



QUEER FAMILY UNITE: FOLLOW THE RAINBOW

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OUR FAMILY is fractured. Our naming, LGBTQAI+, in the spirit of inclusion and visibility begins to give way to individual political agenda. Each identity experiences its own issues. Being a proud B or T or A and finding camaraderie in our cohort of Bs or Ts or As is not a bad thing; finding community is our prerogative. While our fellow Bs and Ts may be our siblings, they are certainly not the only members in our queer family. And the family level is where we need to prioritize our community building, our politics, and our values. To do this, we must de-atomize – we have

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to get to know each other, which will involve stepping outside of our comfort zones (yes, gay men and lesbian moms need to hang out, etc.). We must further transcend the limitations of our own experiences. Too often our understanding of the world is limited to our own perspective, when, in fact, that perspective inhibits us from seeing the world in other illuminating ways. We can achieve our greatest aspirations if we build broad coalitions for sustainable change. And to build strong external coalitions we must first build strong internal ones.

Reformists would ask, “Can we add another letter to give your identity group voice?” which is not a terrible thing to do, to recognize a previously silenced group. But is that victory the one we should be spending our energies on? Perfecting the reforms. Or, are we asking the wrong questions? On a deeper register of the same vein, a changemaker would ask, “what word can we use that includes everyone who wants to be included under it?” To a rowdy response of QUEER. Queer is an umbrella term used to describe all of us gender and sexual identity minorities and comes from a reclaimed defamation.

Our values, our histories, our stories are told or silenced or whitewashed in schools. We observe how governments and societies regard their futures in how they treat their young. The seeds of future's hope are cultivated in cramped, underfunded, industrialized education pens regulated by strict schedules and stifling standardization. Unfortunately in America, we represent a pipelines-to-prison model of education in which our schools are highly authoritarian, restrictive, and resemble detention facilities. The vast majority of human bodies in the United States serve no purpose to the ruling class beyond providing labor that will be exploited for profits. Humans also serve as consumers, debtors, indentured servants, etc., to be exploited for profits.

A reformist asks, “What can we do to make the working classes feel better about their lot in life?” which shares a root with using religion to pacify slave resistance; neither questions the fundamental struggle and only addresses symptoms of the struggle. A changemaker might question, “Why is the ruling class's opinion the one that determines everyone's lives?” which is a question we should all think about quietly for a while. And then we should think about it together. Then we should demand changes to rectify it.



When we look at schools we must ask the question, “What do we want a young person who leaves this place to know, be able to do, feel, and care about?” If we ask that question about American public schools, then we see that we are preparing learners to follow rules, listen to authority figures speak “truths” for enduring amounts of time, study hard for examinations that test regurgitation never creativity or dexterity with knowledge, follow a schedule of bells obediently, swarm with group think and endless pushes to conformity, and ignore ignoble, unflattering historical truths. The extinguishing of imagination in schools is a queer issue.

When we look at this, we see that governments serve a very particular purpose in purporting education of this cruddy caliber in such suffocating environments, and those interests are based on control and profit (and controlling profits), but that's for another essay. Our futures are in jeopardy, the train is running away, and we're tethered to the caboose. And we see it in our schools. Yet the schools are just symptomatic of our greater

cultural decay.

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I recently attended a city council meeting where the police chief and a city councilor both spoke about safety in our schools. Nothing in their remarks resembled anything to do with violence reduction in our culture. They spoke of enhanced security measures at elementary schools and unexpounded tactical response plans—plans for armed state-paid, which means citizen-paid, militarily appointed officers to storm and take over classrooms and active shooters. No one said anything about gun sales. Or about violence as masculine sexy. Or about the biggest elephant in the country, white male self-loathing and mental wellness. A representative from the school board did reassure everyone that there is a new counselor coming on soon. If we think about school counselors, there is a way in which they resemble the forced Christianization of the plantation slaves of the American south. The counselors are there to convince students into feeling safe in these spaces in which we cannot assure their safety. The religious promise for a great afterlife once this one of dutiful slavery has been endured smells of the same manipulative manure. We will turn their school into a prison to prove to the students and to ourselves how willing we are to protect them. We will lock them in and make sure no one can visit. Metal detectors and armed guards. Schools look like prisons. And propositions to make schools “safer” include making them look ever more like prisons. Our imaginations of safety are as constrained as our understandings of the role education serves in our society.

The reformist asks, "What can we do to make sure our schools are prepared for an active shooter?" which is a question asked too commonly. A changemaker asks, "Why are our schools and neighborhoods and concerts and venues and homes plagued by gun violence?" The answer seems to be principally profit, though there is an argument for there being a certain amount of fear that is mustered up in the population knowing there exist armed militia and no where in public is safe. It's a type of domestic terrorism that makes people feel constantly anxious and unsafe. And when people feel this way, it is easier to control their thoughts, to get them to comply with arrangements (wars, usually, but also stripping of rights, like the Patriot Act, and inequitable economic policies), they otherwise would not, and to mold their thoughts. Thought control stems from weakened, attacked psyches. Weakened, attacked psyches result from constant violence and unsafety throughout American life. And thus the system maintains itself, for if we are too weak to fight back then we maintain our consumerist habits and debtor habits and gambling habits and numbing habits. Trauma makes us think short-term, which often leads to self-interested, fear-motivated choices and outlooks. We are all in survival mode.

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Our community is stratified: along money spectrums and religious peplums. Across race divides and hue divides and tribal sides. Our lives look so different; the queer family unites through difference. A rainbow is not one way, there are a multiplicity of possibilities. If there were a heterosexual flag, it would just be white. That ain't us, squirrel friends! But in the modern, global world, it is too easy for queers to lose touch with our connection to queer family. Queer family cultivates love and connectedness, both human needs. Born of sometimes-tragic circumstances, though not always, queer families find each other in the heterosexual world and carve space out for queer ribaldry and authenticity; for queer spaces free of violence, pregnant whimsy and compassion. Hearts soaring in skies of supportive thermals. Queer wings connect us to each other by freeing us from the shackles of land-boundedness. We must remember the queer family, known and unknown, when we invoke our public politic.



Police brutality against queer communities is not a distant memory, though the memories go back distantly. L G B T Q A I, everyone in the bars was in trouble during the random police raids, though most violence often fell on the heads of the gender non-conforming. Our own bars, our sanctuaries from the hatred and vitriol of the heteropatriarchy, heteronormative white-dominant bourgeoisie garbage culture were invaded by the state to terrorize us. Until we organized and fought back. From Harry Hay to Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, our grandparents stepped into the streets and flapped their beautiful faerie wings and made the world radically more safe for each of us to live today. But that mostly pertains to white, middle and upper class gay men, bisexuals, and lesbians who enjoy the trappings of the new nuclear imperatives. To conform begets increased safety. The more we look and act like the oppressors' wishes, the less likely we are to be persecuted. It is too easy to indulge in privilege and abandon the queer family's struggle. Though safety in our community is an absolute priority, the guise of security obtained through conformity presents appealing and dangerous trappings. Short-term security for fidelity to the heteropatriarchy presses only harder on the necks of the least enfranchised among us.

A reformist asks, "When can I get gay married?" and the answer came much sooner, at least in the United States, than many anticipated. But a changemaker would ask: "if marriage has such a high failure rate,

around 50% in the United States, why do we use it as the organizing principle of society? And how can queers reimagine the possibilities for organizing family and community without heteropatriarchal impositions and sectarian procreative priorities?" We deserve to see the answers to these questions fully funded and realized.

Black trans women are the most often attacked, assaulted, harassed, and murdered in our community. (Trans) women of color endure violence in an intersectional complexity of ways; her intersectional oppression demonstrates a nexus of racist, transphobic, possibly homophobic, misogynist, classist violence. All of those prejudices are connected to larger systems of oppression, embedded in the global capitalist culture that includes all of us at all times. Trans women are attacked because their attackers disapprove of their bodies. We cannot stand for any attack on the body. Violence against the body has been used to oppress gender and sexual identity minorities for millennia. The current white macho man culture that treats trans people with disdain, dismissal, detention, also traps and tortures all of us exposed to its toxic masculinity. Trans women take our community's heat and are the targets of violence that, in a way, shields the assimilationist, middle-class conformists from the shared pain of our queer family. We need to fight for our trans families' lives, happiness, and security.

What does her life feel like? How is violence experienced? How is hope maintained? What does a cat call mean? Why does the heart race? And the terribly hard part for our conscience isn't to realize that her experience of the world is perhaps a disadvantaged one to our own, but to recognize the ways her experience is maintained at disadvantage because of our own actions. The same police that keep white people feeling safe are the ones that enact the state's violence against people of color; against the criminalized poor; against the created impoverished, the maintained illiterate, and the so-called sexually deviant. Violence in our culture can never reduce while our state apparatus continues to upscale its violence capabilities. We are asking the wrong questions. And accepting the wrong solutions.

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Our queer community should be asking how we can stand with our trans family and bring an end to violence, harassment, assault, and murder for everyone. How do we link arms with immigrants and say, "I got you because I know what it's like for someone not to want me to be here, too?" How do we recognize and learn from the ways the indigenous movement undertakes human-level issues, like water protection #WaterIsLife? How can the queer umbrella provide sanctuary and courage to a broader community of allies that we have yet to imagine?

Queers stand with #BlackLivesMatter, because they do, and we know they do, and the world is changing to reflect this proclamation. Black is beautiful. Gay is good. Silence is death. Which happens to be true before and after the bullets ring fury. #Enough.

Queers stand with #MeToo for the same heteropatriarch who steps on her neck forces our oppression as well. UNWANTED SEXUAL DOMINATION, PENETRATION, COERSION, TOUCH, TASTE, SMELL, LOOK, INNUENDO, COMMENT, OR JOKE ARE NEVER OK. Period. Queers are invested in living in a world that is post-violence, post-harassment, post-oppression. What does that look like, and how do we get there?

Climate change is a queer issue, because it's a human issue, and like the earth, the queers of the world have been treated terribly for far too long.

Housing insecurity is a demonstration of the collapsing heteropatriarchy capitalist mechanism. With nearly 40% of homeless youth identifying as queer, housing security is a queer issue.

It's harder for us to obtain and maintain gainful employment in the heteronormative, bigoted marketplace. Insecure employment is experienced hardest among queer people of color; just like violence and access to preventative, general health care. We must implement queer solutions to these decaying structures, solutions that recognize the intersectionality of oppressions we experience.

May we embrace a queer politics of inclusivity, listening, support, bravery, and of asking better questions. And we must never forget the camp! Organized queers have gotten real shit done in the past; if we work together, we can change the world for everyone.

Follow the rainbow, and you become and magnify its luminance. If you follow the rainbow westward far enough, you may reach Astoria, Oregon, where our queer families welcome you.

(photos from Stonewall Riots, history.com)

#HappyPride #ProudOfUs