

Embracing Trans Diversity is not a Luxury

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Abstract

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Article

Over the 12 years of living my life as Monica, I have been privileged to learn many things about the TBLG community, but mostly about the trans community. The biggest lesson in my short life as a woman has been the diversity of our people. Trans individuals have covered every segment of human experience since the dawn of time. We span all races, all sexual orientations, all gender identities, all gender expressions, all social and economic levels, all job experiences, all education levels, all ages, and all health issues. If every American trans person populated just one city in America, it would be the third largest city in the country and every job in the city would be covered.

When I moved to Atlanta in 2000, I received the most important part of my education on diversity, that of the African American community. Living in Phoenix most of my life I received a big education on the Latino and Native cultures of our population, but not much on the African American culture. But coming to Atlanta had been the biggest eye-opener for me in finding out about the rich history - and sometimes tragic history - of my African American brothers and sisters. Moving here has proven to be one of the best decisions in my life.

I may have come a long way in understanding diversity, but because of a recent event in the White House, it has been shown that maybe the rest of our community still has a lot to learn. I'm not going to get too much into the event since it happened on June 29. In a nutshell, President Obama held a gathering of about 200 TBLG people to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of Stonewall, of which only about eight trans people received invitations. Out of that eight, two were of Latino decent. However, they didn't have any trans veterans of Stonewall, or any African American trans people. I don't see that as embracing diversity in the trans community.

Several questions about the event in DC have not been answered to my satisfaction. 1.) Why wasn't Miss Majors invited to this? 2.) Who provided the list of trans people that suggested who should go? 3.) Who picked the attendees from that list? 4.) Who didn't make the cut and why did they not make it? 5.) Had there been extensive background checks made on these people? 6.) And, why were there not any crossdressers, intersex people and gender queer people invited?

The lack of African American people at this event speaks to a larger problem facing the transgender

community in general. The most vocal and most well-known African American trans person I know, Monica Roberts, wrote about this event and the lack of African American trans people in her article on TransGriot, dated July 1, 2009. It was posted in other places.

She also posted it on The Bilerico Project, where she got over 60 comments, some of them from gay white men who attacked her. She provided a list of several people who should have been there, but the most glaring omission to the guest list had been Miss Majors. She has the distinction of being the last known African American trans person who helped to start the riots at Stonewall 40 years ago.

In the comment section of the Bilerico article she and others pointed out that several trans African Americans could not only pass the Secret Service background check, but would have represented all trans people proudly. Yet none of them received invitations.

Why does the transgender community find it so hard to accept diversity and admit we have a problem in race relationships? As a white trans woman I get angry and disappointed in how some of my white brothers and sister treat race issues with such a low priority. In the comment section of Monica's article on Bilerico, only one person who attended the event at the White House cared enough to answer some of the questions by others. All of the other people who attended didn't even make an attempt to contact Monica privately on this issue. Is it that they have too many other fancy events to attend to bother addressing one of the core issues dividing our frail community?

Yes, I'm being factitious, but since they don't want to listen to one Monica about this problem, then maybe two Monicas in stereo might get their attention. Maybe, but I'm not holding my breath on it.

The trans community has too many things that divide us to go out of our way to make some of them worse. Indeed, some make it a point to create ways to divide us, while others divide us without realize they had done it. Too many times I have seen a newbie trans woman on a diverse discussion list start off with, "Hey, girls." If none of the trans men say anything, I try to point it out right away. Some particular life experiences tend to give people a narrow view of our community. People need to constantly be aware of the diversity of the trans community, as they transverse through it.

When it comes to race relations, the lessons become harder to learn but not impossible. What I saw taking place from the discussion of the DC event were people who have been made aware of a problem in race relations but choose to ignore it. The problem will not go away. The prominent white "leaders" in the trans community need to put as much effort in healing the rift between the African American leaders in our community as they do in lobbying Congress for our rights. A summit is in order, but I don't see any of the white leaders making an effort.

Since the beginning of the century we have seen massive improvements on the state and local levels protecting the rights of transgender people. However, the number of people of color ending up on the Remembering Our Dead list has grown to over 70%. We have an African American President who has shown great pride in his heritage, but hosts an event that shuns trans people of that same heritage.

We have trans organizations (TAVA included) where the top leaders are white. We have young African American trans people living in a world with few or no known heroes to emulate. We have several African American trans people who can make ALL of the trans community proud, but they get little press or exposure from the white trans leaders. We have a major problem that many white trans people seem to

ignore.

Well, I refuse to ignore this any longer and I am standing up to be counted as a white person who will fight racial indifference in the white trans community. I know many of my white brothers and sisters will be counted as well. Some people say I'm a "leader" in this community. If so, I'll stick my neck out here, as I have done so many times in the past.

As the President of the Transgender American Veterans Association, I call for a Race Relations Summit.

It's not like TAVA is doing a damn thing anyway, right? I'm sure no one will respond to this. Why should they? They're too busy with their own issues to care and TAVA wasn't one of the national groups invited to the White House, along with our African American brothers and sisters. We will be ignored, but not forever.

As veterans we fought along side our brothers and sisters of color, counting on them to watch our backs as we watched theirs. Veterans understand the need to work together because our lives depended on it in the trenches, the fox holes, and on board ships. Well friends, our lives as trans people depend on it just as much today. It would be advisable to work toward that goal. After all, embracing diversity is not a luxury but a necessity.

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