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June 2017; Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project Minutes

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Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project
Meeting Minutes
June 1, 2017

Dramatis Personae: Nissa, Erin, Brigitte, Ana, Phoenix, Liz, Marielle, Adrienne

In This Issue:

1. Updates on the trans film project.
2. Reporting back on the Queer Places, Practices, and Lives Conference
3. Revising the structure of the History Project.
4. Report from the POC Committee.
5. One-on-ones: What are they, and how should we be using them?
6. Update on Anne Balay speaker event.
7. Fundraising.

Trans Film Project:

On Sunday, May 6, members of the Trans Committee interviewed Ebony Johnson, who started Buffalo's ballroom scene, for our film project. We debriefed this interview in the meeting:

- Ebony was a fantastic interviewee--which should be no surprise to anyone who came to our event in February. She is a consummate storyteller, and she anticipated several of Marielle's questions before Marielle even had the chance to ask them.
- Whereas previously, we did lengthy, oral history interviews with our subjects, Isabel is pushing us to interview our subjects in a manner that is more friendly to the process of directing and editing a film. This means paring our long list of questions down to about 5-7 questions, and aiming for about 35 minutes of interview, maximum (with the understanding that even those 35 minutes will be probably edited down to 7 minutes for the final cut). This new format works well--Marielle reports that Ebony felt very happy with the final interview, as it was quick, and not too invasive.
- Following previous discussions about whether or not we should be compensating our interviewees from now on, we have decided to go with gift cards in small amounts. In Ebony's case, we offered her a Tops gift card, and she was happy with that.
- One thing that came up in this particular interview: Ebony revealed some personal information that, although she seemed perfectly happy to talk about it at the time, she later told Ana should not appear on social media. Having our subjects sign a release form is not the end of protecting their privacy. We need to make sure we're checking in with them every step of the way, and that they're comfortable at all times with how much we're revealing of their lives. Specifically, we need to be attuned to the possibility that someone may say something in their interviews that they later don't

want released. In Ebony's particular case, it is easy enough to keep her personal information off social media, but we'll need to check in with her again before we use any of her footage elsewhere.

- Raqs Solidarity, where we filmed the interview, is visually beautiful, but it's probably not an ideal filming set for the future because of the traffic on Amherst Street. Adrienne reports that you can hear some of the traffic in the recorded interview.

Here are our next steps for continuing the film project:

- Liz suggests that our next step should be editing together something like a trailer that can go online. A trailer might attract more participants, and it will surely help trans folks who are interested but apprehensive about participating to better understand what we're trying to accomplish.
- Editing, on the other hand, takes A LOT of time, and we don't want to singlehandedly condemn Isabel to hours of sitting alone in front of a computer. It might be helpful if more of us could learn the skill of editing, so Isabel isn't caught doing that alone. Liz will therefore talk to Isabel about putting together an editing workshop.
- As far as upcoming interviews go: Camille expressed an interest in doing her interview mid-June, and Ari is ready to go with one of her interview subjects. Adrienne will talk to both about setting up a date. We'll need to plan multiple weeks in advance, so Ana can reserve filming equipment.

Queer Places, Practices, and Lives Conference:

Last month, from May 11-14, Ohio State University hosted the Queer Places, Practices, and Lives Conference--something they do every two years. Liz, Brigitte, Ana, and Adrienne attended the conference to present on the History Project, and to learn a little more about what's happening elsewhere in queer activism/scholarship. Here's what they reported:

- There are opportunities for us to connect with other local history projects and create larger scholar/activist networks. And we can, and SHOULD, seize upon them.
- The conference was generous enough to welcome a group of grassroots activists to what was, for the most part, a scholarly conference. But the use of academic jargon meant that many of the other presentations were not accessible to people without advanced degrees. In all that we do, we should make sure our language and events are as accessible to as wide a range of people as possible.
- On the second day of the conference, the keynote speaker was Miss Major. And she brought two younger Black trans women from Columbus on stage with her, and they spent several hours calling everybody out, and it was DELIGHTFUL. Before the

calling out happened, we all viewed a documentary starring Miss Major which made literally everybody in the auditorium cry.

Next Steps: Watching the Miss Major documentary has revived the group's interest in putting on a documentary film series. We might even be able to do it on the cheap: we know that No Labels is interested in screening some films, and if we use Nissa's projector and Adrienne's screen, we might be able to make it an outdoor film series!

Phoenix has started a channel in Slack where we can plan this further. If you're not on our Slack, but want to be, please let Phoenix know, and they'll hook you up.

Revising the Structure of the History Project:

A few months ago, group members began talking about how to change the structure of the History Project, in response to a chronic problem with people failing to follow through on activities they had committed to completing. At the time, Liz and Sylvia presented a group Code of Conduct, and while many agreed that this project needs more structure, several members felt that the Code of Conduct offered a vision of the History Project that was too hierarchical, and in which people's expected roles were too rigid.

For the last month, therefore, Liz has been working with Phoenix, who has a background in anarchist organizing, to create a proposed structure for the group that is looser and less hierarchical. Their proposed structure differs from the previous proposal in the following ways:

- Rather than a Code of Conduct, it offers Points of Unity.
- Its focus is on establishing lines of communication rather than fixed roles.
- It rewrites the Mission Statement to be more action-oriented, and defines the History Project as a radical activism group.

We spent some time in the meeting going over the proposed Points of Unity. In general, those present liked them, but felt it would be more productive to go over the written document in more detail between meetings and discuss it more next month. The Points of Unity and revised Mission Statement are on a Google doc that has been put in our Slack, and we ask members to examine, and possibly revise, them between now and next meeting.

Eventually, our discussion about how to structure the group turned into a discussion about how to structure meetings. Here are some of the suggestions people made:

- Marielle: New members often find meetings hard to follow. Perhaps we should start meetings with bullet points updating new folks on what's going on--or at least distribute a handout with that information.

- Liz: Why don't we start the first 15 minutes of every meeting sharing cool local history stuff?
- Adrienne: Often finds herself scrambling to put together meeting agendas at the last minute, and would love for the agenda-assembling process to be more collaborative.

Next Steps: We will spend some time on Slack this month talking about how to change meeting formats.

Report from the POC Committee:

The POC Committee had a meeting at the end of May, where they decided they would be partnering with the MOCHA Center for some future projects. In the short term: the MOCHA Center is having an art showcase on June 3 as part of Pride Weekend, and our very own Marielle will be hosting in character as Angela Davis! So you should most definitely come and support her.

In the long term: the committee wants to do an oral history sound booth project, akin to Storycorps, focused on LGBTQ people of color. Eventually, they would like to share these stories with the public, in an exhibit that pairs stories with participants' personal artifacts. They estimate that this will take 12-18 months to realize. When asked how the committee would like the larger History Project to assist them, Marielle replied that their greatest area of need is with technical knowhow--sharing group members' experience with recording.

One-on-ones: What are they, and how should we be using them?

During the meeting, Marielle gave us a crash course in one-on-ones--something she encourages members of the group to do in order to recruit and retain new members. In essence: one-on-ones are meetings in which one member of the History Project talks (or more accurately, listens) to a new or prospective member, in order to get to know them, and get a feel for what this project might mean to them. This helps retain new members because they feel personally connected to the larger project; and by understanding individual people's skills and motivations, we can plug them into a part of the project that is likely to interest them.

People who are interested in learning more about how to do one-on-ones can get more information from Marielle, Phoenix, and Nissa, who have been trained to conduct them. A number of local organizations also offer group one-on-one trainings, and Marielle will let us know when the next one comes up. In the meantime, we will begin a discussion on--you guessed it!--Slack, to talk about who we should prioritize setting up one-on-ones with.

Update on Anne Balay Speaker Event:

In the last month, Adrienne has talked to two people about collaborating on this speaker event. The first was Rebecca Newberry of Clean Air Coalition, who is enthusiastic about the project, but who gave the (sad, but ultimately positive because realistic) evaluation that unions are often closed off to outsiders, and that developing relationships with unions takes a great deal of time. We can develop those relationships, and Rebecca is happy to help us with that process, but it will take multiple years to do so. If we want to get this event off the ground more quickly, we might want to figure out a different audience to target.

The second person, Susan Woods, is loosely affiliated with AFL-CIO's Pride @ Work. (Side note: No, there is no Buffalo branch of Pride @ Work. But Rochester has a pretty active branch. Their leader, Bess White, introduced Adrienne to Susan, who has been trying to get a Buffalo branch together for some years.) Adrienne and Susan met last week. The plan is this: Susan will start talking to some of the folks she knows, who are affiliated with unions like United Steelworkers. Adrienne, meanwhile, will start making contact with other folks who might be interested in the intersection of LGBTQ rights and workers' rights, but who are not necessarily affiliated with unions: faith groups, the Historical Society, associated nonprofits, folks who are both university and union affiliated. Out of that, we will hopefully have a coalition of supporters and sponsors, ideally by summer's end.

In more immediate news: Pride @ Work has agreed to let the History Project share their table at the Dyke March. Although they will be there at 2:30, History Project members agreed that it was most important to table after the march ends. Adrienne and Ana will definitely be tabling, but please feel free to join/relieve them on Saturday afternoon.

Fundraising:

Ana closed out the meeting with a discussion about fundraising, building on a discussion she began via Slack and a Google doc in May. The bottom line: many of the projects we do or want to do, including filming trans activists and a Storycorps-esque interview booth, cost money, and we are spending money faster than we can raise it. We have, in the past, discussed some haphazard fundraising techniques, such as benefit concerts or documentary screenings; but we need to have a more structured fundraising plan. This includes not only how we raise money, but revisiting whether we should become a 501c3 (or whether a 501c3 might sponsor us, or whether we should pursue an alternate legal/tax structure); and if we *do* do this, how we manage this institutional relationship while maintaining our integrity.

As a next step, Nissa suggested the following: that we establish a specific committee of people who focus on fundraising; and that every event we create must have at least one person from the fundraising committee as a primary planner.

So far, Nissa, Adrienne, and Liz have agreed to be part of this committee, but we invite other project members to join it. We are starting a conversation on Slack, under #fundraising.

