I’m Still Here

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January 4, 2021 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

I believe it’s fair to say that most of us are happy to see 2020 gone. No doubt that many of us experienced bright spots last year (I turned 50!), but the combination of COVID-19, the economy, racial justice protests and the presidential election was all-consuming.

I’m grateful that we’re making progress on those matters, but that doesn’t mean we don’t have more work to do. We have seemingly effective vaccines for the new coronavirus, but widespread distribution is still months away. The economy remains weak. We are nowhere near being politically united.

Of all the issues that continue to challenge us, racial justice is the most vexing. Although much has improved, so much is still left undone. Too much. As sad as it is to have to say, perhaps that realization is a silver lining from 2020. Folks from all walks of life finally woke up to the realities of being Black in America.

Last year’s resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement inspired us to take stock, yet again, of how social justice and HIV are interconnected. We did so five years ago with our January/February 2016 cover story, which highlighted the efforts of Black Lives Matter activists. To what should be no one’s surprise in 2021, Black lives still matter.

For our current cover story, we caught up with former cover guy Ashton Woods. In addition to living with HIV, he was a founding organizer of Black Lives Matter Houston. However, the events of the past five years have given us much more to explore.

The efforts of Bré Anne Rivera, our new cover subject, are a great example of how the HIV community is stepping up. She founded and directs the Black Trans Fund, which launched in January 2020. Her organization provides funding to groups led by Black trans people. Click here to read more on uplifting social justice and HIV.

The work of Raniyah Copeland, president and CEO of the Black AIDS Institute (BAI), is also an example of how HIV advocates are meeting this moment. She’s been busy. As discussed in our cover story, one of her initiatives in 2020 was to create a digital support network for Black executives in the HIV community.

Also in 2020, BAI released a report titled “We the People: A Black Plan to End HIV.” The plan was created for organizations to adopt and adapt as a framework to guide their HIV work. Click here to read more about Copeland and the future of BAI.

In this special issue dedicated to African Americans, we underscore how Black people are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 in addition to HIV. Click here to read a condensed transcript of an online conversation hosted by BAI with Anthony Fauci, MD, which addressed the struggles of African Americans with the new coronavirus.

A consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a lack of physical connections. Many of us living with HIV already experience challenges finding intimacy. The coronavirus has added yet another hurdle. Click here to read about love in the time of COVID-19.

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