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RAIN Trainings subcommittee

RAIN provides trainings to Washington state agencies and institutions of higher learning to promote 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusivity and best practices in the workplace.

For more information you can view our upcoming trainings at [Trainings | Washington State LGBTQ Commission](#) or by searching "RAIN" in the Washington State Learning Center.

Arab American Heritage Month: Recommendations

RAIN BRG Communications & Outreach Subcommittee

On April 17th, RAIN BRG General Members enjoyed a wonderful presentation and engaging dialogue with guest speaker Tariq Ra'ouf, a LGBTQIA+ writer, journalist, and activist who reclaimed his Palestinian heritage later in life. After sharing a fraction of the rich tapestry of influences Arabic culture has had on the world for thousands of years, Tariq discussed how he wrestled with reconciling his queerness and Arab heritage, and how he connected with family through the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

As Tariq mentioned, it is important to note that Arabic culture refers to people who speak the Arabic language, and who come from geographic regions where people and governments speak those languages. People in those regions may practice multiple religions (or no religion), though Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are the most practiced faiths in those areas.

Both Tariq and general members shared several books and films from which to learn about the ongoing Israeli Palestinian conflict and about LGBTQIA+ Arab people and culture. The RAIN Communications & Outreach Subcommittee would like to share these resources to promote research and discussion.

Tariq also encouraged RAIN BRG members to follow him on Instagram, where people can find more posts linking to his writing and activism: http://instagram.com/tariq_raouf.

continued...



LGBTQIA+ Topics:

[Queer Liberation Library - Arab American Heritage Month](#): a curated list of books by queer Arab American authors. Anyone with a US address can sign up for a free library card with the Queer Liberation Library and add it to their Libby/Overdrive app to check out e-books and other online resources for free.

[Jahshan, Elias. "This Arab Is Queer."](#) Tariq particularly recommended this book, and it is also available from the Queer Liberation Library (above). The book, edited by Elias Jahshan, is an anthology of personal essays by LGBTQ+ Arab American authors.

[Jama, Afdhere. "Queer Jihad: LGBT Muslims on Coming Out, Activism, and the Faith."](#) While the subject matter isn't exclusively about queer Arab Americans, the book covers the experiences of queer Muslims – including Arab Americans – in a post 9/11 world.



The Israeli Palestinian Conflict:

[Axelman, Erin and Sam Ellertsen. "Israelism."](#) This documentary film chronicles the journey of two American Jews who are raised to defend Israel but change their views and become pro-Palestine activists.

[Chomsky, Noam. "Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians."](#) A sizable work with a foreword by Edward W. Said, helping readers understand the Middle East and US foreign policy.

[El-Kurd, Mohammed. "Perfect Victims."](#) This work of non-fiction challenges readers to examine their biases about Palestinians.

[Kanafani, Ghassan. "Letter from Gaza."](#) This is a work of short fiction, which Tariq read aloud at the end of his presentation. The English translation was published in The 1936-39 Revolt in Palestine by the Tricontinental Society of London in 1980.

Report: LGBTQ Commission Public Meeting

by **Sam Cooke** (he/him), DSHS

I attended the March 14th public meeting of the [Washington State LGBTQ Commission](#) via Zoom. Volunteer commissioners from around the state gathered to discuss commission business, current events, hear presentations from state and community organizations, and witness public comments. This was my first time attending, and I felt encouraged and uplifted by the experience. While I cannot recount everything from this 6-hour meeting, I want to share some of the most outstanding takeaways:

The LGBTQ Commission public meeting is a great source of current information.

The commissioners reported what was going on in their represented areas and began brainstorming strategies and potential resources for action. I learned about organizations and resources such as [Warriors Of Wisdom - UTOPIA Washington](#), which I had not known about before. I also learned more about how organizations I was aware of were connected (or not connected) to one another through systems and people.

Vital information is shared at the public meetings! The Department of Licensing gave a presentation on sealed name changes, and attendees also received an introduction to the [Cascade AIDS Project \(CAP\)](#). The LGBTQ Commission asked practical, real-world follow up questions, and the presenters gave practical, real-world answers. Each issue was examined through a diverse array of lenses, from immigration, houselessness, long-term care, health equity, poverty, accessibility, and racial justice. I was very happy to both see and hear the diversity and intersectionality of the people and ideas.

“What the roots can’t reach, the branches will.” I believe it was Commissioner Preciado from Kitsap County who shared this English translation of a Spanish proverb as she encouraged members of the **Commission’s Youth Council**. Two members from the 12-person Youth Council presented to the Commissioners. Both students, they shared their lived experience as LGBTQ youth. I was moved by the intergenerational collaboration and inspired by The Youth Council members’ leadership.

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I was able to contribute, and you can too! Because I attended this meeting, I learned that the Commission wants to connect with LGBTQ seniors and their service providers. Because I work for the Aging and Long-Term Support Administration, I was able to provide some potential contacts and resources through the Q&A feature on Zoom. Any of us with knowledge of systems or organizations through our work in the State has something to contribute.

There is so much more to report: The moving public comments; the humor and camaraderie of the meeting itself; and the joy and strength of being two spirit, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, queer in organized powerful structure.

The LGBTQ Commission’s biggest need is engagement and communication with the community. The Commission thanks the online and in-person attendees several times for being there. If I heard correctly, there were something like 15 online attendees, and that was a big turnout. I strongly encourage anyone who is asking themselves “what can I do?” to attend the next public meeting. You can find resources and upcoming events at [Commission Meetings | Washington State LGBTQ Commission](#). You can also email the commission at contact@lgbtq.wa.gov.



Cultural Legacies of Blues Women

by **Nicoli Dominn** (they/them), DSHS/ESA/CSD

February, March, and April mark a handful of monthly cultural observances that give us the opportunity to celebrate LGBTQIA+ Black women's immense contributions to modern American culture. These observances include [Black History Month \(February\)](#), [Women's History Month \(March\)](#), [Black Women's History Month \(April\)](#), and [Jazz Appreciation Month \(April\)](#).

Readers may ask, why celebrate Blues women in connection with Jazz Appreciation Month? While musicologists debate how connected or distinct Blues and Jazz genres are, they cannot deny the relationships between the genres. Blues and Jazz grew from the same musical and cultural roots, borrowing tonal, modal, and rhythmic practices from one another. Both share the practice of improvisation to varying degrees. Both originate from African American culture. The genres evolved separately, branching off into their own subgenres or influencing new genres. While some later Jazz styles broke away from standard musical structure and common tonalities, later Blues styles – propelled by the invention of the electric guitar – evolved into or influenced more popular genres like Country, Rock 'n' Roll, Rhythm & Blues (R & B), and Soul. The largest difference between Blues and Jazz is Blues' focus on lyrical expression, whereas Jazz can take or leave lyrics and is often instrumental ([Strait 2025](#); [Suisman 2020](#); [Zelazko 2023](#)).

Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, Gladys Bentley, Alberta Hunter, Clara Smith, and Lucille Bogan (a.k.a. Bessie Jackson) brought Blues and Jazz to racially diverse audiences while subverting white supremacist and heterosexist, patriarchal culture through their lyrics and performances. They were among the first recorded Blues and Jazz artists and songwriters in America and among the most influential figures on the Blues and Jazz genres.

Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Clara Smith each released massive discographies and enjoyed extensive touring careers, while Gladys Bentley, Lucille Bogan, and Alberta Hunter earned fame for their live performances, songwriting, and in Hunter's case, theater collaborations. At the time these artists began their careers, the distinctions between Blues and Jazz were unclear. While listeners can hear traces of the later archetypical Blues styles in these artists' recordings from the 1920s and '30s, all these artists showcase a wider range of musical influences. Bessie Smith had been transitioning her style from Classic Blues to the more popular Swing style of the '30s, just before her untimely death ([Hill 2020](#)). Gladys Bentley was known for blurring genre lines, often performing and recording in styles ranging from vaudeville and Classic Blues to Bebop and later Texas boogie-woogie ([Torres 2024](#)).

Some of these artists collaborated or recorded each other's work – for instance, Ma Rainey mentored a young Bessie Smith while they were both touring the vaudeville circuits, helping her build an evocative stage presence and learn to negotiate effectively with troublesome organizations like the Theatre Owners Booking Association (often called "Tough On Black Artists") ([Brandman 2021](#)). Alberta Hunter, a famous and well-respected Blues musician and songwriter, wrote and recorded "Downhearted Blues" in 1922, one year before Bessie Smith re-recorded it and used it to launch her own successful career ([Lewis 2022](#)). Lucille Bogan recorded a later derivative work of Ma Rainey's raunchy tune, "Shave 'Em Dry Blues," which wasn't officially released due to the explicit nature of the lyrics.

Portrait of Bessie Smith. Van Vechten, Carl. [Library of Congress: Public Domain](#).

As the restrictions on this collection expired in 1986, the Library of Congress believes this image is in the public domain. However, the Carl Van Vechten estate has asked that use of Van Vechten's photographs "preserve the integrity" of his work, i.e, that photographs not be colorized or cropped, and that proper credit is given to the photographer.



Not all these artists went public about their orientations or gender expansiveness, but considering the era in which they lived and flourished, living authentically in private or through art was an act of revolution. Not only did they face discrimination because of Jim Crow era laws and patriarchal oppression, but the justice system still criminalized same-gender sexual acts. For Black women, the freedom to choose their sexual partners and to express their desire and gender was still very new and under threat. The Blues was one of the few avenues for these artists to live their truth. According to [Adam Gussow \(2018\)](#), the blues ethos “is a handful of attitudes and strategies for coping gracefully with the worst that life can throw at you.” However, while Blues music focuses on the individual lyrical narrator, it is far from a solitary process. By incorporating a traditional African American cultural call-and-response practice, both between the lyrics and music and between the musicians and their audiences, Blues becomes a shared experience:

“Call and response knits the blues community together. In philosophical terms, call and response says, “Yes, you are suffering and I am suffering. We are suffering. And you hear my suffering, and respond to it, as I hear your suffering and respond to it. We get the feeling out, we give it a ritual public airing. We give it form—a powerful, elegant, shapely expressive form. And in so doing, we earn ourselves a victory over the bad things that have happened to us.” (Gussow 2018)

At the same time, it is important to note that these artists’ disruptions of mainstream, heteronormative culture took up a small percentage of their recordings and performances:

“‘I don’t want to overplay the significance of the three songs that Ma Rainey wrote and recorded that had some references to lesbianism and homosexuality,” says Robert Philipson, who directed the 2011 documentary, [“T’Ain’t Nobody’s Bizness: Queer Blues Divas of the 1920s.”](#) “That’s a handful out of hundreds and hundreds of blues songs that were recorded. The fact that there were any was remarkable, given the times. You certainly never saw it in any other part of American culture.”” (Hix 2013)

Ma Rainey may not have openly proclaimed her sexuality, but she certainly risked censure:

“In Chris Alberston’s[sic] academic biography of bisexual blues icon — and Ma Rainey mentee — Bessie Smith, Alberston[sic] writes that Rainey “and a group of young ladies had been drinking and were making so much noise that that neighbor summoned the police.” Of course the cops showed up, ahem, “just as the impromptu party got intimate.” Rainey was arrested with the charges of “running an indecent party” (emphasis my own) and Bessie bailed her out the next morning.” (Phillips 2020)



Collage of Alberta Hunter News Clippings. Madsen, Rex.
[National Museum of African American History and Culture](#)



Gertrude "Ma" Rainey. Author Unknown.
This work is in the [public domain](#) in the [United States](#) because it was [published](#) (or registered with the [U.S. Copyright Office](#)) before January 1, 1930.

Rainey's song "Prove It on Me Blues," released in 1928, may be a defiant retort following her 1925 arrest. The lyrics boast of her flirtations with women, of wearing a collar and tie (not a women's fashion at the time), and dare the authorities to catch her "in the act":

*"Went out last night with a crowd of my friends,
They must've been women, 'cause I don't like no men.
It's true I wear a collar and a tie,
Makes the wind blow all the while.*

*"Don't you say I do it, ain't nobody caught me
You sure got to prove it on me.
Say I do it, ain't nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it on me." ([Rainey 1928](#))*

Rainey's other songs with queer themes did not have a personal narrative, such as "Sissy Blues," recorded in 1925. At the time, the term "sissy" didn't strictly define gender or sexual orientation – it typically referred to someone assigned male at birth performing a feminine role ([Doyle 2014](#)).

While no sources can claim Lucille Bogan as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, one of her most notable songs, "B.D. Woman's Blues," which she recorded under the pseudonym Bessie Jackson, is a celebration of lesbians:

*"Comin' a time, B.D. women they ain't going to need no men,
Comin' a time, B.D. women they ain't going to need no men,
'Cause the way they treat us is a lowdown and dirty sin.*

*"B.D. women, you sure can't understand,
B.D. women, you sure can't understand,
They got a head like a sweet angel and they walk just like a
natural man." ([Jackson 1935](#))*

Bogan’s recordings and performances – which contained explicit content – made shockwaves during and after her career. Her music was as much provocative sexual humor as it was liberation and empowerment.

Artists like Alberta Hunter, Ma Rainey, and Bessie Smith did not outwardly state their sexual orientations (Hix 2013), and in the case of Clara Smith, historians erased her orientation (Rimmer 2019). Bessie Smith, however, did little to hide her affairs, including relationships with the female dancers who toured with her (Hix 2013). Gladys Bentley was an outlier. She overtly flouted convention by wearing white tuxedos at nightclub performances across the country. The Harlem Renaissance empowered Bentley’s self-expression, as it was a time of both artistic and cultural enlightenment during which many LGBTQIA+ people explored their sexualities and genders more freely than before (Yale University Library Online Exhibitions 2023). Though her recorded work does not reflect as much of her identity, people reported on her live performances, during which she spontaneously rewrote popular songs with bawdy lyrics and openly flirted with female patrons (Torres 2024).

However obscure these artists’ references to their sexualities and genders may have been during their careers and lifetimes, their daring is unmistakable. While the white mainstream would later appropriate it, Blues nonetheless gave rise to a counterculture that helped marginalized people experience catharsis and joy and find the stubborn will to keep persevering in the face of violent opposition. These women and their cultural and musical legacies live on today – who knows where we would be without them?



Gladys Bentley. Author unknown.

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by **Megan Socea** (she/her), DCYF

Distancing Myself from the “Progress” Pride/Profit Flag

Photo Anjali / Adobe

Through the research of writing my previous article for the RAIN newsletter on the history of the Pride flag, I have learned about the shady backstory of the “Progress” Pride Flag. This new knowledge challenges us to question whether we should use or promote it until its creator makes amends for its flagrant pride profiteering. However, even if its creator makes amends, I still do not believe this flag should be pushed on us as the new Pride flag. The “Progress” Pride Flag is not about representation; it is about ticking inclusion boxes and profiting, which narrows the meaning and symbolism of the original rainbow Pride flag. Although this Pride flag contains stripes referencing the transgender flag colors and the black/brown stripes for recognition of nonwhite members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, my position against this specific flag is due to its questionable use of color symbolism and the creator’s choice to copyright it.

The “Progress” Pride Flag’s blue, pink, and white stripes are incorporated from the original Transgender Pride Flag created by [Monica Helms](#). Some who gather under the transgender umbrella feel the Transgender Pride Flag represents their experience, some don’t, and both concepts are okay. But here’s why it’s inclusion in the “Progress” Pride Flag makes me feel like it shouldn’t be pushed on us as the new Pride flag: how is the reduction of gender expansiveness to a male stripe, a female stripe, and a neutral/undefined stripe any kind of real progress? The fiction that sex and gender are binary represents ethnocentrism. The two stripe colors aren’t used globally to represent the sex and gender binary, and furthermore reducing sex and gender to this color binary reproduces this fiction instead of considering transgender as an umbrella concept that covers all who confound this binary model. Adding the stripes was unnecessary, as the original rainbow pride flag was meant to symbolize a much wider range of people.



Similar to the blue, pink, and white stripes, the black and brown stripes are also incorporated from the original Philadelphia Pride Flag created by a partnership between [Philly’s Office of LGBT Affairs and design agency Tierney](#). An [unnamed source](#) involved with Philly’s flag stated, “The black and brown stripes are an inclusionary way to highlight black and brown LGBTQIA members within our (Philadelphia) community.” Again, like including the Transgender Pride Flag colors, the inclusion of the black and brown stripes reduces the meaning of this new “Progress” Pride Flag to a US cultural and political context. The [global majority](#) has some shade of brown skin – an overwhelming majority of the population actually, over 80% according to Rosemary Campbell-Stephens, MBE. So, the inclusion of brown and black stripes on this “Progress” Pride Flag also represents a fictional belief that racially and ethnically diverse peoples can be represented using just two colors: black and brown, creating the very kind of diversity that the flag claims to remedy. Adding the black and brown stripes makes the new flag an American, not a global, Pride flag. This results in a flag that narrows the meaning and symbolism of the original Pride flags that were embraced by a wide range of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.

Finally, the black stripe was also noted in the “Progress” Pride Flag’s original [Kickstarter campaign](#) to represent “...those living with AIDS, those no longer living, and the stigma surrounding them...” Since approximately 1991, the red color and the red ribbons were intended to demonstrate awareness and support for people living with (and dying from) HIV/AIDS. Red was chosen because it was associated with concepts like [passion, heart, and love](#). The “Progress” Pride Flag’s bold choice of the black stripe is a directly contrasting color that is associated in North America (and Europe) with [mourning, evil, and death](#). Color associations can vary historically, but the other identity choices pointed out in the flag above are firmly anchored in an American cultural context, and the color black has specifically negative connotations in the US. This choice of the black stripe to represent AIDS/HIV awareness reflects ignorance of our community’s history and further reduces the accomplishments of HIV/AIDS activists in our community.



The addition of new stripe colors begs the question: why add these identities but not others customarily gathered under the 2SLGBTQIA+ umbrella? But... a symbol that is supposed to be representative of the entire community is also generating profit for just one person! The flag is patchworked from other elements with no compensation to the original creators and encourages consumerism. The flag is [copyrighted](#) with a Creative Commons license that makes it free to use for non-commercial purposes and requires permission from the artist, Daniel Quasar, for commercial use. Commercial use profits go to Daniel alone. The profit in this adventure is [significant](#). "10% of gross sales go towards donations made to organizations that helps our community..." but that leaves 90% unaccounted for, room for a comfortable profit on the [\\$35 shirts and \\$20 tote bags](#) even after manufacturing costs. If this were about elevating and supporting queer people of color and trans people, then 100% of the profits would be donated to people of color and trans organizations.

The original rainbow Pride flag was meaningful because each color represented a broad, abstract concept rather than a specific identity. It was designed to be inclusive of everybody. Over time, however, the symbol has been adapted and expanded in ways such as this Pride Flag, including in profit generating ways, and while it also reflects a desire for greater representation, it shifts us away from the unifying simplicity that gave the Rainbow Pride Flag its original, unique strength. But in the end... I won't be completely cutting ties with anyone who flies the Progress Pride Flag. Any gesture of solidarity with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community likely comes from a good place.

RAIN

**WHAT
PRIDE
MEANS TO
RAIN**



This year, we asked the Rainbow Alliance and Inclusion Network (RAIN) Business Resource Group what Pride means to them, and they did not disappoint. Their heartfelt responses evoked warmth, humanity, support, community, and self-love.

Pride holds deep significance. It stands for self-affirmation, dignity, and resilience. Zoey (she/they/any), Admin Liaison, describes Pride as “a stubborn, joyful persistence of people who always were and always will be—being as visibly and as loudly themselves as they wish to be, in spite of anything or anyone that might tell them otherwise.” Pride symbolizes the celebration of identity and love, as well as resistance to discrimination and oppression. It transcends barriers and inspires individuals to embrace their authenticity and stand tall in the face of challenges. As Nicklaus McHendry (he/they), Training Co-Chair, eloquently states, “Pride is the opposite of shame. Pride means becoming invulnerable to attacks on one's character based on identity, because that identity is something to be proud of, not ashamed of.”

For many, Pride is a movement fostering visibility, unity, and a sense of belonging. It highlights the vital importance of equality and acceptance. “Pride is a time to come together and celebrate our beautiful community. It's a time to connect with one another and feel less alone. I love Pride because we can be our unabashed, true selves and meet all kinds of wonderful people!” shares Quinn Snow (he/him), Best Practices Subcommittee Co-Chair. Nicoli Dominn (they/them), Communications & Outreach Subcommittee Co-Chair, adds, “Pride means self-respect and self-determination as a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. It means celebrating my queer identities that make me both unique and like others. It's a time for both community outreach and introspection—building bridges with others and caring for oneself.”

Pride is not limited to any single group or context. It can be deeply personal, reflecting one's achievements, values, and the courage to remain true to oneself. McKenzie Grenz (she/they) Administrative Liaison says that Pride is, “finding a new, loving family and feeling at home in my own skin.” Kaity Cazares (they/them), RAIN Best Practices Co-Chair, shares, “Pride means embracing bravery, authenticity, and love as essential aspects of queerness, and celebrating these qualities as necessary for our collective liberation and healing.” Pride is both a communal and individual expression of empowerment.

Michelle Wieberg, Budget and Finance Manager, captures it beautifully in its simplest form, stating that Pride means “absolute love, support, and community.” Alison Mielke (she/her), RAIN Safe Places Subcommittee Co-Chair, calls allies to action, emphasizing, “Pride is an opportunity to let our LGBTQ+ community members know they are valued. As an ally, it's important to show that simply saying you're an ally isn't enough. Being an ally means actively advocating for our LGBTQ+ neighbors. What can you do to help?”

If you're interested in celebrating Pride with RAIN, join us! We will raise the Pride Flag over the Capitol on June 4th at 12:00 PM. Come listen to inspiring speakers and enjoy some light refreshments. We will also be tabling on June 28th during Olympia's Pride Festival. Additionally, you can find us tabling with the LGBTQ Commission at Pride in Perry in Spokane on June 14th and at Spokane Pride on June 28th.

THE RAINBOW ALLIANCE AND
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LGBTQ+ & ALLY BUSINESS RESOURCE GROUP

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