

June 3, 2020

From the heart of the Interim Director:

In 1968, Audre Lorde reminded us that "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not lead single-issue lives...Our struggles are particular, but we are not alone." This PRIDE season, I invite us to engage and grapple with the complexities of both celebration and resistance.

As a Black, queer person, it has honestly been hard for me to flip the switch to celebration mode as the past few weeks have been difficult to wrestle with. Many of us have endured the heart wrenching murders of Black bodies in America, a place we sing "land of the free, home of the brave." Let us recall February 23rd, when 25-year-old Black, former high school football player, Ahmaud Arbery, was shot and killed while jogging in a neighborhood of South Georgia. On March 13th, Breonna Taylor, a Black woman and emergency room technician with big dreams to pursue a career in healthcare, was only 26 years old when she was gunned down after a forceful entry into her home by Louisville police. Have you heard of Nina Pop? Nina Pop was a Black transgender woman who was stabbed to death in Missouri on May 3rd. She was the 10th reported transgender person to die by violence this year. She was 28 years old. On May 25th, George Floyd, a Black man, who was 46 years old, died by the knee of a police officer to his neck in the streets of Minneapolis. I also speak the name of Tony McDade, a Black transgender man whose name and story has been missing from most reporting. He was shot and killed by police in Tallahassee, Florida. This made him the 12th reported transgender person to die by violence this year. Here we must ponder, who is free? Who is brave?

I am deeply impacted by the constant, callous violence that happens to Black bodies. Police brutality, systemic oppression, white supremacy and so many other factors continuously display anti-blackness similar to the experience of Christian Cooper. Cooper, a trailblazing gay editor, was criminalized in Central Park for simply for asking a white woman to follow the rules posted on signs within the park. Black people are disproportionately affected by America's deep-rooted history of racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, heterosexism and more. It is clear that our value to society is questioned daily, that our humanity in society is unnoticed and, in many cases, completely invisible.

I remember walking through an outdoor outlet mall in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where a little girl running towards me, abruptly stopped, turned back to her father, pointed at me and said, "Daddy, what's that?" "I don't know," he said, as he glanced at me and walked away. I am often reminded that my Blackness is hidden, erased, unacknowledged, and

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when seen, is still unapproachable, seemingly a threat or intimidation. It speaks to the question that trans and gender non-conforming folx often receive, "So, what are you?" These micro/macro aggressions impact our existence. So, yes, it's been a little hard to process current events while mustering the strength to raise my inclusive pride flag.

Our country is experiencing protests and riots as we seek justice for the loss of Black lives, which are not much different from the Stonewall Riots of 1969, a historical riot which sparked the movement for LGBTQIA+ rights. Trans and queer folx were extremely tired of targeted police violence and discrimination. They were mad, just like many of us are today! Queer and trans people of color led this revolutionary moment. Marsha P. Johnson, a Black transgender gay liberation activist; Sylvia Rivera, a Latinx transgender activist; and Stormé DeLarverie, a biracial butch lesbian and drag performer, were leaders among the many who participated in the revolutionary act of fighting back. Their pain turned into protest. PRIDE as it exists today, acknowledges and celebrates those of us across spectrums of gender and within LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, ace/asexual, plus) identities. Nationally, the month June (for Rutgers GAYpril) highlights the narratives of our struggle-filled history while simultaneously recounting the amazing progress our activists, advocates, and community members have made over the years-to-date.

As we go through June 2020, let us hold both pain and PRIDE. Let us reflect on the abilities to channel anger into organizing, tears from trauma into healing for a healthier community, and unrest into unity for better policy making and structural changes. As a person who navigates life as Black AND queer, among many other intersecting identities, frankly, I am devastated and afraid to confidently lift both in fear of violence. I am figuring out how to mourn and dance together this PRIDE. Excuse me if I am slow to engage the happenings of the world, participate in a conversation about how I am doing, or show up at all. The truth is, I am sitting with the truth of a brave America who snatches life and freedom from Black bodies in a matter of moments. I'm taking my cues from our trailblazing activists, who have shown that it is ok to be hurt, to cry, to feel, but we must face injustices. Black, queer novelist, playwright, essayist, poet, and activist, James A. Baldwin encourages us by saying, "Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced." This is a call to give bravery a new face, take risk, face adversity and change the world around us. Here are a few ways to have positive impact during these tumultuous times:

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1. Educate yourself on issues of anti-blackness, power and privilege, LGBTQIA+ identities and issues, white supremacy in America, history of civil rights protest, just to start.
2. Show up (if you are able) to a vigil, protest, or rally. Being present is very powerful! I suggest that participants follow the lead of Black community leaders and organizers in the struggle for racial justice. Consider ways to do so that reduce risks posed by COVID-19 such as car caravans or wearing masks
3. Financially support organizers/organizations that are supporting social justice causes.
4. Provide space and resources for protesters and organizers. Oftentimes, they need places to gather, to plan, to eat, to share supplies, or to take care of personal needs. Resources can also include supplies such as markers, posters, childcare, packaged food, first aids kits, etc.
5. Self-care. "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." - Audre Lorde

In the coming days, the Center for Social Justice Education & LGBT Communities (SJE) will be offering opportunities to engage in space for collective education, processing, and dialogue. We hope that you will find ways to take care of yourself as Audre Lorde suggests, and check on each other as you have the capacity to do so. On behalf of the SJE team, we hope PRIDE 2020 is a reminder that we have a rich history yet so much work to do to center the most marginalized of our LGBTQIA+ community: our Black, brown, and trans siblings.

With PRIDE & Solidarity,

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