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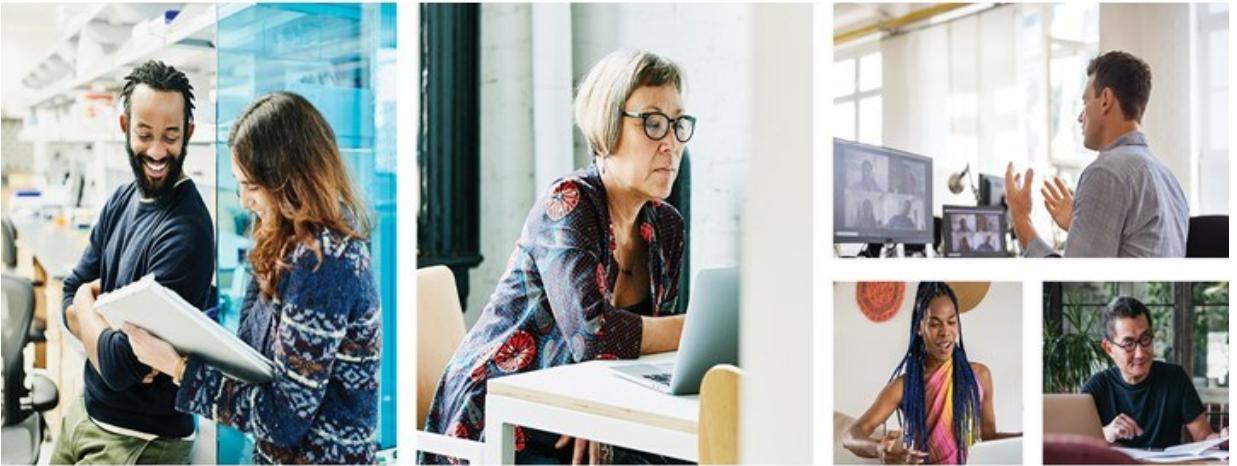




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Jax Gay Inc. is a Community Marketing and Events organization incorporating Jax Gay Magazine, Rainbow Events, and Drag Queen Aholic.

Our mission as a 502(c)3 non-profit is to promote North Florida and especially in Jacksonville, as a welcoming LGBTQ+ destination through marketing and events. Jax Gay produces many events a year, including Jax Equality Festival in Jacksonville. Other events include the Rainbow Awards Show, White Party, Big Gay Picnic, Taste of Pride and Red Party. Visit www.JaxGayMag.com for more information.

Jax Gay Inc. also plans to launch our Jax Event Center & LGBTQ+ Art Gallery in Fall of 2023.

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By David Vandygriff



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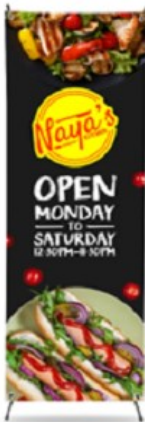
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News & Politics

Johnson Speaks Alongside Pastor Who Says Demons Started Pride Month

By Paige Davis



Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) recently appeared at the summit of the anti-LGBTQ+ hate group alongside Jonathan Cahn, a pastor who blames ancient gods and “demons” for furthering the LGBTQ+ rights movement. The men’s appearance coincided with a report detailing Johnson’s links to Christian dominionism, a movement that sees the U.S. as a Christian nation that must be governed by Biblical law.

Johnson and Cahn both attended the Family Research Council’s (FRC) National Gathering for Prayer and Repentance on Wednesday, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) reported. FRC is an SPLC designated hate group.

At the event, Cahn described pro-abortion and -LGBTQ+ activism as a form of demonic “repossession” spread by three ancient deities: Ba’al, Ishtar,

and Moloch. These deities seek to “drive God from public life, seduce the culture through ‘sexual revolution’ and compel parents to ‘sacrifice their children,’” he said.

Cahn linked LGBTQ+ Pride month and the transgender fight for access to gender-affirming to Ishtar, an ancient Mesopotamian fertility goddess who was both male and female. Cahn said Ishtar and other ancient deities returned to Earth because the 1969 Stonewall riots opened a portal to another realm.

“[Ishtar] was connected with” the rainbow, Cahn said, “[and was] the goddess of parades, parades that celebrated the alteration of gender.” Cahn claimed Ishtar would “possess the culture” in “one month of all months: the month of June,” which is Pride month.

“It is written in the Bible that the pagan world exchanged natural

affections for unnatural ones. We know that in many pagan cultures, homosexuality or bisexuality was widespread,” Cahn has previously written. He has also spoken extensively against the expansion of LGBTQ+ civil rights, calling them a sinful threat to children.

Johnson spoke at the FRC’s event immediately after Cahn. The House speaker was one of 16 congressmembers who attended the event. Together, they prayed to stop feminism and homosexuality, abortion rights, and “alternate lifestyles,” the SPLC wrote.

While the FRC describes itself as a church and, previously, as an educational non-profit, it’s foremost an anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-abortion organization.

The same day that Johnson and Cahn attended the event, The Daily Beast published an exclusive report detailing Johnson’s link to Christian

ONE COMMUNITY



dominionists.

The report noted that Johnson has praised David Barton, a Christian nationalist who, according to the SLPC, has repeatedly “demonized LGBTQ persons and communities, arguing that HIV and AIDS are god-given consequences for living out one’s LGBTQ life.” In December 2021, Johnson said that Barton had “a profound influence on me, and my work, and my life, and everything I do.”

Barton, whose website once published an in-depth defense of biblical slavery, said that he has been advising Johnson on who he should hire to staff his congressional office.

In 2019, Johnson gave the keynote speech at an event held by the Council for National Policy. The council was founded by Gary North, a Christian dominionist who endorsed slavery. In Johnson’s speech, he praised FRC

president Tony Perkins and Mat Staver — both of whom support the criminalization of same-sex relationships.

Johnson has also praised pastor Jim Garlow, a leader of the New Apostolic Reformation, a movement that says Christians need to dominate the “Seven Mountains” of family, religion, education, media, entertainment, business, and government in U.S. social life. Johnson called Garlow “a profound influence on my life and my walk with Christ, brother,” and Garlow has said Johnson has “worked with us very closely.”

Johnson has worked for the anti-LGBTQ+ hate group Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF). While there, he argued that gay sex should be illegal. He has said that same-sex marriage will lead to “chaos and sexual anarchy,” people trying to marry their pets, and “pedophiles” seeking legal protections for having sex with

kids. He has said, “Homosexual relationships are inherently unnatural... ultimately harmful and costly for everyone.” He is also a proponent of debunked attempts to turn gay people straight.

As a member of Congress, he introduced a federal version of Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” law, claimed that President Joe Biden broke federal law by flying the Progress Pride flag outside the White House, and said that parents don’t have the right to help their children obtain gender-affirming healthcare.

Johnson serves on the board of a Christian publishing company that says MPOX is the “appropriate penalty” for being gay. His wife runs a counseling service that compares LGBTQ+ identities to bestiality. Johnson has also said that America is “dark and depraved” because there are too many LGBTQ+ people.

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OUT & HEALTH

Syphilis Cases Are Skyrocketing Across The U.S.

By Leigh O'Neil



Cases of syphilis continue to climb in the U.S. New data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Tuesday found that, while syphilis cases made up a fraction of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the U.S., new diagnoses are dramatically increasing. More than 200,000 cases of syphilis were diagnosed in 2022, marking a 17% increase from the previous year. That represents an 80% increase since 2018, part of a "decades-long upward trend," according to the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services.

Congenital syphilis — which is when the disease is passed from a mother to her baby during pregnancy — has also gone up. The CDC reported in November that about 3,700 babies tested positive for syphilis in the U.S. in 2022 — more than 10 times the number diagnosed a decade earlier — and 300 of them were stillborn or died soon after birth.

Why are syphilis cases on the rise? "There has been a consistent decrease in funding for sexual health services and programs throughout last

couple of decades," Kristen Krause, deputy director for the Center for Health, Identity, Behavior and Prevention Studies at the Rutgers School of Public Health, tells Yahoo Life. As a result, fewer people are aware of the disease and are tested for it, including women.

Syphilis isn't the most common STI in the U.S.; that distinction goes to chlamydia. But it's hard to ignore how quickly cases are increasing across the country. Syphilis isn't as well known as other STIs, but experts say it should be on your radar. Here are five facts that people need to know about this rapidly increasing disease.

Syphilis is usually spread from direct contact with a syphilis sore during vaginal, anal or oral sex, according to the CDC, although it can also spread from an infected pregnant woman to her unborn baby.

"The primary lesion of syphilis, when present, is a painless ulcer," Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, tells Yahoo Life. But because the sore is painless, some people may not notice it, Russo says.

It also may not be in an area that's easy to see. "For women, recognition is problematic because it can be in the cervix or vaginal wall," Russo says. "If you practice receptive anal intercourse, it can be in the anal canal or rectum."

Syphilis is curable with a course of antibiotics. The CDC recommends an injection of long-acting penicillin G benzathine to treat the primary, secondary or early latent stages of syphilis. If someone is diagnosed at the late latent stage of syphilis, the CDC suggests getting three doses of long-acting penicillin G benzathine once a week.

While syphilis is treatable, treatment can't reverse damage that syphilis has done, Russo says.

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Victoria Monét Was Hesitant To Share Her Sexuality

By Jimmy Anderson



2023 was Victoria Monét's solo breakthrough year.

The singer-songwriter released her debut album *Jaguar II*, her track "On My Mama" ended up on former President Obama's list of favorite songs, and she is now up for 7 nominations at this year's Grammys, including for Record of the Year, Best R&B Album, and Best New Artist.

She's done all of this while being an out and proud bisexual, singing about her sexuality in songs like "Smoke" where she playfully sings, "Pre-rolls in the bag, who should I shotgun?/To the left or the right, 'long as it rotate/It's a

bisexual blunt, it can go both ways."

However, in a new cover interview with *Variety*, the singer says that for a long time, she was hesitant about coming out and sharing her sexuality with the public.

"I thought that conforming would make me go further. Being picturesque, straight..." she said. "It almost felt like you didn't want to add any more weights to your ankles trying to win a race. It's like, you're already a woman, you're already Black – you'd better pick a struggle."

Monét also referenced how

Whitney Houston wasn't able to be public about her bisexuality.

"I'm so sad she wasn't able to do whatever that she wanted, and the world would [have] been fine," she said. "Just do and love who you love. And so if I have the ability to talk about it without so much backlash... I know there are special people who hate it. But I feel like since I have the privilege to do so, I should and just be honest. So music has been a playground for sexuality. And some things I don't even express in words will just come out in music because it's on my spirit and soul to do so."

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OUT & HEALTH

The Unequivocal Beauty of Being Black & Queer

By Brenda Rutherford



In the dazzling spectacle of Black History Month, we strut down the runway of celebration, draped in the richness of our heritage.

But wait, cue the music, because, for some of us, there's an unexpected wardrobe malfunction – the clash of being both Black and queer. Let's unpack this sartorial crisis, shall we?

Queer and Black: a double whammy of fabulousness

As we revel in the glory of Blackness, let's not forget the glittering rhinestones that adorn the Queer community. But, darling, statistics paint a rather somber picture.

In the vibrant tapestry of Black identity, the intersectionality of being both Black and Queer adds layers of complexity to one's self-discovery and societal acceptance.

As we immerse ourselves in the month that proudly celebrates Blackness, it becomes imperative to delve into the profound duality experienced by individuals navigating both realms of identity. A 2019 report from the Human Rights Campaign revealed that 44% of Black

LGBTQ+ youth seriously consider suicide. That's a statistic that should make even the sturdiest wig stand on end.

Breaking chains or forging shackles? The identity crisis drama

Society loves to play director, casting us into roles that don't quite fit our script. Enter the unnecessary identity crisis – a showstopper that leaves us questioning our very existence.

During a month dedicated to the celebration of Black history, there's an undeniable surge of pride that resonates within the Black community. It's a time to honor the resilience, achievements, and rich cultural heritage that define the essence of being Black.

However, for those who are also proudly queer, this celebration can evoke a sense of conflict, as societal norms often impose restrictive expectations on the coexistence of these identities.

It's like being told you can't pair red wine with fish. Well, excuse me while I enjoy my Merlot with a side of salmon and societal norms with a pinch of skepticism.

Navigating the healing runway

Societal pressures can instigate an unnecessary identity crisis, compelling individuals to question their authenticity and belonging within their own community.

The struggle arises from external prejudices and internalized notions that suggest a paradox between being Black and queer. This conflict can lead to feelings of isolation, self-doubt, and a desperate quest for acceptance, hindering the celebration of the holistic self.

How do we mend these fabulous but frayed seams of identity? First up, affirmation – because darling, you're a masterpiece, not a discount rack find. Surround yourself with a squad that gets it; share stories, laugh, and slay together.

Educate the masses – our existence is not an avant-garde concept; it's a reality. As the wise Beyoncé once said, "Your self-worth is determined by you. You don't have to depend on someone telling you who you are."

Promoting inclusivity: the runway remix

The Black community has its own runway, but it's time to extend that catwalk to all its

fabulous members.

Advocate for inclusivity. Because diversity isn't just a buzzword; it's the key to a more vibrant and united community. It's time to hijack the runway, darling. Black community, listen up – the catwalk is long, but it's time we expand it to embrace all the fierce folks in our midst.

Inclusivity is not just a slogan; it's a revolution, and we're the damn generals.

As we twirl in the spotlight of Black History Month, let's set this stage on fire. Let's not just rewrite the script; burn it and dance on the ashes. We're Black, we're Queer, and we're

fabulous AF. Embrace the complexity, challenge the norms, and let's leave this read not just inspired but ready to throw down. It's time to break these damn chains and own our narrative.

Strut into the spotlight

So, in this Black History Month, let's rewrite the script. Let's dance to the rhythm of our own fabulous beat. As we celebrate our Blackness, let's remember that being queer is not a costume change; it's a dazzling layer of authenticity.

As we navigate the duality of being both Black and queer, the journey toward healing involves breaking free from

societal constraints and embracing the full spectrum of one's identity. In the month dedicated to celebrating Blackness, let us strive for a community that recognizes and cherishes the richness found in every intersection of identity.

Through understanding, dialogue, and collective empowerment, we can foster an environment where every Black individual, regardless of their sexual orientation, feels seen, heard, and celebrated. Embrace the complexity, challenge the norms, and strut into the spotlight as the unapologetically fabulous intersectional beings we are.



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Life and Style

Divorced LGBTQ+ Parents “Bird Nesting” To Give Kids More Stability

By Michael Brayson



While traditional divorce arrangements still remain most common, an increasingly popular arrangement called “bird nesting” allows the kids to stay in one home while the parents alternate.

And according to a report in *Good Housekeeping*, bird nesting is more popular among LGBTQ+ couples. “This likely reflects in part their lesser likelihood of conforming to gender norms related to how post-divorce co-parenting is supposed to go,” explained clinical psychology professor Abbie Goldberg.

Kathleen Meyer and Judith Franklin (not their real names) bird nested for five years and said their kids “both acknowledge that their lives changed very little when we separated, which made it a million times easier for them. With bird nesting, the most challenging aspect is the separation itself and the emotions that go along with that – not the living arrangement.”

As in this couple’s experience, many experts believe bird nesting is easier on kids because it does not upend their lives in the same way as

moving between two different homes every few days. It also provides kids with a longer time to process the divorce, focusing on getting used to seeing their parents separately without also having to deal with major changes to their living situations.

Some people see bird nesting as a permanent solution, while others see it as a first step. And while for many it works very well, there are also challenges.

“It keeps the co-parents in each other’s spaces,” explained marriage and family therapist Aurisha Smolarski, “thus opening up the possibility of more conflict, tension, and frustration about household issues, responsibilities, and even dating.”

Therapist Erin Pash added that bird nesting should be avoided when the couple is simply too

angry at one another to amicably execute it.

“The goal throughout divorce is to adequately support children through the changes and transitions by reducing conflict in the parent relationship,” Pash said. “So while nesting might seem like a win-win for the kids, if parents can’t do it right and it just increases more conflict, it can actually be more damaging for the children than having them adjust to transitions like moving out of the family home.”

Oona Metz, a psychotherapist who specializes in treating divorced women, said parents should not promise their kids that any situation will be permanent because things will inevitably change and evolve. The only promise parents should make, Metz said, is “we will always be your parents and we will always love you.”

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BUSINESS & TRAVEL



US Travel Warning Issued For Bahamas & Jamaica

By Jason Graham

A significant increase in crime in The Bahamas and Jamaica has led the the U.S. State Department to issue travel advisory warnings for the two Caribbean destinations.

In the past week, the State Department has warned U.S. citizens to exercise “increased caution” when visiting The Bahamas, where two killings over the weekend added to an already alarming homicide rate, and to “reconsider travel” to Jamaica.

The warning on Jamaica was updated on Jan. 23, and is now at Level 3, just one level below the strictest “Do Not Travel” advisory.

“Violent crimes, such as home invasions, armed robberies, sexual assaults, and homicides are common. Sexual assaults occur frequently, including at all-inclusive resorts,” the advisory warns. “Local police often do not respond effectively to serious criminal incidents.”

A crime report from the Jamaica Constabulary Force for this year shows the country recorded 33 murders in the first 13 days of January. Despite the totaling rising to 65 as of Jan. 27, the force says the

number represents a drop in the country’s homicides.

In The Bahamas, the number of killings aren’t as high, but still worrisome for the island-nation of about nearly 408,000 residents.

Since the beginning of the year there have been 19 homicides in Nassau, the Bahamian capital. The killing spree, according to the State Department, is due to an increase in “gang-on-gang violence” that is mostly affecting the local population.

“Murders have occurred at all hours including in broad daylight on the streets.

Retaliatory gang violence has been the primary motive in 2024 murders,” the State Department said. The travel advisory was raised from a Level 1 to a Level 2, which recommends “Increased Caution.”

In its warning, the State Department said that violent crime, such as burglaries, armed robberies and sexual assaults, occur in both tourist and non-tourist areas. U.S. citizens are warned to especially be vigilant when staying at short-term vacation rental properties where private

security companies do not have a presence.

On Sunday, while insisting that the country was still safe, the Bahamian police announced increased levels of vigilance.

Police Chief Superintendent Chrislyn Skippings said during a press conference that police have arrested over 100 individuals, and confiscated nine guns and 1,500 rounds of ammunition in recent days.

“When we talk about 1,500 rounds of a certain ammunition, we have saved 1,500 lives because it only takes one round to kill or injure someone,” she said.

Also confiscated: Over 100 pounds of drugs valued at \$200,000. Skippings said authorities are determined to remove all of the illegal weapons and drugs that are contributing to one of the deadliest spikes in violent crime recent memory.

While The Bahamas is the latest country to see its travel warning raised, it is not the only Caribbean country in the midst of a spike in crime. Besides Jamaica, Turks and Caicos and Trinidad and Tobago are all seeing increases in violent crime.

Last week, local media in Trinidad reported that one of the country's most recent victims was businessman Richard Ramkissoon, the husband of well-known Caribbean economist Marla Dukharan. He was killed during a home invasion robbery.

A travel advisory by the United Kingdom said that gang-related attacks and shootings are increasing around the city center of Port-of-Spain, the twin-island nation's capital, and armed robbery is a continuing risk.

Last year during a meeting of leaders of the 15-member Caribbean Community, CARICOM, Trinidadian Prime Minister Keith Rowley asked for help to deal with the region's worsening crime problem. Violent crime, Rowley said, had become a public health issue. "There are very few diseases that kill more people in CARICOM than arms and ammunition," he noted.

On Monday, Rowley was in Washington, where he and the Secretary of State Antony Blinken held a joint press conference before a meeting where the two will discuss a number of issues including security and gun trafficking in the region.

In his remarks, Blinken said that the U.S. is partnering with Trinidad "to fight violent crime and firearms trafficking, and this is a priority for the work that we're doing."

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Why Gay Bars Still Matter

By David Vandygriff



There's a disturbing false parallel I've heard among friends, seen on social media and even read in local papers: "We have marriage equality now; we don't need gay bars."

The idea behind this way of thinking is simple to understand. The LGBT community is well on its way to achieving mainstream status. Queer people are everywhere. So there's no longer any point in exclusively queer social realms, right?

In the days following the Nov. 20 mass shooting at Club Q in Colorado Springs, which took the lives of five people and injured at least 19 others, LGBTQ bar patrons have been taking the news especially hard.

That's because, historically, in the absence of any other safe gathering places, gay bars have been the heartbeat of the queer community. And still now, particularly for those living in rural areas, or conservative strongholds like Colorado Springs — headquarters of Christian anti-gay ministry Focus on the Family and recently considered the fourth most conservative city in America — it's often the only

place to feel safe while being fully one's self, especially if shunned by family members and while being scapegoated by politicians and targeted by an increasing number of anti-LGBTQ bills.

"That's where I learned how to be everything that I am," Kara Coley, bar manager at SIPPS, one of just two gay bars in southern Mississippi, adding that she "blossomed" in such queer spaces.

Queer bars and clubs have always been a place for people to discover themselves and "find their chosen family," says Fredd E. "Tree" Sequoia, a bartender at the historic Stonewall Inn for 54 years who was present at the 1969 Stonewall uprising, often called the start of the modern LGBTQ -rights movement,

"I was in a gang in the '50s, because if you didn't belong to a gang, everybody would beat you up," Sequoia, 83, tells Yahoo Life. Flocking to the city's West Village neighborhood, home of the Stonewall, was one of the only safety nets he had as a young gay man. "We had little groups of friends, you know, cliques, but we all knew each other. We were family."

Still, despite the importance that these spaces held and still hold for queer people, the number of gay bars has been declining nationwide, especially after being hit hard by the pandemic lockdowns, resulting in a drop of nearly 15% between 2019 and spring of 2021, according to a study from Oberlin College. Lesbian bars, in particular, are uniquely vulnerable.

"It's a place where you can find your family," Erica Rose, a NYC-based filmmaker and co-creator of the Lesbian Bar Project, a documentary series aiming to preserve the remaining lesbian bars in the U.S., says of such nightspots. "It's a space where you can exist and breathe and exhale outside of the confines of a restrictive, heteronormative society — and you can pretend, for a moment, that the world is like this always."

Now, with the decline of queer spaces as a backdrop, the Club Q shooting is also a stark reminder for many of the risks they face, and of past violent attacks — particularly the June 2016 shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Fla., which killed 49 people and was, at the time, the worst mass shooting in modern U.S.

history.

Other past attacks have included an assailant using gasoline in 2013 to set fire to a gay nightclub in Seattle on New Year's Eve, reminiscent of an infamous 1973 arson attack on a popular New Orleans gay club that killed 32 people. Recent incidents have included that of a man caught on camera just this week throwing a brick through the window of an NYC gay bar and, according to GLAAD, 124 anti-LGBTQ incidents and threats targeting drag queens in 2023 alone.

"It feels demoralizing and defeating and traumatizing and triggering," Rose says of the shooting. But the thing is, she adds, "We're not going anywhere. There's great courage in just showing up and existing, and not letting the evil forces in our society try to strip us from power — because that's really what it is. They don't want us to exist, but they're fundamentally never going to win, because we do exist, and we're never going to stop existing."

Adding insult to injury is that, according to some activists, real threats against LGBTQ people increase due to hateful rhetoric from some in power — including Colorado's U.S. Rep. Lauren Boebert, who recently defended herself against accusations that past anti-LGBTQ comments helped fuel the attack in Colorado Springs.

"My fear is that [these tragedies] will continue to happen unless the far right stops using us as political pawns, because words matter,"

Stacy Lentz, co-owner of the Stonewall Inn and creator of the Stonewall Gives Back Initiative, which helps keep queer bars in business across the nation, tells Yahoo Life. "When you demonize and dehumanize us, then people feel like they can come in and just start killing us. Hate cannot be a campaign slogan."

That's why, for many LGBTQ bar owners, ensuring that patrons feel welcome and safe to be who they are is of the utmost importance. At Crossings, a queer bar in Lexington, Ky, there's a sign that reads: "This is a safe space." Its co-owner, Rebecca Richter, says it's a way of paying it forward.

"Going out to gay bars was the first time I felt like I was actually alive," Richter, who bought the bar in 2019, tells Yahoo Life. "I'm humbled and privileged to have the opportunity to own one now."

"Our community is so tight knit," she adds. "We raise money for everyone and everything. We're having a Thanksgiving potluck — and we do the same thing on Christmas. This is our chosen family. It's a place where we feel accepted. We take care of each other."

Craig Cammack, the LGBTQ outreach liaison for Mayor Linda Gorton of Lexington, Ky., says clubs like Crossings are the heartbeat of the local queer community — something that really resonates with him as a gay man who grew up the son of a Baptist preacher in

small-town Indiana.

"We're so happy and grateful that they are here," he said. "There really wasn't an outlet like that for me in my [hometown]. In my early 20s, I discovered a club in Louisville [Ky.] called the Connections. And that's where I found myself, because I was able to just feel relaxed and be around people that I felt a connection to, who had similar backgrounds."

Coley says she felt triggered upon hearing the news about Club Q, and that it sent her back to 2013 and the night of the Pulse shooting, when she was working behind the bar at SIPPS.

"It was devastating to everyone in the bar when we heard about it," she recalls. "It sends shockwaves through you." But now more than ever, she notes, it's important for queer people to be in community with each other. "We will heal from this and it'll make us stronger."

Danny Linden, conference director at the National LGBTQ Task Force, reinforces the idea that queer spaces are a beacon for those in need of healing.

"When you are out and about with people [at these bars and clubs], and you can't see what the future will bring, it can bring gifts that you can't even imagine," says Linden.

"Through the devastation of the worst of the AIDS epidemic in the '80s and '90s, people were still going out and socializing. In fact, it became even more

more important, because they needed to find themselves."

Malcolm Ingram, director of the 2006 documentary *Small Town Gay Bar*, which spotlights two gay bars in the rural South, says queer spaces are vital in the aftermath of such tragedies, as it allows for people to "feel seen and heard."

"People have to keep living their lives, otherwise hatred wins," Ingram tells Yahoo Life. "Being a big, fat hairy guy, coming out and figuring myself out was very confusing about where I fit in. And finding a place like a bear bar meant the world, because that's where I found a community where I was accepted, where I was loved."

Now, as the nation tries to heal from the Club Q shooting, Lenz believes elected leaders ought to utilize their power to ensure that queer safe spaces are not only physically safe, but saved from extinction.

"If [queer people] don't have those places to go, it can wreak havoc on their mental health. That's the fear, too," she says. "They are the hub and the lifeline and the heartbeat — and everything else — of these communities, and we've got to protect them and save them."

None will every be safe until all of us are safe. Our bars an important place to encourage just being one's self in a cruel world of violence.

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Dolly Parton Reveals New CBS TV Special

By David Vandygriff



Dolly Parton has set a new CBS TV special, and dog lovers will want to tune in. On Thursday, the Paramount-owned network announced Dolly Parton's Pet Gala, a two-hour variety special airing on Feb. 21 at 9 p.m. ET. There will be "pink carpet" arrivals featuring stars and some adorable pets. Plus, there will be loads of musical performances. Both CBS and Paramount+ will air the special.

Parton's songs "I Will Always Love You," "9 to 5," "Jolene," and "Puppy Love" will all be performed during the TV special, with Parton, Lainey Wilson, Carly Pearce, Chris Janson and KC (of KC of the Sunshine Band) all set to sing them. As far as celebs making appearances, Drew Barrymore, Kristen Bell, Kristin Chenoweth, Neil Patrick Harris, Jessica Simpson, Margaret Cho, Carson Kressley, Jim Nantz and Iain Armitage (of Young Sheldon fame) will drop by.

Parton and Jane Lynch (Glee, Hollywood Game Night) will host the pink carpet portion of the evening, which will feature pups dressed up in selections

from Parton's Doggy Parton pet line. Kelly Osbourne and Entertainment Tonight's Rachel Smith will also appear on the carpet as correspondents.

"I have hosted or co-hosted many shows throughout my career, but I have never been more excited about co-hosting a show than I am about being part of this pet gala!" Parton said in the CBS press release. "I love animals. I've got all kinds, and of course, I've always had little dogs around, and big ones! We're going to have some of all kinds and colors on the show, and there is nothing more fun to me than when little animals do what

they do best, and I'm looking forward to it! There is so much fun stuff, and I know all the animal lovers out there are going to love this show."

CBS will air Dolly Parton's Pet Gala on Feb. 21 at 9 p.m. ET. CBS is viewable for free for anyone with a digital antenna (which you can purchase at retailers like Amazon and Walmart.) It's also viewable via cable providers or livestream services such as Fubo TV.

The easiest way to stream Dolly Parton's Pet Gala will be on Paramount+, which offers a CBS livestream as well as on-demand viewing afterward.

DOLLY PARTON'S PET GALA



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Life and Style

What Makes Bonded Whiskey Special?

By Stephen Smith

There are many unique types of whiskey out there, which you probably already know if it's your liquor of choice. If you've ever seen a whiskey labeled "bottled-in-bond," then you might be wondering what, exactly, this label means and whether or not it's important when choosing your spirit. In fact, bonded whiskeys are of particularly high quality and, for over a century, have been known for their excellence.

Back in the 1800s, it wasn't easy to know where your whiskey was coming from, what was in it, or how high-quality it was. At the time, alcohol was sold and purchased in barrels rather than bottles. Manufacturers often took advantage of this less-than-secure packaging to water down their whiskey and mix in additives. Some whiskeys included such undesirable ingredients as wood chips or even formaldehyde.

The federal government passed the Bottled-in-Bond Act in 1897 to keep these practices at bay, meaning a bottle bearing that label had to meet very specific qualifications. Colin Spoelman, co-founder of Kings County Distillery, told

Wine Enthusiast, "Bottled-in-bond is one of the earliest examples of a consumer protection law." Bottled-in-bond whiskey was first distilled at a single U.S. distillery and aged for four years in government-supervised buildings. It was also bottled — not barreled — when it was 100 proof. These steps ensured high-quality whiskey, and the bottled-in-bond label meant that consumers didn't have to worry about what they were drinking.

Why The Bottled-In-Bond Label Matters Today

While bottled-in-bond whiskey was all the rage for quite some time, it lost its popularity in the 1970s when lighter, lower-proof options became available. In 2018, however, Jim Beam's bonded whiskey made a triumphant return to the market. Adam Harris, the senior American whiskey ambassador at Beam Suntory, told Wine Enthusiast, "We saw the popularity of higher-proof product rise among the craft-bartending community," adding, "The bigger proofs of bottled-in-bond provide bigger flavors that stand up well in cocktails."

Bottled-in-bond whiskey was once a method of quality control, and today, the label still implies excellence. It also marks a strong, more savory, less sweet whiskey with a high ABV. Noah Rothbaum, author of "The Art of American Whiskey," told Serious Eats that many whiskey drinkers "just think [the classification is] something you slap on a label. But for people in the know, bottled-in-bond says, 'Look, this is quality.'" He added, "I don't like to tell people about bottled-in-bond. I'd rather they not know about it so the prices stay low." So, while bottled-in-bond whiskey may be most popular among informed bartenders these days, it's an easy way to ensure a high-quality bottle that's perfect for any whiskey cocktail you might want to whip up.





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Drag Race's Amanda Tori Meating Comes Out As Trans

By Debi Bennett



All RuPaul's Drag Race fans have been summoned to a mandatory meeting!

Season 16 fan-favorite queen Amanda Tori Meating has come out as trans during a Quick Drag podcast interview from Entertainment Weekly. In the interview, Amanda explained that she considered herself nonbinary years before competing on Drag Race. However, she was going through issues with her then-husband, who was seemingly not supportive of Amanda being trans.

The Drag Race star explained:

"It wasn't at all supported by my partner, and it ended up being a big part of why I had to leave, because he didn't want to be with a trans person. I was in a bad place about it, mentally, for a while, but you get to a point where you're like, I have to do what's right for me, and that involved getting out of

that."

Amanda continued, "I showed up to Drag Race in this space of, I'm going to advocate for myself, I'm going to stand up for myself, I'm not going to allow myself to be victimized in the way that I feel like I have been in the past, pre-Drag Race. [I was] in this environment for the first time where everyone's calling me Amanda and not my government name, and realizing how good that felt, and I started to feel a bit more comfortable in the reformation of my identity."

By the time filming on Drag Race season 16 wrapped, Amanda noticed that going back into her pre-existing reality just didn't feel right. She recalled:

"It was kind of jarring to go from that environment where everyone is calling me Amanda and she/her-ing me, to being

called by my government name again, and he/him. I was like, 'This is very much not correct for me.' That experience helped push me out of the nest a little bit and crack the egg."

We really didn't need even more reasons to stan Amanda, but seeing her speak up for herself on Drag Race and bravely come out as her more authentic self makes us fall in love with her even more. There is no denying that she's already a superstar who is destined for even more greatness after appearing in the series.

Congratulations to Amanda Tori Meating for this huge milestone in her life!

You can listen to Amanda Tori Meating's full episode on Quick Drag below. RuPaul's Drag Race season 16 airs every Friday on MTV.



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News & Politics

Florida Criminalizes Changing Gender On Driver's Licenses

By Brian Griffin



Florida officials last week told driver's license offices to stop allowing residents to change their gender designation on state IDs.

A letter sent out by the Florida Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, part of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' administration, said it was rescinding a rule allowing individuals to alter their driver's licenses when they transition.

"The term 'gender'... does not refer to a person's internal sense of his or her gender role or identification, but has historically and commonly been understood as a synonym for 'sex,' which is determined by innate and immutable biological and genetic characteristics," wrote FHSMV Deputy Executive Director Robert Kynoch. The letter went out to county tax collector's offices around the state.

The letter threatens legal consequences for individuals who seek a change in their gender on driver's licenses moving forward.

"Misrepresenting one's gender, understood as sex, on a driver license constitutes fraud... and subjects an offender to criminal

and civil penalties, including cancellation, suspension, or revocation of his or her driver license."

The letter cites Florida's statute prohibiting fake IDs, which makes use of a fictitious ID a third-degree felony punishable by up to five years of prison or probation and a \$5,000 fine.

Of note, the state agency just changed guidelines in its manual May 2022 to allow a change without proof of gender affirmation surgery, and those guidelines remain on the state website four days after the letter was sent. "Previously, the Florida Division of Motorist Services required proof that sexual reassignment surgery had been completed," a note on the website reads. "This is no longer the policy and proof of such may not be requested or required."

But the letter says the state will reverse that move yet again, and now won't allow gender changes at all. The language in Kynoch's letter suggests even those who undergo gender affirmation surgery won't be allowed to change the designation on their IDs.

"Permitting an individual to alter his or her license to reflect an

internal sense of gender role or identity, which is neither immutable nor objectively verifiable, undermines the purpose of an identification record and can frustrate the state's ability to enforce its laws," the letter reads.

Nadine Smith, Executive Director of Equality Florida, issued the following statement:

"The DeSantis administration's obsession with scapegoating transgender Floridians has escalated into an outrageous attack that further erodes freedom and liberty in our state. This cruel policy threatens transgender Floridians with civil and criminal penalties and blocks them from obtaining the critical government-issued identification necessary to continue their daily lives," Nadine Smith, executive director of Equality Florida, said in a statement. "Transgender people have always existed in every culture on every continent and always will. In Florida, tens of thousands of people have legally updated their gender marker on their driver's license or ID. They carefully followed the rules to ensure their identification accurately reflects who they

are, and they trusted this process. Now, an abrupt policy reversal has thrown their lives into chaos. The cruelty of this kind of government overreach and intrusion should alarm every Floridian."

She added: "These reckless and hateful policies are intended to make the transgender community feel unsafe and unwelcome in Florida and to bully them out of public life entirely."

The guidance comes as the Florida Legislature considers a bill that would eliminate recognition of transgender identities in the state. Florida

state Rep. Dean Black's "What Is A Woman?" Act would eliminate the term gender from government documents, including driver's licenses, and require instead for the sex assigned at birth to be listed under sex.

That legislation has yet to be heard by committee, and no Senate companion legislation has been filed.

But as has occurred in the past with bills like the "don't say gay" law's expansion through high school, the DeSantis administration isn't waiting to implement measures through executive authority, and seems

ready to go beyond what a Legislature with Republican supermajorities will consider when it comes to transgender erasure.

"Florida Republicans' obsession with trans people has to stop," said Florida Democratic Party chair Nikki Fried. "Instead of addressing our raging property insurance crisis or out-of-control rent hikes, the GOP continues to pursue blatantly transphobic policies to serve their made-up culture wars. Erasing and criminalizing trans people is absolutely disgusting and can't be allowed to stand."

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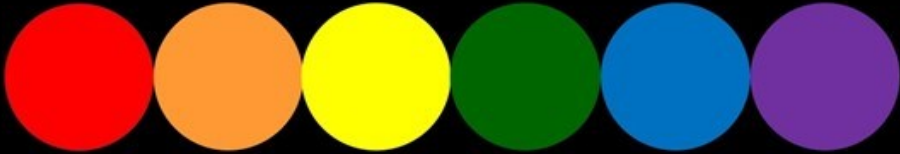
- Top-left: "No Longer Olivia: Reintroducing Liv Lux Miyako-MagJerMa" (Issue 136, March 2012)
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BUSINESS & TRAVEL

Starbucks Unveils Black History Month Cup Collection

By Drew Williams



Renowned artist Damon Brown infuses his signature style into the latest Starbucks drinkware collection, celebrating Black culture and community with each inspired piece. From his early days, enthralled by the vivid world of cartoons and superheroes, through the dynamic storytelling of Japanese anime and the raw energy of urban art, Brown's creative journey has been as colorful as his palette. Educated at Washington State University, his return to Seattle marked a renaissance of public art and design, notably his mural at the city's heart and his commemorative design for Starbucks' 50th anniversary.

In his latest venture, Brown joins the Starbucks Artist Collaboration Series, bringing to life a collection that transcends Black History Month and enriches the everyday. His drinkware collection, available from January 30 in Starbucks stores across the U.S. and Canada, is

a homage to community. The pieces feature pedestrians in a shared space, inviting the viewer to join in their journey.

Brown's color choices — a calming blend of pale blue, green, and cream — nod to the 60s while subtly shifting from the traditional Black art palette to a contemporary vision. His designs marry modern shapes and movement with cultural hairstyles and textures, offering a fresh perspective on classic imagery.

The collection showcases three unique drinkware items, each branded with 'Creative Lou' — a nod to Brown's childhood moniker. They are not just vessels for coffee but symbols of representation, connection, and the shared spaces of our communities.

Starbucks' commitment to celebrating Black voices year-round resonates with Brown's artistic mission. Through their Black Partner Network and other initiatives,

Starbucks supports the African American Mayors Association, National Forum for Black Public Administrators, NAACP, and the National Urban League, all while advancing civil rights and economic growth. The Starbucks Foundation's Neighborhood Grants program, propelled by partner nominations, has granted nearly \$1.7 million, supporting over 1,000 nonprofits that enrich communities across North America.



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