

TRANSADVOCATE

National justice orgs say: End trans exclusion policy at Michigan Womyn's Music Festival

By Cristan Williams

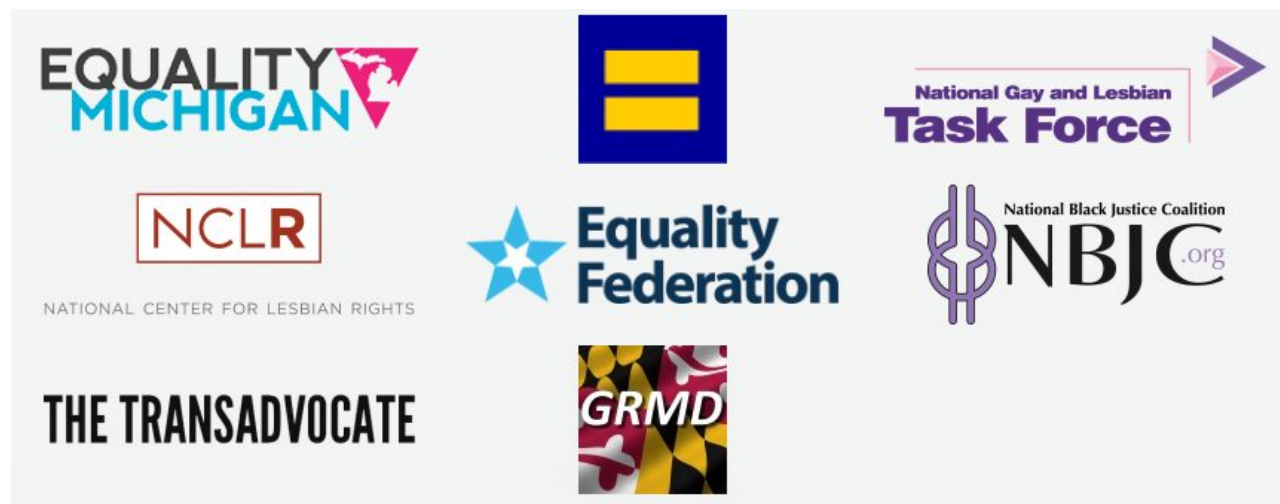
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Abstract

The National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC) has joined the Gay & Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the Nation Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) and several other social justice organizations in petitioning that the trans-exclusionary policy of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (MWMF) end. In recent years, the MWMF trans exclusionary policy has been [...]

Article



The National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC) has joined the Gay & Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the Nation Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) and several other social justice organizations in petitioning that the trans-exclusionary policy of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (MWMF) end. In recent years, the MWMF trans exclusionary policy has been rebranded as merely a trans-exclusionary "intention." In the face of MWMF's continued anti-trans policy intention, the nation's leading equality organizations have joined Equality Michigan in petitioning the festival to end its decades of prominent discrimination.

Historical Context:

- MWMF TERFs organizers supported the targeting of a Radical Feminist, Lesbian-separatist music collective for being trans-inclusive and led to armed TERFs threatening the life of a trans woman.
- Lisa Vogel's fist inspired trans-inclusive Women's Music Festivals

- MWMF violence led to the creation of Camp Trans while Leather Dykes and the Lesbian Avengers offered bodyguard protection for the trans women.

The MWMF's ties to anti-trans oppression run deep. In the 1970s, MWMF founder and director, Lisa Vogel, was inspired to create a women's festival when she learned about a California lesbian women's music collective named Olivia Records. However, through the efforts of Janice "all-transsexuals-rape-women" Raymond, Vogel was shocked to learn that the Olivia women's music collective was trans-inclusive. Vogel and other Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs) attached to the MWMF collective identified Sandy Stone as a trans woman and proceeded to out her.

[Figure] Sandy Stone at Olivia Records

TERFs threatened Olivia Records with destruction unless Olivia vote to become a trans-exclusionary lesbian collective. Olivia took a vote and, choosing to stand with Stone against transmisogyny, decided to remain a trans-inclusive organization. Olivia continued to stand with Stone until they began getting death threats and the entire collective was at risk of being financially ruined. Knowing that the TERF boycott would bring an end to the lesbian feminist music group, Stone chose to leave the collective.

It wouldn't take very much at all to sink us. Our financial situation was okay, but precarious. We had a very big accounts receivable, much, much higher than a company should have had, dangerously high because we wanted to support our distribution system and the women in it, and that meant because they were all living financially close to the line themselves - many of them - that they were slow in paying. And we wanted to support them in that as best we could, and so we ran a high receivable. Anything that interrupted our cash flow could have been disastrous. And when the boycott began to be threatened, we had to sit down and do some serious thinking. And there was a point at which the collective said, "Sandy, the reality of the situation is that if you don't leave, there's real danger." And so I left. - Sandy Stone

Stone wound up being maligned in Janice Raymond's infamous TERF bible, *The Transsexual Empire*, *The Making of the She-male*. Afterward, Vogel and her TERF crew made trans-exclusion part of the fabric of the MWMF. This painful history has continued to this day.

[Figure] Standard TERF hate against Sandy Stone published in Sister, 1977

While many have matured in their understanding of the trans experience, Vogel has chosen to institutionalize her 1970s-era exclusionary ideology. In a letter published in a 1977 edition of *Sister*, Vogel and other then-TERFs such as Sue Hyde and Max Feldman were unified in their anti-trans ideology. However, Feldman later came out as trans and in a statement to the TransAdvocate, Hyde wrote:

It's a personal humiliation to me that I signed such a letter, driven by ignorance and the identity politics of the time. I am deeply regretful and sorry for my participation in the 1977 defaming of Sandy Stone and all trans people. Nothing can make up for that kind of discrimination.

Numerous social justice organizations since have stepped forward to ask that the MWMF bring an end to their history as a trans-exclusionary event.

Rea Carey, Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force recently said:

As an organization with a core value of inclusiveness, the Task Force believes that the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival's 'womyn born womyn' intention, to the exclusion of transgender women, must end. It also runs at variance with welcoming and respecting the reality of all women's lives. We agree with our partners at Equality Michigan and the many activists both inside and outside the festival who have raised this important issue for over two decades. As it approaches its 40th year, the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival must include and welcome transgender women. It's past time for a change in both intention and practice at the Festival, as a matter of love, compassion and radical welcome embraced by the Task Force and countless others.

Sharon Lettman-Hicks, Executive Director of the National Black Justice Coalition said:

NBJC joins with Equality Michigan and the host of other advocacy organizations calling on the organizers of MWMF to immediately end their policy of not welcoming transgender women. This unjust policy only perpetuates hate and stigma, and has no place in a space meant to empower women. Our transgender sisters are simply women and deserve to be treated as such. It is baffling that at MWMF -- an event organized by and built exclusively for women -- imposes such blatant discrimination against one of the most marginalized groups of women in our society. NBJC urges its entire constituency and all supporters to sign the Equality Michigan petition and show the organizers of MWMF that no form of discrimination against our transgender sisters is acceptable in 2014.

Kate Kendell, Executive Director of the Nation Center for Lesbian Rights said:

At NCLR, we have long fought for freedom of LGBT people to live authentic lives from the demands of hetero and gender norms. Transgender issues and identity are an intrinsic part of the struggle to be free from homophobia and misogyny, policing gender is as much an insult to our humanity as policing sexual orientation.

In a post, HRC wrote:

Trans women and ciswomen (another word for non-trans women) suffer under the same patriarchal oppression, similarly restrictive ideas of what it means to be a woman, and the same structural barriers that deny women control of their own lives and bodies. The festival attempts to provide a refuge from this; to exclude some women from this refuge is simply inexcusable.

Other social justice organizations like Equality Federation, Secular Woman, Michigan's Affirmations Community Center and the TransAdvocate itself have signed onto the petition.

Cassandra Varner, a Director at Affirmations said, "It is important for us to join with this effort because this has been an issue for several years and it would be a disservice if we didn't support the effort to end the discrimination of trans women at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. We owe it to ourselves and our community." Kim Rippere, President of Secular Woman said, "Changing your policy to allow every woman to participate in your festival will boldly announce your commitment to ending the discrimination of women; your inclusive perspective; and your willingness to grow, learn, and take corrective action."

Gender Identity Watch, a TERF group who supports a continuation of MWMF's trans exclusionary history, claimed that these social justice groups were anti-lesbian and directed them to read a

“grassroots” booklet that is being distributed at Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival this year. Here are some quotes from this MWMF booklet:

Radical Feminists NEVER agree to the female-hating trans cult con that men could be women or Lesbians. (We also do not accept “trans-paraplegic” able-bodied men who demand to be accepted as paraplegic Lesbians.) This includes not supporting these men appropriating our identity by calling them “transfolk” or “transwomen” or any other terms that give credence to the idea that they are somehow more special than other misogynist female impersonators. Radical Feminists never call men “women” of any kind or “she” or “her,” or call women “men.” - p 12

Transgender politics impact all women because we are coerced into accepting something that is not real, but that has real consequences in our abilities to organize away from men. If even one man, dressed as a woman comes into our women-only spaces, the whole experience of that space is transformed by his violent presence... Transactivism impacts women’s ability to unify and show solidarity even when there are no “trans” people present. Just the idea of “transgender rights” as a legitimate front for social change is harmful to women’s solidarity and movement. It is so sad and infuriating, that even lesbians are calling other lesbians “hateful” if they question the good of transgenderism. - p 31

A man demanding to be seen as anything other than a man is oppressing the woman he is talking to when she resists or questions his “gender identity.” Transgenderism is an oppressive ideology that hurts girls and women the most because it does not allow us to speak in our own terms about ourselves or about male violence and dominance in our lives. Women do not oppress men (“trans women” are men) because we are not in positions of gender power and privilege in society. Merriam-Webster’s dictionary online defines the word “oppression” to be a : unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power b : something that oppresses especially in being an unjust or excessive exercise of power. - p 32

There is no such thing as “trans”, other than it exists as a social phenomena that intentionally or unintentionally, promotes male rule of our lives and separates us from our connection to ourselves and the laws of nature. - p 33

If you would like to add your name to the petition requesting that MWMF end their decades of exclusion, you may do so here:

Organizations wishing to stand with Equality Michigan in their call end the decades of discrimination can do so here.

UPDATES:

- 8/9/14, 6 am: Pittsburgh Lesbian Correspondents signs the petition
- 8/8/14, 7 pm: The Bilerico Project signs the petition
- 8/8/14, 2 pm: BiNet USA signs onto the petition
- 8/8/14, 10 am: GLAAD and Antigone Rising sign the petition.

Suggested citation

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