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## Black Pride Events Save LGBTQ+ Lives. Now What?

TAYLOR CRUMPTON

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Twenty-nine years ago in Washington, D.C., Ernest Hopkins, Theodore Kirkland, and Welmore Cook organized the “first Black PRIDE.” It was held on Memorial Day weekend in tribute to the Club House, a social club that, over its 15-year tenure, became a pillar of the Black LGBTQ+ community. Funds from that first PRIDE event were distributed to local AIDS and HIV organizations that provided services for members of the Black LGBTQ+ community, which was — and continues to be — disproportionately impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

In recent years, many in the LGBTQ+ community have expressed their dismay that PRIDE is a predominantly white-centered event, known for both its affiliation with corporations and significant police presence. But, Black PRIDE is a counter to that, and it has maintained its tradition of uplifting physical spaces that affirm and empower one’s Black and LGBTQ+ identity. It’s more than an opportunity for the Black LGBTQ+ community to enjoy each other; it’s a celebratory reminder of their existence, and a means for community members to learn about access to medicine, housing, economic development, as well as ways to address homophobia in the Black community.

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in alignment with government shelter in place orders, while finding new ways to provide critical healthcare resources to a community that's at [high-risk](#) because of their lived experience of being Black and LGBTQ+.

But now, perhaps when it's needed the most, the [coronavirus pandemic](#) threatens the existence of Black PRIDE. Out of 25 Black PRIDE organizations partnered with Center for Black Equity — a national nonprofit focused on the mentorship and fostering of resources for Black PRIDE organizations in the United States — [eight have cancelled](#)

community members isolated at home. Some new platforms have been formed to create virtual PRIDE experiences. One called [Black In Space](#), for instance, is hosting a five-day online festival to bridge the generational gap between members of the Black LGBTQ+ community. Proceeds from the event will benefit [Black Lives Matter D.C.](#)

“As a Black PRIDE organization in Cincinnati, our responsibility is to serve our population while keeping in mind the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on marginalized communities, Black folk, Queer folk, and poor folk,” Tim’ m West, co-founder and director of Cincy Black PRIDE told R29Unbothered. When COVID-19 hit in the United States, Cincy Black PRIDE drew inspiration from Bill T. Jones’ [Still/Here](#), a critically acclaimed dance inspired by the choreographer’s HIV status and his partner’s death from AIDS, for this year’s theme “Still Here.”

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“As a long-term survivor myself, I’ve always liked the idea of ‘Still Here’ as a testament to our resilience as a community of Black folk, and Black queer folk,” West said.

On June 17, Cincy Black Pride will host a community conversation to address the impacts of the Trump’s administration [removal of sexual orientation and gender identity questions on the U.S. Census](#), which eliminated data about the living and working conditions of their communities across the country. “It’s a way of dehumanization because if we see that there’s a disproportionate impact, then we have to be responsive. It’s like can we get out of accountability, if we don’t have the information,” West said.

On its 25th anniversary, Detroit Black PRIDE — the nation's second oldest behind D.C. and a founding member of Center for Black Equity — is working with local healthcare professionals to implement COVID-19 testing, in addition to testing for HIV and AIDS. Curtis Lipscomb, the Executive Director of [LGBT Detroit](#), the largest Black-led LGBTQ+ non-profit in the United States, was appointed to Governor's Gretchen Whitmer COVID-19 task force on racial disparities. Lipscomb helped to inform the organizations on the state's techniques to combat [COVID-19 in the Black community](#), which account for [40% of coronavirus deaths](#) in Michigan. Detroit Black PRIDE, which is housed under LGBT Detroit, has built the infrastructure to execute programming and outreach online.

"Being an older Black PRIDE, we were organized at the height of the AIDS and HIV epidemic. Viral epidemics and pandemics are a stranger to no one in the [Black LGBTQ+ community](#), nor Black PRIDE, because the HIV epidemic is the reason that Black PRIDE formed," Jerron Totten, LGBT Detroit's social outreach coordinator and legislative advocacy specialist, told R29Unbothered. Totten said that LGBT Detroit was formed to

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For Totten and others, the parallels between the impact of HIV/AIDS and coronavirus within the Black LGBTQ+ community are clear. Contrary to a pervasive narrative that frames COVID-19 as the “great equalizer,” the pandemic has highlighted existing health and social inequities in the Black community, such as lack of testing resources, restrictions on access to healthcare, housing density, and high numbers of employment in essential worker industries.

Detroit Black PRIDE aims to be an example of what community-based work can be done under the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the application of [web-based platforms such as Zoom](#) and GoToMeeting, the organization has distributed Brother to Brother, a regional

satellite exhibit.

While some of the critical education and advocacy work that takes place during Black PRIDE can be adapted for coronavirus-related cancellations, the loss of the opportunity to gather together can be devastating for a community that relies on it. As [social distancing fatigue](#) orders compound on mental health and ignites a longing for human companionship, West encourages members of the Black LGBTQ+ community to take a harm reduction approach.

“It’s a hard time for queer and trans people of color who solely [rely on proximity](#) — the comfort, the hugs, the laughter of their community,” said West. “Obviously, we want people to be safe and practice precaution, but we’re getting to a point where people will take calculated risks to get the comfort they need from their community.”

Reminiscent of Black PRIDE’s beginnings, the Black LGBTQ+ community is [re-engaged in a fight with an invisible killer](#), yet there’s an abundance of hope in the community that they’ll be able to weather the storm. Totten told R29Unbothered, “The good thing about Black PRIDE and the Black LGBTQ+ community is that we’ve been here before, we’ve seen it before... The world should be looking at the Black LGBTQ+ community, because we’ve done this before.”

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WRITTEN BY  
TAYLOR  
CRUMPTON

ART DIRECTION BY IDIL GOZDE; ILLUSTRATED BY TWISHA PATNI



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