

July 2020



Living in a Historical Moment for Black LGBTQ People: The Evolution of Queer Black Leadership



By Bryce J. Celotto

We are living in a historical moment for Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people — a moment that is on par with the Compton's Cafeteria riot (1966) and Stonewall (1969). In both instances, trans women and queer people of color led the charge against constant police brutality and street harassment. The scenes of 2020 mirror those iconic actions, as Black LGBTQ people are still leading the way in the face of constant violence, harassment and discrimination.

In June 2020, during nationwide protests organized by Black transgender women and queer folks, tens of thousands of people came out to march, sing and dance, declaring not only that “BLACK LIVES MATTER” but that “BLACK QUEER, TRANS, LIVES MATTER.” This rallying cry of justice is rooted in the intersectional experiences of Black LGBTQ people.

Intersectionality, a framework designed by Black feminist scholar and lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, takes into account the fact that people with multiple marginal identities face compounded challenges. This is true for Black LGBTQ people like myself, as we face disproportionate obstacles accessing equitable opportunities and outcomes in healthcare, criminal justice, education, housing, employment and other essential services necessary to survive and thrive.

Pioneers & the Present

As we continue the march forward, we must be committed to looking back to the pioneers such as Marsha P. Johnson, Miss Major, James Baldwin and Bayard Rustin, who paved the way for us, while simultaneously looking forward to the fights on the horizon. We continue to fight, because the reality is that Black LGBTQ people are still being killed at disparate rates, are still being economically exploited, and are still being harassed by police simply for existing in the world.

To learn more about the history of Black LGBTQ leaders, and where the movement for Black queer and trans lives is headed next, join us for a “Fighting Back” panel on July 22 entitled “[The Evolution of Black Leadership](#)” (see the events section below for more information or [register here](#)). This panel will feature six Black LGBTQ movement leaders who will share their own personal experiences, critical historical context and social commentary on racial and LGBTQ justice in America.

Author’s note: This article is written in memoriam of all those who have come before us whom we have lost too soon. Rest in power Nina Pop, Tony McDade, Dominique Fells, Riah Milton, Titi Gulley and so many others.

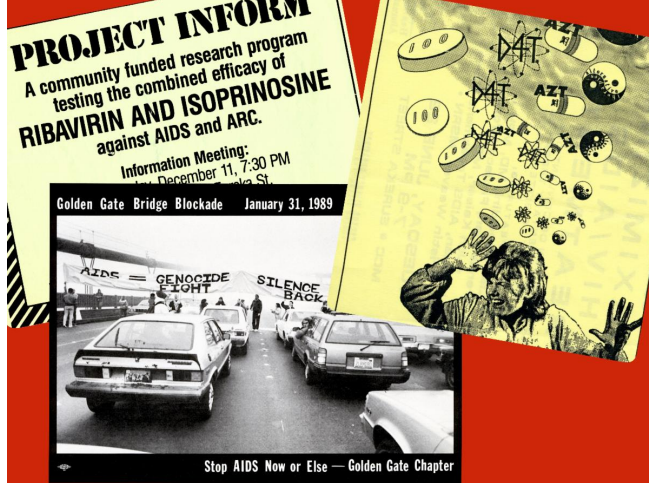
Bryce J. Celotto, M.A.T., is a proud Black, queer, transgender policy advocate, DEI strategist, historian and educator in Oakland.

Curator Interview

Bay Area AIDS Treatment Activism

By Brenda Lein

In the face of daily tragedy, the Bay Area’s AIDS treatment activists of the 1980s and 1990s undertook their advocacy with defiance, determination and



hope. They distributed experimental medications for people with AIDS. They founded advocacy organizations demanding government and industry-sponsored research on the disease, and then demanded community participation in those initiatives. They took to the streets in order to attract and leverage media attention.

“[AIDS Treatment Activism: A Bay Area Story](#)” is a new online exhibition on the GLBT Historical Society’s website. The show uses documents, flyers, photographs, ephemera and audiovisual materials to explore the rise and growth of the treatment-activism movement in the San Francisco Bay Area. *History Happens* interviewed curator Brenda Lein, a veteran of the treatment-activist movement, as she put the finishing touches on the exhibition.

Q: What drew people to AIDS treatment activism in the 1980s?

People find their path to activism in different ways and for different reasons. Some are fighting for their lives, or the lives of their friends or a lover. Others are digging themselves out of wells of grief or rage and looking for both escape and empowerment. For still others it is a way to grasp at control during a time that is chaotic and out of control. In the 1980s, HIV was spreading through the LGBTQ and other undervalued communities, while mainstream America went on, business as usual. It’s the same with the Black Lives Matter movement today; for decades Black Americans have been dying at the hands of largely white “law enforcement.” When lives hang in the balance and people are dying before you, you turn up the volume. Many people who turned to treatment activism felt there was simply no other choice but to act. They were not extraordinary; they were very ordinary people in an extraordinary situation and they rose to the moment.

Q: What was the relationship of treatment activists to the medical community? Did it evolve over time?

There were a few different kinds of relationships at play. The mainstream medical establishment didn’t (and still doesn’t) have much room for input from the communities it serves. There was reticence to embrace community involvement, but AIDS treatment activists weren’t waiting for permission; they were reading medical journals (with a thesaurus in hand) and attending scientific conferences. It wasn’t long before they were more informed about HIV disease and the bleeding edge of research than the average general practitioner. Over time treatment activists were invited as featured guests to speak at Continuing Medication Education forums.

The relationship of activists to the research establishment was a different

animal. Initially, researchers made efforts to minimize contact and input from community activists. Perhaps not surprisingly, the brightest scientists — the thought leaders — were often the first to sit down with treatment activists. When their peers and colleagues witnessed positive and growing relationships between activists and scientific leadership, it softened the edges. As activists were made privy to the barriers to scientific progress, they marshaled their forces and fought for changes that loosened purse strings and resulted in meaningful reforms. When scientists were flooded with more resources, they began reaching out to the activists as partners, as opposed to adversaries.

Q: How does this exhibition document a uniquely Bay Area story?

While AIDS treatment activists emerged in many urban areas, both the approach and focus of activists in the Bay Area were unique. The community in San Francisco mobilized more rapidly, establishing organizations to provide care and services, buyers' clubs to provide access to experimental therapies and HIV information networks emerged. And while New York is known as the birthplace of ACT UP, San Francisco was the birthplace of treatment activism. Project Inform was founded in 1984 to provide information, advocacy and inspiration to people living with HIV. On the proposal of an ACT UP Golden Gate member, Jesse Dobson, Project Inform created Project Immune Restoration, an advocacy program focusing research attention on immune therapies and advanced-stage AIDS. This focus area of activism became signature to Bay Area treatment activists.

NOTE: “[AIDS Treatment Activism: A Bay Area Story](#)” opened July 1 on the GLBT Historical Society’s [website](#).

Brenda Lein was a member of ACT UP San Francisco, a founding member of ACT UP Golden Gate, and held the dual positions of director of information and advocacy and director of Project Immune Restoration at Project Inform.

In the Archives

An Online Home for the Art & Artifacts Collection



By Mark Sawchuk & Ramón Silvestre

Most of us, if asked to do so on the fly, could probably come up with a working definition of the terms “art” and “artifacts.” But would you include items such as broken glass, picket signs and leather vests in your definition? We do! Our [Art and Artifacts collection](#) contains plenty of traditionally “artistic” treasures, including paintings, mixed-media works and photographs.

But it’s also home to surprising, one-of-a-kind items, many of them rooted in the bars, buildings and even the sidewalks that make up the fabric of the city.

From Finocchio's to Tinky Winky

We've got large-format theater photographs of famous performers who starred at Finocchio's, the legendary North Beach nightclub, in the 1940s and 1950s. There's a handful of colorful shards from a stained-glass window that was shattered in a state office building in San Francisco during the 1991 AB 101 riot (so named because it occurred after Governor Pete Wilson vetoed a bill that would have guaranteed statewide protection from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation).

We have business signs from long-gone San Francisco queer establishments, such as the Bagdad Café and the Artemis Café. And that's just scratching the surface of a collection that also contains matchbooks, pins, buttons, coffee mugs, picket signs, and yes, a Tinky Winky "Teletubbies" plush toy, twenty years after Jerry Falwell outed the loveable purple fellow.

Undisturbed but Underutilized

Until now, these remarkable materials have lain largely undisturbed, but also underutilized, in the archives. While we had internal records of each item, they had not been cataloged or inventoried in a systematic way, and were difficult to serve to researchers. Thanks to a grant from the San Francisco Office of Economic and Workplace Development's Historic Preservation Fund, the society has nearly completed a multiyear project that has assessed, documented and cataloged the entire collection.

We implemented the project in two phases. First, we surveyed the objects to create a definitive catalog and undertake any necessary conservation efforts for fragile or deteriorating items. Next, we digitally photographed each object in high resolution.

To make these materials available to you, we've created an [online database on our website](#) that contains photographs of approximately 350 of the over 600 items in the still-growing Art and Artifacts Collection, including all of the items described above. A separate page accessible from the main page houses those objects that contain adult content, and we'll continue to add additional entries to the database as we research and establish provenance information for them.

Even before the COVID-19 crisis made it impossible for researchers to visit the archives in person, the Art and Artifacts Collection could not be enjoyed by the public as it deserved to be. So we are doubly pleased to make it available to you [remotely](#). As you peruse the collection, we invite you to ask yourself: What objects excite you? Move you? Make you chuckle? Inspire you to learn more? If you have any thoughts, why not write and share them with us?

Mark Sawchuk is the communications manager at the GLBT Historical Society.

Ramón Silvestre is the registrar at the GLBT Historical Society.

Upcoming Online Events

Fighting Back

The International AIDS Conference in SF, 30 Years Later



Wednesday, July 8

6:00–7:30 p.m.

Online program

Free | \$5.00 suggested donation

Thirty years ago, the Sixth International AIDS Conference was held in San Francisco at the height of the AIDS crisis. Activists and people with HIV from around the world confronted political and public health leaders, demanding action in response to the growing pandemic. A reunion of activists and attendees of the 1990 conference will provide opportunities for remembrance of the conference, and reflect on the conference's legacy and role during the COVID era. This event is scheduled during the 23rd International AIDS Conference, originally planned to be held in San Francisco and Oakland, which is now taking place online from July 6 to July 10. Register online [here](#).

Curator Tour

Curating “Labor of Love: The Birth of San Francisco Pride”



Friday, July 17

6:00–7:30 p.m.

Online program

Free | \$5.00 suggested donation

Join us for a virtual tour of our newest online exhibition, “[Labor of Love: The Birth of San Francisco Pride, 1970-1980](#).” The exhibition’s co-curators, Gerard Koskovich, Don Romesburg and Amy Sueyoshi, will lead a special guided tour of the exhibition, explaining their curatorial choices and demonstrating how San Francisco’s LGBTQ community forged the internationally renowned annual celebration that would come to be known as Pride. Register online [here](#).

Panel Discussion

The History & Evolution of Black LGBTQ Leadership

Wednesday, July 22

6:00–7:30 p.m.

Online program

Free | \$5.00 suggested donation

Black LGBTQ leaders have long been at the

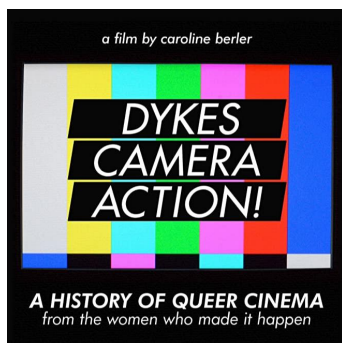


forefront of protest and revolutionary movements, including the Compton's Cafeteria riot of August 1966 in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco and the Stonewall riots in June 1969 in New York. Activists Marsha P. Johnson and Miss Major protested in the streets, strategists such as Bayard Rustin worked behind the scenes to combat inequality and thought leaders like James Baldwin moved the intellectual

conversation forward. This panel will shed light on these revolutionary leaders, tracing the arc of justice from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s to the burgeoning LGBTQ rights movement of the 1980s to the modern-day movement for Black lives. Foregrounding the significance of intersectionality and intersectional movements, a panel of today's activists will share their own personal experiences, critical historical context and social commentary on racial and LGBTQ justice in America. Register online [here](#).

Film Screening

Dykes, Camera, Action! A History of Lesbian Cinema



Friday, July 31

6:00–8:00 p.m.

Online program

Free | \$5.00 suggested donation

Join us for a screening of director Caroline Berler's 2018 documentary *Dykes, Camera, Action!*, which examines queer women's cinema from the mid-twentieth century through the

present. Lesbian filmmakers have used the cinema to build visibility and transform the social imagination about queerness. The documentary features filmmakers Barbara Hammer, Su Friedrich, Rose Troche, Cheryl Dunye, Yoruba Richen, Desiree Akhavan, Vicky Du, film critic B. Ruby Rich, Jenni Olson, and others as they share moving and often hilarious stories from their lives and discuss how they have expressed queer identity through film. The screening will be followed by a prerecorded panel discussion with some of the interviewees, moderated by Jenni Olson. Register online [here](#).

Labor of LOVE

The Birth of
San Francisco Pride
1970-1980



Visit Us & Online Resources

The museum and archives are closed until further notice, but the archives staff is still available to work with researchers; please contact us at reference@glbthistory.org.

Online exhibitions: Our online exhibitions are available here.

Online collections: Browse over a dozen digital collections.

Upcoming events: More information about all of our online events.

Fighting Back series: More information about this online event series.

Past events: Footage of a large number of our past programs.

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CREDITS. FEATURE: Top: Cover illustration from the April/May 1991 issue of *Aché* magazine; Periodicals Collection, GLBT Historical Society. Bottom left: Joan Jett-Blakk campaign poster, ca. 1992; General Poster Collection, GLBT Historical Society. Bottom right: Cover illustration from the Spring 1993 issue of *Aché* magazine; Periodicals Collection, GLBT Historical Society. Photograph of Bryce J. Celotto courtesy of same, used with permission. **CURATOR INTERVIEW:** Top left: Project Inform town meeting flyer, ca. 1990; Ephemera Collection, GLBT Historical Society. Top right: ACT UP flyer, ca. 1990; Ephemera Collection, GLBT Historical Society. Bottom: Stop AIDS Now or Else postcard with photograph of the 1989 Golden Gate Bridge blockade, ca. 1989; photograph by Rick Gerharter, Ephemera Collection, GLBT Historical Society. **IN THE ARCHIVES:** Registrar Ramón Silvestre works with an object in the Art and Artifacts Collection; photograph courtesy of same, used with permission. **EVENTS. Fighting Back 7/8:** Demonstration on women's AIDS issues at the Sixth International AIDS Conference in San Francisco, June 22, 1990; photo by Daniel Nicoletta, used with permission, all rights reserved. Curator Tour 7/17: San Francisco Gay Pride Program, 1972; Ephemera Collection, GLBT Historical Society. Panel Discussion 7/22: Joan Jett-Blakk campaign poster, ca. 1992; General Poster Collection, GLBT Historical Society. Film Screening 7/31: Poster for *Dykes, Camera, Action!* courtesy of Frameline Distribution.

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