



ATL-BASED SISSIES WITH AN EYE ON
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THE LGBTQ MOVEMENT HAS A WHITE SUPREMACY PROBLEM

Jul 10 - Written By [Tatiana Durant](#) & [Gregory Samantha Rosenthal](#)





PHOTO: DAVID HUNGATE OF THE *ROANOKE TIMES*

Pride month is over and it's time to check in: where do things stand with the LGBTQ movement and the ongoing work of anti-racism and combating white supremacy?

We are a Black non-binary person and a white queer trans woman, respectively. We recently met in the national uprising against police violence. Our activism has unfolded in the small city of Roanoke, Virginia during the course of Pride month. This has led us to think about how our queer identities are always conditioned by race:

Samantha:

As a white queer trans woman, I am still learning just how much race shapes my queerness and my transness. Yet I live in a part of the country



—in a small Southern city on the edge of Appalachia—where the benefits of claiming white womanhood are crystal clear.

Several months ago, I was stopped by a police officer on a rural highway. As he ran my license and registration, I thought of Sandra Bland, a Black woman pulled over by the police in 2015 for failure to use a turn signal. She later died under mysterious circumstances in a jail cell. I thought of Muhlyasia Booker, a Black trans woman, who ten months before my own encounter with the police was yanked from her car and viciously beaten by a transphobic mob in Dallas, Texas. Black motorists have long known the dangers of “driving while Black.” But for me, as long as I lean into my whiteness and my femininity (not too much, not campy, just demure and polite) I know that I will be safe from violence. This performance of white womanhood is a privilege that I routinely use as a white trans person to keep me safe. While I often hear white trans folks talk about “passing” privilege, i.e. passing as cis, it is even more important that we talk about our whiteness.



Tatiana:

I am a Virginian. I am Black with a white mother. I am non-binary with effeminate features. I am conscious of consistently being on the precipice of privilege. I could, as many mixed-race people choose to do, reject my Blackness. It is at times admittedly easier to allow people to label me as a woman rather than trans. My privilege is that my identity is conflated with whiteness and womanhood. My survival depends on this oversimplification and my ability to appeal to white supremacist, heteronormative, patriarchal structures that fester inside of me until I, like the rest of the world, might explode. This June, as Black people cried out for justice all over the world, it was more apparent to me than ever that Pride is not felt equally in the LGBTQ community.

Like many queer and trans Black people, I am unsure where I belong. I often feel I have to choose between my transness and my Blackness.

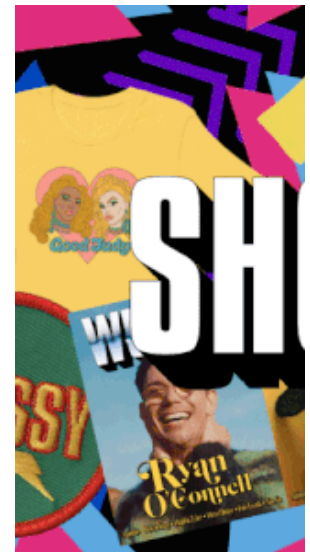


I use my privilege and my voice to empower those who suffer more than myself. I am consistently isolated by LGBTQ and feminist movements that disregard intersectionality with ideologies supposedly outside of race. When it comes to Black liberation I hesitate to broadcast my trans identity. Sometimes I fear that laying my work at the mercy of society's transphobia and anti-Blackness will harm the progress I am working to achieve. It is in these moments, when my Black comrades are just as disempowered to take a stand as I am, that I genuinely wonder if white LGBTQ allies will show up in defense of me.

In the South, LGBTQ organizations and spaces historically emerged in the leftover spaces of Jim Crow-era segregation. Gay male narrators in [a local oral history project](#) remember Roanoke's first gay bar as an all-white space in the 1960s. Roanoke's historic gay neighborhood, Old Southwest, was nearly 99 percent white in the early 1970s. [Decades of gay and lesbian newsletters](#) published since the 1970s in Roanoke almost never discussed issues of race. We live with the legacies of this history—of movements and spaces made “gay” but never actually made for Black people.

Black Queer people, especially Black trans women, are disproportionately vulnerable to the violence wrought by systemic racism and overpolicing, and in most cases their white LGBTQ allies have done little to use their privileges to protect Black queer lives.

Over the past month many LGBTQ organizations have spoken up in solidarity with Black Lives Matter. But solidarity is the wrong framework. Solidarity assumes that LGBTQ people are allies to (and thus separate from) the Movement for Black Lives. The reality is that these movements are intimately intertwined. White LGBTQ people are complicit in the very systems of white supremacy that harm Black LGBTQ people. Solidarity assumes a mythical distance between queer liberation and Black



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liberation and erases the very existence of Black LGBTQ people within queer spaces. Rather than solidarity, LGBTQ groups must adopt an intersectional lens that acknowledges how white supremacy operates within our communities. We must affirm that systemic racism is an LGBTQ issue just as much as it is a Black issue.

Black queer women have been saying this for decades. The Combahee River Collective released [a manifesto](#) in the 1970s on how Black queer women experience the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. They laid out the political implications of this understanding for supporting and challenging Black, feminist, and gay movements. During the 1960s and '70s, scholar, activist, and lesbian [Angela Davis](#) transformed abolition to target the country's punitive justice system as a continuation of slavery—a principle which the Black Lives Matter Movement holds at its core. Audre Lorde, in her essay "[The Uses of Anger](#)," writes of how well meaning white women often become defensive when Black women suggest that their womanhood is always racialized. White LGBTQ people similarly get defensive when told that their queerness and transness is racialized. Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, three Black queer women, founded the Black Lives Matter movement with [an explicit call for supporting and uplifting Black queer and trans lives](#). White LGBTQ people who think that race is not an LGBTQ issue need to at least start by acknowledging and learning this history.

White queer people can also do so much more. White LGBTQ people need to hold other white queer folks accountable and discuss the racial privileges inherent in their identities. There are structured spaces for doing this work without burdening queer people of color: join a SURJ ([Showing Up for Racial Justice](#)) chapter or get involved with SONG ([Southerners on New Ground](#)) whose "[Race Traitors](#)" workshop is particularly geared toward white queer people committed to anti-racism. White-majority LGBTQ organizations also need to make more explicit acknowledgement and analysis of their own racist pasts and the steps they will take to cut off the arteries of those legacies. White-majority

LGBTQ organizations must redistribute resources into the hands of Black queer and trans people, and hire Black LGBTQ people to lead their organizations. Without doing this work, the LGBTQ community further cultivates the harm of white supremacy. Finally, anti-racism should be an integral component of the mission of all LGBTQ organizations. These are not new ideas, but they represent new work for many small and regional LGBTQ organizations across the South.

Just as the feminist movement is still reckoning with its ugly history of centering white womanhood as a universal womanhood, the LGBTQ movement must also acknowledge the ways in which it has long articulated gender and sexuality-based oppression as universal while erasing distinctions of race and class. The mainstream LGBTQ community often defines identity within the same parameters as western, white supremacist society, neglecting how gender and sexuality manifest in unique ways in non-white communities and in pre- and post-colonial cultures. The language of LGBTQ people as a “minority” is extremely problematic without an intersectional approach to how white LGBTQ people experience marginalization in ways always mediated by their whiteness. Both oppression and privilege are nuanced. Just as Black LGBTQ people are more vulnerable to the harm inflicted by white supremacy, white LGBTQ people benefit from it. Solutions such as solidarity or diversity and inclusivity still center whiteness as the default, and for true healing and progress in the LGBTQ community to occur, the perspectives of Black queer people must be at the forefront when it comes to defining the future of LGBTQ communities.

Black LGBTQ people are leading the way. Yet the work of white queer folks confronting their own racism is still raw and nascent and fifty years too late. Now that Pride month is over, let us commit ourselves to doing this important work for the next eleven months and beyond.

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WHITE SUPREMACY – BLACK – NO JUSTICE NO PEACE – GREGORY SAMANTHA ROSENTHAL – TATIANA DURANT – ROANOKE –
BLM – LGBTQ – COMMUNITY – PRIDE – QUEER – MOVEMENT – SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA – PROTEST



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