

MESSAGE

Summer 2025



BLACK GAY MEN'S WELLNESS MONTH

FREEDOM



*Committed to re-defining our
freedom to live, prosper, love, and
give back to ourselves, those we love
and the communities we live in.*

Powerful Programs
Every Tuesday Evening in August
@ In The Meantime



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EDITOR AND PUBLISHER: Jeffrey C. King
PHOTOGRAPHY: Spider Martin, David Fenton
ART DIRECTOR: Alan Bell
ON THE COVER: Cali Payne

Message is published quarterly by In The Meantime Men's Group, Inc., 2146 W. Adams Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90018-2039. Mailing address: P.O. Box 29861, Los Angeles, CA 90029-0861, 323-733-4868, inthemeantimemen@aol.com, www.inthemeantimemen.org, Facebook @ inthemeantimemen

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FREEDOM



FREEDOM

BY JEFFREY C. KING, THE SAGE

This edition of MESSAGE is dedicated to BLACK PRIDE and JUNETEENTH at the intersection of FREEDOM, our theme for 2025.

FREEDOM can never be taken for granted. The privileges we call (rights) have always been challenged by the greedy sociopaths who seek to control. Their, (MORE) will never be enough. Their insatiable appetites to dominate, overrule their sensibilities to short circuit their moral compass. The war we fight is of a spiritual; nature. Like a virus it continues to grow as people suffer in silos.

The violence waged against Black, (Black LGBTQ+) people is first to mis-define, mystify and stigmatize who we are as a people. Secondly to secure the buy-in from other weak-minded individuals who are willing to go-along to get-along, and ultimately to get us to believe these misnomers about ourselves.

To be Black and LGBTQ+ in America is a gift. Learning to navigate and negotiate this gift requires a lifetime of spiritual commitment. Although we have been under attack for centuries, we can never be cancelled. We are more than resilient. We are chosen and our purpose on the planet includes elevating universal beauty, grounding divine intelligence, uplifting joy and manifesting super creativity.

Black Gay Men's Wellness month 2025 is committed to re-defining our freedom to live, prosper, love, and give back to ourselves, those we love and the communities we live it.

*Jeffrey C. King
is Founder and Executive Director
of In The Meantime Men's Group.*

**JAMES
BALDWIN
TO
ANGELA DAVIS:
'IF THEY TAKE
YOU IN THE
MORNING,
THEY WILL BE
COMING FOR US
THAT
NIGHT'**

BY KAREN OCAMB

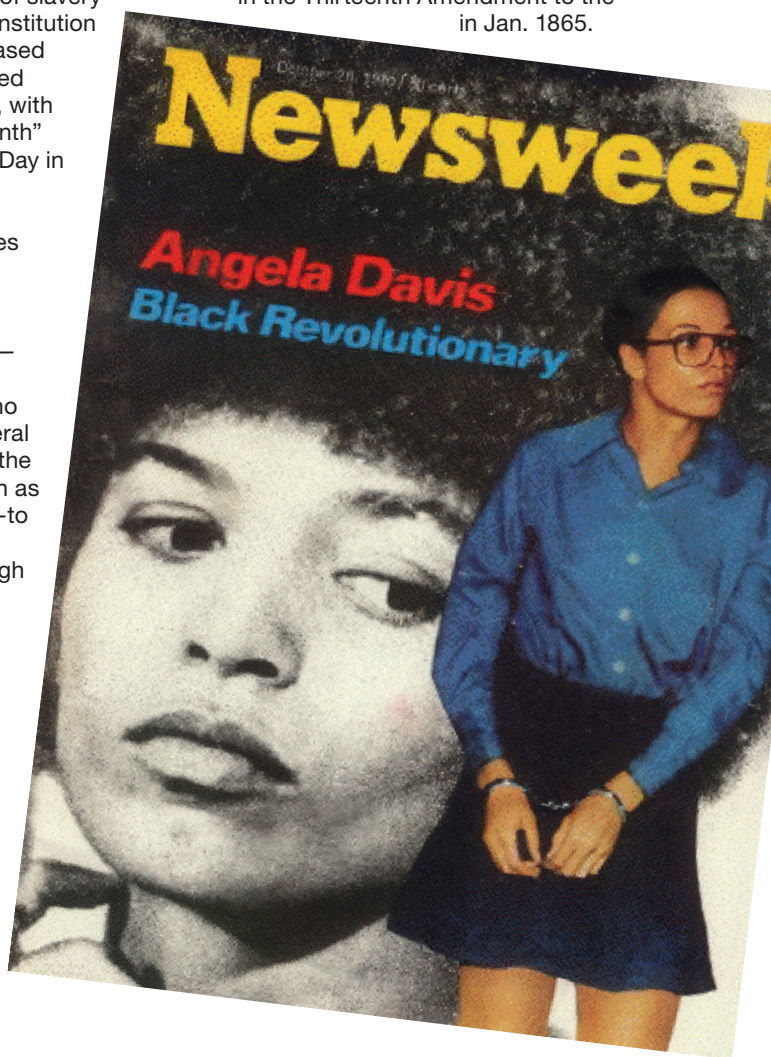
It's become a ritual. On March 7th of every year since 1965, conscientious people around the globe pause to contemplate that American Day of Infamy known as “Bloody Sunday” when 25-year-old civil rights activist John Lewis stood in front of 600 mostly Black marchers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama facing down angry white State Troopers determined to unleash hell.

For a moral moment each year, millions secretly ask themselves: What am I willing to do for freedom?

The question is excruciatingly relevant this Juneteenth, America's second Independence Day. The federal holiday commemorates the official end of slavery on June 19, 1865 in Texas—two and a half years after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on Jan. 1, 1863. Congress proposed the national abolition of slavery in the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in Jan. 1865.

Largely church-based celebrations started the following year, with the term “Juneteenth” replacing Jubilee Day in the 1890s.

But it took decades and the devoted commitment of individuals like teacher Opal Lee—the “grandmother of Juneteenth” who lead walks in several states promoting the idea of Juneteenth as a federal holiday—to achieve national recognition. Though most of America didn't know her, on June 17, 2021, 94-year old Opal Lee stood beside President Joe Biden as he signed the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act into law.



This Juneteenth, however, is fraught with confusion. The MAGA Project 2025 playbook orders the punishment of anything that smacks of diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI). And yet, in an example of blatant political hypocrisy, the White House issued a Black History Month Proclamation citing “consequential leaders” such as Frederick Douglass who have “monumentally advanced the tradition of equality under the law in our great country.”

One of Frederick Douglass’ most “consequential” speeches, delivered for an Independence Day celebration on July 5, 1852 in Rochester, New York, was: “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”

“The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me,” Douglas said. “The sunlight that brought light and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn.”

But while the Fourth of July amplifies the disparity between whites and Blacks during the American Revolution and Juneteenth celebrates the liberation of



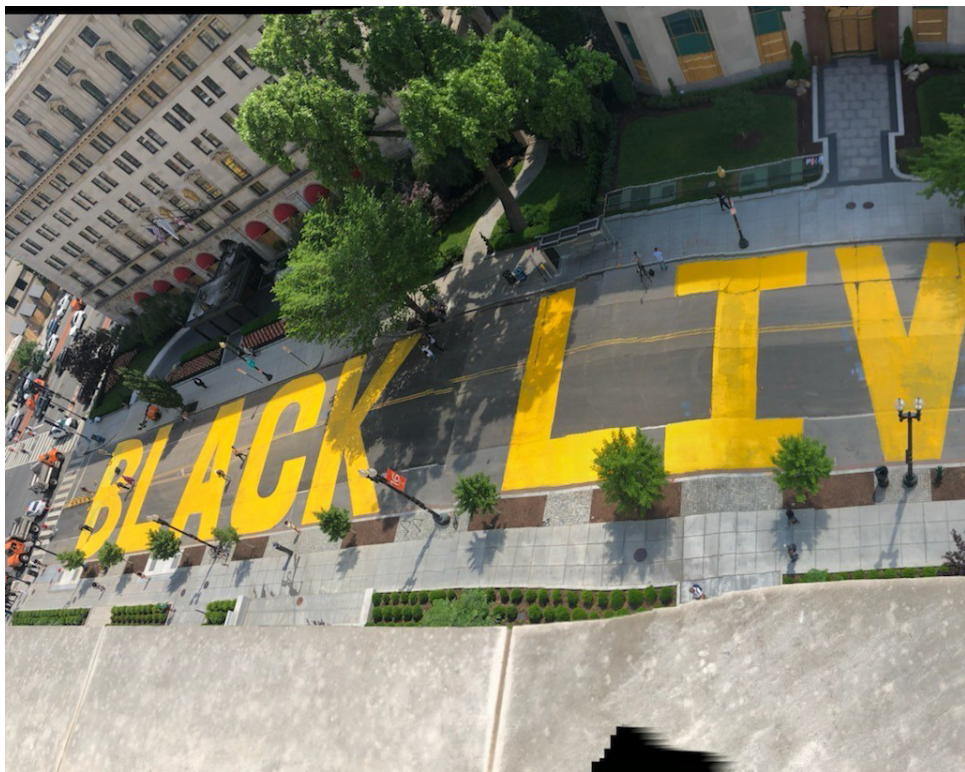
America's enslaved during the Civil War—Juneteenth today is a call for all to exercise their right to freedom, regardless of government threats.

Black gay icon James Baldwin expressed this best in a letter to his “Sister,” Angela Y. Davis, 20 years his junior, after *Newsweek* magazine published a cover featuring the closeted Black activist in handcuffs.

“The American triumph—in which the American tragedy has always been implicit—was to make Black people despise themselves,” Baldwin wrote. “We know that a democracy does not mean the coercion of all into a deadly—and, finally, wicked—mediocrity but the liberty for all to aspire to the best that is in him, or that has ever been.

“The enormous revolution in black consciousness which has occurred in your generation, my dear sister, means the beginning or the end of America. Some of us, white and Black, know how great a price has already been paid to bring into existence a new consciousness, a new people, an unprecedented nation. If we know, and do nothing, we are worse than the murderers hired in our name,” Baldwin continued.

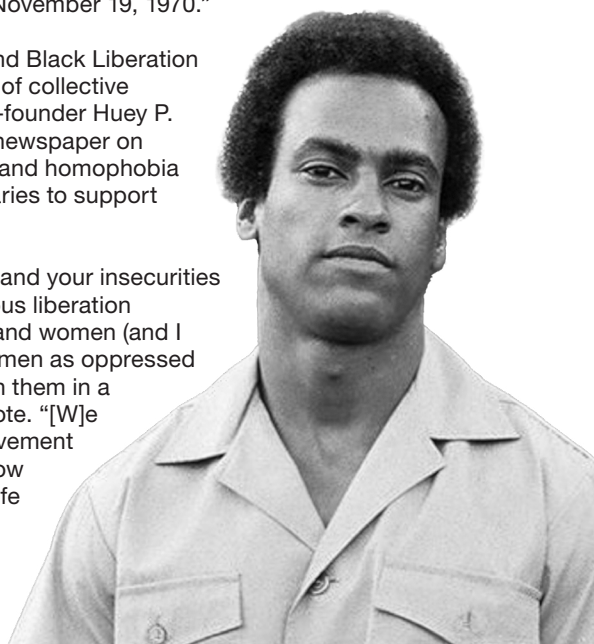




"If we know, then we must fight for your life as though it were our own—which it is—and render impassable with our bodies the corridor to the gas chamber. For, if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night. Therefore: peace. Brother James November 19, 1970."

What was truer in the civil rights and Black Liberation movements than now is the sense of collective empowerment. Black Panthers co-founder Huey P. Newton published a letter in their newspaper on August 21, 1970 criticizing sexism and homophobia and calling upon fellow revolutionaries to support other liberation movements.

"Whatever your personal opinions and your insecurities about homosexuality and the various liberation movements among homosexuals and women (and I speak of the homosexuals and women as oppressed groups), we should try to unite with them in a revolutionary fashion," Newton wrote. "[W]e must relate to the homosexual movement because it is a real thing. And I know through reading, and through my life experience and observations that





homosexuals are not given freedom and liberty by anyone in the society. They might be the most oppressed people in the society.”

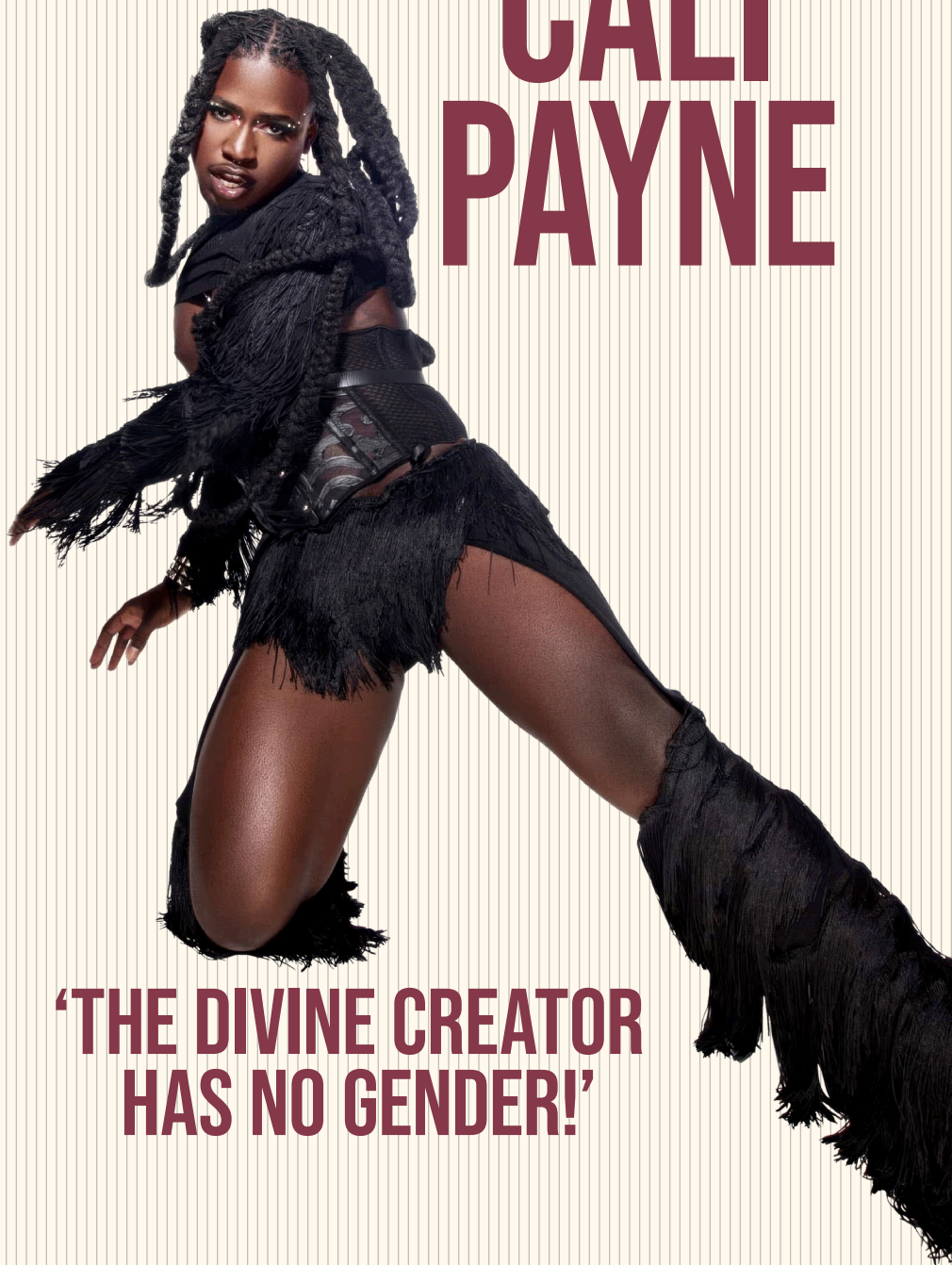
How many people know that Black Panthers reached out to Gay Liberationists? The history that is being remembered is being revised or erased. But, says Critical Race Theory author Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, we all must intercede and take action.

“The destruction of the [Black Lives Matter] plaza (in Washington DC) is of a piece with other efforts to bury any recognition of the past that continues to live in the present—from censoring words and banning books to defunding education and threatening museums. These are not mere excesses in cost-cutting,” Crenshaw says in *The Battle for Our Memory Is the Battle for Our Country* in *Time* magazine’s May 1 issue. “Wiping out our collective memory is part of their targeted strategy to suppress historical literacy, empathy, and our capacity to fight for a racially just democracy.”

Juneteenth is a opportunity to get joyfully energized and recommit to saving ourselves, our history, and building new coalitions with our family of choice. Happy Liberation Day!

Karen Ocamb is a veteran LGBTQ+ journalist who can be found on Facebook.

CALI PAYNE



**‘THE DIVINE CREATOR
HAS NO GENDER!’**

BY DOROTHY RANDALL GRAY

Cali Dequan landed on the shores of Los Angeles, California, in January 2019—pre-COVID. After making a conscious decision to leave Dallas, Texas, and recovering from a toxic breakup, Cali set out to pursue her dreams of becoming an award-winning actress. She later stepped into her passion for writing and performing original music.

With \$300 and 22 years to her name, Cali came to realize that there were many paths her life could have taken. She arrived armed with talent, determination, and something even more precious than all of the above: an abiding faith in, and love of, God.

In the beginning, her days were filled with UberEATS and Postmates deliveries. A connection with Central Casting led to background and extra work in films, along with bit parts in *Grown-ish*, *Euphoria*, and other productions. Then came the HBO Max original reality competition series *LEGENDARY*, and a \$100,000 prize won by Cali and four other members of the House of Balmain, led by [Legendary Jamari Balmain, father].

Today, Cali is known as the legendary West Coast mother of the Kiki House of Nike. She is renowned for walking Vogue Fem. Cali used her prize money to establish the Shirley Payne Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit community service organization named in honor of her beloved grandmother. The foundation's mission is to provide microgrants to queer people of color and members of the Kiki scene.

In December 2024, Cali began mental health therapy as the first step in her gender transition journey. She describes this journey as an evolution—becoming more of who she is and who she was born to be.

"I've always been in touch with the feminine side of who I am. Most recently, I've come to realize that I want to be in alignment with how I truly feel, rather than how I was socialized to be—as a masculine boy. I was conditioned to wear baseball caps, Jordans, and tees. Ballroom gave me the space to express myself within the terms of my own binary. I feel that Black people experience transphobia more than others, especially the darker-skinned among us. We are the most visible."

Through it all, Cali believes her decisions are divinely guided by a firm belief in the words of Jeremiah 29:11: *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

*Dorothy Randall Gray is an artist, activist, poet, master teacher, and the author of the best-selling book *Soul Between the Lines* (Avon Books, 1998).*

THE EROTIC SOUL

WHY PLEASURE IS A
POLITICAL ACT FOR BLACK MEN

BY TREVOR JAMES



In a world that often demands Black men harden up, shut down, or disconnect from their sensuality, choosing to stay erotically alive is a bold, radical act. It's not just about sex—though that, too, deserves to be honored without shame. It's about reclaiming your birthright to feel, to desire, to experience pleasure, and to live from the inside out, even when everything outside feels unstable.

We are living through uncertain times. Economic disparity widens, political systems feel rigged, and the pressure to perform—professionally, socially, emotionally—intensifies. For many Black men, the stress is compounded by racial expectations that box us in: the strong Black man who doesn't need tenderness, the hypersexual threat, or the emotionally unavailable provider. These stories are not just exhausting—they're deadening.

But there's another way.
Let me say something you might not hear often:
Your pleasure is powerful.
And for Black men? It's revolutionary.

We live in a world that tells us our worth is tied to how much we can grind, how much pain we can take, how many people we can protect, and how little we need in return. We're told to be strong, silent, and always in control. Anything soft, sensual, or vulnerable? That's seen as weakness—or worse, a threat.

But what if I told you that claiming your right to pleasure—real, embodied, soulful pleasure—isn't just self-care?

It's resistance.
It's liberation.
It's a homecoming.

WHEN WE'RE TAUGHT TO NUMB OUT

Growing up, I learned early that survival meant shutting things down. Don't feel too much. Don't cry. Don't let people see what you long for. And definitely don't talk about desire—especially not in a way that sounds tender, or soft, or sacred.

Like many of us, I internalized that pleasure was something to sneak, not savor. It was something we did in the dark, behind closed doors—something we chased to escape, not to connect. And for a while, I did just that. I numbed out with work, with sex, with noise. I didn't realize how disconnected I'd become from my own body, from my own soul.

But here's what I learned the hard way: numbing your desire also numbs your joy. You can't selectively shut down. When you suppress your erotic self, you're not just cutting off sex—you're cutting off your life force. Your aliveness. Your creativity. Your power.

And that's exactly what systems of oppression want.

PLEASURE IS A PORTAL BACK TO YOURSELF

There came a point when I started to question it all. I started asking: What if pleasure isn't selfish? What if it's sacred? What if it's my birthright?

That's when things began to shift. I stopped treating my body like a machine and started listening to it like a teacher. I explored sacred intimacy, tantra, slow touch, sensual breathwork. And what I discovered blew me open.

Pleasure wasn't just about feeling good—it was about remembering who I was.

I felt more rooted, more real, more me.

Not hustling. Not performing. Just... being. Feeling. Receiving. Belonging. And let me tell you something—that kind of presence? That kind of self-love? That kind of open-hearted erotic energy? It's magnetic. It's healing. It's radical.

WHY THIS MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

Let's not pretend times aren't hard. Between racism, capitalism, political chaos, and generational trauma, Black men are carrying a lot. Most of us are tired. Tired of surviving. Tired of proving. Tired of pretending we're fine.

And here's the wild truth: reclaiming pleasure—real, soul-deep pleasure—is one of the most defiant things we can do.

It says: I am not just a worker. I'm not just a warrior. I am a whole, feeling, desiring, sacred being.

It says: My joy matters.

My softness matters.

My body matters.

That's not fluff. That's freedom.

PRACTICING EROTIC LIBERATION—DAILY

If you're ready to reconnect to your erotic soul, you don't have to wait for the "perfect moment." You can start small. Here's what's helped me and the men I've worked with:

1 Make space for sensuality

Slow down. Light a candle. Take a bath. Touch your body like it belongs to someone you love. Because it does.

2 Breathe with your whole body

Most of us are walking around holding our breath. Let your breath drop into your belly. Let it wake up your chest. Breathe like you deserve to feel everything.

3 Reclaim solo pleasure

Self-touch isn't just about release—it's about reconnection. Touch yourself without a goal. Be curious. Be tender. Let it be an offering to your own soul.

4 Talk about it

Find brothers you can trust and talk about your relationship to pleasure, desire, shame, and joy. These conversations change lives.

5 Say yes to joy, even in the chaos

You don't need permission. You don't need to earn rest, love, or pleasure. You are worthy now.

THIS IS ABOUT MORE THAN SEX

This is about wholeness.

It's about reclaiming parts of ourselves that were never meant to be shamed. It's about letting go of survival mode and stepping into what I call thrival. Your erotic soul isn't something extra. It's your birthright. It's the pulse of your power. It's the bridge between your body and your spirit.

So the next time you feel the urge to rest, to touch, to dance, to breathe deeply into pleasure—don't push it away.

Say yes.

Because every yes is a quiet act of revolution.

YOU ARE ALREADY WHOLE

If you take nothing else from this, let it be this:

You don't need to be more "pure" to be spiritual.

You don't need to be less sexual to be worthy.

You don't need to silence your longing to be respected.

You are already whole.

Your sex is sacred. Your spirit is embodied.

And your survival—our survival— isn't just about making it through. It's about thriving as full, integrated, sensual, soulful men.

You don't have to split yourself in half anymore.

You get to bring it all back together.

You get to come home.



Trevor James is a cuddle therapist, masseur, intimacy coach, sacred intimate, and uthor of "On Being Seen: Chronicles of a Touch & Intimacy Therapist." Helping men reclaim connection, confidence, and embodied joy. Learn more and book a session at www.TrevorJamesLA.com.

The Los Angeles Black AIDS Monument **Pouring Into Each Other** is a constant reminder that **All Black Lives Matter**



Commissioned by
The Black AIDS Monument
Committee

Sculpted by
Nijel Lloyd Binns

Installed
June 27, 2021

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