

**Our democracy is at risk!  
If we are complacent it will FALL**

# Celebrating *Black History* Month

**A look at  
affirming  
spaces**



**What goes on  
in a queen's world?**  
- pg 13

**Legendary,  
Black and Queer**  
- pg 10



Happy  
Valentine's  
Day



**Make sure you are PrEP(ared)  
for all that may come your  
way this Valentine's Day.**

**Call us today for all your  
sexual health and  
preventative care needs.**

**704-977-2972**

A teal background decorated with various medical icons such as hearts, plus signs, pills, and ECG lines, all hanging from strings as if they were ornaments.

**ROSEDALE**  
HEALTH + WELLNESS

"Comprehensive, compassionate care for everyone — offering HIV treatment, PrEP, transgender-affirming care, lab & pharmacy services, and nutritional counseling."

**Now accepting  
new patients.**

**Contact Us:** (704) 948-8582 [www.myrosedalehealth.com](http://www.myrosedalehealth.com)



contributors this issue

Writers: Jaylen Jones, L'Monique King, Taylor Heeden Larkins, Shauneen Miranda, David Aaron Moore, Terri Schlichenmeyer, Liz Schob

on the cover

Graphic Design by Danny A. Mannanov  
Photographer: Carolina Chapter of the Artistic Haus of Telfar

Mission:

The focus of *Qnotes* is to serve the LGBTQ and straight ally communities of the Charlotte region, North Carolina and beyond, by featuring arts, entertainment, news and views content in print and online that directly enlightens, informs and engages the readers about LGBTQ life and social justice issues.

Pride Publishing & Typesetting, Inc.,  
dba *Qnotes*

P.O. Box 221841, Charlotte, NC 28222  
ph 704.531.9988 fx 704.531.1361

Publisher: Jim Yarbrough

Sales: x201 adsales@qnotescarolinas.com

Nat'l Sales: Rivendell Media, ph  
212.242.6863

Managing Editor: Jim Yarbrough, x201,  
editor@qnotescarolinas.com

Director of Strategic Initiatives:  
Liz Schob

Digital Engagement Specialist:  
Tim Kendra-Dell

Sr. Editor: David Aaron Moore,  
Editor@qnotescarolinas.com

Copy Editor: Bailey Sides

Production: Danny A. Mannanov, x205,  
production@qnotescarolinas.com

Printed on recycled paper.

Material in *Qnotes* is copyrighted by Pride Publishing & Typesetting © 2026 and may not be reproduced in any manner without written consent of the editor or publisher. Advertisers assume full responsibility — and therefore, all liability — for securing reprint permission for copyrighted text, photographs and illustrations or trademarks published in their ads. The sexual orientation of advertisers, photographers, writers, cartoonists we publish is neither inferred nor implied. The appearance of names or photographs does not indicate the subject's sexual orientation. *Qnotes* nor its publisher assumes liability for typographical error or omission, beyond offering to run a correction. Official editorial positions are expressed in staff editorials and editorial notations and are determined by editorial staff. The opinions of contributing writers and guest columnists do not necessarily represent the opinions of *Qnotes* or its staff. *Qnotes* accepts unsolicited editorial, but cannot take responsibility for its return. Editor reserves the right to accept and reject material as well as edit for clarity, brevity.

# inside this issue

## feature

- 10 Legendary inventors, artists and thinkers of the Black LGBTQ+ community
- 11 Black LGBTQ+ affirming spaces in North Carolina

## news

- 5 Prominent Carolina LGBTQ+ community member dies unexpectedly
- 6 Creating Change conference returns
- 7 HRC leads National Day of Reading for LGBTQ+ inclusion
- 8 Netflix butts heads with Senator Josh Hawley over trans content
- 8 Trump education dept. increases protections for prayer in schools
- 8 Anti-marriage equality and ready to fight to undo our rights: the 'Greater Than' campaign
- 9 Arrest of gay journalist Don Lemon raises Freedom of Press concerns
- 9 EEOC rescinds LGBTQ-inclusive harassment guidance
- 9 Former SC lawmaker known for anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric sentenced to prison

## a&e

- 13 What goes on in a queen's world
- 14 Out in Print: 'The Queer Thing About Sin: Why the West Came to Hate Queer Love'

## life

- 15 Our People: Ali Steele

## views

- 4 Mecklenburg County experienced lower than normal voter turnout in 2024

## events

For event listings, visit  
goqnotescarolinas.com/events-calendar.



### HRC leads National Day of Reading

Observed each year on February 27, the National Day of Reading is organized by Welcoming Schools, the HRC Foundation's education program. The effort focuses on preventing bias-based bullying and supporting LGBTQ+ and gender-inclusive school environments.

PAGE 7

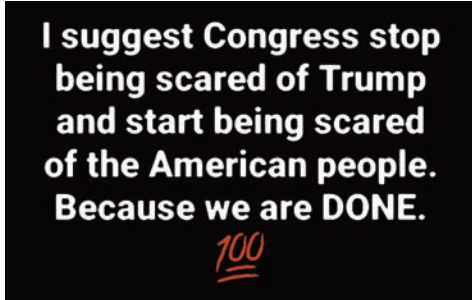
### Qnotes Democracy: Mecklenburg's voter turnout

More North Carolinians went to the polls in the 2024 election, with over 5.7 million folks casting a ballot compared to the over 4.6 million in 2020. Democratic strongholds across the state, however — including Mecklenburg County — had decreases in turnout.

PAGE 4



### The People speak on Social Media



For entertainment only. *Qnotes* does not vouch for factual authenticity.

**SUBSCRIBE!**

**These rates only cover a portion of our true cost, however, our goal is to serve our community**

Mailed 1st class from Charlotte, NC, in sealed envelope.

Subscription Rates:  1 yr - 26 issues = \$62  1/2 yr - 13 issues = \$32

Mail to: P.O. Box 221841, Charlotte, NC 28222

name: \_\_\_\_\_ phone: \_\_\_\_\_

address: \_\_\_\_\_

city: \_\_\_\_\_ state: \_\_\_\_\_ zip: \_\_\_\_\_

credit card – check one:  mastercard  visa  discover  american express

card #: \_\_\_\_\_ sec. code: \_\_\_\_\_ exp. date: \_\_\_\_\_

signature: \_\_\_\_\_

# Mecklenburg County experienced lower than normal voter turnout in 2024

According to the N.C. Board of Elections, just over 68 percent of eligible voters in Mecklenburg County cast their ballots in the last presidential election



by Taylor Heeden Larkins  
Qnotes Staff Writer

The election of Donald Trump to the presidency in 2024 has left many asking questions: how, after losing reelection in 2020, could Trump regain power and defeat a more than qualified candidate? While there may be many contributing factors, there may be an explanation in the number of people who turned out to vote nationwide.

The Pew Research Center released a report examining and comparing the voter turnout rates for 2020 and 2024. In the 2024 presidential election, a higher number of Trump's 2020 voters turned out to vote than voters who cast their ballots for Biden in 2020. Trump also won a higher percentage of those who had not voted in 2020. The overall voter turnout rate in 2020 was 66 percent — the highest in U.S. history — while in 2024, that number dropped to 64 percent.

Among all 2020 Trump voters, 89 percent voted in 2024, compared with 85 percent among Biden's 2020 voters, showing that both overall and across most demographic groups in the population, Trump's 2020 voters turned out at higher rates than Biden's did.

The turnout difference was larger among Latino/a voters than among many other groups, according to Pew Research Center — 86 percent of Trump's 2020 Latino/a voters turned out in 2024, compared with 77 percent of Biden's Latino voters. Trump also had more turnout with men and women, adults 35 and older, and those with no college degree. Almost no difference was found in 2024 turnout among 2020 Trump and Biden voters who are white.

Voters ages 22 to 34 in 2024 had a three percentage point difference between turnout for those who voted for Biden (77 per-



It's important, now more than ever, to make a plan for voting in both the primary in March and the midterm election this fall.

cent) and those who voted for Trump (80 percent). Young adults were a larger share of those who opted not to vote in 2024 than in 2020 (30 percent vs. 25 percent), with citizens under age 30 making up only 15 percent of all voters in 2024.

voters) leaned slightly toward Harris (51 percent to 47 percent).

The majority of voters (64 percent) who participated in all three elections were nearly evenly split, with Trump at 50 percent and Harris at 48 percent.



Trump performed strongest among voters who turned out in 2024 but skipped the 2020 and 2022 elections. Those who voted only in 2024 — despite being eligible in the prior two cycles — backed Trump by a wide margin (55 percent to 41 percent) and made up 12 percent of the electorate.

Voters who participated in both the 2020 and 2024 presidential elections but not the 2022 midterms (22 percent of

Data from North Carolina does reflect some of what is going on at national level. Trump improved on his 2020 performance in North Carolina, expanding his margin from 1.3 percent to 3.2 percent in 2024, according to state election data. As in 2020, he dominated rural areas. Trump managed to flip 38 Biden-won precincts, while Democratic nominee Kamala Harris flipped 37 that had backed Trump, a *News & Observer* analysis found.

Unlike nationwide trends, more North Carolinians went to the polls in the 2024 election, with over 5.7 million folks casting a ballot compared to the over 4.6 million in 2020. However, Democratic strongholds across the state — including Mecklenburg County — had decreases in turnout.

According to the North Carolina Board of Elections, just a bit more than 68 percent of eligible voters in Mecklenburg County participated in the 2024 election — a four percentage decrease from 2020. Turnout in Mecklenburg County surged in northern precincts and the county's affluent southern corridor, from just south of uptown east to Mint Hill, where some areas topped 80 percent. Participation lagged in Charlotte's lower-income neighborhoods: north, east and west of uptown where turnout dropped to as low as 43 percent. Harris did win in Mecklenburg County, but her margin of victory tightened by nearly two percentage points when compared to Biden in 2020.

There is a conclusion one can concur from the data — low voter turnout from key demographics and precincts may have contributed to Trump's descent back into the White House. While it's impossible to travel back in time and change the outcome, folks can mobilize and organize for the upcoming midterm elections this November.

It's important now more than ever, to make sure you make a plan to go vote in both the primary election in March and the midterm election this fall. Encourage your family and friends to make sure their voter registration information is up to date, and make sure you have a valid form of identification, as North Carolina is a voter ID state.

In other places across the country where special elections have been held, Democrats have predominantly swept — including in a race for Texas State Senate that has always been “reliably Republican.” Voters have made it a mission in these places to turn out and use their ballots to voice their concerns with the current administration and its policies. North Carolina can definitely do the same. ::

**Connie J. Vetter, Esq.**

**Attorney at Law, PLLC**

**Your LGBTQ+ Law Attorney  
serving Clients from across  
North Carolina**

**Talk/Text 704-333-4000 or online**



**Richard A. Grimstad, CPA, P.C.**

Bookkeeping - Consulting - Tax Advisory & Compliance

FREE INITIAL CONSULTATION

**Need help this  
tax season?**

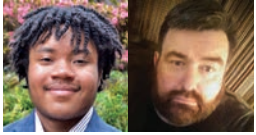
14 years of individual and small business  
tax & accounting experience

grimstadcpa.com  
980-224-3124  
richard@grimstadcpa.com



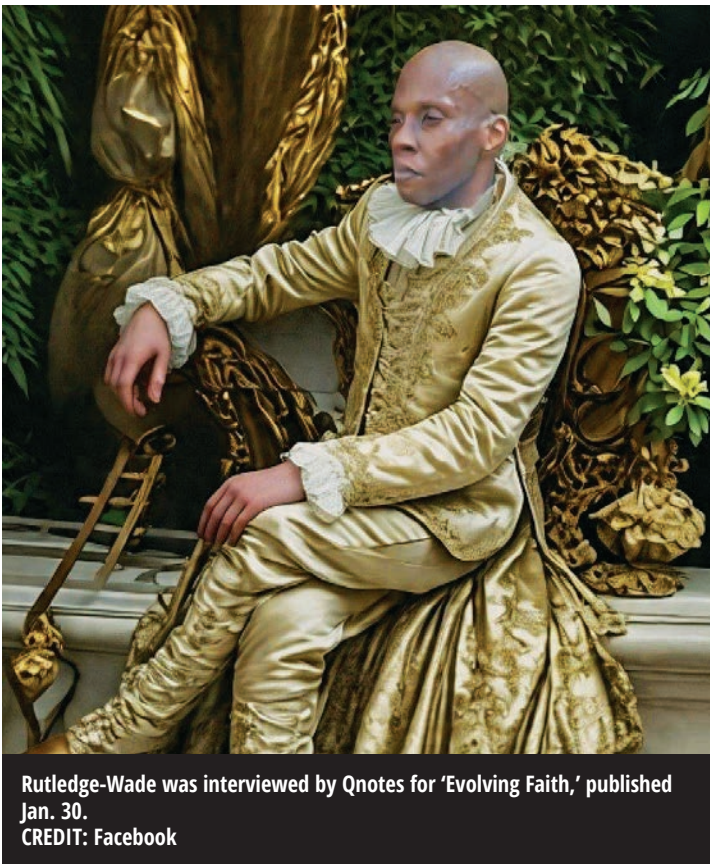
# Prominent Carolina LGBTQ+ community member dies unexpectedly

Quandrico Rutledge-Wade was a creative artist and spiritual leader in the Charlotte area



by Jaylen Jones & David Aaron Moore  
Qnotes Staff Writers

A prominent Charlotte Metro area LGBTQ+ community member, Quandrico Rutledge-Wade, 50, was found deceased at his home on Jan. 29.



Rutledge-Wade was interviewed by Qnotes for 'Evolving Faith,' published Jan. 30.  
CREDIT: Facebook

for Rutledge-Wade in nearby Lancaster, S.C. According to friends, Rutledge-Wade was receiving treatment for seizures and a heart condition, although no official cause of death has been released.

He was a proud member of the Charlotte-based Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, a minister; and a member of Gamma Mu Phi, the first gay fraternity. Additionally, Rutledge-Wade was deeply involved in ballroom culture and Pride events. He touched many lives by promoting self-love and mentoring young queer folk.

Rutledge-Wade and longtime friend Jermaine Nakia Lee were fraternity brothers and worked together to create Gamma Mu Phi's first group of founders in the early 2000s. Said Lee: "He wasn't afraid to challenge ignorance. He fought for everyone's rights, regardless of friendships." Lee added that Rutledge-Wade helped him see that anyone's oppression in the LGBTQ+ community meant the oppression of all.

"[He was] a dear friend to me," Lee said in his podcast 'The Conversation.' I consider [Quan] family. He was a mentor to many people who were a part of the pageant community. Quan was very outspoken, very funny ... wonderful sense of humor."

Rutledge-Wade was also known as an early founder of Rebirth Cathedral of Praise and a leader of Charlotte Black Pride. He helped create a solid space for the LGBTQ+ communities of faith and color. Throughout social media, many individuals locally and nationally offered praise for his accomplishments and remorse for his loss.

"I'm still trying to process it," Ra'Shawn Flournoy wrote on social media. "I literally just spoke with him. We talked, we planned, and he had even applied to serve on our Board of Directors at Quality [Comprehensive Health Care]. To go from conversation to loss so quickly is a painful reminder of how fragile life is.

"Quan was a founding member and part of the early journey of ReBirth Cathedral of Praise, and though his path later led him elsewhere, the respect and connection never left. I'm praying for his family, his loved ones, and all who are grieving. [His] life mattered and willingness to serve will not be forgotten."

Rutledge-Wade's ministry path urged

him to encourage people to think and practice outside the four walls of the church. On Instagram, he posted motivational quotes and offered people to take a "Church Cheat day" to focus on themselves.

Regardless of whether he stood in the pulpit or on the streets of Beatties Ford Road, Rutledge-Wade continued "to be a beacon of light," said Flournoy.

Recently included in the Qnotes' article "Evolving Faith" and featured in our story "25 in '25: Who's Who in Charlotte's Black LGBTQ+ Community," used his influence to change people's minds in and outside of the community. As well, he was an early advocate for the trans community and other marginalized groups.

According to the announcements section of Crawford Funeral Home in Lancaster, South Carolina, a funeral service was held for Rutledge-Wade on Saturday, Feb. 14, at 2 p.m. at the Crawford Funeral Home Chapel. To leave condolences for family and friends, visit their website at <https://www.crawfordfuneralhomesinc.com/obituary/Quandrico-RutledgeWade>. ::

After several attempts to reach him by phone went unanswered, family members visited his residence, reportedly two days after his death. Public records list an address

**Jim Yarbrough**  
GEMINI MANAGEMENT

**Executive Offices  
For Rent**

PO Box 221841  
Charlotte NC • 28222

Ph. (704)965-5214  
Fx. (704) 531-1361



**TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH**

**GET TESTED**  
FREE Confidential Testing  
Rapid HIV | Rapid HEP C  
Chlamydia & Gonorrhea

**WALK - IN TESTING**  
Monday - Thursday  
8:30 am - 6:00 pm  
Friday 8:30 am - 4:00 pm

**STAY HEALTHY**  
Gay Friendly Primary Care  
HIV Specialty Care  
PrEP and PEP

**Affinity HEALTH CENTER**

877.647.6363  
455 LAKESHORE PKWY.  
ROCK HILL, SC 29730

[affinityhealthcenter.org/get-tested](http://affinityhealthcenter.org/get-tested)

# Creating Change conference returns

Event held in Washington, D.C. Jan. 20-25

by Qnotes Staff

The National LGBTQ Task Force hosted the 38th Creating Change conference in Washington, D.C. Jan. 20 to 25. An estimated 2,000 individuals attended the series of events to bolster their organizing and strategy skills through hundreds of workshops, sessions and day-long, identity-based institutes prepared to strengthen the LGBTQ+ movement.

"Unstoppable" was the theme of the gathering, as Creating Change brings together activists on the state, local and national levels and brings the movement together to move forward.

"There is a palpable call for courage in DC...where we will continue to blueprint our liberation at a time when our very existence is being legislated out of classrooms, clinics and courtrooms," said Fernando Lopez, director of Creating Change. "Our convening is our rebellion, our refuge, and our rallying cry. From the streets of our neighborhoods to the suites of power, we share wisdom to turn outrage into strategy and strategy into action, equipping people from across the nation to build an unstoppable movement."

Special general sessions during Creating Change included the annual State of the Movement presentation. Task Force President Kierra Johnson addressed attendees about

the challenges ahead in 2026 and beyond.

The general sessions are available for streaming online at the Task Force's webpage.

"The climate of today's political attacks against LGBTQ+ and other marginalized communities makes Creating Change a timely, deeply necessary, and powerful gathering for us to push back and win against the current administration and entities at state and local levels working to do away with progress we have made toward liberation and cause real harm to so many," said Task Force President Johnson.

The Jan. 23 general session included a "Leaving Extremism" discussion about political and religious extremism's impact on LGBTQ+ and other movements, featuring Kris Hayashi, ACLU's Director of National Campaigns Trans Justice, Tahil Sharma, the National LGBTQ Task Force's Faith Director and Nadine Smith of Equality Florida. Journalist Laura Flanders served as moderator.

The general session held on Jan. 24 included keynote speaker Leo Herrera, a queer Mexican artist who explores queer and immigrant experiences through the lenses of sex, technology and history. The session also included a highly anticipated appearance by social media influencer, educator and comedian Alok Vaid-Menon.



Attendees at the Creating Change conference. CREDIT: National LGBTQ Task Force

The DC's Gay Men Chorus performed several iconic queer anthems to close out the final general session.

The Task Force has a long-standing tradition of recognizing leaders and trailblazers in the LGBTQ+ movement and this year is no exception. The following awards were presented during the general sessions:

**The Carmen Vázquez SAGE Award for Excellence in Leadership on Aging Issues** was presented to **Letitia Gomez**, whose work exemplifies outstanding leadership in their advocacy for LGBTQ+ elders. Each year at Creating Change, the Carmen Vazquez SAGE Award is given to a community leader who reflects her spirit and passion as a long-time LGBTQ+ and social justice activist.

**Outstanding Transgender Leadership Award** was presented this year to **Kris Hayashi** of the ACLU, this award honors a trans or nonbinary leader whose vision, courage, and advocacy have strengthened and uplifted trans communities.

**Faith Leadership Award** was presented this year to **Rev. Dr. Sofia Betancourt**. The award honors a faith leader whose

work bridges spiritual values with the pursuit of justice, equality and liberation for LGBTQ+ people.

To offer attendees the Task Force's traditional version of "radical welcome" to one of the queerest cities in America, more than 50 local ambassadors worked tirelessly to bring Creating Change to life in the past year. Local artist and icon Rayceen Pendarvis appeared at Creating Change as an ambassador, joined by dozens of other diverse LGBTQ+ DMV area individuals.

The DC Mayor's Office on LGBTQIA+ Affairs' Community Health Specialist Malachi Stewart, another Creating Change Ambassador, said attending the gathering was a chance to be frank about the challenges facing LGBTQ+ people.

"It's a place to be with other people facing that same fate, we can say it out loud, be in community and exhale," Stewart explained. "We have to face it in the present time before we face the future. [Creating Change] comes at the right time."

To stream presentations from Creating change, go to <https://www.thetaskforce.org/>.

**SADU**  
BODY MODIFICATIONS

PROFESSIONAL BODY PIERCING & FINE JEWELRY

Experienced Piercers • Safe & Sterile • Award-Winning

[www.sadupiercing.org](http://www.sadupiercing.org)

1515 Central Avenue  
Charlotte, NC

Services By Appointment - Book Online

LOW COUNTRY BLUE RIDGE MIDLANDS GRAND STRAND TWIN CITY GATE CITY METRO

[clgbtcc.org](http://clgbtcc.org)

CAROLINAS  
LCBF Chamber of Commerce

WE ARE THE CAROLINAS

JOIN TODAY!

# HRC leads National Day of Reading for LGBTQ+ inclusion

The Human Rights Campaign's Welcoming Schools program brings inclusive storytelling to North Carolina



by Liz Schob  
Qnotes Staff Writer

On a late February afternoon, children, educators and families will gather in libraries and community spaces across North Carolina to do something deceptively simple: read together. The gatherings are part of the Human Rights Campaign's National Day of Reading, an annual effort led by its Welcoming Schools program to center LGBTQ-inclusive stories at a time when those same books are increasingly being challenged, restricted or removed from schools.

Observed each year on Feb. 27, the National Day of Reading is organized by Welcoming Schools, the HRC Foundation's education program, which focuses on preventing bias-based bullying and supporting LGBTQ+ and gender-inclusive school environments.

The initiative encourages communities to host public and private readings of LGBTQ-inclusive children's and young adult books, pairing storytelling with discussion and reflection.

Participants who pledge to read receive an organizing toolkit with guidance on hosting events, facilitating conversations and selecting age-appropriate materials. This year's events arrive amid a continued wave of book bans and education-related legislation targeting LGBTQ+ content, a climate that Welcoming Schools Deputy Director Rebbly Kern said has raised the stakes for visibility and local engagement. This year, more than 3,000 people across 18 states have pledged to participate, with readings planned in both Charlotte and Raleigh as part of the national observance.

Welcoming Schools has been part of the HRC Foundation's education work for more than a decade, operating at the intersection of school climate, student safety and curriculum. The program provides professional development for educators and youth-serving professionals, along with lesson plans, curated book lists and tools designed to help schools address bias-based bullying and harassment, particularly against LGBTQ+ students.

Kern said the program has trained more than 13,000 educators nationwide this year alone, with the potential to reach approximately 750,000 students. In recent years, that work has expanded as debates over gender identity, censorship and curriculum have increasingly played out in classrooms and school board meetings across the country.

"Our core mission at Welcoming Schools is to ensure that every school is a safe and welcoming environment for LGBTQ students, particularly at the intersections of race and disability," Kern said.

Much of the program's work focuses on preparing educators to respond when bias-based bullying occurs, while also helping schools build a culture that affirms students before incidents happen. Said Kern: "How do we intervene in a way that's supportive to the student and creates a teachable moment for everybody involved?"

National Day of Reading grew out of events in 2015, when an elementary school



The 2026 National Day of Reading includes more than 3,000 pledged participants, 40 confirmed guest readers, and events across 18 states.  
CREDIT: Human Rights Campaign

in Wisconsin planned a reading of "I Am Jazz," a children's book based on the early experiences of transgender advocate Jazz Jennings. After the school faced threats and pressure to cancel the event, members of the local community organized a public reading at a local library instead. Hundreds of people attended, turning what began as a small act of resistance into a visible affirmation of the freedom to read.

The creation of National Day of Reading was inspired by that effort to center joy and underscore the importance of LGBTQ-inclusive stories. Since then, the initiative has expanded to include books for a range of ages and reading levels, with communities hosting readings in schools, libraries, places of worship, bookstores and private homes.

This year's National Day of Reading includes a selection of books spanning early childhood through young adult audiences. Titles highlighted nationally include "Marley's Pride," a picture book about a child attending their first Pride parade with a supportive grandparent; "Chloe and the

Fireflies," which centers on family, adoption, and belonging; "Halfway to Somewhere," a graphic novel exploring gender identity, immigration and cultural transition; and "A World Worth Saving," a novel that weaves questions of faith, identity and courage through Jewish folklore. Welcoming Schools also features a monthly Book of the Month series leading up to the event. January's selection was "Freddy the Alien."

According to Kern, the diversity of the book list is intentional. "Inclusive books also help everyone," Kern said. "Everyone learning about LGBTQ+ identity helps fight bullying and disrupt some of the misinformation." The books are selected with attention to age appropriateness and intersectionality, offering entry points for conversations about gender, family, race, disability and belonging across different grade levels.

The urgency surrounding this year's National Day of Reading is shaped by a broader political and educational climate. Kern pointed to the rise in anti-LGBTQ+ legislation affecting schools, from restric-

tions on curriculum to efforts aimed at limiting discussions of gender identity. National Day of Reading is one way communities are responding, Kern said, particularly as efforts to restrict access to LGBTQ-inclusive books continue.

Participation in National Day of Reading reflects that response. In addition to thousands of pledges, the initiative includes approximately 40 confirmed guest readers and events across 18 states. Kern said readings are taking place in schools, libraries and community spaces including in states where book bans and curriculum restrictions have been most aggressive, such as Tennessee, Georgia and Virginia.

North Carolina is among the states hosting multiple events this year. In Raleigh, a reading will take place at the LGBTQ+ Center of Raleigh, with elected officials and community partners participating. In Charlotte, a separate reading is scheduled for Feb. 21 at ImaginOn, the city's children's library, in partnership with the HRC North Carolina steering committee.

For Kern, local participation is essential to the initiative's impact. "The people in political power are actually not the ones that are dictating who we are in community," Kern said.

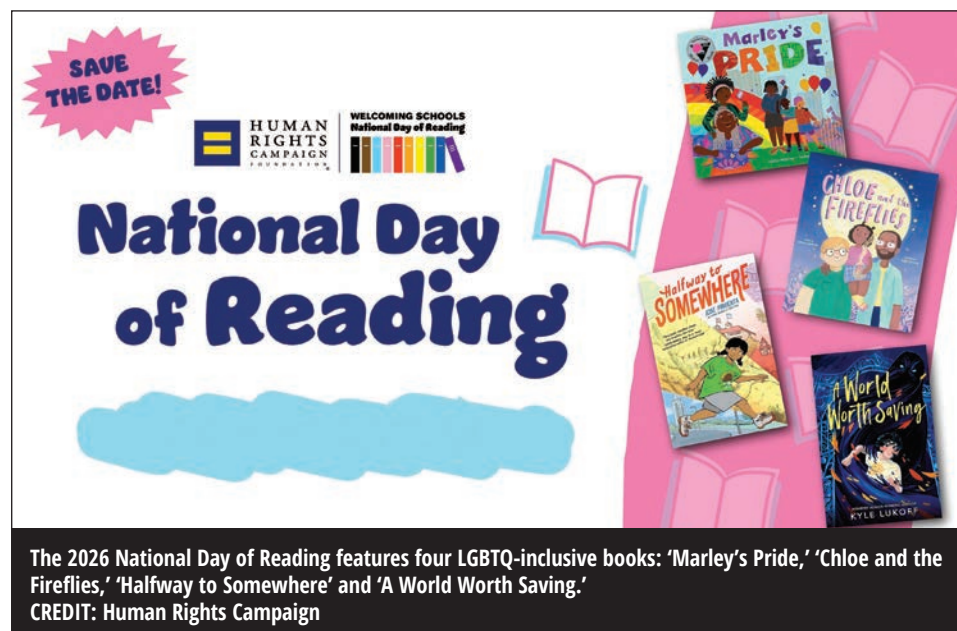
Educators, families, students, librarians and community members are showing up together to share experiences and support LGBTQ+ youth. In states like North Carolina, Kern added, community-based events like these demonstrate that support for inclusive education extends beyond legislative debates.

Beyond a single day, National Day of Reading is intended to serve as a starting point rather than a conclusion. Welcoming Schools encourages educators and families to integrate inclusive books throughout the school year, pairing reading with broader conversations about school climate, student safety and belonging. Kern emphasized storytelling as a way to build empathy and understanding.

As National Day of Reading approaches, Welcoming Schools leaders say the goal remains both modest and expansive: to create moments of connection in classrooms and communities, while reinforcing the idea that LGBTQ+ stories belong in shared public spaces. In a time marked by heightened debate over whose stories are allowed to be told, organizers see reading together as an act that is both ordinary and deeply meaningful.

For communities across North Carolina, those late February gatherings will center on books, conversations and the simple act of showing up. In doing so, National Day of Reading continues a tradition that began with one challenged story and grew into a nationwide reminder that visibility, empathy and belonging often start with a book read aloud.

Readers who want to learn more about National Day of Reading or participate locally can visit the Human Rights Campaign's National Day of Reading page at [hrc.org/campaigns/welcoming-schools-national-day-of-reading](https://hrc.org/campaigns/welcoming-schools-national-day-of-reading). Details about the Raleigh reading are available at [mobilize.us/hrc/event/897441/](https://mobilize.us/hrc/event/897441/). Information about the Charlotte event at ImaginOn can be found at <https://bit.ly/46wAs5x>.



The 2026 National Day of Reading features four LGBTQ-inclusive books: "Marley's Pride," "Chloe and the Fireflies," "Halfway to Somewhere" and "A World Worth Saving."  
CREDIT: Human Rights Campaign

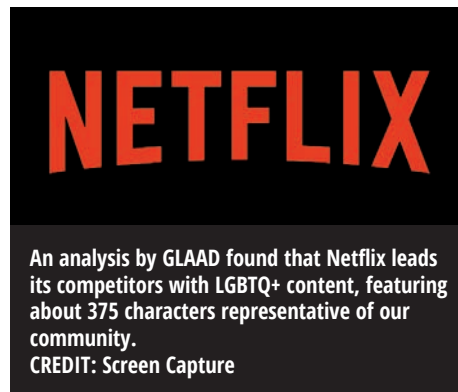
## Netflix butts heads with Senator Josh Hawley over trans content

Members of the senate, and representatives for Netflix and Warner Brothers met Feb. 3 to discuss the companies' merger. Most expressed their hesitation with the streaming platforms because of the massive monopoly and economic power it would gain, but Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO) had another question for Co-CEO Ted Sarandos.

The two went back and forth on the concerns of "highly sexualized, highly controversial" trans content on Netflix. Hawley claimed that "almost half" of the streaming platform "promotes transgender ideology." He called the content a "disservice to the parents of this country" and a danger to children's development.

The senator cited data from The Oversight Project, which was the former investigative

arm of the Heritage Foundation. The study claimed that "progressive political content outnumbered" conservative content by 55 to 1.



This statistic alarmed the White House and led to a review of Netflix's LGBTQ+ kids' content before the merger. The Trump administration claimed that the platform swayed "millions of Americans" into accepting "left-wing ideological dogma."

Senator Hawley highlighted the amount of children's programs: "[They] have a transgender agenda. I can't let them [my children] watch anything they want on Netflix. I don't have confidence [in] what's on your platform."

"It just seems strange to me." Hawley continued, "It can't possibly be a reflection of the population? Is this an advocacy position...ideological?"

Other Republicans like Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX), Eric Schmitt (R-MO) and former Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) shared Hawley's concerns.

Sarandos assured Hawley that "Netflix has no political agenda of any kind" and that the platform's wide range of content appeals to a variety of people. There are also "state-of-the-art tools for you [Hawley] to manage those choices." Sarandos re-

mindful Hawley that not everyone shares his beliefs, and that the company's staff also have children they want to protect.

The senator's claim that Netflix has an abundance of LGBTQ+ content isn't entirely incorrect. An analysis by GLAAD found that Netflix leads its competitors in LGBTQ+ content. There are about 375 characters of queer representation. This number increased by 45 from the previous season.

But of those 375, only 29 characters (7.8 percent) are transgender. This number has grown by nine in recent seasons. A majority of LGBTQ+ representation on Netflix are gay men, with 40 percent, and lesbians at 29 percent.

Both statistics from the Oversight Project and GLAAD represent only a small portion of the amount of programming available from the streaming company. In reality, there isn't enough trans content to justify removing it from the platform. As Sarandos told Hawley, it is up to the parents to monitor what their children watch. ::

— Jaylen Jones

## Trump education department increases protections for prayer in schools

The U.S. Department of Education reinforced the right to prayer in public schools in a guidance issued Thursday, Feb. 5.

Under that guidance to state and local education agencies, students, teachers and school officials have "a right to pray in school as an expression of individual faith, as long as they're not doing so on behalf of the school," the department said. Trump's administration has sought to protect religious liberty in public schools and beyond, and a growing number of GOP state legislators have tried to infuse Christianity in public education.

Trump announced the guidance during remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C., on Thursday, calling the move a "big deal." The president predicted that Democrats would sue over the guid-

ance, but said he believed his administration would win any legal challenge.

The guidance also makes clear that "public schools may not sponsor prayer nor coerce or pressure students to pray." In 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that school-sponsored prayer in public schools violates the Constitution.

The new guidance calls on school officials to "allow the individuals who make up a public school community to act and speak in accordance with their faith, provided they do not invade the rights of others, the school does not itself participate in religious action or speech as an institution, and the school does not favor secular over religious views or one religious view over another."

The guidance leans on a handful of recent Supreme Court rulings surrounding

religious expression and religious freedom in public schools, such as *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*, which found that the actions of a Washington state high school football coach who prayed at the 50-yard line after games were constitutionally protected.

The Education Department is required by law to periodically reissue guidance on prayer in schools, according to the department. Trump had previewed Thursday's guidance while speaking in September 2025 at a Religious Liberty Commission hearing.

The president established that commission in May 2025 in an effort to "safeguard and promote America's founding principle of religious freedom."

Education Secretary Linda McMahon said the administration is "proud to stand with students, parents and faculty who wish to exercise their First Amendment rights in schools across our great nation," in a statement alongside the announcement.

"Our Constitution safeguards the free exercise of religion as one of the guiding

principles of our republic, and we will vigorously protect that right in America's public schools," she said. ::

*This story appears courtesy of our media partner NC Newsline through Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.*

— Shauneen Miranda / NC Newsline



## Anti-marriage equality and ready to fight to undo our rights: the 'Greater Than' campaign

The landmark Supreme Court case that gave us marriage equality legal nationwide in the United States became the law of the land on June 26, 2015. *Obergefell v. Hodges* requires all states to license and recognize same-sex marriages across all 50 states.

Now there's a new organization – founded on Jan. 27 of this year – known as the "Greater Than" campaign. Their purpose? To overturn *Obergefell v. Hodges* and reverse same-sex marriage.

The campaign is made up of 47 anti-LGBTQ+ organizations, including Colson Center, Protect Our Kids, and the American Family Association. But the leader of this initiative is the far-right non-profit, Them Before Us, led by president and spokesperson Kate Faust.

These groups have come together to change the minds of the public and gov-

ernment about same-sex marriage. With a message that focuses on children rather than "adult desires," the Greater Than campaign believes that the "sole purpose of marriage is to have kids." Adding that the legalization of same sex marriage denies children the right to their "mother or father in the name of 'adult equality.'" These desires, Greater Than adds, leads to children feeling abandoned, creating mental challenges and depression.

After a decade of marriage equality, Greater than and their sources say that kids aren't fine, "and they haven't been for quite some time." They again bring up the destruction that same sex couples can have on children. When "you redefine marriage [same sex, single-parent households, and insemination], you have just destroyed the house."



By centering marriage on biological pregnancy, the Greater Than campaign wants to

shift people's views to a more conservative way of thinking. On top of changing policy and public opinion, the campaign wishes to create a church that is a "child-centered fighting force." They hope to push adoption and biological pregnancy, and stop same-sex marriage and insemination.

Their desire to alter public sentiment on same-sex marriage, in theory, could make it easier to justify LGBTQ+ repression and bigotry. Instead of thinking of marriage as love and children as a result of that love, the Greater Than campaign wants to focus their war on marriage equality solely on procreation and opposite-sex parentage.

Although an attempt late last year to overturn *Obergefell* was denied by the U.S. Supreme Court, comments from the organization on social media indicate they're obsessed with achieving their goal. Though the Greater Than campaign is new on the scene, they have gained traction with other far-right groups.

To stay informed about their plans and reasoning, check out social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram and the group's website. ::

— Jaylen Jones

## Arrest of gay journalist Don Lemon raises Freedom of Press concerns

The arrests of multiple journalists and protest participants connected to immigration-related demonstrations in Minnesota have drawn scrutiny from media organizations and civil liberties advocates, following federal actions against reporters covering a church protest in St. Paul.

Independent journalist Don Lemon, who is openly gay, was arrested by federal agents in Los Angeles recently in connection with his coverage of a January anti-ICE protest at Cities Church in St. Paul. Lemon was released from federal custody following a court appearance and has publicly stated his intent to continue reporting.

The protest occurred after demonstrators learned that one of the church's pastors is an Immigration and Customs Enforcement official. Protesters briefly interrupted a worship service. Lemon has

maintained that he was present solely in a journalistic capacity and did not participate in the protest itself.

Federal prosecutors have charged Lemon and others with conspiracy to interfere with religious freedom and violations of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, a 1994 law that also applies to places of worship. Lemon has pleaded not guilty. Court records show that a federal magistrate judge previously declined to approve an arrest warrant for Lemon, citing a lack of evidence, before the case was later brought to a grand jury.

Attorney General Pam Bondi confirmed in a post on X that the arrest occurred "at my direction." Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche later defended the decision in a televised interview, arguing that freedom of religion must be balanced

against press freedom.

Lemon's attorney, Abbe Lowell, rejected that argument. "Don has been a journalist for 30 years, and his constitutionally protected work in Minneapolis was no different than what he has always done," Lowell said. "The First Amendment exists to protect journalists whose role it is to shine light on the truth and hold those in power accountable."

Others arrested in connection with the protest include Minnesota-based reporter Georgia Fort; Nekima Levy Armstrong, a former president of the Twin Cities NAACP; Chauntyll Louisa Allen; Jamael Lydell Lundy; Trahern Jeen Crews; and William Kelly, according to court documents and media reports.

Lemon's arrest has drawn particular attention because of his visibility as a Black, gay journalist. He spent 17 years at CNN and was among the first openly gay Black anchors on national cable news. Press freedom advocates have warned that arrests like these risk discouraging journalists, especially LGBTQ+ and Black reporters, from

covering protests and government actions. Speaking briefly outside the courthouse after his release, Lemon said the arrest stemmed from work he has done throughout his career and emphasized that he does not intend to stop reporting. "The First Amendment of the Constitution protects that work for me and for countless other journalists who do what I do," Lemon said, according to ABC News. "I stand with all of them, and I will not be silenced." ::

— Liz Schob



Don Lemon speaks outside the federal courthouse in Los Angeles after his release. CREDIT: Screenshot

## EEOC rescinds LGBTQ-inclusive harassment guidance

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission voted last week to rescind its 2024 harassment guidance, withdrawing LGBTQ-inclusive examples that had clarified how federal law applies to workplace harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The commission voted 2-1 on Jan. 23 to repeal the guidance, which had been approved in 2024 during the Biden administration. The document, nearly 200 pages long, outlined how existing federal civil rights laws apply to workplace harassment and included more than 70 examples of unlawful conduct. Among them were examples addressing repeated misgendering, denial of restroom access, and harassment tied to sexual orientation and gender identity.

The vote followed changes to the commission's makeup after President Donald Trump appointed two Republican commissioners, giving the agency a conservative majority.

Andrea Lucas was named chair in January 2025, joined by Commissioner Brittany Panuccio, who was confirmed later that year.



Trump-appointed EEOC Chair Andrea Lucas voted to rescind the agency's 2024 harassment guidance. CREDIT: Facebook

The dissenting vote came from Kalpana Kotagal, the commission's sole Democrat.

The 2024 guidance built on the U.S. Supreme Court's 2020 decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, which held that Title VII's ban on sex discrimination includes discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. While the guidance itself was not legally binding, it was widely viewed as a roadmap for how the commission interprets and enforces federal law and is often cited by courts.

Republican commissioners objected most strongly to the guidance's section on gender identity and sexual orientation. That section included examples such as the repeated and intentional use of a name or pronoun an employee no longer uses and denial of access to bathrooms consistent with a person's gender identity. A federal judge in Texas blocked that portion of the guidance last year, ruling that the EEOC had exceeded its authority.

In a statement following the vote, Lucas said rescinding the guidance would not weaken enforcement. "Rescinding this guidance does not give employers license to engage in unlawful harassment," she said. "Federal employment laws against discrimination, harassment, and retaliation remain

firmly in place."

Kotagal sharply disagreed. "There's no reason to rescind the harassment guidance in its entirety," she said. "Instead of adopting a thoughtful and surgical approach...the commission is throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Worse, it is doing so without public input."

LGBTQ+ advocates and Democratic lawmakers also condemned the decision. Human Rights Campaign legal policy director Cathryn Oakley said the move undermines workplace protections. "We all deserve a country that protects and defends civil rights for all, where our laws are enforced equally, our workplaces are safe for everyone, and people are held accountable for their actions," she said.

While Title VII remains unchanged, legal experts note that without the 2024 guidance, employers and employees alike now have less clarity about how the EEOC will interpret harassment claims. For LGBTQ+ workers, advocates say the vote marks a significant shift in how the agency approaches enforcement, even as the underlying law remains the same. ::

— Liz Schob

## Former SC lawmaker known for anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric sentenced to prison

Former South Carolina state Rep. RJ May, a Republican who repeatedly asserted that transgender people and drag performers posed a danger to children while in office, was sentenced in January to more than 17 years in federal prison for distributing child sexual abuse material.

May, 39, was sentenced on Jan. 14 to federal prison after pleading guilty to five counts of distributing child sexual abuse material. U.S. District Judge Cameron McGowan Currie also imposed 20 years of supervised release following his prison term and ordered May to pay \$58,500 in restitution to identified survivors.

The sentencing concludes a case that drew national attention both for the severity of the crimes and for the stark contrast between May's public anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and the conduct detailed by federal prosecutors.

According to federal prosecutors, May distributed hundreds of videos depicting the sexual abuse of children during a five-day period in April 2024. Court filings state that he sent 220 files a total of 479 times through the messaging app Kik, using the username "joebidennnn69." The material was shared with users in 18 states and six countries and included images involving toddlers and prepubescent children.

"All of the victims in May's videos were too young to protect themselves," prosecutors wrote in court filings. "The content May sought out, possessed, and distributed represents some of the most degrading and damaging content that comes before any court."

While serving in the South Carolina House, May regularly used speeches and online posts to argue that transgender people and drag performers endangered children.

During a January 2024 floor debate on transgender-related legislation, he said, "We as legislators have an obligation to ensure that our children have no harm done to them."

In a 2022 social media post, May described "exposing children to drag shows and pushing sex changes on toddlers" as forms of "child exploitation," language he echoed in floor speeches and public statements while backing



Former South Carolina state Rep. RJ May in a mugshot released following his arrest on federal child sexual abuse material charges. CREDIT: Lexington County Sheriff's Dept

legislation targeting the LGBTQ+ community. At sentencing, prosecutors highlighted the lasting impact of the crimes on survivors, including the ongoing harm caused by the continued circulation of abuse material. One survivor wrote that knowing strangers still view and share images of her childhood abuse has made it difficult for her to leave her home alone.

"She concludes that her normal life has been taken from her," prosecutor Elliott Daniels told the court. "May argues his normal life has been taken from him."

May resigned from office while the case was pending. As part of his sentence, he will be required to register as a sex offender for life and is permanently barred from holding public office.

The sentencing closes a case in which May's public record as a lawmaker, marked by repeated anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric, including claims that transgender people and drag performers posed a danger to children, now stands alongside a federal conviction for distributing child sexual abuse material. ::

— Liz Schob

# Legendary inventors, artists and thinkers of the Black LGBTQ+ community

A look at what they accomplished, and how their genius continues to impact us today



by David Aaron Moore  
Qnotes Staff Writer

It has been said that societal constraints and oppression encourage creativity, thought and action. Most of us have heard this infamous quote: “Art is never created in a vacuum. It reflects lived realities, challenges, injustice and gives voice to stories that are often unheard.”

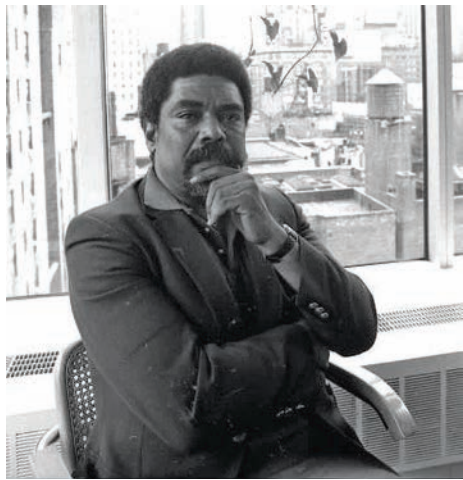
In the case of many of the individuals included here, their desire to achieve and create may have indeed grown from that very reality, as evidenced by the lives they lived.

If you find them as intriguing as we have, do some more digging! On YouTube you'll find a clip of George Washington Carver speaking, Sister Rosetta Tharpe singing and playing the electric guitar, Angela Davis sharing stories about her life, Alvin Ailey discussing dance, and so much more.

In recognition of Black History Month, we've chosen eight people from the LGBTQ+ community who have left a mark on our world. Of those, five are no longer with us, while three are here still. All continue to leave a lasting, one-of-a-kind impact.

## Alvin Ailey

Born in Rogers, Texas, in 1931, Alvin Ailey was raised by a single mother in the segregated South. His childhood memories of gospel music, spirituals and “honky-tonks” profoundly shaped his later work.



After moving to Los Angeles at age 12, he began training with Lester Horton, who founded one of the first racially integrated dance companies in the U.S. Ailey moved to New York in 1954 to perform on Broadway before founding his own troupe in 1958.

Founded in 1958, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater became one of the most respected dance companies in the United States and brought African American culture to audiences around the globe. Ailey choreographed 79 ballets, among them “Revelations” (1960), a masterpiece celebrating Black resilience and faith that remains one of the most-performed modern dance pieces in history. He established The Ailey

School (1969) and Ailey II (1974) to train and provide opportunities for young dancers. Among his numerous accolades are the Kennedy Center Honors (1988) and a posthumous Presidential Medal of Freedom awarded by Barack Obama in 2014.

A gay man, Ailey remained intensely private about his personal life due to the social stigma prevalent during most of his lifetime. While he maintained romantic relationships exclusively with men, he did not come out publicly during his lifetime. He died on Dec. 1, 1989, from AIDS-related complications at age 58. To shield his mother from the stigma then associated with HIV/AIDS, he initially requested the cause of death be listed as a rare blood disease. Today, he is widely celebrated as a pioneering queer figure in the arts.

## Alan Emtage

An inventor and creator who conceived and implemented the first version of ‘Archie’ in 1989, Alan Emtage created the world's first internet search engine. The concept



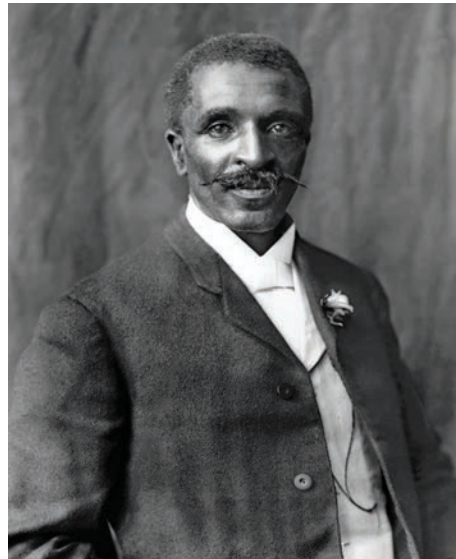
pioneered many of the techniques used by modern public search engines leading directly to today's Google, Yahoo, and Bing. For a time, he worked as a systems administrator for the School of Computer Science at McGill University in Montreal. He was inducted into the Internet Hall of Fame (Innovators Category 2017) by the Internet Society (ISOC), of which he is a founding member. Since 1998, he has been a partner at Mediapolis, Inc., a small web development company based in New York City. Now 62 and long an openly gay man, he makes his home in NYC and Provincetown, Mass.

## George Washington Carver

George Washington Carver was born into slavery sometime around 1864; he became a world-renowned agricultural scientist and educator best known for his work at the Tuskegee Institute, where he spent 47 years revolutionizing Southern farming.

Carver popularized the concept of crop rotation through the use of nitrogen-fixing crops like peanuts and sweet potatoes to restore soil nutrients depleted by years of cotton farming. He also developed over 300 products from peanuts -- including dyes, plastics, cosmetics, and medicinal oils; and another 118 products from sweet potatoes. He also created a movable school to bring agricultural education directly to poor rural farmers.

In 1921, he captured national recognition when he testified before the U.S. House



Ways and Means Committee, securing a tariff that protected the American peanut industry. He was a respected advisor to presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin D. Roosevelt, as well as leaders like Henry Ford and Mahatma Gandhi.

Most historical interpretations of Carver's personal life suggest he was likely gay or bisexual, though such identities were rarely public during his lifetime. He reportedly spent much of his life with Austin W. Curtis, Jr. from 1934 until his death in 1943. Carver lived and worked with Curtis, a fellow scientist, and the two shared a relationship described by some historians as a life partnership. The two were often seen walking arm-in-arm on campus, and Carver left his entire estate to Curtis.

Carver died on Jan. 5, 1943. His exact age was unknown, but it is likely he was 78 or 79. He passed away at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama after falling down the stairs at his home and was subsequently buried on the campus of Tuskegee, near the grave of Booker T. Washington.

## Angela Davis

Born in 1944, Angela Davis is a renowned American political activist, scholar, and



author who rose to prominence in the late 1960s as a radical feminist, Marxist and member of the Communist Party USA. She is a leading advocate for prison abolition, intersectional feminism and social justice. She publicly came out as a lesbian in an interview with *Out Magazine* in 1997.

Now 81, Davis is retired, although she is still recognized as a Distinguished Professor Emerita at the University of California, Santa Cruz, focusing on the history of consciousness and feminist studies. She has authored numerous influential books, including *Women, Race, & Class* (1983) and *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003).

In 1970, she was charged with conspiracy and acquitted in a high-profile trial that made her a global icon of resistance. She later founded Critical Resistance, a leading organization working to abolish the prison-industrial complex. In 1980 and 1984, she ran as the Communist Party USA's vice-presidential candidate; and in 2020, she was named one of *Time* magazine's Most Influential People. She continues to discuss the intersections of race, gender and sexual orientation in her advocacy, although she generally tends to keep her personal relationships private.

## Audre Lorde

A Caribbean-American “Black, lesbian, mother, warrior and poet,” Audre Lorde used her literature and activism to combat injustice. A pioneering intersectional



feminist, she challenged racism, sexism, homophobia and classism through works like “Sister Outsider” and “Zami.” A prolific writer of poetry and essays, notable works included “The Black Unicorn” (1978) and “The Cancer Journals” (1980), which documented her battle with cancer. She taught as a professor of English at John Jay College and Hunter College, and was named the Poet Laureate of New York from 1991-1992.

See *Legendary* on page 12

# Black LGBTQ+ affirming spaces in North Carolina

From Pride organizations and ballroom houses to churches and community groups, these spaces reflect histories of survival, care and self-determination



by Liz Schob  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Across North Carolina, Black LGBTQ+ communities have long created their own spaces for survival, celebration and care. These spaces exist not because of preference, but because of necessity. For generations, Black LGBTQ+ communities have navigated racism within mainstream LGBTQ+ spaces while also facing homophobia and transphobia within Black institutions. In response, affirming spaces emerged as places where identity does not have to be divided in order to belong.

As a white LGBTQ+ individual reporting on Black LGBTQ+ affirming spaces, this writer approaches our article with care and humility, recognizing that these spaces are shaped by lived experiences different from my own. This piece draws on reporting, community voices and existing scholarship to highlight why these spaces matter.

These spaces deserve attention not as side notes, but as living institutions. Black queer history is inseparable from American history, yet it has often been erased or

marginalized. From early drag balls and underground gatherings to modern Pride organizations, ballroom houses and affirming churches, the Black LGBTQ+ community has consistently built places where safety, culture and connection could exist on their own terms. That work continues today across North Carolina.

### Black Pride Organizations

Black Pride organizations play a critical role in creating visibility and connection for Black LGBTQ+ communities. Their emergence is rooted in the history of mainstream Pride celebrations, which have often focused on white, cisgender experiences and failed to fully address the realities faced by Black LGBTQ+ people. In response, Black Pride organizations formed as intentional spaces where race, sexuality and gender identity could be held together rather than compartmentalized.

Locally, **Charlotte Black Pride** works to uplift the Black LGBTQ+ community through programming and community engagement. In addition to annual celebrations, the organization serves as a connection point for people seeking culturally affirming spaces in the Charlotte area.

**Raleigh Black Pride** and **Fayetteville Black Pride** provide similar opportunities in their regions, offering spaces where Black LGBTQ+ people can celebrate identity while also building relationships and support networks. Together, these organizations demonstrate how Pride can function as both cultural celebration and community infrastructure.

### Ballroom and House Communities

Ballroom and house communities hold some of the most enduring legacies of Black LGBTQ+ cultural infrastructure. Ballroom culture can be traced back to Harlem in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where Black LGBTQ+ people created alternative spaces in response to racism and exclusion from white-dominated venues. From the beginning, ballroom functioned as more than spectacle, providing structure, recognition, and survival for people navigating overlapping systems of marginalization.

Historically, ballroom spaces offered safety during periods of intense social hostility, including the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis, when houses became sites of education, mutual care and collective resilience. Houses estab-

lished systems of leadership, lineage and accountability later reflected in documentaries like "Paris Is Burning," reinforcing the idea of chosen family long before that language entered mainstream LGBTQ+ discourse.

Across North Carolina, ballroom spaces continue to support Black queer and trans people through creativity, competition and kinship. The Carolina Ballroom Kiki Scene connects houses and performers across the state, sustaining a network rooted in affirmation and belonging. Ballroom houses such as the **Carolina Chapter of the Artistic Haus of Telfar** and the **Xclusive International Haus of Anna**



Ballroom houses continue a legacy of chosen family, creativity and care within the Black LGBTQ+ community.  
CREDIT: Carolina Chapter of the Artistic Haus of Telfar

**Wintour** illustrate how these communities function as chosen family, offering mentorship, accountability and care.

### Faith and Spiritual Communities

For many Black LGBTQ+ people, faith spaces have been sources of both harm and healing. The Black church has his-



Unity Fellowship Church of Charlotte provides an affirming, Black-led faith space.  
CREDIT: Facebook

torically played a central role in Black life as a site of spiritual grounding, political organizing and community care. At the same time, many Black LGBTQ+ people have experienced

See *Affirming spaces* on page 12



Charlotte Black Pride has centered Black LGBTQ+ joy, safety and community since 2005.  
CREDIT: Facebook



God loves YOU,  
just the way you are!

NEW LIFE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH  
SUNDAYS at 7:00 P.M. 1201 SOUTH NEW HOPE ROAD GASTONIA  
Rev. Dawn Flynn, Pastor [www.NewLifeMccNC.org](http://www.NewLifeMccNC.org) [NewLifeMccGastonia@gmail.com](mailto:NewLifeMccGastonia@gmail.com)

Relax...

to a  
therapeutic or erotic body rub  
given by attractive, experienced  
professionals.

704.651.6899

4 hands available, by longest couple doing so.

Jim Yarbrough  
GEMINI MANAGEMENT

Executive Offices For Rent

PO Box 221841 • Charlotte • NC • 28222

Ph. (704) 965-5214

Fx. (704) 531-1361

**Legendary** from page 10

Married to Edward Rollins from 1962 to 1970, the relationship produced two children before she embraced her lesbian identity. She later had long-term relationships with Frances Clayton, beginning in 1972, and later Dr. Gloria Joseph. Lorde died on Nov. 17, 1992, at the age of 58. Her cause of death was liver cancer, which she developed following a 14-year battle with breast cancer. She passed away at her home in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Island.

**Reiss Reid**

A black queer-identified immunologist,

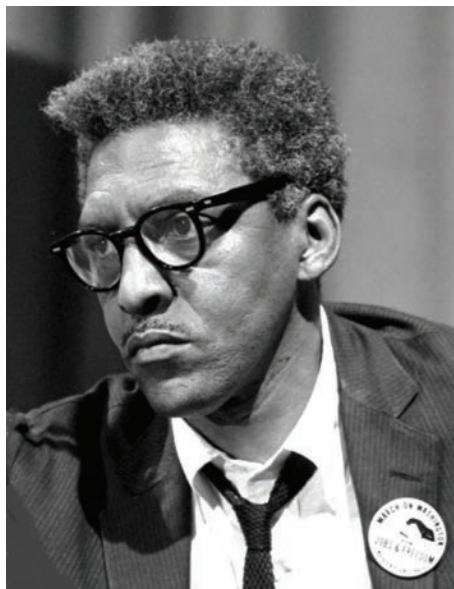


Reiss Reid focuses on developing cancer treatment by genetically modifying the immune system. Beginning as a young man,

Reid found himself captured by science and related topics like astrophysics and ecology. As a child, he was unaware of any Black or LGBTQ+ scientists, but that didn't lessen his perseverance.

From an interview with the website 500 Queer Scientists: "Being that black queer scientist makes me immensely proud. For me being a scientist isn't simply what I do but it is a fundamental part of who I am. In high school I dreamed of one day being a famous scientist working on ground breaking new medicines to meaningfully impact the lives of others. Today I get to spend my days leading a team that works on genetically modifying the immune system of cancer patients in the hopes of finding ... treatments for a disease that affects so many."

Reid is a senior research scientist at biotech in the San Francisco Bay area. He has a BSc in biomedical science from the University of Manchester UK, and a PhD in cancer immunology from Cardiff University UK. His postdoctoral research in CAR-T therapy took place at the University of Pennsylvania.



**Bayard Rustin**

Born in West Chester, Penn., Bayard Rustin was a key strategist of the American Civil Rights Movement who mentored Martin Luther King, Jr. and organized the 1963 March on Washington. As an openly gay man often sidelined due to his sexual orientation, he was a staunch advocate for nonviolence, labor rights and later, LGBTQ+ rights. Out of the closet during a time of intense stigma, this often forced Rustin to work behind the scenes to avoid harming the movement. In the 1980s, he became a public advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, specifically drawing attention to the AIDS

crisis. Rustin died on Aug. 24, 1987, at the age of 75. He passed away at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City from cardiac arrest following surgery for a ruptured appendix. He was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2013 by President Barack Obama.

**Sister Rosetta Tharpe**

Born Rosetta Nubin in Cotton Plant, Ark., in 1915, Sister Rosetta Tharpe was a

pioneering gospel singer and electric guitarist known as the "Godmother of Rock 'n' Roll." Raised by an evangelist mother, she began playing guitar at age four and performing professionally by age six. Merging gospel with blues and swing, she achieved fame in the 1930s and 1940s with hits like "Strange Things Happening Every Day" and was known for her flamboyant, influential style. A queer, bisexual Black woman, she often toured with her partner, Marie Knight, and was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2018. Tharpe died on Oct. 9, 1973, at age 58 in Philadelphia, Penn., following a stroke. She passed away at Temple University Hospital and is buried at Northwood Cemetery in Philadelphia. ::



**Affirming spaces** from page 11

exclusion or silence within religious settings, creating deep tension between faith and identity. Affirming faith communities emerge in response, reclaiming spirituality as a place of dignity and belonging rather than judgment.

**Unity Fellowship Church of Charlotte** is part of a broader tradition of Black-led, LGBTQ+-affirming churches rooted in liberation theology and inclusive practice. **Sacred Souls United Church of Christ** similarly offers a justice-centered faith community with visible Black LGBTQ+ leadership. **St. Luke's Lutheran Church** of Charlotte also serves as an affirming faith space for LGBTQ+ people in the region, reflecting how inclusion can take shape across denominational lines.

Initiatives like Pride in the Pews underscore the importance of explicit affirmation within faith spaces. For many Black LGBTQ+ people, affirming churches provide rare opportunities to reconcile faith and identity.

**Social, Cultural and Community Organizations**

Not all affirming spaces take the form of formal nonprofits or highly visible institutions. Across North Carolina, social, cultural and community-based groups provide vital spaces for connection, particularly for people navigating isolation or exclusion within mainstream LGBTQ+ spaces and Black institutions.

**ZAMI NOBLA**, the National Organization of Black Lesbians on Aging, supports Black lesbians through advocacy, visibility, and community-building, with intentional work in North Carolina. Its work highlights the importance of age-inclusive spaces within Black LGBTQ+ communities, particularly for elders who may be overlooked.

Groups like **Black Educated Lesbians, The Carolinas Chapter** create space for connection rooted in shared experience, education and mutual support. **Lesbian Friends of Charlotte** offers another example of community-build-

ing shaped by leadership and intention. While the group is not exclusively Black LGBTQ+, it is Black-led and provides social connection for lesbians in the Charlotte area.

Black LGBTQ+-affirming Greek-letter organizations also function as important community spaces. **Delta**

cultural and educational organization that supports Black artists and other creative individuals, demonstrating how arts-based spaces can encourage leadership, belonging and affirmation rooted in Black LGBTQ+ community life.

**What Responsibility Requires**

The organizations and communities highlighted here are not exhaustive, and they are not meant to be. Many Black LGBTQ+ spaces operate informally, prioritize safety over visibility, or exist primarily through relationships rather than institutions. This is not incidental. It reflects long histories of adaptation in the face of exclusion, surveillance and instability, where flexibility has often been the difference between disappearance and survival.

As public spaces shrink and LGBTQ+ rights face renewed challenge, affirming spaces remain more than symbolic. They are practical, necessary and often life-sustaining. They offer places to gather without compromise, to celebrate joy without explanation, to heal from harm and to imagine futures rooted in care, rather than defense.

Black LGBTQ+ affirming spaces in North Carolina remind us that history is not only something to be remembered. It is sustained through daily practice, relationships and the ongoing work of community. These spaces exist because of exclusion and discrimination, including within LGBTQ+ spaces.

For non-Black members of the LGBTQ+ community, especially white LGBTQ+ people, honoring this history means more than statements of solidarity. It requires unlearning

the biases and power dynamics that made these spaces necessary in the first place and committing to accomplice-ship rather than performative allyship.

That means following Black LGBTQ+ leadership, supporting these spaces materially and politically and resisting the urge to reshape them for comfort or visibility. Responsibility is not abstract. It is ongoing, relational and rooted in accountability to Black LGBTQ+ liberation. ::



**ZAMI NOBLA builds power, visibility and advocacy for Black lesbians over 40.**  
CREDIT: Facebook

**Phi Upsilon Fraternity** and **Rho Phi Kappa Fraternity** are national organizations with members and chapters active in North Carolina. Through service, education and leadership development, they create spaces where Black LGBTQ+ people can participate in fraternity life without separating identity from belonging.

Cultural and educational organizations also function as affirming spaces. **Kuumba Academy** is an LGBTQ+-led

# What goes on in a queen's world

A look at drag through the eyes of enthusiastic beginners



by Jaylen Jones  
Qnotes Staff Writer

Squeezed into a closet-sized bathroom in the small apartment they share, drag queens Venus Wyre and Moxxxxie Hexxx search through a hundred brushes and containers of makeup as they prepare for a lip-sync battle at Chasers, a local gay bar in Charlotte.

Their home is highlighted in pink and neon. A blue wig is pinned to a mannequin head near the center of the room, surrounded by tinsel and scattered fabric.

Wyre has been part of the drag scene since the age of 15, beginning with online drag competitions. Her performances were supported by her progressive parents, and it was her mother who introduced Wyre to her drag mother, Barbie.

The virtual events that are Wyre's roots gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic, giving drag queens an opportunity to practice their art, despite the closure of many public spaces. She rehearsed in her bedroom late at night so that when her time came, she could create a storm onstage.

Hexxx was not as fortunate. Coming from a conservative home in Philadelphia, she felt pressure from her religious community to repress her identity and the drag she was interested in, resulting in a tiring yet accomplished career in basketball.

People took Hexxx's queer self-identity for weakness, "Like, just cause I'm gay doesn't mean you can make fun of me. I can do all the things you can do, too," says Hexxx.

She says that competitive spirit has shifted from the court to the drag stage.

When asked about the feedback given at Chaser's lip-sync battles and other drag events, Wyre and Hexxx have contradicting feelings. Wyre feels that Chaser's idea of drag creates a box that

constricts her creativity. "Yeah, things do need rhinestones...but some people don't do that type of drag," says Wyre.

Hexxx says "polish is just as important as mess."

The two stress the need for a queen to balance beauty and performance.

Wyre glues down her wig as she talks about the restrictions she believes drag has on creativity and especially for people of color in Charlotte.



Venus Wyre applying eyeliner in her tiny bathroom.  
CREDIT: Jaylen Jones



Moxxxxie Hexxx gazes into the mirror while applying contour.  
CREDIT: Jaylen Jones

She thinks most of the venues in Charlotte seem geared more toward white patrons and performers. When Scorpio closed its Freedom Drive location and moved to Southend, some felt that they had lost a space that was more welcoming to the city's Black LGBTQ+ community.

Wyre adds that the lack of Black gay spaces is a shift she is adjusting to when she moved from Memphis, her hometown. She goes on to describe the energy in these locations: "You do some Kia. You move, bitch. You have fun. You look glamorous. You gotta have everything together."

## The Drag Persona

Nerves can affect anyone before performing. Hexxx says the struggle between her drag persona and non-drag life can be challenging as well.

"Balancing Luke and Moxxxxie outside work and personal spaces is a struggle. It can consume you," says Wyre, referring to the energy it takes to get into character.

While applying lashes, Hexxx says, "I wouldn't say they are completely different people. Moxxxxie is a part of Luke, and there are some aspects of Luke that [are] in Moxxxxie." As a new queen, "if you don't have the conversation with yourself about who this person is, you won't figure it out."

Wyre interrupts and says, "it's an extension of myself. Drag gives you a pass to be as big of a personality as you wanna be." She adds that drag doesn't require you to code-switch for the norm; a concept queer people know too much about. "In drag, you're able to be your full person times ten."

That larger-than-life personality is on full display as they walk into Chasers. The girls compliment the bartender and saunter toward patrons. Four-inch heels announce that royalty has entered the building.

The dance floor is empty, though the event is scheduled to start in an hour. The DJ behind the stage tends to his turntables while occasionally greeting people as they enter the club. Pink and blue spotlights sway to the thump of the speakers. Glistening, aluminum-like, ornaments hang from the ceiling, replicating winter branches.

The queens make sure everyone in and outside the club knows their names. Though the wind is dry and sharp, they stand tall, giggling with others. Gossip fills the silence. Everyone seems to know one another. People shiver on patio furniture, desperately trying to resist the cold's push to send them inside.

The Jimmy James song "Fashionista" blasts through the speakers, alerting the audience that the show is about to start. Groups walk to their seats and watch the hosts' opening numbers.

Wyre's lip-sync is next. She marches onto the stage with determination as if the mix she made the night before ignites the performer inside.

Her energy screams power and sex appeal as she uses the entire room for her performance, starting with the pole on-stage and moving down into the audience. Behind the blasting speakers are screams from attendees.

experiment with their craft. That night, a new queen hit the stage with Britney Spears's "Circus." Drag Queen Tommy, dressed as a clown in black and white stripes, surprises the audience with her talent.

Competition is in the air, and host, Vanna Vanity, could feel it. "This has been such a fun night," Vanity says. "We have fierce competitors."

Each queen, different from the next, ends their routine to applause and a handful of bills. Once the first round of lip-syncs are over, the hosts decide which queens will compete for the win. After seconds of silence, Vanity announces that Tommy will move to the next round and battle the audience's choice, Ohsheaman.

Though Wyre and Hexxx cannot compete for the crown, the two cheer for Tommy, another new queen in Charlotte. The hosts follow the competing queens' kicks and lips to decide who outperformed the others. In the end, Ohsheaman wins and the audience applauds another victorious queen.

Says Wyre: "I'm here to have fun and enjoy myself." She doesn't worry about loss. Though Hexxx's competitive spirit hates a loss, she agrees. For both, drag is an outlet of expression. Losing means nothing as long as they're able to perform and tell a story.

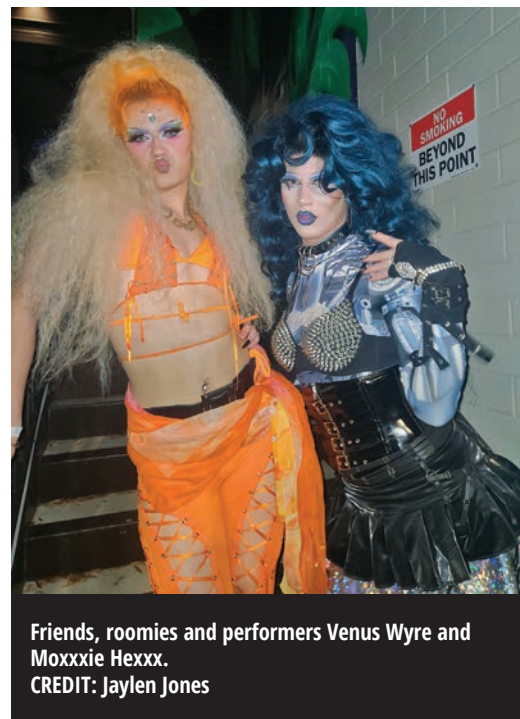
"It's something I view as to just get on a stage and compete, kinda low stakes," Hexxx offers. "It's [competing] fun, and I get more out of it."

Whether a performer wins or loses – it's clear – drag is a magnet for community. After the results

are called, the various queens reconnect with one another, exchanging compliments on performances, hugging and laughing.

"Drag has a way of being a true unifier," says Wyre, "that I don't think other outlets do."

Both queens insist they are not in drag to win, they are there for family and the love of the craft. ::



Friends, roomies and performers Venus Wyre and Moxxxxie Hexxx.  
CREDIT: Jaylen Jones



Hosts Vanna Vanity and Lolita Chanel watching Aria Venus perform.  
CREDIT: Jaylen Jones

People eat up each drop of Wyre.

After her performance, the hosts, Vanna Vanity and Lolita Chanel, offer their praise and critique. Letting her know their opinions of her outfit and routine.

Unlike other bars, Chasers's lip-sync battles are open to queens, old and new. The event gives them an opportunity to

**Lupie's Cafe**  
**HOME OF THE EMPTY PLATE CLUB!**  
 2718 Monroe Rd.  
 Charlotte, NC 28205  
 704-374-1232  
 M-F 11 - 4pm  
 Sat 12 - 4pm  
 Email: lupie@lupiescafe.com  
 www.lupiescafe.com



# 'The Queer Thing About Sin: Why the West Came to Hate Queer Love'

Out in Print



by Terri Schlichenmeyer  
 Contributing Writer

"The Queer Thing About Sin: Why the West Came to Hate Queer Love"  
 by Harry Tanner  
 ©2025, Bloomsbury  
 \$28.00  
 259 pages

Nobody likes you very much. That's how it seems sometimes, doesn't it? Nobody wants to see you around, they don't want to hear your voice, they can't stand the thought of your existence and they'd really rather you just go away. It's infuriating, and in the new book **"The Queer Thing About Sin"** by Harry Tanner, you'll see how we got to this point.

When he was a teenager, Harry Tanner says that he thought he "was going to hell."

For years, he'd been attracted to men and he prayed that it would stop. He asked for help from a lay minister who offered Tanner websites meant to repress his urges, but they weren't the panacea Tanner hoped for. It

wasn't until he went to college that he found the answers he needed and "stopped fearing God's retribution."

Being gay wasn't a sin. Not ever, but he "still wanted to know *why* Western Culture believed it was for so long."

Historically, many believe that older men were sexual "mentors" for teenage boys, but Tanner says that in ancient Greece and Rome, same-sex relationships were common between male partners of equal age and between differently-aged pairs, both. Clarity comes by understanding relationships between husbands and wives then, and careful translation of the word "boy," to show that age wasn't a factor, but superiority and inferiority were.

In ancient Athens, queer love was considered to be "noble" but after the Persians sacked Athens, sex between men instead became an acceptable act of aggression aimed at conquered enemies. Confoundingly, raping a male prisoner was encouraged but "[g]ay men became symbols of a depraved lack of self-control and abstinence."

Later Greeks believed that men could turn into women "if they weren't sufficiently virile." Biblical interpretations point to more conflict; Leviticus specifically

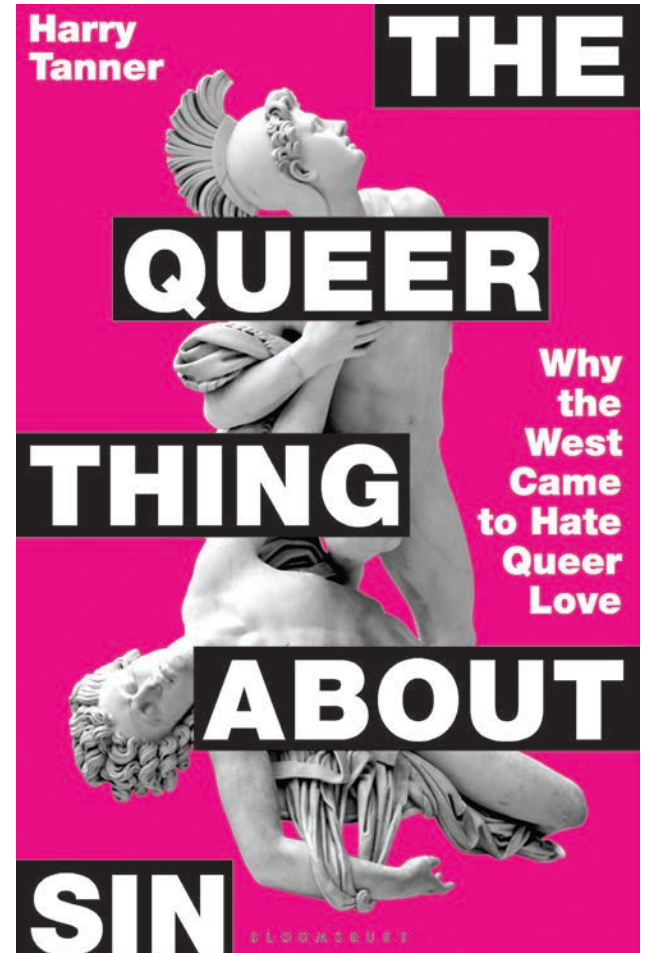
bans queer sex but "the Sumerians actively encouraged it." The Egyptians hated it, but "there are sporadic clues that same-sex partners lived together in ancient Egypt."

Says Tanner, "all is not what it seems."

So you say you're not really into ancient history. If it's not your thing, then "The Queer Thing About Sin" won't be, either.

Just know that if you skip this book, you're missing out on the kind of excitement you get from reading mythology, but what's here is true, and a much wider view than mere folklore. Author Harry Tanner invites readers to go deep inside philosophy, religion and ancient culture, but the information he brings is not dry. No, there are major battles brought to life here, vanquished enemies and death – but also love, acceptance, even encouragement that the citizens of yore in many societies embraced and enjoyed. Tanner explains carefully how religious credo tied in with homosexuality (or didn't) and he brings readers up to speed through recent times.

While this is not a breezy vacation read or a curl-up-with-a-blanket kind of book, "The Queer Thing About Sin" is absolutely worth spending time with. If you're a thinking person and can give yourself a chance to ponder, you'll like it very much. ::



**We buy interesting & worthwhile used books & Compact Discs.**

**Books Do Furnish A Room**  
 1809 W Markham Avenue • 286-1076  
 (Between 9th & Broad) Durham

*Sweeten your love life!*

**Peaches**  
 Adult Boutique & Arcade  
**OPEN 24/7**  
 115 Swain Street, Fayetteville, NC, 910-339-2770  
 facebook.com/PeachesAdultBoutique1

# Our People: Ali Steele

Artist, African Spiritualist and Public Health Worker talks about travel, community and self-love.



by L'Monique King  
Qnotes Staff Writer

**Y**ou have to go the way your blood beats. If you don't live the only life you have, you won't live some other life, you won't live any life at all." When famed author and social justice warrior James Baldwin said that – he couldn't have possibly known how much his words would capture many of our community members. A native Charlottean and a creative artist in many fields, Ali Steele is surely one. Steele is firmly ensconced in "going the way his blood beats," traveling across continents to learn, grow and spread love in a way only he can – Steele lives fully. In this interview from his living room – an artistic space, flooded with art and African artifacts – Qnotes learned more about his journey to empowerment, love and distant lands.

**L'Monique King: So, you were born and reared in Charlotte? That's rare.**

**Ali Steele:** Yes, I am a proud Charlottean. I went to Hornets Nest Elementary, Ranson Middle School and West Charlotte High School.

**LMK: Have you ever considered leaving?**

**AS:** I have attempted and will probably end up being bi-coastal. I tried to live in Atlanta and Miami for a little bit, but there's nothing like home. Charlotte is where I come from and I'm just so proud to be from here and all the growth Charlotte has had. It's home – even with all the gentrification.

**LMK: What's it like for you – being a Black gay man in the South?**

**AS:** My mother is my biggest supporter and my best friend. I didn't really give my family a choice but to accept me. I just didn't take no for an answer. [As for living in the South] I'm me and at the end of the day I am part of the [LGBTQ] community, but my sexuality doesn't define me in totality. I'm a nature guy, I'm a community health worker, I'm multifaceted. I've also stood by my sexuality as being my business, not community business. I live in my truth but I grew up in a time where being bullied was the norm – so when it came to fight or flight, I've always chosen to fight. When I see people being bullied, I stand up for them because standing up for them means standing up for me. I'm still a man at the end of the day and I will not be disrespected. Being who I am and as an African Spiritualist – I've been taught to stand in my strength.

**LMK: Do you have any siblings?**

**AS:** I have a sister through my mom. She's a realtor in Charlotte and works hard at making sure people of color can become homeowners. She's two years younger but she's like my little big sister. I also have seven other siblings: two boys and five girls by my father. I'm close with most of my siblings. The youngest is currently in the 11th grade and attending West Charlotte where I graduated from.

**LMK: Sounds like there's a lot of love in your life. Are you partnered?**

**AS:** There is. I'm currently engaged to an amazing person, Zed. He's from Mississippi and working on his doctorate. He's in the medical field as a mental health practitioner and one of the biggest blessings of my life. We live in a world where everyone has this idea of who they want their significant other to be and how they want them to contribute [to their lives and relationships]. With him I can always be myself and I'm accepted for all of that I am, good or bad. That's hard to come by in this lifetime.

**LMK: What do you do for a living?**

**AS:** A lot – I do a lot for a living <chuckling>. My greatest passion is my art. I've been writing and performing music for years now – all of my life actually. I'm a choir boy and grew up in the church, but at 18 I started writing and performing my own music. It's available on all the major platforms – Apple, Google, Spotify, YouTube – it's everywhere.

**LMK: What kind of music do you produce?**

**AS:** Most of my music is about reconnecting to nature, our experiences as people of color throughout the diaspora, life experiences and love. It's about healing, like I've been healed through music.

**LMK: Who do you listen to? What are the top three songs on your playlist?**

**AS:** <Laughter> It's going to be really ratchet. Um, let's see; "If You Want It" by Sexy Red, "Feeling on My Body" by Taffy & Pluto and my song "Got Damn 'Mantra" featuring local poet Sade Sade.

**LMK: Can you share a little about who you are as an artisan?**

**AS:** I've only been back working for a steady paycheck for about three years now. Up until then, I've also been an entrepreneur and founder of Ethnic by Ali, now called Osian Sun. The name changed because Ethnic by Ali was a reflection of my experience in African Spirituality. I'd take what I'd learned and try to bring it back to my community.

The source of my artistic and creative ideas flow from and through nature. Osian is the Orisha that I primarily work with. An Orisha is an extension of Olodumare (equivalent to God in Western Civilization) it's an African spiritual practice – of characteristics and energy through nature. Many times, when you talk about African spirituality people try to make it into something pagan or something polytheist when in actuality it's monotheist – believing in one God. As an entrepreneur I've challenged all that into hosting the Healer's Market (which includes entertainment, yoga, horseback riding and the sale of handmade soaps and shea butter) and facilitating hiking groups that chase waterfalls through North Carolina. This year for Black History Month I'm thinking about repeating one of my favorite hikes to a waterfall near Nina Simone's house. For me, it's all about exposing our community to things that are geared towards a more holistic way of living. It's not about being perfect, it's about healing and being at peace.

**LMK: How'd you get into making your own shea butters?**

**AS:** My mom taught me how to make custom shea butters made with essential oils. In 2018, I took a trip to Ghana to visit

and study the Akhan people and others from Ghana. I was exposed to hand made crafting with African brass. I had the brass imported from people I met there and started making jewelry from the brass and trade beads; beads made from recycled glass.

**LMK: Is Black History Month important to you?**

**AS:** Definitely. It's a celebration and reflection of the hard work and excellence of my people, our ancestors and all they have contributed to this nation. It's our legacy, our past and our future.

**LMK: With all your thoughtful and creative endeavors, do you also have a nine to five job?**

**AS:** During the day, nowadays – I'm employed by Quality Comprehensive Health Center as a linkage to care coordinator. Basically, I'm a liaison between clients and the organization, assisting clients in their care and their needs for housing, food and medicine. Quality has its own pharmacy where clients can get their prescriptions filled onsite. It's very rewarding work. Working at The PowerHouse 2.0 (the HIV Intervention and Prevention Division) is the best job I've had and I've done a lot of things. I worked in telecommunications, worked wiring trucks (better paying but hard on the body), fast food (as a teenager), childcare and none of those jobs made me feel like part of my community. Someone once told me, I could either work to build someone else's dream or work to build someone else. With this position I feel like I'm living my dream of servicing my community and I'm able to provide for myself at the same time.

**LMK: When you're not involved in working and your many creative endeavors – what do you like to do?**

**AS:** Travel, of course. I recently returned from Benin. It was a beautiful African experience. It was a place where you could walk into a community and everyone (of all religious faiths) came together to celebrate African spirituality. I got to see Ganvie' - the continent's largest water village. I also visited the space of an African King, a festival and saw the huge statue depicted in the movie Woman King – an ode to the African female warrior of the Dahomey tribe. It was all amazing.

**LMK: Having visited other nations, what are your thoughts on the current U.S. political climate?**

**AS:** I just think it's really unfortunate that we're in a time when so many people who have done so much work towards progress are now seeing the funding of that progress being taken away. It's very disheartening, but we have to remember, where there's a



Ali Steele, a native Charlottean with a love for an ever-changing Queen City.  
CREDIT: Jo Hayes Images

will, there's a way. Quality, where I'm employed, does good work in finding alternate ways to provide for our LGBTQ community, people living with HIV and other ailments access the care and medications they need. So, I'm more hopeful that as a community that we continue to stand together in finding a way to provide needs for each other – with or without the powers that be.

**LMK: If you could go back in time and speak to your younger self, what would you say?**

**AS:** Take time to really love yourself, get to know yourself, create boundaries and take time to love and appreciate the people who have made a way for you. Community used to be in your backyard, now our neighbors are strangers, and we have to come together to find and create community because our children may not see or find it where they live. When you're surrounded by hate it's hard to see love within yourself. Especially for those in community, church, school, etc... Community is important because we live in a world where we're not taught to love ourselves, especially those of us who are part of the LGBTQ community like me. We're scrutinized and sometimes ostracized. The feelings of self-doubt [many of us experience] often come from trauma and not learning to love ourselves. If I had understood that as a young person – I would have done so much more [in loving and taking care of me] sooner instead of taking so long to get there. That's my wish for our youth, our community, our world – that we find that self-love and embrace it sooner. ::

# WHITE RABBIT WHERE EVERYONE IS WELCOME



**WHITE RABBIT**  
920 CENTRAL AVE.  
CHARLOTTE N.C. , 28204  
(704) 377-4067



FOLLOW US @



@WRABBITNC



WHITE RABBIT



SHOPWHITERABBIT