



GLBT
Historical
Society
museum & archives

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Facebook Censorship Removes Image of Black Transgender Man From GLBT Historical Society's Social Media

San Francisco — San Francisco – The GLBT Historical Society strongly condemns social-media giant Facebook for removing a post on the society's account that depicted a portrait of a Black transgender man.

The GLBT Historical Society frequently posts photographs and images of materials in its extensive archival collections to its social-media accounts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. On Wednesday, September 2, the society's communications manager, Mark Sawchuk, scheduled a post on Facebook and on Instagram for the morning of September 3. The post included an image of a recent acquisition in the society's Art and Artifacts Collection: a framed, black-and-white portrait of Zion Johnson, a Black transgender man who served as president of the Lou Sullivan Society. The portrait, by Anderson M. Clark, shows Johnson posing shirtless and looking directly at the camera.

Within a half-hour of the post's publication, Sawchuk received a warning notification that the Facebook post had "violated Facebook community standards" for nudity and had been taken down. The warning was accompanied by a notification explaining that the society could click "agree" and accept the decision, or click "disagree" and initiate a review. Sawchuk clicked "disagree." A second notice appeared, explaining that due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Facebook is not reviewing all disputed posts for compliance or noncompliance with community standards, and that the matter is closed. Sawchuk's Facebook account has been placed on "warning" status.

Of the censored photograph, the subject, Zion Johnson, wrote, "One reason I participated in this project was to extend the visibility of transgender men. Especially for people of color, I thought it was important for other people of color to know we exist in their own communities; this is not a white European concept...It's an image that shows different shapes, sizes and colors of the trans experience."

This is not the first time that Facebook has flagged GLBT Historical Society content for removal. In 2017, two of the society's advertisements for volunteers

at the Folsom Street Fair were rejected, one on Facebook and one on Instagram. The advertisements depicted bare-chested leather men, but did not include nudity or suggestive language. The ads were reinstated after the society appealed the decision. In August 2018, the society was unable to promote a Facebook post publicizing an upcoming program about the history and current state of transgender-rights activism. Unlike these previous incidents, the September 3 incident involved a content-based post, not an advertisement.

“This wasn’t the first time our posts have been flagged and it probably won’t be the last time that our content is censored by the platform’s frequently anti-LGBTQ algorithm and moderation,” said GLBT Historical Society Executive Director Terry Beswick. “Making LGBTQ life visible is central to our mission. We’re up against a culture that is still relentlessly anti-LGBTQ, and social-media platforms that wield enormous power over the images, news and politics we consume. When they make people invisible, it becomes easier to spread the fear and misinformation that quickly and frequently turn into violence.”

Multiple emails to Facebook employees who assisted the society with its earlier appeals went unanswered. The society’s identical post on Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, was not removed and can be seen at <https://bit.ly/36g5qRa>.

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ABOUT THE GLBT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The GLBT Historical Society is a public history center and archives that collects, preserves and interprets the history of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people and the communities that support them. Founded in 1985, the society maintains one of the world’s largest collections of LGBTQ historical materials. For more information, visit www.glbthistory.org.

GRAPHICS

This image may be used in coverage of this story. It shows the portrait of Zion Johnson in the society's Art and Artifacts Collection that was removed from Facebook. Portrait of Zion Johnson; photograph by Anderson M. Clark, GLBTART Temp Number 020, Art and Artifacts Collection, GLBT Historical Society.



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