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Black Queer History Matters

by Rev. Irene Monroe
contributing writer

Black History Month is a time to acknowledge and celebrate the achievements and courageous acts of people of African descent in the United States and around the world. This year Black History month celebrates its 100th anniversary. Yet Black History Month has failed to fully acknowledge or celebrate the contributions of Black LGBTQ+ people.

Our icons

Just as Pride Month remains overwhelmingly white in its representation, Black History Month continues to be deeply homophobic in its omissions. Our continued erasure from the annals of Black history suggests—in correctly—that the only shapers and movers of Black life, past and present,

have been heterosexual.

Today, however, contemporary scholarship that examines the intersectionality of people's lives has begun to challenge long-accepted historical narratives once treated as gospel. Records that were canonized as definitive truths are now being revisited and corrected for their glaring exclusions. These course corrections have given us a more expansive, honest, and complete understanding of Black history.

A powerful example is the deliberate and long-standing omission of Bayard Rustin from dominant narratives of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement until the 1990s. Once largely confined to Black queer subcultures and

see **MONROE**, page 2



Bayard Rustin. Photo via The Library of Congress from Washington, DC, U.S.

NY officials raise rainbow flag at Stonewall in rebuke of Trump administration



People demonstrate after New York politicians and activists raised a rainbow flag on a pole across the street from the Stonewall Inn, Feb. 12, 2026, in New York. Photo by Yuki Iwamura/AP.

By Jennifer Peltz
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York politicians defiantly raised a rainbow flag Thursday at the Stonewall National Monument amid a boisterous, cheering crowd, rebuking the Trump

administration for removing the well-known symbol of pride from the LGBTQ+ landmark.

"We did it," said Manhattan Borough President Brad Hoylman-Sigal after helping raise the flag near an ex-

see **STONEWALL**, page 5



5 New LGBTQ+ Books for Younger Readers

by Dana Rudolph | drudolph@mombian.com
contributing writer

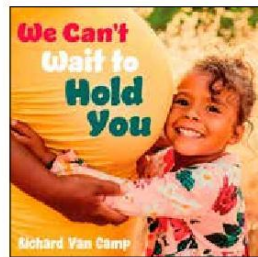
Sometimes representation is resistance and joy is a powerful antidote to despair. These brand-new queer-inclusive picture and chapter books offer young readers (and their adults) stories where they can see themselves and the world around them: joyous, inclusive, and strong.

Picture/Board Books

"We Can't Wait to Hold You," by Richard Van Camp (Orca): This cheery board book shows photographs of diverse families of color awaiting the arrival of new children; families with two moms and two dads are among them. "Hello, sweet baby. Can you please hurry up and get here already?" says the first page, while another asserts, "Let's bloom and grow together." A few of the photographs

show pregnant parents and older children; others show two parents and a young child without specifying how the family was created, leaving room for many options. The simple and sweet book could be used with first/only children to share what the parents' feelings were as they awaited the child's arrival, or it could be used with children who are expecting a new sibling.

"A Family of Readers," by Rob Sanders, illustrated by Gabbie Benda (Charlesbridge): In this rhyming celebration of all that libraries offer, the titular family goes to the library one day "to search and explore," encountering patrons of all ages and interests engaged in reading, building robots, and learning about gardening, bread



baking, and more. At closing time, the family drives away, full of knowledge and inspiration. Meanwhile, a young child, whom observant readers will note has been hiding in plain sight on every page, finally picks up a first book to read. While the main family here doesn't appear to be obviously LGBTQ+, their car has a rainbow bumper sticker, implying that one or more of them is queer or they are at least allies. A Progress Pride flag is also visible on the library circulation

see **MOMBIAN**, page 3

Jesse Jackson, a Defender of LGBTQ+ Rights

by Rev. Irene Monroe
Contributing Writer

Civil rights activist Rev. Jesse Jackson died on February 17, 2026. A protégé of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Jackson was among the last remaining icons of the modern Civil Rights Movement. Known for his fiery oratory, he was often called "the Country Preacher," a moniker that reflected both his humble roots and his lifelong commitment to advocating for the disenfranchised.

His famous speech, "*I Am Somebody*"—also the title of his 1971 spoken-word album—resonated deeply with me at the time, as an orphan and ward of New York City. In 1984 and again in 1988, I voted for Jackson



Photo courtesy of Irene Monroe.

because he was the only presidential candidate whose campaign openly welcomed people like me: an African

see **JACKSON**, page 5



"I got an exclusive campaign for Gucci when Tom Ford was running it. I flew to Italy for the runway show. He puts me in a pink Speedo. I know exactly how much I weighed: 178 pounds. He was like, 'He's too fat,' and I got fired."

— Ashton Kutcher. As luck would have it, I'm in Europe, roughly 170 pounds and about to put on my pink Speedo!

Photo by Max Penn, via Wikimedia Commons.

more in Billy Masters on page 6!

MASSACHUSETTS BRIEFS

By Bay Windows Staff

Boston Pride for the People announces new date June 6, 2026**Departing from Longstanding Schedule**

Boston Pride for the People announced that Boston's 2026 Pride celebration will take place on Saturday, June 6, featuring a parade and public festival.

The date marks a departure from Boston Pride's long-standing tradition of being held on the second Saturday in June.

Further details—including parade routes, festival location, and performers—are expected to be released closer to Pride Month. The 2026 celebration continues BP4TP's community-led approach following the reorganization of Boston Pride after years of controversy under its former leadership.

For more information: www.bostonprideforthepeople.org.

Federal Judge Narrows Opt-Out Order on Lexington School Materials

In a February 10 federal court order, U.S. District Judge Douglas P. Saylor IV ruled that two picture books used in Lexington Public Schools—*Pink Is for Boys* and *Except When They Don't*—do not fall within the scope of a preliminary injunction allowing a parent to opt a child out of certain classroom materials.

The judge concluded that the books address

gender stereotypes, not sexual orientation or gender identity, and therefore do not trigger the opt-out protections established in his December 2025 ruling. That earlier injunction, issued after the Supreme Court's 2025 *Mahmoud v. Taylor* decision, had temporarily required the district to permit opt-outs from instruction involving LGBTQ+-specific content.

The broader case remains pending, and the injunction continues to apply to other disputed materials.

Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth Opens Applications for 2026 Jeff Perrotti Leadership Award

The Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth announced that applications are now open for the 2026 Jeff Perrotti LGBTQ+ Leadership Award.

The award honors Massachusetts high school seniors who have demonstrated leadership in advancing LGBTQ+ inclusion, justice, and student wellbeing in their schools or communities. It is named for Jeff Perrotti, the founding director of the Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students. Eligibility requirements, application materials, and deadlines are available through the commission's listings on Mass.gov.

More information at: www.mass.gov/news/massachusetts-commission-on-lgbtq-youth-announces-2026-jeff-perrotti-lgbtq-leadership-award.

Senate race, a wide-open governor's contest, and a competitive 2nd Congressional District fight.

NEW HAMPSHIRE**Gov. Ayotte Vetoes "Bathroom Bill" for Third Consecutive Year**

Republican Gov. Kelly Ayotte vetoed Senate Bill 268 on Friday, February 6, marking the third straight year a New Hampshire governor has rejected legislation that would carve exceptions into the state's 2018 anti-discrimination law protecting gender identity. SB 268 would have allowed businesses, schools, prisons, and other organizations to exclude transgender people from restrooms, locker rooms, and sports teams that match their gender identity.

In her veto statement, Ayotte noted there was minimal difference between this bill and the version she rejected in 2025, which itself was virtually identical to a bill vetoed by her Republican predecessor, Chris Sununu, in 2024. Sununu had called the earlier version contrary to New Hampshire's "Live Free or Die spirit" and said it sought to solve problems that hadn't presented themselves.

Conservative lawmakers lack the two-thirds majority needed to override the veto. In December, they failed to overturn Ayotte's 2025 veto on a 159–190 vote. But the issue isn't going away: HB 1447, filed for 2026, would again attempt to separate facilities by biological sex and go further by mandating such separation for state entities.

It's worth noting the veto came from a governor who has not been uniformly supportive of transgender rights. In 2025, Ayotte signed two bills banning gender-affirming care for minors while

see **NE BRIEFS**, page 7

Monroe

Continued from page 1

relegated to a footnote in heterosexual retellings of history, Rustin has now been rightfully restored as a central figure. We can no longer accurately discuss the historic 1963 March on Washington without naming Bayard Rustin. Inarguably one of the tallest trees in our collective forest—straight and LGBTQ+ alike—Rustin was the chief strategist and organizer of the March that propelled the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. onto the world stage.

The canon of Black history needs to expand the many notable LGBTQ+ icons who influenced future movements and artists. moments Here are a few.

Marsha P. Johnson (1945–1992): Mother of our Movement

The second wave of the modern LGBTQ+ movement rests on the shoulders of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera (1951–2002), widely honored as the trans mothers of the movement. A Black trans freedom fighter, Johnson was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey. She is often credited with throwing a shot glass against a mirror during the Stonewall uprising—an act remembered as “the shot glass heard around the world.” Rivera, a Latinx from NYC, reportedly threw the second.

Johnson's middle initial, “P,” stood for “Pay It No Mind,” her defiant response to those who questioned her gender identity. She was a founding member of the Gay Liberation Front and co-founded Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), an organization dedicated to supporting unhoused trans youth. “They call me a legend in my own time,” Johnson once said, “because there were so many queens gone that I’m one of the few queens left from the ‘70s and the ‘80s.”

Monuments honoring Marsha P. Johnson now stand in her name, including one in her hometown of Elizabeth along the Freedom Trail. Her legacy deserves recognition not only during Black History Month, but every day.

First Black Queer Movement: The Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance was as queer as it was Black. More than a Black cultural moment, it also functioned as one of the earliest visible Black LGBTQ+ movements of the 1920s. Rent parties, speakeasies, sex circuses, and buffet flats created spaces of sexual freedom and self-expression. The renowned Savoy Ballroom and Rockland Palace hosted lavish drag balls, awarding prizes for the most dazzling costumes. Harlem Renaissance writer Langston Hughes depicted these balls as “spectacles of color.” Historian George Chauncey, author of *Gay New York*, noted that during this era “perhaps nowhere were more men willing to venture out in public in drag than in Harlem.”

While we have come to know of gay and bisexual male literary figures of the Harlem Renaissance like Alain Locke, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Wallace Thurman and Richard Bruce Nugent, to name a few, we know too little of the LBT and queer-friendly feminist women writers. Zora Neale Hurston, Jessie Fauset, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Nella Larsen, Alice Dunbar-



Marsha P. Johnson. Photo by Hank O'Neal, via Wikimedia Commons.



Gladys Bentley. Public domain photo, via Wikimedia Commons.

Nelson, and other African American feminist writers of the era used issues of sexuality and gender non-conforming identities as artistic influences in their literary works, performances and life-style.

Gladys Bentley (1907–1960): Precursor to same-sex marriage

A gifted pianist and blues singer, Gladys Bentley was among the most notorious and successful African American lesbians of the Harlem Renaissance. Cultivating a devoted LGBTQ+ following into the 1950s, Bentley became famous for performing in her signature white tuxedo and top hat. Her unapologetic gender-bending, however, came at a steep cost.

In 1931, Bentley publicly married her white girlfriend in a civil ceremony in Atlantic City. At a time when anti-miscegenation laws were the law of the land and same-sex marriage would not be federally recognized until 2015, Bentley executed a radical coup d'état against both racial and sexual prohibitions surrounding marriage.

The backlash, however, was fierce. Under the pressures of McCarthyism, Bentley was forced to conform. The Black Church ceased its denunciations, and the Black press celebrated her “respectability.” Purportedly to have taken female hormones to cure her lesbianism, Bentley published an article in *Ebony* magazine declaring, “I am a woman again!” Shortly after, she married a man sixteen years her junior.

Richard Bruce Nugent (1906–1987): Precursor to Baldwin

Before James Baldwin, there was Richard

see **MONROE**, page 4

Mombian

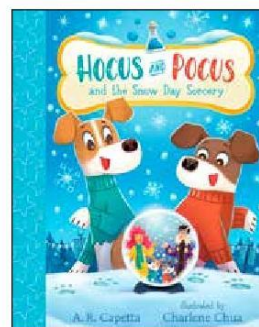
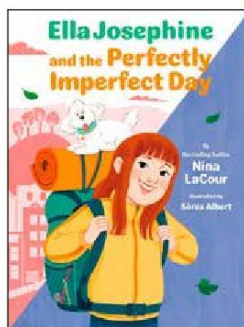
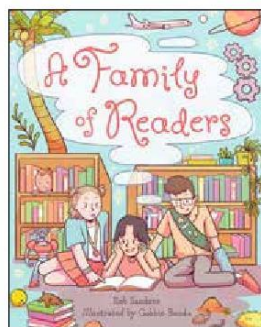
Continued from page 1

desk in several scenes, and one of the other patron families appears to include a two-mom (or mom-and-nonbinary-parent) couple. The spot-on verse lifts up what could be a pedantic recitation of what to do at a library and makes it instead a lively and engaging story, tailor-made for read-alouds.

Chapter Books

The three chapter books below are all the third books in their respective series—happy evidence that LGBTQ+-inclusive tales have staying power. Each offers a different look at what we do when things don't go as planned.

"Hocus and Pocus and the Snow Day Sorcery," by A. R. Capetta, illustrated by Charlene Chua (Candlewick): The latest charming book in this series again brings us adorable illustrations and incidental nonbinary inclusion, as magical pups Hocus and Pocus want to help their human witch, Jinx, and her apprentices (including nonbinary Tam) prepare for the local Winter Solstice party. The only problem is that there's no snow, putting several of the planned events at risk. Hocus and Pocus ask Nimbus, a friendly, wish-granting sorcerer (who also happens to be nonbinary), to assist. But a wish for snow is a big, delicate wish, and the snow is soon overwhelming. Hocus's feet are



turning into pawcicles. A promising solution then turns into something worse—or does it? The residents creatively find a way to celebrate even if things didn't go exactly as planned, offering lessons about helping, community, and dealing with unforeseen circumstances.

"Witchycakes #3: Puddles and Potions," Kara LaReau, illustrated by Ariane Moreira (Random House): This volume continues the whimsical interlinked stories about Little Blue, a witch-in-training, who helps out their Mama Moon at the magical Witchycakes bakery. Here, Blue again wants to be useful, but when they "borrow" a magic potion from Mama Moon to help make things perfect, things don't go quite as planned. The lesson, which emerges as Blue goes about their day, is that everyone makes mistakes and we shouldn't strive to live up to someone

else's idea of perfection. Blue is clever and resourceful but not infallible, which makes them a relatable role model. Readers of many identities should enjoy the story, although it may particularly resonate with nonbinary ones seeking tales with nonbinary protagonists that aren't "about" being nonbinary.

"Ella Josephine and the Perfectly Imperfect Day," by Nina LaCour, illustrated by Sônia Albert (Chronicle): In these three connected stories, charmingly self-assured nine-year-old Ella Josephine once again shows herself a helpful and caring neighbor to the residents of the old San Francisco apartment building where she lives with her two moms: husbands Jacques and Merland; artsy Matilda; young couple Leo and Cleo, and the mysterious elderly Robinsons. In the first story, she and the Robinsons secretly

help Cleo with the grand opening of her record store; in the second, she helps Jacques regain the confidence to create and share his art; in the third, Ella's family and several neighbors go on a camping trip that doesn't go as planned—but is somehow still perfect. LaCour once again gives us stories that are both entertaining and perceptive, with characters whose unique personalities shine from every page. Ella has spunk, but it's tempered with kindness and a sense of community responsibility, and the gentle lessons are a master class in "show, don't tell."

Dana Rudolph is the founder and publisher of *Mombian* (mombian.com), a two-time GLAAD Media Award-winning blog for LGBTQ+ parents, plus a searchable database of 1,900+ LGBTQ+ family books.

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Courage is contagious

We cannot normalize hate

by Richard J. Rosendall | rrosendall@starpower.net
contributing writer

I am in bed before dawn playing solitaire on my phone when I hear a helicopter overhead. I wonder if it's ICE agents coming to rappel onto my roof so they can knock my door in and drag me off to El Salvador.

Granted, that seems farfetched, but so is the recent history of this country.

Cardinal Richelieu said, "If you give me six lines written by the hand of the most honest of men, I will find something in them which will hang him." Thus we who speak up stand figuratively on the gallows. I am ornery enough that I don't let this bother me.

At the same time, I am mindful of what a man sitting next to me with his cappuccino at the bakery said about the current madness: "It hasn't affected me yet." It is a failure of the imagination that for many people the problem has not hit home in a way that cannot be solved by turning off the TV.

Speaking of which, at a televised hearing on Capitol Hill on February 11, Attorney General Pam Bondi showed she has reduced her job to that of a mobster's lawyer. She was as nasty as could be. She paid no respect to the constitutional oversight role of Congress. She refused even to turn and look at the eleven survivors of Jeffrey Epstein's child sex trafficking seated behind her.

Rep. Jasmine Crockett told the survivors, "Thank you for having more courage and moral clarity in your pinky fingers than the entire Department of Justice."

As Bondi paged through her book of insults, Rep. Becca Balint said, "This is not a game, Secretary." Bondi replied, "I'm Attorney General." Balint said, "My apologies. I couldn't tell."

Bondi's attacks and unresponsiveness were useful in displaying her utter soullessness and contempt for the law. That will not help Trump with the supporters he betrayed on the issue with his cover-up.

Trump is attacking on multiple fronts at once. He named white supremacist Jeremy Carl to a State Department post. Carl claims that "white erasure" is weakening this country. Why do people complain about being called Nazis when they won't stop be-



Photo via Pexels.

having like Nazis?

Trump has declared his intent to impose stringent voter identification requirements in the name of combating what he claims without evidence is massive voter fraud, "whether Congress approves it or not." Voting is a fundamental right. The president has no right to infringe on it. The cost of complying with his expected executive order amounts to a poll tax. He is doing this to suppress voters who do not support him.

Amid his mad rampage, it is important to recognize that he is no less a threat because he does it so crudely as to appear comical. He is but the latest in a long line of malignant clowns.

Speaking of clowns, Republican congressman Andy Ogles accused Bad Bunny's Super Bowl halftime show of broadcasting "gay pornography."

Why do so many homophobic politicians appear to need a cold shower at the slightest manifestation of gayness? This is fake straight fragility to go along with fake white fragility.

Trump said no one understood a word of the halftime show. That is how casually he tries to erase 59 million Spanish speakers.

Florida Senator Rick Scott called for American Olympic athletes who criticized Trump to be stripped of their uniforms. First, they have as much

right to express their views as he. Second, they could hardly bring greater discredit upon America than Trump himself has done.

There are many constructive ways of responding to the fascist surge: be sure to vote, of course, but also participate in public demonstrations; support legal groups fighting Trump and his cohorts in court; support advocacy groups or podcasters you like; donate to political candidates; and raise your voice online and in your community. You can plaster protest signs on light poles. You can organize fundraisers.

One crucial thing we can do is not succumb to Trump's gaslighting. Despite our legitimate concerns, we can decide not to declare that we're all doomed. We can resolve to be hopeful and say we'll get through this challenging time together. This is the opposite of the angry mob Trump incited at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021.

We are in the midst of a battle for our country. We need to celebrate small victories; ignore the trolls; remember who we are and our obligations to those we love; and refuse to accept the normalization of hate.

Richard Rosendall is a writer and activist who can be reached at rrosendall@mee.com.

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Monroe

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Bruce Nugent. Known simply as "Bruce," Nugent was a writer and painter who stood in stark defiance of Black bourgeois respectability politics and the ideology of racial uplift. Unapologetically out and proudly gay, Nugent's brashness challenged norms in both mainstream American society and within Black communities.

A vital voice of the Harlem Renaissance, Nugent produced some of the earliest American literature to depict homosexuality, bisexuality, and interracial desire in affirming ways. His 1926 short story, "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade," predates Baldwin's 1956 "Giovanni's Room" by three decades. As a godfather of gay male literature, Nugent's life and work continue to influence Black LGBTQ+ writers today, helping generations of Black queer people affirm their identities.

Many LGBTQ+ figures and nightclub-goers

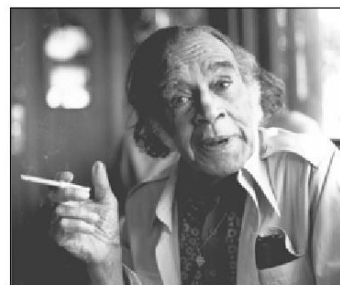
of the Harlem Renaissance lived in Harlem, the mecca of Black America. Others, however, resided across the George Washington Bridge in New Jersey, seeking refuge from white audiences' voyeuristic gaze and Harlem's rising rents.

Born into a socially prominent family in Washington, D.C., Nugent became the last living artist of the Harlem Renaissance. He spent his final years in Hoboken, New Jersey, where he became a beloved local figure—sparking renewed efforts to honor his legacy both there and in Harlem.

Homage to our ancestors and trans-cestors

As a Black LGBTQ+ community, we stand on the shoulders of our ancestors and trans-cestors. Because we know the danger of a single story we showcase an array of them. Our history is canon for survival and an archive for future generations.

If Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the Father of Black History, were alive today, he would be proud of the tenacity of the African American



Richard Bruce Nugent. Photo by Tom Wirth, via Wikimedia Commons.

community. Our survival on American soil since 1619—through 250 years of slavery, 90 years of Jim Crow, and 60 years of so-called "separate but equal" rule—speaks volumes. To fully capture the canon of the Black experience, Woodson would have wanted our LGBTQ+ histories included, too.

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Stonewall

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isting American flag in a tiny Greenwich Village park jammed with more than a hundred people. Many onlookers chanted "Raise it Up!"

"If you can't fly a Pride flag steps from Stonewall monument, at the National monument for LGBTQ liberation, where can you fly it?" asked Hoylman-Sigal, a Democrat who is the first openly gay person elected to his job. "So we put it back."

Until a few days ago, the flag had flown for several years on a flagpole in the park at the heart of the National Park Service-run site. The park is across the street from the Stonewall Inn, the gay bar where a 1969 police raid sparked an uprising and helped catalyze the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement.

The initial rainbow flag-raising, on a pole brought to the park, was short-lived. Activists, annoyed that the rainbow flag was flying lower on a separate pole, promptly took it down and raised it again on the same pole as the American flag, leav-

ing the two flags on the same rope billowing in the chilly breeze.

Jay W. Walker, one of the activists who helped secure the Pride flag in its eventual spot, said advocates would restore it again if the park service pulls it down.

"We will keep doing this," he said, adding: "Our community is not going to stand for our park, our flagpole, to be disrespected by the Trump administration."

The park service has said it's complying with federal guidance on flags, including a Jan. 21 park service memo that largely restricts the agency to displaying those of the United States, the Department of the Interior and POW/MIA recognition, with exceptions that include providing "historical context."

The Interior Department on Thursday dismissed the flag raising as a "political stunt" and criticized the city's Democratic leadership.

"Today's political pageantry shows how utterly incompetent and misaligned the New York City officials are with the problems their city is facing," the department said in a prepared statement.

Activists who had pressed for the flag display

consider its removal a deliberate insult that compounds other recent changes that they find objectionable and ominous, such as eliminating many references to transgender people at the monument.

"The new Trump administration is literally stealing our pride, or attempting to," Ken Kidd, who aided early efforts to get the flag installed permanently, said in an interview Wednesday. "It is a form of identity theft, where they are truly trying to take away those symbols of what we stand for — those symbols of our history, those symbols of our progress, those symbols of our future."

The flag's removal also drew complaints from a series of New York's Democratic officials, including Mayor Zohran Mamdani, Gov. Kathy Hochul, U.S. Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand.

A rainbow flag still appears on a city-owned pole just outside the park, and smaller ones wave along its fence, where a local volunteer maintains them.

After Democratic former President Barack Obama created the Stonewall monument in

2016, advocates yearned to see the Pride flag fly daily on federal land. When it finally happened some years later, they saw the display as an acknowledgment of LGBTQ+ people's place and visibility in the nation.

Soon after Trump, a Republican, returned to office last year, he took aim at diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in the U.S. government and beyond. In one such move, his Defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, renamed a Navy ship that had been named for Harvey Milk, a slain gay rights activist and San Francisco city official who served during the Korean War. The vessel is now named for Chief Petty Officer Oscar V. Peterson, a World War II sailor who received the Medal of Honor.

Trump's administration also has scrutinized interpretive materials at national parks, museums and landmarks and sought to remove or alter descriptions that the government says are "divisive or partisan" or "inappropriately disparage Americans past or living."

The park service has not answered specific questions about the Stonewall site and the flag policy, including whether any flags were removed from other parks.

Jackson

Continued from page 1

American lesbian.

In 2018, I met Jesse Jackson at the Chautauqua Institution, where I was the guest preacher for the week. I thanked him for his decades of public service.

HIV/AIDS Champion

During the AIDS epidemic, the Black LGBTQ+ community often found neither refuge nor welcome in the church. Racism, poverty, healthcare disparities, and violence all contributed to high HIV/AIDS rates in African American communities. But among the most damaging factors were homophobia within the Black Church and its entrenched politics of silence.

"I grew up in the Black Church," Dr. David Satcher, former Surgeon General and Assistant Secretary for Health, told *The New York Times*

in 1998. "I think the church has problems with the lifestyle of homosexuality. A real problem has been getting ministers who are even willing to talk about it from their pulpits."

Jackson was among the earliest Black ministers and national political leaders to promote AIDS education and prevention. He worked to destigmatize the virus by publicly undergoing HIV testing and urging fellow clergy to do the same. He reframed HIV/AIDS as a public health crisis rather than a moral failing tied to LGBTQ+ identity.

In May 1987, during a speech at Northeastern University, Jackson expressed outrage over President Ronald Reagan's prolonged silence on AIDS. When Reagan finally acknowledged the epidemic, he belatedly labeled it "public health enemy number one," without reckoning with how years of inaction had worsened its spread.

In 2002, through the Rainbow PUSH Coalition, Jackson launched the *One Million Tests* initiative to encourage HIV testing in African American communities and pressure pharmaceu-

tical companies to lower the cost of antiretroviral drugs.

Marriage Equality

"Marriage is based on love and commitment—not sexual orientation. I support the right of any person to marry the person of their choosing," Jackson said at a rally outside the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in San Francisco in December 2010.

Jackson was a full-throated supporter of LGBTQ+ rights. He opposed California's Proposition 8, rejected the idea that marriage equality should be decided state by state, and publicly stated that he would officiate same-sex weddings. At the same time, like many Black Americans, he objected to comparisons between the LGBTQ+ rights movement and the 1960s Civil Rights Movement.

That tension was addressed during a June 12 Capitol Hill ceremony marking the 40th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision striking down

anti-miscegenation laws. The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund released a statement acknowledging historical differences while affirming marriage equality as a civil rights issue:

"It is undeniable that the experience of African Americans differs in many important ways from that of gay men and lesbians... But differences in historical experiences should not preclude the application of constitutional protections to gay men and lesbians who are denied the right to marry the person of their choice."

Rest in Power

Jackson advocated for the LGBTQ+ community—especially Black LGBTQ+ people—at a time when we had few champions. He offered hope when family, church, and society turned their backs on us. In this dark political moment, as hard-won civil rights are once again under threat, he leaves us with the enduring charge from 1988:

"Keep Hope Alive."



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billy masters

It's a small world after all, as the song says. This was driven home during my endless overseas excursions. Last week, I was in a remote area of Bulgaria—a country made up of nothing but remote areas. Being the capitalist pig I am, I ordered dinner to be delivered (I can only struggle to pronounce letters shaped like the number “3” for so long). I got a call that my food was downstairs. The delivery guy explained that he realized my phone number was from the United States because he had been there. “Where?” I asked. Massachusetts. I tell him I’m from Massachusetts. Turns out he spent the summer in Provincetown—working in places like Bayside Betsy’s and the Governor Bradford Inn. “By working there for three months, I could pay for a year of college and living expenses here.” Big Daddy Masters used to tell me how he’d work all summer to pay for a year at Boston University. It’s nice to know the American Dream is still alive...as long as you don’t live in America!

Even though I’m abroad, I still tuned in for the Super Bowl. Well, parts of the Super Bowl. I actually remembered it was Super Bowl Sunday when I saw a post on Twitter/X for Duolingo (I’m in the middle of a 3+ year streak). Something about a guy painted green, wearing tight CK hip briefs, and a Duo head seemed vaguely familiar. Then I remembered—last year, a USC student won West Hollywood’s Hal-loween Carnaval by dressing up as the Duolingo mascot. The Duo dude in question was fitness fanatic **Dima**, known online as @dima.is.fit (fit people get right to the point). His “costume” caught the attention of someone in corporate, and the rest is history.

Speaking of good costumes, Apple TV+ has been shooting their limited series “Wild Things”, based on the ambiguously gay “magicians”, **Siegfried and Roy**. **Jude Law** plays Siegfried, and **Andrew Garfield** plays Mantecore’s appetizer. Andy won’t have to worry—the folks at Apple will only be employing CGI tigers. Where’s the fun in that? The boys look great in their costumes, as you’ll see from the photos on our website.

Sandra Bernhard has been cast in season four of “The White Lotus”. The destination will be Saint-Tropez, and one can only hope Miss Sandi plays some rich bitch in custom couture instead of one of the scullery maids (although that might be fun, too). Others in the cast include **Helena Bonham Carter**, **Steve Coogan**, **Caleb Jonte Edwards**, **Marissa Long**, **Alexander Ludwig**, **Chris Messina** and **AJ Michalka**. Stay tuned.

Isaac Mizrahi knows a thing or two about clothing. But he may be losing it. He recently discussed dressing **Gwyneth Paltrow** in the ‘90s (the first thing people with dementia do is talk about the past). “She would leave after things, and I’d say that girl has the most fabulous ass I’ve ever seen. She has the best ass in show business, I mean that.” It’s sad when you see it happening. Isaac may soon be ready for Jell-O and mahjong.

Luke Evans will have some nifty friends joining him in the Broadway revival of “The Rocky Horror Show”. Most inspiring is the casting of **Rachel Dratch** as the Narrator. And, while one rarely hears of **Juliette Lewis** these days, I bet she’ll be a kooky Magenta. **Andrew Durand** should make a tasty Brad.

By the by, I just read about “By Design”, a movie starring Juliette Lewis. Here’s the plot: “A woman swaps bodies with a chair.” And, I kid you not, people are saying she’s great. “The role Juliette Lewis was born to play”—says Billy Masters. Put that on the side of a bust!

Two daytime talkers are hanging it up after this year. **Kelly Clarkson** is ending her talk show after seven years to concentrate more on family and music. And **Sherri Shepherd**’s show will end after her fourth season. The timing is perfect, since Sherri is in the middle of a comedy tour. Check out her dates on SherriShepherd.com.

There are two things we can count on in February: the groundhog looking for his shadow, and Customs and Border Protection Agents looking for passengers possessing drugs on a gay cruise. This year was no different—the groundhog did indeed see his shadow, and nine passengers attempting to board an Adantes Events cruise out of Fort Lauderdale were arrested on drug charges. Why, oh why, can’t these guys just bring a few pills hidden in their Balzac? But, no, they bring enough drugs to “distribute” to other revelers—and that’s when problems occur. While the mainstream press has named them all, I’m going to single out one person because he’s kinda a public figure. That would be **Joshua Eddy** of West Hollywood, who did gay porn for **Sean Cody**

under the name **Eddie Burke**. He is currently a popular content provider for OnlyFans under the name “Beefy ginger bro next door”. And he’s also an attorney—talk about versatility! He faces felony charges of trafficking 19.3 grams of MDMA, 3.4 grams of ketamine, 7.55 grams of methamphetamine, and 80 grams of GBL—you know, just to take the edge off! He’s scheduled to be arraigned in Miami-Dade Court on April 2nd—should you need a fix around then.

These days, there’s a convention for everything. It of course started with the granddaddy of them all—ComicCon. And our people love to go to BravoCon. Then we got ChristmasCon for devotees of Hallmark Channel movies. Since this is not an officially sanctioned event, it takes place in Edison, New Jersey (oh, the indignity). But it attracts quite a number of Hallmark regulars like **Tyler Hynes**, **Lacey Chabert**, **Jonathan Bennett**, **Ryan Pacey**, and even **Rachel Boston**—who isn’t from Boston. Given that success, Hallmark has started an official event. Hallmark Christmas Experience takes place in Kansas City, within spitting distance of Hallmark headquarters. And it’s not a one weekend event—it’s every weekend between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

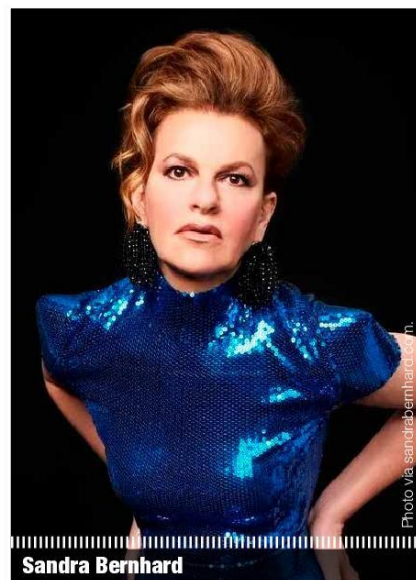
Not to be outdone, “Dancing with the Stars” has a con of their own—aside from the liberal use of the word “stars”. Fans can meet some of their favorites at DWTS Con July 31st through August 2nd in Palm Springs at the Acrisure Arena. Some of the “stars” scheduled to attend will be **Hannah Brown**, **Danielle Fishel**, **Xochitl Gomez**, **Joey Graziadei**, **Elaine Hendrix**, **Rashad Jennings**, **Amanda Kloots**, **Whitney Leavitt**, **Phaedra Parks**, **Jojo Siwa**, **Johnny Weir**, **Rumer Willis**, **Kristi Yamaguchi** and **Ginger Zee**. The pros on the leaderboard include **Brandon Armstrong**, **Lindsay Arnold**, **Rylee Arnold**, **Alan Bersten**, **Hailey Bills**, **Sharna Burgess**, **Witney Carson**, **Val Chmerkovskiy**, **Sasha Farber**, **Jenna Johnson**, **Daniella Karagach**, **Pasha Pashkov**, **Jan Ravník**, **Gleb Savchenko**, **Emma Slater**, **Ezra Sosa**, and **Britt Stewart**. As if that weren’t enough, we’re told **Bruno Tonioli** and **Carrie Ann Inaba** will represent the judges. Throw in **Tom Bergeron**, and you could film a season!

For our Olympic moment, astory from the cutthroat world of competitive curling. That’s a sport where two teams attempt to manipulate a granite stone on the ice by swirling some kind of mop. Picture bringing your Swiffer to the local ice rink. The incident in question took place during a nail-biter between Canada and Sweden. One reporter captured the drama this way: “The Swedes believed one of the Canadians was repeatedly double-touching some of his stones.” And you thought “Heated Rivalry” was intense! **Marc Kennedy** from the Canadian team wasn’t taking the Swedish accusations lightly. “I don’t like being accused of cheating after 25 years on tour and four Olympic Games. So I told him where to stick it.”

Our “Ask Billy” question came from Mark in Boston: “During *Bad Bunny*’s halftime show at about the four-minute mark, you see two guys grinding up against each other behind the open door of a white pickup truck. I thought maybe they might be famous (or semi-famous). Maybe models or porn stars. Do you know who they are?”

Mark wasn’t the only one who picked up on this. Moments after the camera panned past these two men dancing inside an open truck door, the clip went viral. I think the first person to post the meme was **Louisa Jacobson** from “The Gilded Age”, who captioned it “Important!” One of the men is **Dan Santiago**, a 30-year-old dancer from NYC who previously performed with Bad Bunny on “Saturday Night Live”. “There were a lot of intentionally fluid pairings in the show reflecting the sense of unity the show was trying to convey,” says Dan. He added that both he and his dancing partner, **Igor Farina**, are straight, but they “feel honored to represent the LGBTQ community.” “To me, being part of this moment wasn’t about performing queerness; it was about freedom and representing a community that deserves to be seen.” And see it you will on BillyMasters.com.

When I’m trying to squeeze my Balzac into Ashton’s pink Speedo, it’s time to end another column. If you wanna check out the latest gossip, sit right down on Juliette Lewis and head on over to www.BillyMasters.com—the site that never leaves a stone unturned. If you’ve got a question, send it along to Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before Dan or Igor turn up on “Dancing with the Stars”. Until next time, remember, one man’s filth is another man’s bible.



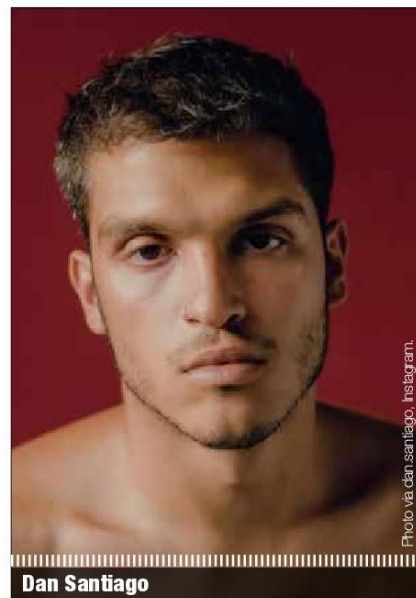
Sandra Bernhard

Photo via sandrabernhard.com



Sherri Shepherd

Photo via sherrishow.com



Dan Santiago

Photo via dan.santiago.instagram

NE Briefs

Continued from page 2

vetoing the bathroom bill on the narrower grounds that it was "overly broad and impractical to enforce."

VERMONT & RHODE ISLAND

New England AGs Help Lead Federal Lawsuit Over HHS Anti-Trans Funding Conditions

Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Neronha is co-leading a 12-state lawsuit filed January 13 in U.S. District Court in Rhode Island — joined by Vermont Attorney General Charity Clark and attorneys general from ten other states — challenging what the coalition calls the Trump administration's illegal use of federal funding to coerce states into discriminating against transgender people.

At issue is a Department of Health and Human Services policy requiring recipients of federal health, education, and research grants to certify compliance with a presidential executive order that redefines sex in a way that excludes transgender people. HHS has warned that noncompliant recipients could face grant termination, repayment of funds, and even civil or criminal liability — applying the conditions retroactively to existing grants, not just new ones.

In Vermont, the policy threatens more than 250 federal grants representing nearly \$2 million flowing to state entities. Clark called the action "yet another illegal attack by the President and his administration on transgender people," noting that Vermont law explicitly protects all gender identities and prohibits discrimination based on gender identity in education, public accommodations, housing, and employment. The lawsuit is Clark's 41st case against the Trump administration since January 2025.

In Rhode Island, where the case was filed, Neronha called the conditions "yet another distraction from an Administration that would rather target marginalized groups than do anything to help the American people." Rhode Island state law similarly prohibits state agencies from discriminating on the basis of gender identity or expression. The lawsuit is Neronha's 47th action against the Trump administration.

The coalition argues HHS lacks the authority to rewrite Title IX through executive action, that the policy violates the Constitution's separation of powers, and that it breaks federal law by attaching vague, retroactive conditions to funding. Multiple federal courts — including a Rhode Island court in October 2025 — have already blocked comparable restrictions. The case has been assigned to U.S. District Judge Melissa R. DuBose.

RHODE ISLAND

AG Neronha Joins Second Challenge to Federal Gender-Affirming Care Restrictions

In a related but separate action, Neronha also joined a 19-state coalition challenging HHS Secretary Robert F. Ken-

nedy Jr.'s December 18 "declaration" that certain forms of gender-affirming care are "unsafe and ineffective." That declaration threatens to exclude any health care providers or hospitals that provide gender-affirming care for transgender youth from Medicare and Medicaid. Two proposed federal rules — one barring Medicaid and CHIP funding for such care, the other prohibiting hospitals from providing it — carry a public comment deadline of February 17. That deadline has driven significant mobilization across New England, with attorneys general, advocacy organizations, and health care providers urging public comment before the window closes.

CONNECTICUT

Homophobic Backlash Greeted Proposal to Honor Pioneering Gay Coach in Westport

A proposal to rename a Staples High School sports field after Dan Woog — one of the first openly gay high school coaches in the country — drew swift support from the Westport community but also an explicitly anti-gay objection from a member of the Representative Town Meeting.

Westport resident Phillip Perri emailed all 36 RTM members on February 5 requesting the honor for Woog, who coached Staples soccer from 2003 to 2021, winning four FCIAC championships and a state title. Woog was recently named to the LG-BTQ Sports Hall of Fame's 2026 class and is already inducted into both the Connecticut Soccer and FCIAC halls of fame. Beyond athletics, Woog founded the first Gay-Straight Alliance at any Connecticut public school, co-founded the OutSpoken youth support group that he ran for 23 years, and has written extensively on LGBTQ issues in sports and education.

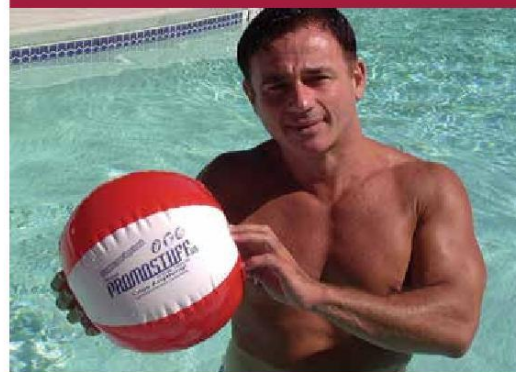
More than 20 RTM members quickly co-sponsored the renaming. But RTM member Victoria Wylie, who joined the body last November, emailed the entire RTM that she opposed the proposal because she has "always been taken aback" by what she called Woog's choice to be "so open with his sexual proclivities," calling it "highly inappropriate for an adult to share their sexual preferences in a school environment." Wylie also claimed that some former students avoided the soccer team due to Woog's "openly-gay lifestyle."

RTM member Andrew Colabella, lead sponsor of the renaming effort and a 2007 Staples graduate, called Woog an "incredible, successful, loving, giving, caring individual" who touched numerous lives. RTM member Adam Drake objected to Wylie's use of the terms "sexual proclivity" and "lifestyle" to describe sexual orientation, calling the language shocking from an elected official.

Westport Pride issued a statement in support of the renaming, saying that "when communities honor LGBTQ+ leaders, it's a reflection of our values — that visibility, integrity, and service matter."

An online petition to rename Wakeman B Field as Dan Woog Soccer Field has already gathered hundreds of signatures. Woog, who also runs the popular 06880 community blog, said he was honored by the proposal but declined to comment on the controversy.

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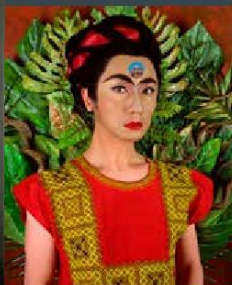
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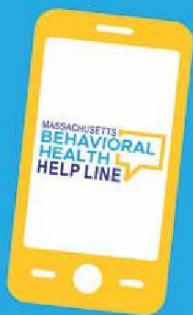
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Images from left to right: Claude Cahun (French, 1894–1954), *I am in training don't kiss me*, 1927. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the Jersey Heritage Collections. Yasumasa Maruyama (Japanese), *An Inner Dialogue with Frida Kahlo (Skull Ring)*, 2001. Digital chromogenic print mounted on aluminum. © Yasumasa Maruyama; Courtesy of the artist and Lubing Augustine, New York. Samuel Fosso (Camerounian), *Self-Portrait (Makolm X)* and *Self-Portrait (Angela Davis)* from *African Spirits* series, 2008. 11x14 Fiberbased Glossy Paper. © Samuel Fosso. Courtesy of the artist and Yossi Milg, New York. Narcissister (American), *Untitled Self-Portrait Series (Pink Nails)*, 2012. C-Print. © Narcissister. Courtesy of the artist. Claude Cahun (French, 1894–1954), *Self-portrait (reflected image in mirror, chequered jacket)*, 1928. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the Jersey Heritage Collections

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