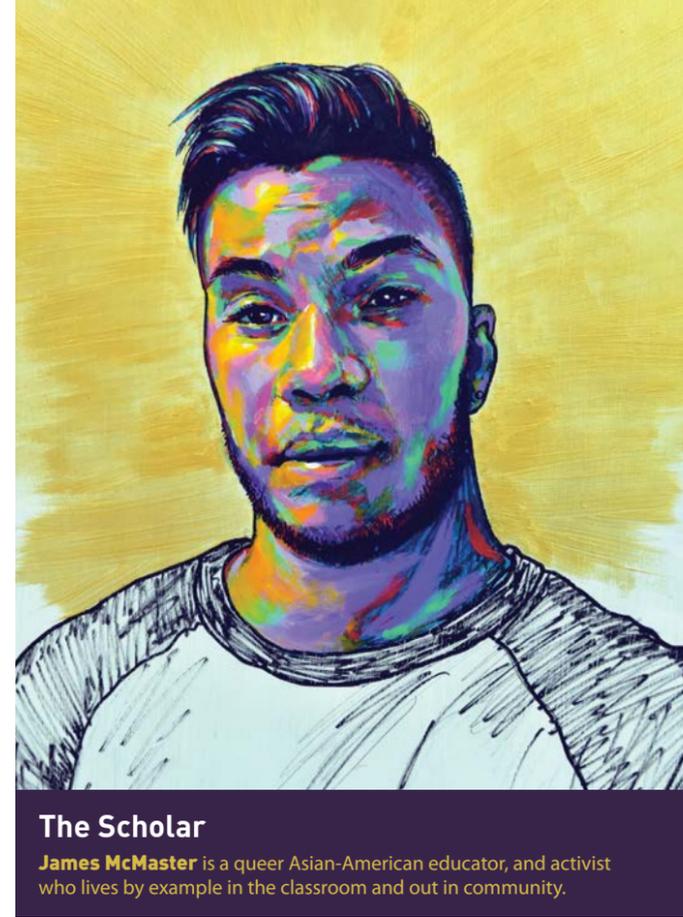
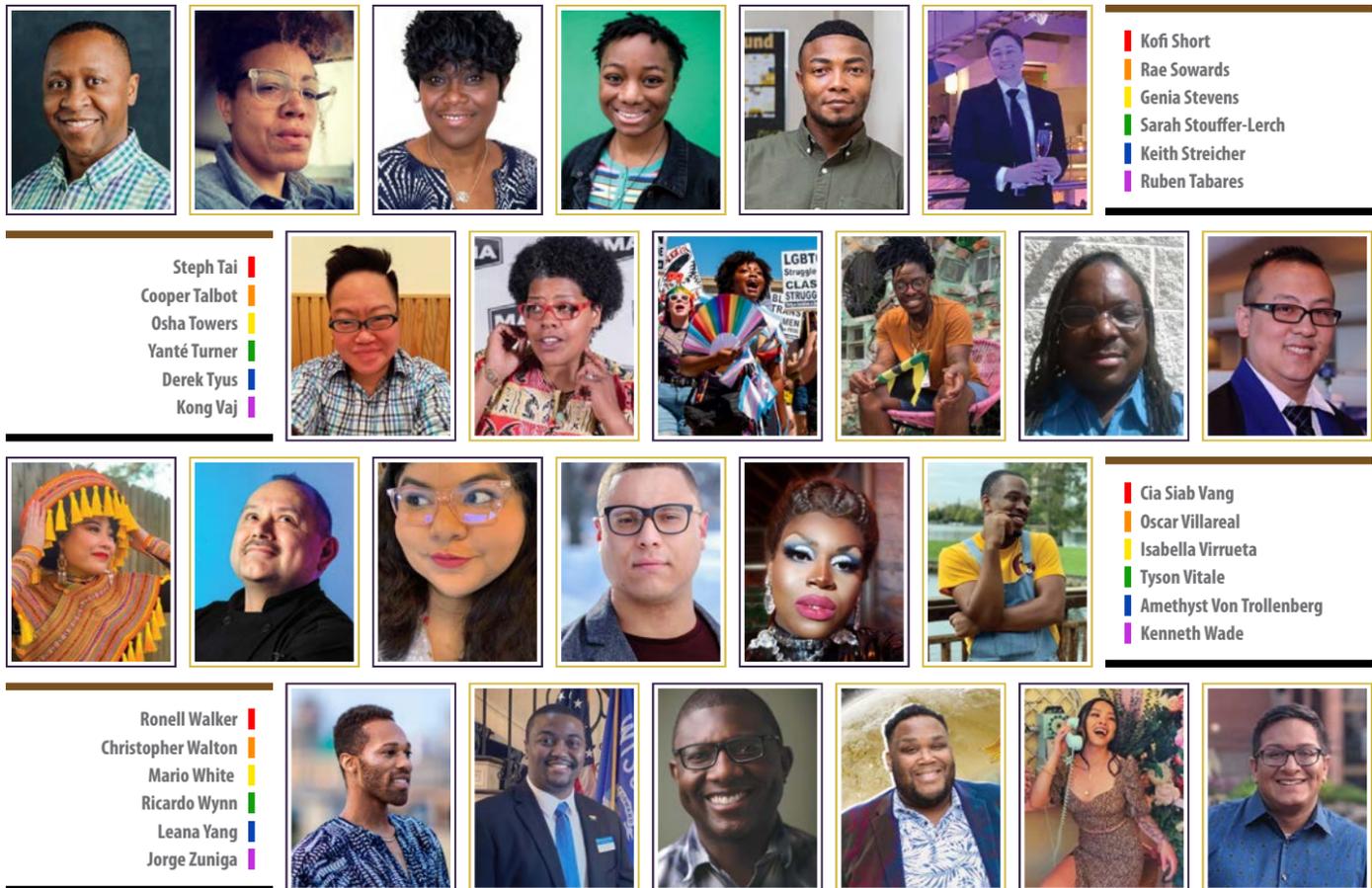
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**The Scholar**  
**James McMaster** is a queer Asian-American educator, and activist who lives by example in the classroom and out in community.

**WHAT FORMS OF CARE** have queer and trans Asian Americans devised in order to survive the violence they face in the contemporary United States? To get tenure at an institution like UW-Madison, where I've worked since 2019, professors often have to publish a book based on their research, and the book I'm writing for tenure is an attempt to answer the above question. If the pandemic has taught us anything—and I really hope it has—it's that without care there is no life. And yet, care is a resource and a responsibility that is often unjustly distributed along lines of race, gender, and so on. My work as a scholar is about writing a more just distribution of care into existence, not just for multiply marginalized Asian Americans, but for everyone.

The classes I teach at UW focus on LGBTQ+ and Asian American performance and politics. One of my favorites is a class called "Feelings: Queer and Asian" where I help students to understand how the emotional lives of queer folks and Asian Americans are all tangled up with white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and other life-diminishing systems. For students who don't count themselves as members of these communities, I hope the class can offer an accessible entry into the study of oppression and exploitation. For students who do identify with these communities, I hope the "Feelings" class can provide language with which to name the pain, and joy, of queer Asian life. I hope it can help them to see that the way they feel on an everyday basis cannot be thought apart from history and political reality.

Every semester I tell my students that the world we're living in isn't worthy of them. But, I insist, it can be made so through the hard work of activism and organizing. I try to practice what I preach, and so, when I can, I march with Freedom, Inc., build with the DSA, and take to Teen Vogue or Twitter to speak out against policing and prisons, to explain why justice for Asian Americans will only be won in opposition to empire and capitalism, in coalition with Black-lead movements for abolition and Indigenous-lead movements for decolonization.

Amidst all of this, my main concern is that my communities, friends, and families get the care they need. That's what they deserve, and the world isn't going to give it to them without a fight. ■



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NIGHTLIFE LANDMARK COMMUNITY

# Fire and Ice: Remembering the long-lost Hotel Washington

Twenty-five years after a fire burned the Hotel Washington (a hub of queer nightlife and community) to the ground, nothing remains at the former site to mark its existence. But the memories and stories remain.

**A STRANGE SENSE** of amnesia sets in when we lose all sense of a place.

First, we memorialize; then, we misremember; and finally, we forget. Without storytellers to carry forward our history, our culture and community is eventually lost.

Fortunately, some histories are kept alive in the stories of those who lived there, worked there, played there and loved there. Even 25 years after a catastrophic fire ravaged the Hotel Washington, the landmark is still alive in the hearts and souls of everyone who knew it. At the same time, an entire generation of LGBTQ Madisonians has grown up hearing facts, fictions, and folklore about a place they will never know themselves.

And that's really a bit tragic.

THE DAY IT ALL WENT DOWN

Shortly before sunrise on Sunday, February 18, 1996, hotel manager Michelle Dorland and bar manager Steve Richards were playing cribbage after-hours in Rod's. Normally, they'd be gone by 4:30 a.m., but on this particular night, they lingered later than usual. To this day, Hotel Washington tenants are grateful that they did.

At 6:15 a.m., they heard an ominous sound: a fire alarm had registered within the building.

Café Palms was on fire.

Dorland and Richards ran upstairs to the first-floor restaurant, where they met Jeff Schultz, assistant manager and hotel resident, who had called the fire department. The Café Palms kitchen was filled with smoke, so they didn't immediately see the flames halfway up the office wall. The office sat above a basement furnace room, so it seemed the fire might have started in the basement and come up the wall.

Firefighters arrived around 6:15 a.m. Schultz, Dorland, and Richards were on the third floor, banging on doors and ordering all 15 tenants to get out. False alarms weren't uncommon at the Hotel Washington, so few people left the building when the alarm went off. Fif-



Hotel Washington around 1993.



teen minutes later, the smoke was so thick that people could barely see. Half-asleep, half-awake, and half-dressed, residents poured into the parking lot in a daze. By the

end of the evacuation, Dorland and Richards were crawling on all fours through pitch-black hallways, relying on memory and instinct to find their way out.

"I was choking on the smoke," Richards told the *Wisconsin State Journal* that day. "I tried to grab a fire extinguisher, but it was already out of control, and my response was to just get people out."

Additional firefighters showed up at 6:28 a.m. Eventually, 12 firetrucks and 42 firefighters would battle the blaze. By 8:00 a.m., large crowds had gathered to watch in shock and disbelief as the violent, fast-raging fire devastated the building. Shortly thereafter, the Speed Print shop exploded in flame, as the fire reached its flammable chemicals. Most of the building collapsed, leaving only one jagged brick wall and the door to Café Palms, surrounded by a charred pile of ice-glazed rubble. Many LGBTQ people stood sobbing and hugging as they watched their refuge burn to the ground. People reported seeing the smoke from as far

away as I-90.

The timing was especially poignant. The *Capital Times* had just featured the Hotel Washington in an ongoing series of Rhythm articles celebrating its history, heritage, diversity, and community. Suspicious fires were not unknown to Madison. A suspicious 1982 fire destroyed nearby lesbian landmark Lysistrata (319 Gorham St.). The Rodney Scheel House was torched only eight months prior. Even the hotel had recently burned, when a 1995 New-

"Nothing else stands out as a place where the gay community can come together in the way they came together at the Hotel Washington. I felt like we lost our rallying point."

Bar fire damaged the second and third floors.

Schultz, Dorland, and Richards remarkably survived their ordeal without serious injuries. Fortunately, no human lives were lost in the blaze, but employees would later recall two resident pets—a kitten and a tarantula—did not make it out alive.

During the fire, Hotel Washington co-owner Greg Scheel saw a silver cross shining through a gaping hole in the bricks. "I never even knew

GREG SCHEEL.

that was there. There was so much beauty and mystery in that building."

It was a moment of inspiration. Scheel immediately announced plans to rebuild on the site. This was what Madison needed and wanted to hear in the moment. Even in this darkest hour, Greg Scheel and his sister Sherry Nelson kept the city focused on a brighter future.

"There are too many people counting on us to come back," he said.

The fire was still smoldering the next day, as over 500 gathered outside the Wisconsin State Capitol for a mournful vigil. Three hundred gathered for a memorial service Sunday at the train depot next door, overlooking the smoking mass of memories.

"The fire has taken a lot from a lot of people," said drag artist Racine, "but this complex gave everything to us, and we will rebuild."

On Day 3, photographers captured the now-iconic photo of a rainbow pride flag hanging over the destroyed hotel. By March 6, all that remained was the concrete front steps.

"We all told ourselves, it won't be that bad," said Toni Ziemer, Club De Wash employee.

"But once the smoke cleared, and we saw how bad it was, we knew it was going to be torn down. It was really devastating."

"It can't believe it's gone," said Michelle Dorland. "It provided a safe haven for a lot of people, and it's going to be missed."

"It's like a funeral, and we've lost a friend," said Mike Verveer, 4th District Alderman.

LOSING LGBTQ MADISON'S HEART

The Hotel Washington was more than just a 22-room residential hotel. It was an elaborate and intentional collective of high-concept businesses, including:

- **Barber's Closet**, a gorgeous Prohibition Era speakeasy only accessible through a secret entryway, where goldfish bowl-sized cocktails, tarot card readings, and murder mystery events were on the menu;
- **Rod's**, an old-school, unapologetic, aggressively masculine gay bar in the basement;
- **Club De Wash**, an intimate concert venue that offered live music almost every night for 19 years, hosted an astonishing list of up-and-coming artists over the years, including Smashing Pumpkins, Soul Asylum, Babes in Toyland, Alanis Morissette, Bush, Sarah McLachlan and Dave Matthews Band;
- **NewBar**, an '80s-style video bar featuring DJs, drag shows, and a dance floor to die for;
- **Café Palms & Café Espresso**, a higher-end, late-night hotspot open until 3:30 a.m. and its lower-end coffee-house neighbor, usually crammed with UW students;
- **Microbar**, a small tap offering over 75 rare microbrews, before they were widely available;
- **Speed Print**, a copy shop; and
- **Barber's Closet Salon**, a popular, two-seat hair salon. The fire claimed not just these places, but

GREG SCHEEL.

everything that gave them their unique sense of place. Club De Wash lost hundreds of musician photos that once decorated its walls. NewBar's resident DJ lost over 800 albums, some of which could never be replaced. Historic photos that once covered the walls of Café Palms were also destroyed.

Fortunately, some artifacts escaped the fire. Rodney Scheel's desk. The legendary Rolodex of Barber's Closet drink recipes.

Amazingly, ALL of Greg Scheel's videos, which now populate the Hotel Washington YouTube channel. Hundreds of photos, which were rescued, hung on clotheslines to dry, and carefully restored by volunteers over the course of four days. (Greg later scanned these photos and added them to the Hotel Washington Memories Facebook group, founded by Toni Ziemer in 2016.)

More than 100 people lost their jobs, but in spirit, they lost far more than employment.

"It was a lot more than a job for me," said Richard. "It was an integral part of who I am."

"This place was the best place I ever worked in my life," said Mike Sharpe of Club De Wash, "Everyone was so cool. Everyone was in touch with each other. We worked as a unit.



Adrian and Rodney Scheel around 1975.

It hurt me really bad to see the walls falling down. The place was an institution. It was a place where anyone in the country could come and feel comfortable in one unit or another."

"I worked at the Barber's Closet and the New Bar," said a bartender. "I've never felt more like I had a family than when I was there. I'm not ready to let go."

"That place had a lot of character and I wonder where the ghosts will go now," musician Marques Bovre (1962–2013) told the *Wisconsin State Journal*. "When old houses burn down, they say the ghosts have to find a new place to live."

"We'll come back 100 percent bigger and better," said Lori Sandy, Club De Wash manager. "The people who came here and worked

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PROTESTS STONEWALL MILWAUKEE

# Wisconsin's Stonewall

The Black Nite Brawl of 1961 was Wisconsin's first LGBTQ uprising.

**THE STONEWALL UPRISING** in New York City in June 1969 was undeniably the start of a national LGBTQ awareness. But even before that event, gay people in cities around the country were beginning to push back against homophobic attitudes. Perhaps one of the most notable, but most underrated, is the Black Nite bar brawl in Milwaukee.

This summer, the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project seeks to celebrate the revolutionary spirit of our brave elders—who on August 5, 1961, ignited the first LGBTQ uprising in Wisconsin history, and one of the first LGBTQ resistance events in U.S. history. Over time, this event was hidden by history, remembered only by a small and ever-shrinking group of aging survivors, and dismissed as a bit of an urban legend.

"The Black Nite Brawl was truly Wisconsin's Stonewall," said Don Schwamb, founder of the Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project. "It was the birthplace of LGBTQ pride in Wisconsin."

"We are all past due in paying homage, respect, and recognition to the elders who made it happen that night, knowing they were putting their entire lives, as they knew them, on the line."

## THE BLACKEST OF NIGHTS

Milwaukee may be a tavern town, but the Black Nite was no everyday bar brawl.

On a hot and foggy August night, four sailors went to the Black Nite (400 N. Plankinton Ave) after losing a drinking game. They were "dared" to go this known gay bar as a form of humiliation. When the bouncer asked them to sign in and show ID, as was customary at the time to keep suspicious strangers out, they panicked. They didn't want anyone to know they'd been there, and now there would be a record.



The Black Nite at 400 N. Plankinton Ave, a tavern storefront in a pre-civil war warehouse.

"They could have just left," said Don Schwamb, "and nobody would have ever known they were there. They made the worst possible decision they could have made that night. By morning, everyone knew who was there—and worse yet, what they did and what they caused."

The sailors became belligerent and refused to leave. The bouncer threw them out on the sidewalk, at which time, all four piled on him and began to beat him. Inside the Black Nite, owner Wally Whetham and a young customer were getting ready for the night. Hearing the commotion, that customer rushed outside to defend her boyfriend. "I instinctively grabbed two beer bottles and ran outside," she would remember in 2011, "forgetting that I was still in a bathrobe and slippers. But in that moment, I could have fought off an army in my bathrobe."

She knocked out one of the sailors cold and warded off the other three with a broken beer bottle. Embarrassed to be beaten up by a homosexual, they vowed to come back and 'clean up' the bar and 'teach those sick faggots a lesson.' And, later that night, they did come back.

But these sailors didn't know who they were dealing with.

Josie Carter, a gender non-conforming black "queen," had already given their friend a concussion. They had threatened her, her boyfriend, and her bar, before she'd even had time to finish putting on her make-up for the night. As Saturday night customers rolled in, she wound up the crowd with the story, encouraging them to stay and defend the bar if the sailors came back. Owner Wally Whetham wanted to lock up the bar and send everyone home, but people were sick and tired of running.

Only a year before, a police raid in Juneau Park resulted in Elroy Schulz, a gay brewery worker, being beaten to death. A police inquest had ruled the killing a "justifiable homicide" **Continued on page 50 →**

**Damage Put at \$2,000 After Brawl in Tavern 3 Hospitalized, 3 Held in Bar Fights**

here share a sense of community and we will bring Club De Wash back."

## BURNING QUESTIONS

A Madison Fire Department spokeswoman said that arson had not yet been ruled out. Division Chief William Olson said, "We have to start digging—we have to dig to find the point of origins and the cause."

Greg Scheel disagreed. "There's not any inkling it was arson," he said. He said most of the \$2 million in damages would be covered by insurance. He also dismissed speculation that anti-gay fireman Ron Greer had somehow caused the fire.

Nikki Baumbblatt, co-producer of a popular LGBT radio program on WTSO-AM, wasn't so convinced. "The fire is a reminder that Madison isn't as progressive as some people think. Greer may not have started the fire, but he ignited the flame of anti-gay sentiments in Madison."

In response, Greer simply said, "I am not sorry that some of these businesses are gone now, but I am sorry about the fire."



Cafe Palms early 1990's.

The Keanu Reeves/Morgan Freeman movie Chain Reaction was supposed to be filmed outside the Hotel Washington. Although scenes within the state capitol building were retained, planned scenes at the train depot were scrapped.

In the end, the fire was traced to a simple, routine, and innocent action. An employee had dumped an ashtray full of cigarette butts into a trash can, as they'd probably done hundreds of nights before then. On this particular night, the embers somehow sparked an inferno that engulfed the bar.

"The *Wisconsin Light* wishes to express its heartfelt sorrow and deep sense of loss to the Scheel family and the entire Madison LGBT community at the loss of the Hotel Washington," wrote the editors of the state's leading LGBTQ publication in February, 1996.

"We remember fondly all the good times we had there and the people that we met. We remember the laughter, rare nowadays. We remember the cruising. We remember the

fun. We remember sitting now and again and talking to Rod. We'd talk about AIDS. We'd talk about politics. But most of all, we'd talk about things that gay men do. Now we have our memories of an open, friendly place, where we could be accepted and not feel afraid. But we are persuaded that the Hotel Washington will rise again."

Everyone was.

## HOW THE HOTEL WASHINGTON HAPPENED

The Hotel Washington traced back to 1885, when the Commercial House (also known as the Madison House) operated a display headquarters, sample room, and lodging on West Washington Avenue for traveling businessmen. Over 20 trains arrived daily—from Chicago, Milwaukee and Minneapolis—at the Milwaukee Road depot next door.

In 1904, E.G. Trumpf acquired and rechristened the "Trumpf Hotel" as the finest accommodations available in the city. After a shocking 1906 fire, Trumpf converted the wooden hotel to "fireproof" brick. Ten years later, he sold it to August Harbort who renamed it the Hotel Washington in 1916.

The hotel changed hands many, many times by 1961, when Louis Wagner became owner. Wagner was the operator of Koin Cafe, a trendy automat in the Park Hotel on the Square, but not financially prepared to preserve or modernize the Hotel Washington. When the Milwaukee Road Depot closed in 1969, the hotel transitioned from a one-star traveler's hotel to 60 low-income housing units.

Rodney Scheel opened the Back Door (46 N. Park St.) as Madison's first out-and-proud gay bar in 1972. For safety reasons, customers had to enter through the "back door," but this didn't always prevent street harassment and violence. At age 25, he bought the Hotel Washington in 1975. Within a few months, he opened the Barber's Closet—and it was just the beginning of the renaissance. He transformed the greasy spoon "Hot L Cafe" into Café Palms. Club De Wash opened in 1977, Rod's in 1979, NewBar in 1984 and MicroBar in 1995.

Rodney Scheel was one of Wisconsin's best-known gay rights and AIDS activists. He founded the MAGIC Picnic, an annual celebration of gay Madison, a tradition that continued until 1998. The Picnic began as an employee appreciation event, but at its peak, it was one of Madison's largest annual fundraisers. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were raised over the years for critical LGBTQ causes. (The MAGIC Picnic was resurrected as the OutReach MAGIC Festival in 2019.)

Rod's was one of the most popular—if not most notorious—gay bars in the state. "If you came into Rod's with underwear on, you would

probably have them torn off and they would get tied up on the pipes," said Greg Scheel.

Meanwhile, high school and college students from across the state would travel to NewBar for Tuesday's 18+ nights, when the

The Scheels allowed people suffering from AIDS to move into hotel rooms if they were unable to maintain their independence. This inspired Rodney Scheel's dying wish: To open a home where people with AIDS would be treated respectfully and competently.

lower level was reserved for minors and the upper level for adults.

By 1990, AIDS and HIV infection was reaching critical mass in Wisconsin. Over 80 funerals were held for Hotel Washington regulars. The Scheels allowed people suffering from AIDS to move into hotel rooms if they were unable to maintain their independence. This inspired Rodney Scheel's dying wish: To open a home where people with AIDS would be treated respectfully and competently.

Sadly, Rodney Scheel died in July 1990 at the age of 39.

The Hotel Washington was open 365 days a year and offered holiday events so nobody was left behind. It was a huge supporter of local

pride organizations, and it was lovingly reconstructed on many a pride parade float.

Steve Starkey, executive director of Outreach LGBT Community Center, said "There was something for everyone. If you wanted to go dancing, you could do that. If you wanted to go to a leather bar, you could do that. If you wanted to hear music, you could do that. If you wanted to go out and eat, there was Café Palms. It was one-stop shopping."

"If you were gay and didn't want anybody to know you were gay, you went into one of the straight clubs, and then you would sneak into the back staircase and go to one of the gay clubs," said Greg Scheel.

Here are some of those stories.

## HOTEL WASHINGTON MEMORIES

Michael

"HOTEL WASHINGTON PLAYED an important role in my life," said Michael, a 30-year Madison native. "I saw Sarah McLachlan at Club De Wash. My husband and I had our first date at Café Palms. But it's NewBar that had the first, and probably most lasting impact on me."

"I came to UW-Madison in 1990 from a small town in rural Wisconsin," said Michael. "and it was definitely overwhelming. Coming from where I'd been, it was a whole lot at once. So, one night, I went with a group of



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GREG SCHEEL.



and strongly implied that eliminating a homosexual improved society as a whole. Gay men were hassled with sting operations everywhere they went. They were disowned, demoralized, and disrespected at every turn. Even worse, they could even be murdered by police and no one would care.

Now, violence had come into one of the few safe spaces they had.

There seemed to be nothing left to lose.

“We do not run from a fight,” Josie told the crowd. “We do not run from anything.”

On August 5, 1961, Milwaukee learned how true this was. When the sailors returned, they weren’t just fighting Josie and the bouncer anymore. They were fighting an army of angry queens, lesbians, and gay men who had reached their breaking point.

Six years before Stonewall, five years before Compton’s Cafeteria in San Francisco, and four years before the Dewey’s protests in Philadelphia, our elders fought back against homophobia with unforeseen fury.

**THE GREAT GAY PANIC**

Local news coverage sought to scandalize the event. Instead, the news stories changed the course of history. For the first time, Milwaukee knew that gay people existed here, in large enough numbers to have their own spaces, and that they would fight back if provoked. For the first time, isolated LGBTQ people learned that they were not alone in the world, but that they had a local community. For the first time, Milwaukee’s LGBTQ people felt pride after a lifetime of shame, guilt, rejection, and scorn.

The sailors were cleared of all charges. The Black Nite was ordered to close. Within a few years, the Plankinton Strip—Milwaukee’s first “gayborhood”—was deliberately demolished.

But the seeds of liberation had been planted within Wisconsin’s earliest gay rights activists.

People like Eldon Murray grew up seeking to find any reflection of gay people like himself in the world. All he found were the negative, hostile, depressing indictments of the era: sexual deviate, criminal, neurotic, invert, perversion. He, and others like him, scrapbooked every headline about the Black Nite Brawl. It was a community’s first glimmer of hope and a first spark of liberation.

By 1964, the *Milwaukee Journal* was reporting that “the homosexual has gotten bolder.” By 1965, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* commented that “whether or not there are more homosexuals now than ever before, they are certainly more visible, and society must decide what it’s going to do about them.” By 1969, over three dozen gay bars had opened in Milwaukee, including a bar that allowed men to dance together while it was strictly forbidden throughout the Midwest. Throughout the 1970s, Gay People’s Union fought for gay rights so ferociously, that by 1982, Wisconsin was known as the “gay rights” state because of its progressive protections for gay and lesbian people.

“Liberation didn’t happen by accident,” said Schwamb. “It was borne in brutal battles like the Black Nite Brawl.”

**THE LOST GENERATION**

Josie Carter humbly downplayed the event as just another wild night out. She refused to accept the title of “Mother of Gay Milwaukee,” even as a whole new generation of transgender youth “adopted” her as a trancestor. After her passing in 2014, more and more details of the Black Nite were discovered.

“Until our researchers connected the dots between oral interviews, **Continued on page 52 →**



ABOVE: As the instigator of the Black Nite brawl, and a spiritual mother figure for generations of Milwaukee queens, Josie has been remembered as the Mother of Gay Milwaukee. She died of cancer in 2014 without ever being recognized for her decades of commitment to the community. To be fair, she would most likely have declined any special recognition as she was, in her own words, “nobody special. Just a girl out to have a good time.”

BELOW: Jamie Gays and Josie Carter, reigning club kids and nightlife personas of the 60s and 70s, gender non conforming trancestors, and early gay community champions. Jamie was the first-ever Miss Gay Wisconsin.



friends to the Hotel Washington, got separated from most of them, and got lost”

“Somehow, we came upon it, and it was spectacular. It was a great, gigantic old building, and it had such an imposing presence to it. I don’t even recall if we got into NewBar the first time, but I was just so struck by the architecture and the experience of the building itself for days afterwards. Nothing else in Madison matched it, then or now.”

“I’d read about New York nightclubs in high school and expected something like that, but that wasn’t NewBar. It was modern and worldly but still very small-town. I always thought Café Palms and Barber’s Closet were so glamorous. The Hotel Washington was a really great place to have in my life at that time.”

“We went to Café Palms two weeks before it burned down, after not being there for years, not even realizing it would be our last visit,” said Michael. “We drove right past the fire as it was happening. I remember thinking, this is just crazy, what is Madison going to be like without it? And then I remember this feeling of nothing happening—and then, nothing ever happening again. Nothing ever rose up to replace it. But how could it? The Hotel Washington was unique to the point of being irreplaceable.”

**HOTEL WASHINGTON MEMORIES**

Emily

**EMILY CAME TO MADISON** in fall 1990 and stayed for 15 years. After graduation, she settled down, got married, had kids and left the downtown scene. Still, her memories of the Hotel Washington stay with her today.

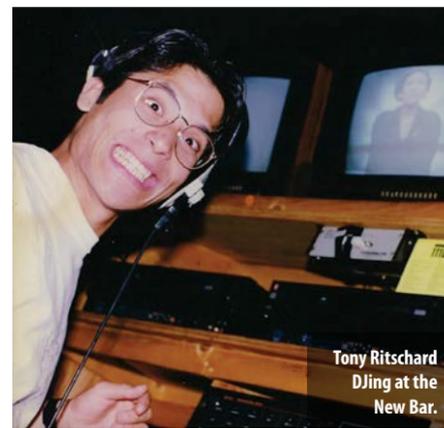
“I still remember the first time we went,” said Emily, “thinking how it was a little bit of a lot of things. It had this cool vibe, but kind of a city vibe, the air of something slightly dangerous that appeals to you at that age. That air was exhilarating to me.”

“I remember staying at Café Palms late at night, after the bars closed, and being so poor, and so young, we’d all share a gigantic plate of French fries. I remember sitting around and



Eric & Donnie attending New Bar’s Halloween.

GREG SCHEEL



Tony Ritschard DJing at the New Bar.

smoking and acting so intellectual at age 18.”

“One night, I was invited upstairs into the living quarters for some reason. It was this totally different world from where I came from. There were people in various states of undress, with their room doors open, and it all felt very debaucherous, like some kind of cabaret.”

“I remember Rod’s—and I’m not sure how I got in—and seeing men with Freddie Mercury mustaches and harnesses for the first time. I walked into that back room with all the TVs showing porn, and absolutely nobody was watching it! Nobody was paying attention at all. I’d never seen a lot of porn, much less this much porn. And here, everyone was standing around, sipping their drinks, acting blasé.”

“I just remember thinking that outsiders looked at our group and wanted to be part of it. We were really something. I can’t believe how many hangers-on we attracted. I remember people taking videos of us because we were unlike everyone else in the bar.”

“NewBar was the first place I ever saw a drag queen. I was so young, and so sheltered. They were unlike anything I’d ever seen before. Just so fabulous and glamorous. One of my favorite memories was voguing with a male model on the dance floor at NewBar. It was really fun, and I thought I was so cool. I hope nobody has videos of that!

“Nothing else stands out as a place where the gay community can come together in the way they came together at the Hotel Washington. I felt like we lost our rallying point.”

**HOTEL WASHINGTON MEMORIES**

Dave

**DAVE CAME TO UW-MADISON** in 1989 and stayed for five years.

“I have fleeting memories and thousands of photos from that era,” said Dave. “Madison felt so big-city to me. I was on my own, with no supervision at all, and suddenly had that self-aware moment where I realized I could do anything I wanted. I can dye my hair any color

GREG SCHEEL

and nobody will laugh. I can date whoever I want and nobody will judge me. I’d never been in such a bubble before, and it was liberating.”

“Eventually, I realized I had access to bigger cities, like Milwaukee and Chicago, where I could get a better understanding of gay life.

“I remember my first exposure to Hotel Washington. We went to NewBar, at the height of Madonna’s “Vogue” and the Truth or Dare Tour. The Ten Percent Society dances had been a place to dance, and I loved dancing in that giant hall. But NewBar was the scene we saw in Andy Warhol’s Interview: This was our Studio 54, this was our Club MTV. And then, the hierarchies got built: who’s in what clique and who’s built what name for themselves. I really felt like King of the Twinks. I surrounded myself with people who were glamorous, eccentric, monied, and fun. I wasn’t super close to them, but they made me look good. It was all so much fun.”

“I started to date older men, which changed everything,” said Dave. “I discovered the Barber’s Closet, where I learned about high-end liquors like gin and whiskey. From there, I fell into Café Palms where I could find an alternative culture not found at the Rathskeller. I wanted to talk about John Waters or Fran Liebowitz, not Nietzsche, and you could do that there.”

“Then came Rod’s! Oddly enough, my first experience was with a group of lesbians in the summer of 1991. I remember seeing those massive tube televisions hanging from chains on the walls. They had to be at least 75 pounds each. I was excited to find such a salacious place. Was this real life? Was this actually happening? I jumped right into it.”

“I got into the grunge scene in 1993. My friend circle was changing rapidly, as people were breaking up, choosing grad schools, even leaving Madison. Club De Wash drew me into the live music scene. I was amazed by the amount of access Madison had to emerging talent. It was very straight, but it was my last stop in my Hotel Washington journey.

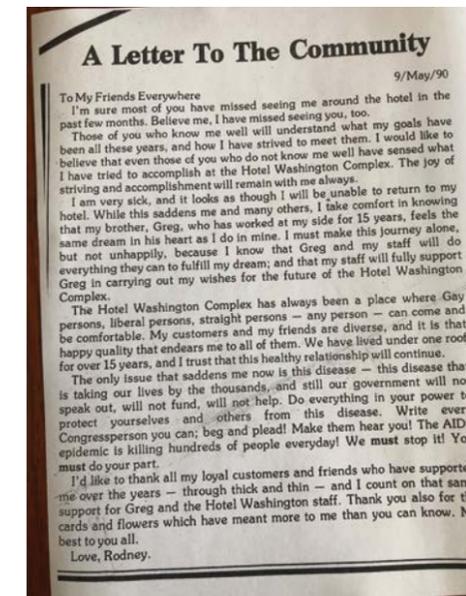
“NewBar was a moment that held my interest for about two years, before I went downstairs to Palms, and then Rod’s, and later branched out to the Cardinal, Genna’s, and other places. I grew up in the Hotel Washington, or shall I say, I grew as I worked my way down from the third floor to the street. I realized I didn’t have to be gay 24/7. I had other options.”

“I was shocked when the hotel burned down,” said Dave. “I was living in Ann Arbor at the time and hadn’t thought about it for two years. And then, I couldn’t stop thinking about it. I went through a grieving process. I called my old friends and we rehashed all the stories, just for old times’ sake. Therapeutically, it was nice to revisit the old days because everyone

remembered them differently, as if we had all seen different versions of the same movie.”

**THE LONG GOODBYE**

At one point, some believed that Rod’s could be salvaged, and could reopen within a few months, with the rest of the building eventually reconstructed over it. The Scheels hoped to add a fourth story to the hotel, double the number of hotel rooms, and expand into



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newspaper clippings, testimonials and timelines, the historical significance of the event was unknown," said Schwamb. "Many thought Josie was embellishing or exaggerating the story, but that really wasn't her style. She was one who told it like it was, always. Her stories of the Black Nite were no exception."

"This was a significant historical event that shaped the future of LGBTQ Wisconsin history," said Schwamb. "We seek to unhide this history and make this historical event well-known throughout the nation. Too often, LGBTQ people are disconnected from their community history, which also disconnects them from our shared heritage. Our history is not taught in schools except in a handful of states. Our history is not passed down from generation to generation like other communities. It is at constant, collective risk of being erased."

"In a second year without a PrideFest, we cannot allow the 60th anniversary of LGBTQ pride to 'go dark,'" said Schwamb. "We owe it to these warriors—and, especially, to the 'Mother of Gay Milwaukee'—to keep their stories and spirit alive, and to give them the proper respect they were denied while they were alive."

**A CALL TO ACTION**

The Black Nite Brawl is reminder that LGBTQ history did not start at Stonewall—the fuse was lit long before June 1969 in cities all over America, in bars like the Black Nite, by pioneers like Josie Carter.

Today, nothing stands at 400 N. Plankinton Avenue at all. Fifty-five years after the Black Nite was torn down for "civic improvements," the land remains empty and abandoned. Schwamb and the History Project have pledged to fix that.

"We seek a historical marker at the corner of Plankinton and St. Paul to commemorate Josie's heroic confidence, bravery, and leadership—at a time before equality, at a time before liberation, at a time before hope," said Schwamb. "We have submitted an application to the Milwaukee County Historical Society for the first historical sidewalk marker honoring an LGBTQ person."

Schwamb hopes the landmark would bring inspiration and hope to LGBTQ people facing adversity today, especially transgender and gender non-conforming women of color like Josie, who continue to face extinction-level threats in Milwaukee. He has received confirmation that Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley will be issuing a proclamation honoring the Black Nite, and awaits confirmation from Mayor Tom Barrett's office as well.

**AUGUST 5 COMMEMORATION**

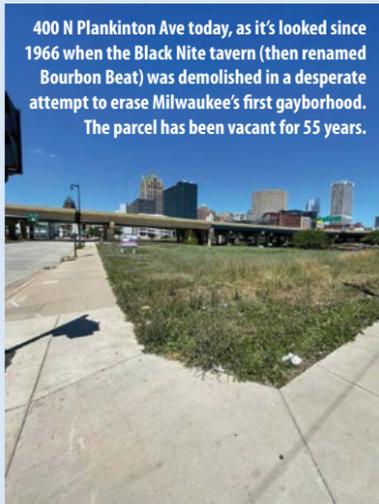
The Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project has also committed to lighting the Hoan Bridge in pride colors on Thursday, August 5, 2021. They are currently fundraising to cover the \$3,500 expense—and you can support the cause with a donation of any amount at their GoFundMe page. As the History Project pays no salaries, has no physical space, and funds its minimal operating expenses through honorariums, all community donations will be applied directly to memorial activities.

"The whole wide world celebrated Stonewall 50 in 2019," said Schwamb. "Let's make sure the 60th anniversary of the Black Nite Brawl is remembered with pride, not lost to history."

**ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION**

The Wisconsin LGBTQ History Project is an independent, self-funded, all-volunteer, not-for-profit organization founded at PrideFest in 1995. Over the past 26 years, the project has become the state's largest digital collection of LGBTQ historical content. They are the publishers of LGBT Milwaukee (2016) and the upcoming The Golden Age of Milwaukee Drag (2021.) Connect with the History Project on Twitter and Facebook.

For more about the Black Nite Brawl, visit OnMilwaukee and NPR. ■



the neighboring gas station space. The Hotel Washington team set up a temporary office at the train depot and pursued their ambitious restoration. They even ran a full page ad in the Madison Gay Directory saying the Hotel would reopen in fall 1996.

But, only six months after the fire, it became clear that reconstruction wasn't going to be quite so easy.

Contractor estimates had soared far beyond available financing. At the same time, scaling back the plans reduced the revenue generating capabilities of the hotel, which in turn reduced the amount of financing offered. Because of the hotel's age, it was grandfathered from some building and zoning codes that would have applied to a new building. And the insurance policy only covered the Hotel Washington's market value, not the cost of rebuilding it. In effect, the cost of rebuilding would be twice as much as it cost to buy an existing building. The project was over \$400,000 short on funding.

"It's really devastating not only to myself, but for everyone else," said Greg Scheel in September 1996. "We have orders from the city to fill in the hole. City regulations only give you so much time to either rebuild or cover up the hole. Ours must be covered by the end of October."

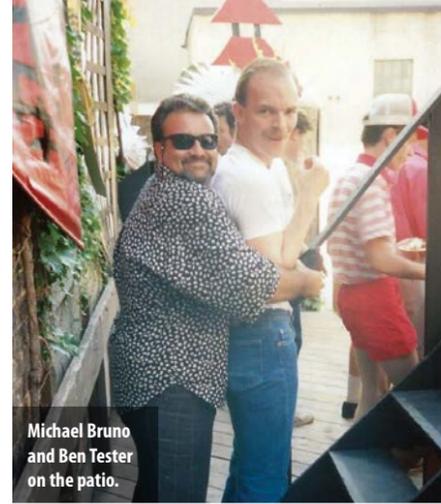
The struggle to rebuild the crown jewel of Wisconsin's LGBTQ social spots was over. The Scheel family began considering other locations for the Hotel's businesses.

Steve Starkey, former co-chair of GALVANIZE and Director of Wisconsin Community Fund, said, "Madison isn't a real big town. It's not like Milwaukee where there's lots of different bars and possibilities. It was a community center, because there were five different bars in that building. There won't be anything on the scale of the Hotel Washington for some time. People have been awaiting the rebuilding. It's going to be hard to accept it will never come."

"How do you say goodbye to an old friend, especially when it's a wonderful building that had been the hub of gay life in your city?" asked *Wisconsin Light*. "The Scheels deserved better. They waged a tenacious battle with a willingness to risk everything for the community they have for so long supported. They simply ran out of time. They deserved to win this battle. Part of our disappointment is knowing how they must feel. Our hearts are broken along with theirs."

**A WOUND THAT NEVER HEALS**

Without the Hotel Washington, one-stop shopping was no longer an option. Madison's



Michael Bruno and Ben Tester on the patio.

GREG SCHEEL

gay bars were no longer together in one area, like in other major cities, nor did Madison's gay community seem to have a spiritual center. New gay bars, like Club Five, were outside the downtown area and only accessible by car. Many found the newer bars cliquy, unfriendly, or exclusionary, serving only a niche of the overall community. Meanwhile, many Hotel Washington regulars began leaving Madison.

Within just a few years, Madison felt like an entirely new city. A decade later, the concept of a Hotel Washington seemed unthinkable.

Four years later, Chris Ott asked, "Why is Madison so Gay Unfriendly?" in June 2000's *In Step*:

"Hotel Washington burned down and

nothing has ever replaced it. I've talked with a bunch of Madison residents about the lack of 'gay space' in town. What I heard from everyone is how different things were when the Hotel Washington was still around. It was a place to talk, dance, have a drink, eat or just hang out, all in a gay-friendly environment.

"But here's the problem: as good as the Hotel Washington was—Madison doesn't have anything like it anymore, even spread throughout the whole area, not to mention in one space. I don't mean to put down the gay space that Madison does have. Still, something's missing.

"Especially for the growing number of us who came to Madison after the demise of the Hotel Washington, the city feels more like a town of 20,000, not 200,000."

"The Hotel Washington just seems to be one of those stories we hear about the '60s, '70s or '80s," said Amber Halverson, bar manager of Plan B, in 2015. "It seemed like a crazy time when anyone could be a rockstar."

Toni Ziemer hosted a reunion, "20 Years after the Fire: A Shindig" at Genna's in 2016. While researching the hotel, she learned that the 1996 fire fell—almost to the date—on the anniversary of the property being renamed Hotel Washington. Ziemer has been planning a book of her own.

Some spectators still own bricks they took from the scene of the fire. Today, they're the

only physical remains of this building that meant so much to so many.

In 1999, the Hotel Washington lot was replaced by a gas station and convenience store, which in turn, was replaced in 2020 by West Washington Place, a five-story 51-apartment complex offering "luxury penthouse lofts."

The Scheels deserved better. They waged a tenacious battle with a willingness to risk everything for the community they have long supported. They simply ran out of time. They deserved to win this battle.

Madison politicians saw the redevelopment as a good thing: An investment in downtown that would attract more urban dwellers. Critics saw the building as more of the same dull and soulless architecture 21st century Madison was flooded with. While Hotel Washington alumni hoped for some connection—any connection—to their historic landmark, there doesn't seem to be any at all. Not even the address is the same.

"It's dreamlike to think it's been gone 25 years, like none of our experiences ever actually happened," said Dave. "There's no proof to point at. But this entropy is all part of the human experience. We get used to it, we accept it, we move on, but we just keep telling the same stories about a place that no longer exists." ■

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LAW & POLITICS QTBIPOC SYSTEMIC RACISM

## The Failings of White Liberalism

*As progressive as Madison tries to be, its achilles heel continues to be its blindness to the systemic oppression of people of color.*

**Ankita Bharadwaj** and **Jill Nagler** outline specific areas for improvement.

I would like to start with a definition and a disclaimer. I am using the definition of “whiteness” to mean any political ideology that enforces the will of a white majority group and treats non-white folks as a monolith capable of feeling freedom, justice, and fairness only in one flavor across the board. I use “white liberalism,” “the white liberal/s” and “white liberal movement” interchangeably. The disclaimer is that I am not a conservative. I’m a socialist.

I come from a country whose Preamble of the Constitution clearly states that besides being a Sovereign, Secular, Democratic Republic, we are Socialists. I feel it is pertinent to give a disclaimer because the first issue I find with white liberalism is that if you are criticizing it, people assume that you must be from the other side of the political aisle. This idea centers white opinions by default. It dictates that whiteness knows more about the oppression enforced on people of color than people of color do. White liberalism criticizes whiteness with words and sometimes even actions that are too often not informed by historical analysis or the lived experience of the oppressed. While this criticism may come from a place of benevolence, it does not necessarily come from a place of understanding the oppression itself. White liberals, however, are vastly unaware of this. There are times when they would verbalize it, but practicing it is rare. Again, their inability to practice does not necessarily come from a place of malevolence; however this behavior does have long-lasting effects on leftist movements and progress.

Recently, the Madison Police Department body-worn camera report was released, and I saw an immediate pushback by some activists against its adoption by the city. There are several prominent activists who do not necessarily disagree with its adoption but understand where the people against its adoption are coming from. However, I have seen in many online spaces, especially Facebook, that folks opposing the adoption of the body-worn camera report have a tendency to demonize those who are either neutral or in favor of the report. This demonization comes in the form of assumptions that those not in line with their position must be Conservatives or Republicans and even racists.

I firmly believe that this is not only a counter-productive tactic, but it is an example of the “my way or the highway” attitude of white liberalism.

If you look at the political scene on national, state, or even county and city level, we see very little representation of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color (BIPOC Folks). Lack of BIPOC representation and influence regarding what liberation looks like leads to a lack of BIPOC perspectives in decision making and political environments that impact the liberatory movement. White liberals that dominate these spaces think that Liberation for Black people is the same as Liberation for Indigenous people and that Liberation for Indigenous people is the same as Liberation for other people of color collectively, and this broad application of Liberation automatically means Liberation for all of us who are non-citizens. The white liberal fails to understand that since our oppression has been different, our Liberation must be different, and it will look and feel different to each of us.

White liberals often fail to understand that being in a leadership position while being non-white means having to face a different set of hurdles in order to achieve what is just and fair than a white leader.

Our lack of representation in these spaces also leads white liberals to think that BIPOC folks are a monolith. White liberals think that if the majority of BIPOC folks they know agree on a certain thing, it must mean that the rest of us do, too. This is a fallacy. This only goes further in maintaining a different kind of homogeneous status quo that works for those of us who have had the “privilege” to be in proximity of these white liberals or have access to political and social systems governed by whiteness. For example if we look around us, we find that most of the left-leaning organizations are white majority. While they truly believe in equality, they somehow fail to understand that equality itself means different things to different people and that true liberation cannot be achieved unless we are able to craft a movement that encompasses these different expectations out of a model system that governs us.

This is because white liberalism has shown an inability to apply the concept of intersectionality that was first defined by Kimberle Crenshaw to BIPOC political or social leaders

as “a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It’s not simply that there’s a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things.”

White liberals often fail to understand that being in a leadership position while being non-white means having to face a different set of hurdles in order to achieve what is just and fair than a white leader. They fail to understand that the hurdles that a non-citizen leader of color faces are very different from the hurdles a citizen leader of color faces. This is also true with the distinct hurdles Black leaders face or the ones Indigenous leaders face. White liberals think that since the system places all of us on the same footing by giving us the same title within the system we work in (for example nonprofit founders, senators, alders, etc.) we must have access to the same power structure.

As a non-citizen, brown, immigrant, queer, non-binary woman, public representative, and an activist, it has become amply clear to me over the years that I need to mould my expectations from the system according to the expectations the system has of me and expectations that the white majority liberal organizations have of me. I feel trapped because I cannot expect more than the system is willing to give me, and I cannot hope or want anything different from what the white liberal movement expects I should hope and want.

When Kamala Harris got elected as the first woman Vice President of the United States of America, as an Indian woman I was overjoyed as I had never seen such a successful and beautiful representation of who I am in such a positive, historical way. While I posted gleeful Facebook statuses and Snapchat stories about how Indian women are so amazing, I saw so many white liberals all over the country posting on Facebook that Kamala Harris’s representation should not be celebrated because she did not vote or act in a way that was acceptable to most of the left-leaning activists, including BIPOC folks. I have disagreed with Kamala Harris multiple times in the past and if I could have voted, I wouldn’t have voted for her in the primaries. But the fact that I could not even be happy for a little while, without being made to feel like it was somehow prohibited, only goes to show the point that white liberalism cannot understand the importance of representation from BIPOC folks. The moral of the story for me was that I am only allowed to be happy when the white liberalism allows me to be, and that representation should not matter to me as much as perfectionism, aka white supremacy.

It is, therefore, my firm belief that most

left-leaning politics are dominated by whiteness. Movements like Black Lives Matter are the exception, whose struggles and advocacy have transcended beyond the veils of whiteness and whose presence has pushed white liberalism in the direction of progress. However, a lot more needs to be done, and I want to put that burden on white folks in close consultation with BIPOC folks. White liberals have access to the kind of institutional power BIPOC folks don’t, and remediation and reparation are essential to our liberation. However, I do earnestly hope that the white liberals will keep the points made above in mind. Always. Otherwise, the white majority liberalism is doomed to make the same mistake over and over again, making all of us suffer the consequences of its failure. —Ankita Bharadwaj

**THIS IS AN INDICTMENT** of the status quo of white liberalism and a call to white Madison leadership to do better. Many white Madison leaders call themselves progressive but their actions, impact, and response to criticism are contrary to the ideals they claim to hold.

This is a repetitive issue that has led to Madison being one of the worst cities for Black folks in the entire United States. The damage done by well-meaning liberal white leaders has been documented for decades. Folks keep saying that they’ll do better. They run campaigns

filled with promises of diversity, equity, inclusion, and progress. But actions speak much louder than words, and once in office the drive to change is lost due to pressure and self-preservation at the expense of marginalized people.

I have disagreed with Kamala Harris multiple times in the past and if I could have voted, I wouldn’t have voted for her in the primaries. But the fact that I could not even be happy for a little while, only goes to show that white liberalism cannot understand the importance of representation from BIPOC folks.

In February, *The Cap Times* published an article featuring a conversation with Rev. Alex Gee centered on how white Madison leadership points to incremental progress as proof that progress has been made, while ignoring the vast social and economic divides that continue to disproportionately impact the Black community. His article speaks to the assumptions that white liberals make about the Black community, assumptions that uphold and center white supremacy. And while the author acknowledges that he agrees with Rev. Alex Gee, he is also aware that there are Black folks in Madison who disagree with Rev. Gee’s analysis, and he does so in a way that doesn’t

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QTBIPOC MAINSTREAM MEDIA REPRESENTATION

# Diversity, without diversity

Madisonians often don't see the full color or gender spectrum, especially during Pride.

I WAS IN MONTANA when I saw the first posts celebrating *Madison Magazine's* "Faces of Pride" article. Missing my Madison community and wanting to support my amazing friends excitedly sharing their inclusion in the piece, I clicked. And read. Then wondered if my shoddy service on the Blackfeet Reservation might have prevented the entire article from loading. I re-checked the article title, "Meet 11 Madisonians in the LGBTQ community who celebrate their authentic selves not just in June during Pride Month." I had indeed read the whole piece, but I knew there was still a lot missing.



Of the 11 Madisonians featured, five visually or verbally identified as Black, four visually/verbally identified as white, and two visually/verbally identified as Latinx. Six used he/him pronouns and five used she/her pronouns. And this article was being praised for its diversity.

Maybe it was that this article was published during AAPI Heritage Month. Maybe it was that it was published on stolen Ho Chunk land. Maybe it was all those binary pronouns. But I didn't see diversity. I saw a continued pattern of erasure of Asian, Pacific Islander, Native, and nonbinary people in Madison.

I commented on my sense of loss on a few shares of the post, where my words were either ignored or met with an astounded, "I didn't realize!" Those responses hurt as much as the original article. Not only were we overlooked by a predominantly white institution like *Madison Magazine*, but my white and non-white peers and colleagues also didn't realize we were missing.

It was then the doubt crept in, the doubt that is so familiar to people whose identities are repeatedly dismissed. Were we not open enough about the intersections of our queerness with our cultures? Were our accomplishments not enough to merit our faces shown alongside the people already chosen? There were 11 chances to include us, and 11 times it was decided we weren't worth including.

This exclusion is longstanding and systemic. Asian people suffer the model minority myth that lumps them into whiteness, their histories of colonization, oppression, and resilience lost to harmful stereotypes. Pacific Islanders often see their demographic lumped into Asian or Native categories when outside their traditional homelands, or they are just not considered at all. Native peoples, specifically Tribal peoples of what is now the United States and Canada, are seen as objects of the past or confined to reservations and removed



from urban and queer environments. Nonbinary, genderfluid, genderqueer, agender, trans\* people of all cultures are often seen and portrayed as difficult and confusing by cisgender or binary people. This has negative impacts on our professional development, mental health, and overall well being.

As a Two Spirit person, I have seen and felt these impacts. I've been told that Native and Asian queer folks are not part of the Black and Brown communities on the Inclusive Pride flag because—and I quote—"Red and yellow are already on there." (Just to be clear, it's a slur to call us by those color terms.) I have been told my use of they/them pronouns is not legitimate, that my tribal culture of gender fluidity is wrong. Hardest of all, I have been told that fighting for the inclusion of Native, Pacific Islander, and Asian people hurts better-represented Black and Latinx communities, and that existing as a nonbinary person harms binary trans people. But cultural identities, queer identities are not singular spectrums. They are spectra, plural, encompassing multitudes of expressions.

So while the individuals featured in *Madison Magazine's* 2021 Pride article are worth celebrating, the article itself is not. The author did reach out to me saying that if her article wasn't inclusive enough, she will help make opportunities for good writers. But no adjustments have been made to the article, no apologies stated for the lack of inclusion in both cultures and genders. This is the peril of cis white writers, editorial boards, and funders deciding what inclusion looks like. The rainbow is just divided white light. So we must shine in our own way. —nibiwakamigkwe

demonize or alienate Black folks who have different ideological views.

It is essential for white liberals, and any white person in general, to understand that the definitions of "progress" and "liberation" mean different things to different people, especially with regard to anti-oppression activism and organizing, and that being involved in movements that center marginalized identities requires humility and compassion from those who are not directly impacted by systemic oppression—or even by the same kind of systemic oppression. It is possible to unite for a common cause and not share the exact same political or social ideology. And whiteness often shows us this to be true, especially when whiteness loses political or social power and privilege; when whiteness loses control.

It is essential for white liberals, and any white person in general, to understand that the definitions of "progress" and "liberation" mean different things to different people, especially with regard to anti-oppression activism and organizing.

The worst part is, none of this is new. The most well-intentioned white liberals with power have a steady track record of making decisions on behalf of oppressed people instead of listening to and elevating the agency and autonomy of the people they claim to be supporting. And the answer continues to remain the same, white folks—and folks with privilege in general—need to be willing to use their privilege to support those most impacted by systemic oppression. Meaningful and impactful support, not just support for personal, political, or ideological gain.

This means not centering yourself, white liberal Madison. And if you don't know what that means, I suggest taking time to ask why you are doing the work. Deep, meaningful, intentional, and consistent self-reflection is essential to collective liberation, as is creating networks of trust and accountability. True accountability means listening when someone says you have caused harm, acknowledging the harm, and working through the harm you've caused within your community. It is essential that all leaders be comfortable with the discomfort of their own fallibility, and especially those who do not experience the discomfort of oppression.

If you've never read/heard Audre Lorde's "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," it's time. —Jill Nagler

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VENEZUELA FOOD CARTS FARMERS' MARKET MADISON PUBLIC MARKET

## From Caracas, with Love

Growing up in Venezuela, **Luis Dompablo** shares his heritage and culture through both **Caracas Empanadas** and **Caracas Arepas**.

**ANYONE FROM AROUND** Dane County knows that the Madison Farmers' Market is a staple of the Saturday morning experience. And, if you are like me, you like to plan your route for food while strolling around the square. One popular stop for market-goers is the Caracas Empanadas food cart on the corner of King and Main Street. You might also recognize them from numerous festivals around town like Art Fair on the Square or the Taste of Madison. Open since 2010, the portable delicacies from Caracas Empanadas became a staple of

Madison food cart-goers, and in 2017 Caracas Arepas food cart opened.

Caracas Empanadas, and Arepas, are two food carts owned by Luis Dompablo and his partner in life and business, David Piovanetti. Priding themselves on fresh, local, authentic ingredients, they produce delicious products from Dompablo's Venezuelan culture. And that's not mentioning the addictive and mouth-watering sauces (namely the green guacaca—my personal favorite).

For Luis, opening a food cart was not the plan he had for his life and his family. Originally hailing from Venezuela, Luis has made Madison his home since the 1980s. He was a horticulturist and had a successful business until the Bush recession. But, like many small businesses at the time, he couldn't keep operating and had to close his doors.

Luis didn't have a culinary focus in his life, and didn't cook much himself. Thankfully though, culinary history ran in his family as his father used to have a restaurant back in Venezuela. Dompablo has three children, and he wanted to be able to share their heritage

and culture through food but, who do you turn to when you don't know where to start? Luis turned to his mother and asked, "How do I cook this?" With her help, he was able to recreate some of his father's recipes and start to share his culture with his children and friends.

"These are delicious, you HAVE to sell these," were comments constantly being made by friends and family. Suddenly the thought of baking with love to share his culture blossomed into a business venture. "In the beginning, it was just Luis and I," David described. At the time of its inception, Piovanetti was a high school teacher and had summers off. "This was perfect for both bringing us closer together and working together to build the business." First meeting each other in 2006, and then building the business together, Dompablo and Piovanetti married in 2013.

With the now two popular carts, what could be next? Dompablo shared that they will be part of the Madison Public Market, set to open on East Washington Avenue. "We have been in talks about this since 2017." For those unfamiliar, the Public Market will house brick-and-mortar sites for local small businesses. Caracas Empanadas, and more, will be one of 12 food spaces operating in the complex. This is giving Dompablo the opportunity of turning his cuisine from portable, to plated fare and expanding his business even further. With a potential opening planning for Fall of 2022, keep watching for more updates from Caracas Empanadas and the Madison Public Market.

Other than local festivals, you can find Caracas Empanadas and Arepas on the corner of King Street and Main, and weekdays at the

"These are delicious, you HAVE to sell these," were comments constantly made by friends and family. Suddenly the thought of baking with love to share his culture blossomed into a business venture.

Library Mall. "We also do private catering for anyone who wants to rent the cart," Dompablo was sure to add.

Any way you package it, Caracas Empanadas and Arepas have become a delicious staple of the Madison food culture. If you love authentic Latin cuisine where you can taste the love and culture it was deprived from, be sure to give them a try. Speaking from experience, you will not be disappointed! Oh, and ask for extra sauce! ■

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