



MIDWEST RAINBOW NEWS



AUGUST 2023

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"If you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else."

-Toni Morrison

HOUSEKEEPING

DISCLAIMER

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The Midwest Rainbow News makes no representations as to the accuracy of statements made by individual authors, including but not limited to legal and medical information.

By sending submissions to the Midwest Rainbow News, you are agreeing to have your submission published. We may edit submissions to fit our anti-oppression values and/or our own editing guidelines.

Missing your copy?

Although things seem to be improving in terms of uniform delivery of the newsletter, please reach out if you do not receive your copy for more than one month in a row. Thank you!

Midwest Rainbow News
PO Box 81624
Pittsburgh, PA 15217

MAMA SAYS

No point in my talking about summer. I think everyone has been overwhelmed by the excessively high temperatures mixed with suffocatingly high humidity! Please, keep hydrated by drinking lots of fluids!

I am happy to report the name changes seem to be moving along. Please understand that there are a large number of our men and women seeking name changes and that slows the process. If you have sent your request in to us and have not received a questionnaire within two months, please let us know and I will personally look into it.

I am happy to announce that the Midwest Rainbow News now has its own web page! Every issue from Issue 1 Volume 1 to the latest issue is available for your family and/or friends to read. The web address is: <https://liberationlit.org/midwest-rainbow-news>

It is really important for us to hear from you, our readers. We would like to hear your suggestions about our content and what we can do to improve the newsletter. For those of you who can draw, we would love for you to design a logo for our newsletter. Send in your submission and we will let an independent group of outside volunteers choose the winner. We cannot pay you for your work, but we will certainly announce your name and your logo will be the masthead for the newsletter. We must receive your submission no later than September 30th 2023.

With a Mothers Love,
Patricia



C.R.E.A.M BY DANEZ SMITH

in the morning I think about money
green horned lord of my waking
forest in which I stumbled toward no salvation
prison made of emerald & pennies
in my wallet I keep anxiety & a condom
I used to sell my body but now my blood spoiled
All my favorite songs tell me to get money
I'd rob a bank but I'm a poet
I'm so broke I'm a genius
If I was white, I'd take pictures of other pictures & sell them
I come from sharecroppers who come from slaves who do not come from
kings
sometimes I pay the weed man before I pay the
light bill
sometimes is a synonym for often
I just want a grant or a fellowship or a rich white husband & I'll be straight
I feel most colored when I'm looking at my bank account
I feel most colored when I scream ball so hard motherfuckas wanna find me
I spent one summer stealing from ragstock
If I went to jail I'd live rent-free but there is no way to avoid making white
people richer
A prison is a plantation made of stone & steel
Being locked up for selling drugs = Being locked up for trying to eat
a bald fade cost 20 bones now a days
what's a blacker tax than blackness?
what cost more than being American and poor?
here is where I say reparations.
here is where I say got 20 bucks I can borrow?
student loans are like slavery but not but with vacation days but not
but police
I don't know what it says about me when white institutions give me money
how much is the power ball this week?
I'mma print my own money and be my own god and live forever in a green
frame
my grandmamma is great at saving money
before my grandfather passed he showed me where he hid his money
& his gun
my aunt can't hold on to a dollar, a job, her brain
I love how easy it is to be bad with money
don't ask me about my taxes
the b in debt is a silent black boy trapped

THE PRISON JOURNALISM PROJECT

The Prison Journalism Project is a great place for any prisoner to express their views while working to establish themselves as a credible writer and journalist. Many first time authors have been published on the Prison Journalism website. It only takes imagination and willingness to write your story. It is 100% free, costs you only time and dedication. Ask about their writing program and upcoming correspondence-based classes. For more information on how to get started, contact them at:

*Prison Journalism Project
2093 Philadelphia Pike #1054
Claymont, DE 19703*

WRITE FOR US!

We are actively seeking material from our readers to publish in future issues. We will no longer publish messages from one reader to another.

We are looking for:

- Articles with accurate information about relevant policies, legal developments, and current affairs (cite your sources!)
- Tips, life-hacks, and how-to articles that our readers would find useful
- Media recommendations — books, authors, podcasts, tv, movies etc. Preference given to free things. Write a little bit about why you're recommending it and/or what you got from it.
- Personal essays on topics relevant to our community, including but not limited to: mental health, personal growth, what sucks about being LGBTQ in prison, what's cool about being LGBTQ in prison, pride, shame, self-acceptance, friendship, liberation from oppression, dealing with difficult family relationships, etc.
- Good news — if you have something to celebrate!
- Reports from your camp on conditions for LGBTQ prisoners
- Responses — If you have something constructive to add to a particular conversation, you can write a response to a previously published piece

SEND SUBMISSIONS TO OUR PO BOX OR THE BLACK-PINK GAZETTE TABLET CONTACT

IF YOU'RE A NEW SUBSCRIBER AND DON'T HAVE THE CONTACT ON YOUR TABLET YET, PLEASE BE PATIENT. IF YOU'RE STILL MISSING THE CONTACT AFTER A COUPLE WEEKS, WRITE TO OUR PO BOX.



ON OUR HEARTS AND MINDS



HUMAN CHAMELEON

In life, altering one's appearance or behavior can be essential and in many cases necessary for survival. Multiple circumstances come about in our lives in which we must conform and adapt so that we may come out on top, manage the system, or just simply survive. Altering our appearance such as keeping shorter hair styles, wearing gender appropriate clothing, growing facial hair or the complete opposite are ways we adapt to society and social settings to blend in, avoid conflict and become less noticeable.

In turn, avoidance measures that are taken normally further the layers of facades burying our true natural selves deeper and deeper. Some scenarios of cloaking could cause one to lose and momentarily forget our true identity. Behaviourally, we may act, think, and appear to believe what in society deems "normal" or "acceptable" only to dupe those around us in order to fit in, be an accepted social member, to remain on the pedestal in which we have been placed or to simply blend in.

Changing our thought process, ideals, and belief systems, not for the betterment of self but only the acceptance of others for an easier and simpler life takes its toll and we reap not the rewards but the costly deficits of such dehumanizing acts.

Exhibiting chameleon characteristics is wonderful in social settings such as business or professional standards. However, personally it can be destructive and quite demanding of one's psyche. Over extended periods of time, depending on the mental mettle of an individual, an individual may actually think the beliefs, thoughts, actions, and appearances are that of their true self. So the old adage becomes true, "One who lies so much they actually believe it themselves."

These chameleon characteristics, how dearly we hold onto, can be very useful and productive. But, on the other hand can become quite destructive and detrimental to one's mental health, self-esteem, and cause irreparable damage. Therefore, as we will continue to be human chameleons we have a duty to ourselves to acknowledge our true selves and let them shine through. The personal and spiritual repercussions of dismissing our true forms and selves are mightier than any social fallout we may suffer for being our true selves. So take care and love yourself. If you can't right now, know we do love you and will continue to do so.

THE COMPANY YOU KEEP

It is better to be alone than in the wrong company. Tell me who your best friends are, and I will tell you who you are. If you run with the wolves you will learn how to howl, but if you associate with eagles, you will learn how to soar to great heights.

A mirror reflects a person's face, but what they are really like is shown by the kind of friends they choose. The simple but true fact of life is that you become like those with whom you closely associate - for the good, and the bad. The less you associate with some people, the more your life will improve. Anytime you tolerate mediocrity in others, it increases your mediocrity. An important attribute in successful people is their impatience with negative thinking and negative acting people. As you grow, your associates will change. Some of your friends will not want to go on. They will want you to stay where you are. Friends that don't help you climb want you to crawl. Your friends will either stretch your vision or they will choke your dream. Those that don't increase you will eventually decrease you. so consider this

- never receive counsel from unproductive people.
- never discuss your problems with someone incapable of contributing to the solution, because those who never succeed themselves are always first to tell you how to be unsuccessful.
- not everyone has the right to speak into your life.
- you are certain to get the worst bargain when you exchange ideas with the wrong person.
- don't follow anyone who's not going anywhere. they'll just lead you to nowhere.
- be careful where you stop to inquire for directions on the road of life.
- wise is the person who fortifies their life with the right friendship

SKY

Freddy



ON OUR HEARTS AND MINDS



SOME LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS

First: Did you know that, despite being founded by the Brethren Church many of the Ashland University Corrections Education Program (AUCEP) professors are pro LGBT? After MJC's Pat Mobley got my name changed, Ms. Cynthia West mailed the proper paperwork to the University and my file was changed. JPay will not change our names on our tablets and I have to explain to my professors about my name and pronouns. Majority of the time they call me either Amber or Ms. Wolf. Once my Exploring World Religions prof accidentally called me by my dead name she said, "I am so sorry Amber! My niece is transitioning and I should know better! Please forgive me!"

Second: Here's a little known secret- Medicaid (MoHealth Net) is funded by Missouri and Uncle Sam. The Federal government could withhold their share of the funding if House Republicans force a government shut down this fall by refusing to pass bills funding the government, which could hamstring many, many people.

Third: A bigger secret when you go onto the Law Library computers look for Federal Register and find stuff by the President. Like if you mark the box for 2023 and do a search for "transgender" you will see all of the executive orders Biden signed that mention Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender among other things. In 2022 Biden signed an Order that will force both Medicaid (State/poor) and Medicare (elderly/disabled) to take the steps needed to cover more transgender care from doctor visits, HRT, and the various surgeries. However Biden needs to be reelected and we need to take back the House otherwise all of Biden's previous work will be for nothing.

Fourth: Podcasts to listen to --
Queer Money- do I need to explain this?
Pod Save America- Obama's former speechwriters discuss the news.

Lovett or Leave It- a cross between the news of Pod Save America and the skits of Saturday Night Live with an LGBT twist. Jon Lovett (from Pod Save America) is a self proclaimed gay Jew and he tends to go on stage in a skirt in Texas. "But first let's get into it, what a week."

Last: I hear about how some transgender people had their family turn their backs on them. I couldn't come out to my mother as she thought that what happened to Mathew Shepard was a good start.

Auntie Amber

UPDATE ON THE FIGHT

FOR TREATMENT

On June 29 Amy and Pat from the MacArthur Justice Center drove from StL. to K.C. to argue my need for a preliminary court injunction for me to start the Gender Affirming Hormone Treatment (GAHT) while we prepare for trial. On June 30 we had a conference call and Amy said that Judge Wimes was very attentive, engaged, and was asking questions during the one hour Argument. They both felt extremely confident that Wimes would rule in my favor. July 21 I had an update with Amy and she said Wimes denied the injunction saying that because I am on 50mg of Remron and I see Mental Health every 90 days (despite going through five therapists in 16 months) we failed to prove within a reasonable doubt that I need the injunction. He said something along the lines of Centurion taking over and my evaluation is on track (despite Centurion's abysmal track record in transgender inmate care). Amy said a judge in Arkansas ruled against years of precedent and said, "inmates can't use Deliberate Indifference, but rather Gross Negligence." Amy said this will make it more difficult in getting a judge to rule in our favor and she said she will reach out to Washington University's Transgender Clinic for extra help along with the help we are already getting from Dr. E.

Auntie Amber





IN THE NEWS



BEYONCÉ HONORS GAY MAN MURDERED FOR DANCING TO HER MUSIC

By [Daniel Villarreal](#) for LGBTQ Nation

Beyoncé used her personal website to honor O’Shea Sibley, the 28-year-old Black gay dancer who was stabbed to death in a gas station parking lot for voguing to her music.

Concurrently, Black and queer Twitter users also commemorated Sibley, expressing outrage over his death and sharing a crowdfunding campaign for his burial costs.

The Grammy-winning performer wrote “Rest in Power O’Shea Sibley” [on her website](#). He was voguing to a song from her 2022 album Renaissance, which largely features Black and queer house music, before a 17-year-old confronted him, told him to stop, allegedly called him anti-LGBTQ+ slurs, and then [stabbed him in the chest](#) before departing in a vehicle. The incident was captured on video. Police haven’t made an arrest and are investigating the murder as a possible hate crime.

In the liner notes for Renaissance, Beyoncé [thanked her gay uncle](#) as the album’s “inspiration.” The album won the 2022 Grammy for Best Dance/Electronic Album, making her the first Black woman to win in that category. During her acceptance speech, [she said](#), “I’d like to thank the queer community for your love, and for inventing the genre. God bless you.”

Black and queer Twitter users honored Sibley and shared a link to a [GoFundMe campaign](#) raising funds for his burial. As of August 1, the campaign had raised \$29,696, well over its initial \$10,000 goal.

On the crowdfunding page, Sibley’s father Jake Kelly wrote, “O’shae not only was the glue to this family, he was a great dancer and performer for the majority of his life. His spirit lit up every room he stepped in. His smile was contagious! To know him, was to live him. He did not deserve this. Everyone loved his spirit.”

On Twitter, Brooklyn-based choreographer [@wenwinsituation](#) [wrote](#), “In 2016, I got to choreograph a piece that O’Shae Sibley was a part of. He had such a gentle soul, was so hardworking, and just a great energy to be around. The news of his murder is quite jarring. And all because a group of men didn’t like his dancing. it’s painful. RIP O’Shae.”

Amherst College English professor [@DrFrankRoberts](#) [wrote](#), “THEY KILLED HIM FOR VOGUING. he was 28 years young. i am completely undone with rage. you should be too. o’shae sibley: we speak your name.”

A queer cast member of the Bravo TV reality show Summer House: Martha’s Vineyard, Preston Mitchum [wrote](#), “A Black gay man was killed over an ‘altercation’ because a straight man wanted him to stop voguing.... Black queer joy is under attack, not masculinity. Be clear. Rest in Peace, O’Shae Sibley.”

Nonbinary public speaker Dana White [wrote](#), “O’Shae Sibley was stabbed to death for voguing to Beyonce. In New York City. His older gay neighbor told the Times he warned him about being so visible, saw the looks, heard disgruntled comments about ‘all the rights’ we have. In 2023, that’s how far we are from freedom.”

UPDATE: According to the Philadelphia Inquirer on Aug. 4, the suspect in Sibley’s murder has turned himself in and is in police custody.

BELOW: O’Shea Sibley dancing at the Ailey Extension dance school in Manhattan.





“Let them be their natural trans fabulous selves”:

D. Smith on telling trans sex workers’ stories

The director of the new documentary “Kokomo City” resists the victim narrative in this groundbreaking portrayal of Black trans strength.



With her new documentary *Kokomo City*, director D. Smith presents a rollicking, unexpected, and deeply affecting portrait of Black transgender sex workers. The film spotlights not only the women’s complicated experiences of sex work — from harrowing encounters with clients to the impact their work has had on their sense of selves — but also their experience of Black trans womanhood, their relationships with men, and their relationships with the broader Black community. But Smith, like her subjects — which include Daniella Carter, Liyah Mitchell, Dominique Silver, and the late Koko Da Doll, among others — resists the victim narrative. The film is clear-eyed about the circumstances (the lack of opportunities, transphobia, racism) that lead Black trans women to sex work. But it also showcases their unvarnished perspective, their humor, and their refusal to be reduced to tragic stereotypes.

Smith, a Grammy-winning music producer who has worked with Billy Porter, Lil Wayne, and André 3000, has said that she lost everything after coming out as trans. Earlier this year, [she told *Out in New Jersey*](#) that after the music industry rejected her, she was homeless for a time, sleeping on friends’ couches, and thinking about the lengths some trans women have to go just to survive. The result is *Kokomo City*, which had its world premiere at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival where it won both the NEXT Audience Award and the NEXT Innovator Award. This week, the film hits theaters in New York, expanding on August 4. Ahead of the release, *LGBTQ Nation* spoke to Smith about bringing these refreshing and timely stories to the screen.

LGBTQ Nation: I think we have to start by acknowledging and honoring Koko Da Doll, who appears in the film and was murdered in April. Has her death changed the way you think about the film, and what has it been like for you promoting and talking about the film in the wake of that tragedy?

D. Smith: Koko was an absolute vessel to make this film’s message even more urgent. Accepting and processing her death really elevated the purpose, and also it just made it more clear and evident why we need to protect trans women. It’s a very vulnerable state of living that they have to endure to survive.

LGBTQ Nation: The film opens with Liyah Mitchell telling what seems like a pretty scary story about an encounter with a client, but with humor and a kind of unbothered frankness, and the music and imagery in much of the film echo that tone. What were you hoping to convey with the film’s tone?

DS: Sometimes when people hear the stories of transgender trauma — a lot of these stories are statistics and numbers— we kind of just become noise. It was a style that I wanted to create. Yes, it was a dangerous story, but to have suspenseful music or even sad piano music, it’s like, it plays with the mind, in a kind of profound way.

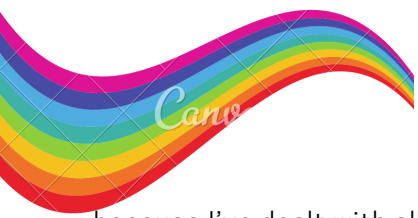
As creators, we should be allowed to do that no matter what story we’re telling. I was not going to confine myself, conform myself to any expectations and rules to create this film.

LGBTQ Nation: The range of perspectives in just this small group of women is really fascinating. What do you want people to understand about Black trans women’s experience of and relationship to sex work?

DS: So many times in transgender narratives, trans women are deemed the victims, but also the villains. We’re often villainized. Especially Black women. And what I wanted to just show, without the trans women having to be defensive or having to plead their argument, is to just let them be their natural transgender fabulous selves. And that’s why I really discouraged any makeup or any extra glam. Because I really wanted the truth to just be centered. I think that was a really impactful way to draw people into this narrative.

LGBTQ Nation: The film deals with so many issues, but one that I found particularly moving was how some of the women in the film talk about love and sexuality. What did you discover in your interviews about how sex work has shaped these women’s perspectives on that aspect of their lives?

DS: There is a moment when Koko mentions in the film, “This is why it’s so hard for me to love. This is why I don’t trust people. This is why I don’t trust men,



D SMITH CONTINUED



because I've dealt with all kinds of men and I know how they treat their wives and their girlfriends, and I know how filthy they can be." Or, you know, how emotionally unbalanced men can be because they're not accepting who they are. So, sometimes it really traumatizes trans women in terms of just really wanting to invest in a healthy, real relationship. A lot of times trans women – all trans women, not just sex workers — you just become alone, because it's very discouraging.

LGBTQ Nation: There is of course a movement in the U.S. advocating for the respect and dignity of sex workers and for decriminalization. Do you see your film as part of that movement? In conversation with it? Did it change your perspective on sex work in any way?

DS: I'm going to start with the latter part of that. It did change my perspective because I went in, like most people, with this pre-judged, pre-conceived notion about sex workers. Even strippers, dancers, you know? It's just how we were raised. It's our culture. It's very dehumanizing. But talking with these girls, even sitting with them before I filmed them really humbled my ego. I had to kind of change my approach a lot of times as a director. Because I kinda thought I was going to come in as the savior. In some ways I did. But, like anyone else, sitting with these women and talking to them, you really get to understand how deep and complex and yearning for love they are. At the end of the day, I don't care how strong they try to be, but we all, as humans, especially as women, we really need and want that validation.

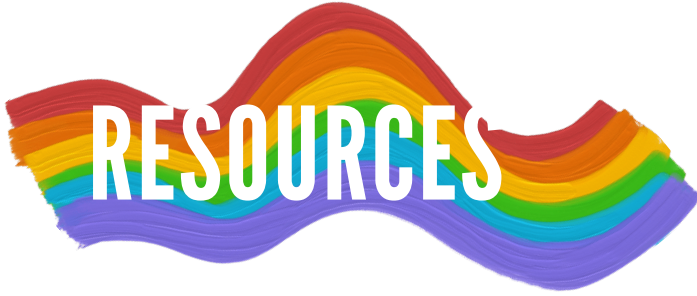
I didn't make the film to advocate for sex workers, to be honest with you. I did it for a broader conversation for Black people — that dichotomy between trans women and the Black community. This time, I really wanted to hone in on sex workers because they're not the ones normally with the podium and the microphone. That was my reason for using them as opposed to the trans girls with the agents and the PR. But, obviously I hope that it trickles down — or up — to help that cause. I do support sex workers. I don't encourage it. I do want other options to be presented to trans women.

LGBTQ Nation: You also devote a significant amount of time to the women discussing and parsing cis men's — and particularly Black cis men's — attraction to trans women. Why was it important to deal with that and what do you hope people will take away from those discussions?

DS: This is part of why I had the guys in the film. Because we more than often see Black men being shamed out of coming forward or coming out. We see them running out of hotel rooms. It's like the most disgraceful, dishonorable thing. I was so excited to have men come into this film voluntarily, with authority, confidence, and assurance, and complete comfort in saying, "You know what? These are women. These are my people. I've got trans friends. I'm in love with a trans girl. I'm here to support trans women even though I'm not into them." There's a various amount of reasons why these men wanted to be a part of the film. So, it was important that I show that portrayal of Black men stepping up.

At the end of the day, trans people are wonderful people, but we're not perfect. And we shouldn't be treated like we're above anyone else. I do love the fact that trans women are being shown in a humanized way. Not a super-humanized way that is intangible, or like dirt. We're treated in these films like humans. And so, to see more of that would be a step forward.

On my part, as a trans woman, I want to do more than tell trans stories. As a trans woman, it wouldn't be fair for me to have to stick to that. Right now I'm working on another film that's completely opposite, but still, it deals with cultural relevance. But...to be honest with you, we will have to see. I think the more we talk, we should probably call more of these powers-that-be out by way of not just letting us shine during Pride Month. That's still a form of segregation, to me. Why are we on the cover of Vogue's LGBT issue? Why is it Netflix's LGBT department? It's very degrading, to me. It's very segregating. We still have so far to go, but I do feel like there's a light that's shining on the transgender, queer narrative. And we gotta f**king double down and keep it moving.



**Reach us at:
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LEGAL/ADVOCACY

NEWSLETTER

RESEARCH

Lambda Legal
C/O Help Desk
4221 Wilshire Blvd
Los Angeles, CA 90010

Missouri - Cure
P.O. Box 411794
Kansas City, Mo 64141
Chair Person: Kathy Franklin

Liberation Lit (inquire for free books)
P.O. Box 45071
Kansas City, MO 64171

ACLU
906 Olive St., Suite 1130
St. Louis, Mo. 63101

LAGAI (Ultraviolet)
3543 18th St #26
San Francisco, CA 94110

Library of Congress
101 Independence Ave. S.E.
Washington, DC 20540-4660

Missouri Protection and Advocacy Services
925 S. Country Club Dr.
Jeff City, Mo. 66109-4510

Black and Pink
6223 Maple St., #4600
Omaha NE 68104

Centurion
1400 Edgewood Drive
Jefferson City, Mo. 63109

Transgender Law Center
P.O. Box 70976
Oakland, CA 94612

Prison Health News
4722 Baltimore Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19143



National Center for Transgender Equality
1032 15th St NW
Suite # 199
Washington, D.C. 20005

Slingshot (quarterly radical newspaper)
3124 Shattuck Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94705



GLAAD
18 Tremont St Suite # 950
Boston, MA 02108

Prisoner Express (twice a year)
Prisoner Express
PO Box #6556
Ithaca, NY 14851



TGI Justice Project
370 Turk St # 370
San Francisco, CA 94102

LEGAL/ADVOCACY



Southern Poverty Law Center
400 Washington Ave.
Montgomery, AL. 36104

The Midwest Innocence Project
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