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January 2017; Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project Minutes

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Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project
Meeting Minutes
Jan. 25, 2017

Dramatis Personae: Adrienne, Phoenix, Brigitte, Marielle, Carolyn, Ana

POC Committee Hosts an Event on Buffalo Ballroom Culture Feb. 11

I usually put committee stuff at the end of the minutes, but this is so important it has to go first. Our POC Committee, led by the amazing Marielle, is going to host an event on Buffalo's ballroom/vogueing culture to commemorate Black History Month.

The details:

- Feb. 11, Sugar City, at 7 or 7:30 p.m.
- Sliding scale admission--suggested donation of \$5; pay what you can; no one turned away for lack of funds.
- Will include: an ongoing video loop of past Buffalo vogueing performances, a speech/presentation by a current house mother, and live performers.

There are MANY ways you can help make this event a success! They include:

- **Volunteer at Sugar City.** Sugar City is giving us their venue in exchange for volunteer labor, rather than money. They ask that the group contribute 5 hours of volunteering for every hour we have the venue.
- **Look through vogueing videos.** As Marielle explained to the rest of the group, there are A LOT of videos of Buffalo vogueing performances from throughout the years on YouTube, but they tend to be whole shows. She wants the beginning and end of the shows to be a continuous loop of the most eye-catching performances from these videos. In order to help make the loop happen, she needs people who are willing to: 1) look through some of the videos that Marielle has compiled, 2) watch them for particularly eye-catching performances, 3) mark down the beginning and end time of those eye-catching performances, and 4) pass the information on to Chris, who has graciously agreed to edit together the video loop. We need this all done BEFORE FRIDAY, FEB. 3, so if you are interested, please contact Marielle NOW.
- **Distribute posters, once they have been made.** Ana has agreed to make a poster for the event. Those should be ready next week, and available at No Labels. Please volunteer to take a few and distribute them to places.

For those of you who have already volunteered to do stuff, here is your gentle reminder to do it:

- **Adrienne:** Arrange volunteer time with Marielle and Sugar City; make copies of poster and take to No Labels; distribute posters when ready.
- **Chris:** Edit together photo loop.
- **Marielle:** Send images and info about event to Ana ASAP; send info about vogueing videos to Carolyn.
- **Ana:** Make poster for event.

- **Carolyn:** Look through videos of voguing videos; send info about performances on to Chris.
- **EVERYONE:** Take performers out for drinks afterwards.

Finally: Everyone stay tuned for the next POC Committee meeting, which will probably take place **NEXT WEEK**, to finalize details for the meeting. We would like to see **EVERYONE** from the History Project, not just those actively involved with the POC Committee, acting as donation takers, concession vendors, venue preparers, etc. at the actual event.

Archive Digitization Project: How's it Going?

In the past month, the History Project has held two meetings that had to do with our archive digitization project.

The first took place on **Dec. 30** at Adrienne and Ana's house. There, Brigitte, with the help of a worksheet drawn up by Hope, taught us how to scan archival material: the resolution at which we should scan them, how to properly name materials once scanned, etc. Nissa allowed the group access to her OneDrive account, which is where all the materials are being kept and logged.

At that session, Carol Speser was gracious enough to share some of her materials with us, and to give us some explanatory context for those materials. She also brought up some issues of ownership with us. For instance, if someone lets us digitize their archive, does that mean we own it? Or does the donor own the materials, with the understanding that we are the stewards of the digital archive, unless and until the donor decides to take the archives back? How will we ensure that the donor has their own copy of digitized material? What are our stipulations for how others, reading the material online, can use the archives? Our overall decision here is that the donor will be considered the owner of the digitized archives, and that unless otherwise indicated, materials will be held under a [Creative Commons Attribution License](#). But we recognize that individual donors will have individual concerns and stipulations? To that end, Liz has been working on a release form for donors of archival material, based on the release form the Trans Committee uses to film oral history interviews.

Our second meeting--and our first actual Party in the Archives!--took place on **Jan. 14** at Camille's house. On that particular day, we didn't delve much into Camille's paper archives. Instead, she showed us a number of tapes and DVDs that traced her appearances on local media, and her emergence as a trans activist. A few days later, Liz, Adrienne, and Ana went to Camille's place, and obtained a box of her archival materials. Camille has requested that we return her materials by **March 16**, so we really need help scanning those.

People who have been trained in scanning: Adrienne, Ana, Brigitte, Liz, Camille, Nissa, and Chris. If your name is on this list, please feel free to check out some archival material for scanning at Adrienne and Ana's house. We ask that you give back whatever you have within a week.

People who have NOT been trained in scanning: It's not too late for you to join the club! Here's how it's going to work: In the next week or so, Brigitte is going to create a training

guide to walk you through the process. Carolyn has agreed to be Brigitte's guinea pig for the training guide. If she can follow it on her own without any help, we can start distributing guides to you, and you can get scanning. If she CAN'T follow it on her own, we will set up another in-person training session.

Once we get more material scanned, the next steps will be to edit it, and then affix metadata to it, before finally getting it up (with captions and other guides) on our website.

So, here's the list of things people have committed to do:

- **Phoenix:** Talk to Brigitte and Hope about how to use their background in computer science to extend and improve the project. Possibilities: create a server for us, improve the metadata-adding process.
- **Brigitte:** Make a training packet and distribute to Carolyn; talk to Phoenix about how they can contribute to the project.
- **Carolyn:** Try to work through Brigitte's training packet.
- **Adrienne:** Figure out a less haphazard system for organizing archival material.
- **All The People:** Scan!

Code of Conduct

During the Dec. 30 scanning party, the group unearthed (read: Carol showed us) a Code of Behavior that was written for the Buffalo Gay and Lesbian Community Network, probably sometime in the late 1980s. Liz was inspired by it, and wrote a Code of Conduct for the History Project. Adrienne will post the draft to the Facebook group shortly, so that we can discuss whether we like it, what we may want to change about it, and whether we wish to have a Code of Conduct. Liz was unable to attend this meeting to talk about her proposed code further, so likely this will get more airtime in our February meeting.

Anne Balay Speaker Event

As we round the bend to February, it doesn't look like we'll be getting [Anne Balay](#) into town within the month. We are still, however, committed to bringing her into town.

A quick review of our goals with this event: we want to create a space for Anne to talk about her book, *Steel Closets*, and her broader work with LGBTQ union workers. We also want to:

- Invite local LGBTQ union workers to share their own stories--to compare and contrast local stories of queerness, class, and labor with those Anne shares in her work.
- Create an event in a space, and with a sensibility, that appeals to a variety of people: LGBTQ activists (of all class backgrounds), organized workers (of all gender identities and sexual orientations), labor activists, academics, and the general public.
- Partner with organizations who can help us figure out what such an event would look like.
- Partner with organizations who can help us raise a generous honorarium for Anne. Anne, for her part, has not given us a specific price quote; she has told us to figure

out what we can offer, and get back to her. But she's an adjunct, so we'd like to pay her generously.

For the past three weeks, it has been on Adrienne's to-do list to create a list of possible partners, and then to contact them and ask if they are interested in collaboration. She hasn't gotten very far with this list. So far, Kirk Laubenstein of the Coalition for Economic Justice (CEJ) has expressed interest in collaboration, but hasn't specified the form his interest would take. The Buffalo Dyke March has given us a firm maybe. Ana also reminded the group that the Leslie Lohman LGBTQ Museum at UB is interested, as well as the Disability Studies Center, but they would want Anne to do some sort of event/presentation on campus in exchange for any financial help.

Beyond that, Adrienne has been busy with a new job, and thus unable to give the list of partners the time it needs. She is therefore asking for people to help add potential partners to the list, and then to contact these partners, just to get a preliminary statement of dis/interest in collaborating with the event.

So far, **Ana** and **Carolyn** have agreed to help out with this list. But we need more. Also, here is a list of possible additional collaborators we brainstormed during the meeting:

- Ruth Goldman, professor at Buff State. Does screenings, and could also connect us with campus teachers' union.
- Nickel City Housing Co-Op.
- Dreamland is putting together a Sunday Salon speaker series. Anne Balay might be a good candidate for that.
- Pride @ Work is an LGBTQ group affiliated with the AFL-CIO. Rumor has it that there is a local group, but that contact info is nowhere to be found on the Internet.
- *Workers' World*.
- Liberty Union Progressives.
- Democratic Socialists of America.
- Burning Books.
- Ellie Dorritie and her organization.
- Evergreen Health Services.
- Brigitte's friend who works for a labor union.
- The Foundry--possible venue?

Keep that list of collaborators coming! We could definitely use more potential collaborators in the labor community.

LGBTQ Refugee Project

In our December meeting, Brigitte, who teaches English to refugees at the Catholic Charities building on Herkimer Street, expressed some reservations about simply putting the call out to LGBTQ refugees to be interviewed, and suggested that we make connections to refugee communities (and LGBTQ people within them) more obliquely--for example, by hosting an art show.

In the past month, Brigitte has spoken to her boss, Doreen, about our ideas. Doreen agrees that LGBTQ refugees risk ostracism in their communities if they come out, and that asking them to simply be interviewed is dicey. But she did think that collaborating on a refugee art show was a great idea for casting a wide net and opening lines of communication between the refugee and LGBTQ communities--with the hope that space will be created further down the line for people who belong to both communities. Brigitte also talked to Heather Gring, who works at the Burchfield-Penney, and she is super into the idea of hosting an art project there--possibly sometime in the spring.

Other members of the group agreed with Brigitte's assessment, and thought that hosting an art show would be a good way to open up lines of communication between LGBTQ and refugee communities. Carolyn said that the art show would be a good way to express solidarity and create relationships that aren't transactional in nature: "I just want people to know that they're welcome, and they don't owe us anything." Marielle thought that in the current political environment, and in a local context where refugees have reported a lot of negative encounters with police, we should be wary of any act that appeared to demand stories from refugees, and should instead host an event that invited forms of expression.

The next step for the project, then, is to talk with Doreen and Heather in more detail about what the event should look like, and start working through details. **Brigitte** will arrange that meeting.

Should the History Project Pursue 501c3 Status?

One question that has been sort of at the edges of the work the History Project does for the past several months has been: should we pursue 501c3 status and become an official nonprofit organization?

Becoming a nonprofit isn't crucial for doing the work we do. Not all social justice groups pursue 501c3s. For instance, Movimiento Cosecha, who has been advocating for the #Buffalo25, chooses not to become a 501c3. Nor is Spectrum. On the other hand, several of the LGBTQ elders with whom we work have recommended getting our 501c3, and there are several advantages--primarily financial--associated with the status. (Then again, there are many disadvantages that might arise from getting a 501c3, as well.)

Admittedly, we have not done any extensive research on getting a 501c3. But these appear to be the pros and cons of becoming a nonprofit:

Pros:

- People might be more willing to donate to our organization if they can get a tax exemption for doing so.
- We can apply for grants.
- The respectability factor--some groups and LGBTQ elders in the region might be more inclined to respect and work with us if we had some sort of official status.
- Basically, money. Right now, we don't have enough money to do all the filming, public events, etc. that we want to do. We often have to seek out the sponsorship of

other organizations, and we don't want other organizations to see us as a parasite, or a drain on their resources.

Cons:

- Applying for a 501c3 is EXPENSIVE. (When Liz and Adrienne tried to price it out for a grant application, they estimated it would cost \$600--and that's a low estimate.)
- We believe (though we need to do some more research) that becoming a nonprofit requires us to structure our organization in a specific way. At the very least, we would need to assemble a Board of Directors. Do we want to compromise our freedom to structure our organization in a manner that makes sense to us?
- Applying for grants means being beholden to the desires, ideologies, and whims of funders. What happens when our sense of what constitutes a worthwhile projects clashes with the wants of wealthy, privileged funders?
- Applying for a specific tax status means getting embroiled with the state. Do we want to do that under the Trump administration?

As a group, we also generated a number of other questions that we might consider and research before making a decision on this front:

- Is a 501c3 the only entity we can become? Are there other paths we might pursue? (**Phoenix** suggested looking at art collectives as a possible alternative model.)
- How complicated is the process of becoming a 501c3? Do we want to exert the time and energy necessary to undergo that process?
- **Carolyn** brought up the concern that if we become a 501c3, raising money, and not preserving local LGBTQ histories, will become our #1 raison d'être. She also refuted the idea that not having a lot of money necessarily makes us a drain on other organizations. Carolyn reminded the group that reciprocity with other organizations can take other forms, such as volunteer labor and promotion.
- **Ana** pointed out that when Adrienne, Camille, and she went to visit Madeline Davis to plan the *Swimming with Lesbians* screening, Madeline said she thought that the Madeline Davis GLBT Archives were still a 501c3, and that we could operate under the auspices of that organization for a while. We would need to find out whether the nonprofit Madeline founded to support the archives before they were taken to Buff State were still considered a valid entity, and find out a bit more about what it means to be an organization operating under the sponsorship of a more established nonprofit organization.

Although these are points to be considered later on, when we take up this question in earnest, the general consensus at the meeting is that we don't really want to pursue the 501c3 question right now. As Phoenix summarized: "We don't seem to have the nexus of momentum, enthusiasm, or commitment to labor hours" that researching 501c3 status would require. Nor do we particularly want to focus our energy on raising funds to file for 501c3 status right now, while we are working on so many other projects.

Group Consensus: We will table this question for now, and revisit it in April, to decide whether we want actively research obtaining 501c3 (or perhaps some sort of alternative) status.

Fundraising Opportunities:

At this point, our meeting time was drawing to a close, so we didn't spend a whole lot of time talking about this topic. Here, however, are some fundraising opportunities that linger on the horizon:

- **Punch a Nazi for Freedom and Justice:** On Feb. 2, No Labels is starting a monthly film series titled Punch a Nazi for Freedom and Justice, where they screen action films and offer concessions, and all admissions fees go to a local organization. The History Project will be the beneficiary of their very first screening! The screening is on Feb. 2 at 8 p.m. Come, and bring everyone you know!
- **DIY Shows?** Our very own **Chris** has their own PA system, and has mentioned the possibility of putting together some sort of DIY show for us. Follow-up is necessary, but **Phoenix**, who knows some local bands who might perform for us, is interested in possibly collaborating with Chris on this. Adrienne will put the two of them in contact.

NEXT MEETING: Thursday, Feb. 23, 6 p.m.
Location TBA