



DIGGING UP THE PAST

Spring 2024: “If there is no struggle, there is no progress”

Welcome to the Spring issue of *Digging Up the Past*. As we now start the Spring semester here in Pullman, and across the campuses of the WSU system, I find it an exciting time as we commemorate three very important months during the semester: Black History Month in February, Women’s History Month in March, and Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month in April. On campus students brace the frigid temperatures to continue their empowering education, all while engaging and participating in exciting cultural and social events here at WSU. The main mission of *Digging Up the Past* is to invite our student community, and the community at large, to think about History in their daily lives and to consider the ways by which History has transformed their understanding of the world around them. As such, when we “dig up the past” we can begin to have a transformative and completely new perspective of our individual, and collective, histories and the impact these have on the world today.

The Spring semester is also a joyous time that sees not only the graduation of bright minds, but also multitude of visits from prospective students to campus. If you are interested in History, rest assured that the Department of History at WSU has plenty of information on the field and on the exciting opportunities and possibilities that a degree in History can bring! Please refer to page 10 for a list of exciting events happening at WSU during the Spring 2024 semester.

As we commemorate Black History month in February, this issue contains a special page on the History and legacy of Frederick Douglas, one of this country’s earliest freedom fighters and fiercest advocates of equality across racial lines. Matter of fact, the quote that opens this issue, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress,” is perhaps one of Douglas’s most enduring quotes, one that still has tremendous relevance to this day. While Douglas is often relegated to events of the nineteenth century such as the Civil War and emancipation, it is key that we build on the actions he took to seek a more equitable American society. Also, in commemoration of Women’s History Month, this issue dedicates most of the “Digging this Day” section to celebrate African American, Native American, and Latinx women that have been instrumental to the fight of civil rights and equality in this country. This issue also celebrates the important contributions of Latinx Transgender women like Sylvia Rivera, showcasing a student-crafted essay on Rivera that explores her legacy.



I wish everyone a productive semester, and for those of you graduating this Spring 2024, ¡Felicidades!

Sincerely,



Alan Alexander Malfavon, Ph.D

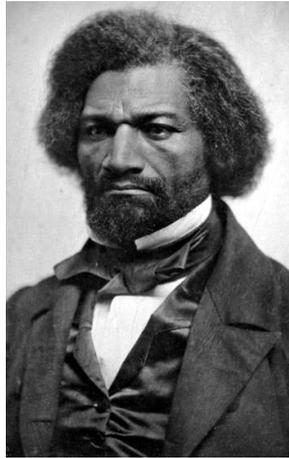
IN THIS ISSUE

Quotable People: Frederick Douglas.....	2
Student Abstracts.....	3
Student Essay: Sylvia Rivera.....	5
Digging This Day.....	8
WSU Spring Events.....	10
Spring History Quiz.....	11

QUOTABLE PEOPLE: QUOTABLE PAST

February 14th, 1817

Celebrate Frederick Douglas's Birthday



Born enslaved in 1817, Frederick Douglass escaped from bondage in Maryland in 1838, travelling north, and eventually becoming a national speaker and leader of the abolitionist movement in both Massachusetts and New York. Considered by many to be one of the most prominent U.S. abolitionists of the nineteenth-century, Douglass became an avid writer and fierce orator whose work was always aimed towards the eradication of slavery in the United States, and later, with the coming of emancipation for most African-Americans, dedicated to achieve equal social and political rights. Douglass wrote three essential autobiographies that described life as an enslaved person of African descent in the United States: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881).

One of his most memorable quotations is: “What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim.”

A powerful question that opened his July 4th speech in 1852 remains a testament of the heightened disparities between the promises of equal rights proclaimed by the United States' founding fathers, and the failure of granting rights to enslaved, and free, African Americans as the country still thrived from the toil, enslavement, and oppression of African descendants. While the nineteenth-century might seem like a very long time ago, it was the work of abolitionists like Douglass that highly influenced the actions, ideologies, techniques of resistance, and intellectual frameworks, that Civil Rights leaders in the 1960s built upon. May his legacy never be forgotten. Learn more at the National Museum of African American History and Culture:

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/nations-story-what-slave-fourth-july>

Learn More

Books:

- Blight, David W. *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*. First Edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018.
- Douglass, Frederick. *Autobiographies: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave ; My Bondage and My Freedom ; Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. The Library of America 68. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1994.
- Levine, Robert S. *The Failed Promise: Reconstruction, Frederick Douglass, and the Impeachment of Andrew Johnson*. Reprint edition. W. W. Norton & Company, 2022.
- Oakes, James. *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics*. New York London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008.

Enraged by police violence and oppressive actions, the onlookers rose in protest and defense of the victims of the police raid. Rivera is often credited at throwing the first bottle, but she herself asserts that she was not the first, but the second person to throw a Molotov cocktail.^[3] Whether she was the first or the second, her actions were among those that triggered a historical event, causing others in the crowd to launch into a strong and violent resistance to the police. They pushed the police back. Rivera was instrumental as a transgender Latinx woman in causing the uprising, which was a major step for gay and trans rights.



Street named for Sylvia Rivera. Photo by Gotty.
Wikimedia Commons

After the Stonewall Riots, Sylvia Rivera became very involved with the struggle for gay and transgender rights and liberation. She was a part of the Gay Activist Alliance, as well as a founding member of the Gay Liberation Front, attending marches and protests. With the help of Rivera’s friend and fellow Stonewall veteran, Marsha P. Johnson, she helped establish the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) program. STAR was created to help at-risk trans and other LGBTQ+ youth on the streets and give them opportunities and protections that Rivera herself and many others did not have access to. STAR’s manifesto read:

We want a revolutionary peoples’ government, where transvestites, street people, women, homosexuals, Puerto Ricans, Indians, and all oppressed people are free, and not f*d over by this government who kills us off like flies, one by one, and throws us into jail to rot. This government who spends millions of dollars to go to the moon, and lets the poor Americans starve to death.^[4]

Rivera also advocated abolishing discrimination against trans individuals in employment, housing, and healthcare.^[5]

^[3] Jessi Gan, “Still at the back of the bus”: Sylvia Rivera’s struggle, *Centro Journal* 19 no.1 (2007): 131-132.

^[4] STAR Manifesto, quoted in Vienna I Austin, “The Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries Manifesto, 50 Years Later, *Out Front Magazine*, March 1, 2022, <https://www.outfrontmagazine.com/the-street-transvestite-action-revolutionaries-manifesto-50-years-later/>.

^[5] Joseph Nicholas DeFilippis, “Betraying the Legacy of Stonewall,” *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* 6 no.2 (Summer 2019): 99.

Rivera’s activism extended to the rights of multiple communities. She was an activist for women’s liberation, attending and spearheading protests for women’s rights. She networked with the Young Lords and with Black liberation movements. ^[6] Many of the strides made for LBGTQ+ individuals can be attributed to the way she was able to see the big picture and make connections between different kinds of discrimination. ^[7]

Sylvia Rivera’s actions and activism were catalysts for a better future for LBGTQ+ youth and adults. Today her legacy and sacrifices are celebrated across the country, inspiring organizations such as the Sylvia Rivera Project, which works to ensure that people are free to their self-expression and identity, without discrimination or oppression. ^[8] For we who dream and work for a more just society, Rivera provided a firm foundation on which to build.

Further Reading

Ellison, Joy Michael, and Teshika Silver. *Sylvia and Marsha Start a Revolution: The Story of the Trans Women of Color Who Made LBGTQ+ History*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2020 (Children’s book, but quite fabulous).

Fountain-Stokes, Lawrence “The Life and Times of Trans Activist Sylvia Rivera.” In *Critical Dialogues in Latinx Studies*, edited by Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas and Mérida M. Rúa, 241-252. New York: NYU Press, 2021.

Funk, Mason. *The Book of Pride: LBGTQ Heroes Who Changed the World*. New York: New York: Harper One, 2019.

Prager, Sarah. *Queer, There, and Everywhere: 23 People Who Changed the World*. New York: Harper, 2017.

Stryker, Susan. *Transgender History*. Seal Press. 2009. 66-86.

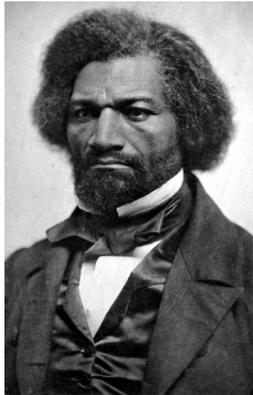
^[6] Fountain-Stokes, 242; Morgan Artyukhina, “Our Armies are Rising”: Sylvia Rivera and Marsha Johnson,” *Liberation School*, <https://www.liberationschool.org/our-armies-are-rising-sylvia-rivera-and-marsha-p-johnson/>.

^[7] La Fountain-Stokes, 246-248.

^[8] La Fountain-Stokes, 248.

Spring History Quiz (all answers can be found in this edition of Digging up the Past)

Writer and Sioux Indian activist, founded the National Council of American Indians (1926)(NWAHA).



Quotable Past

One of the fiercest abolitionists in 19th Century U.S. also considered one of the earliest Civil Rights activists in our country. He was born on February 14th 1817.

Addressed the first Black Women's Rights Convention, Akron Ohio, 1851.



Mexican-American civil rights activist known for her work on women's rights, the rights of the poor, and the protection of the environment.

Bring your answers to the Department of History Wilson-Short 301 for your LOADED HISTORY MUG!

How many syllables are in a History Haiku?



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“History is instructive. What it suggests to people is that even if they do little things, if they walk on the picket line, if they join a vigil, if they write a letter to their local newspaper... Anything they do, however small, becomes part of a much larger sort of flow of energy. And when enough people do enough things, however small they are, then change takes place.”

Howard Zinn, American historian (1922-2010)

STAY CONNECTED!

NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETIES



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