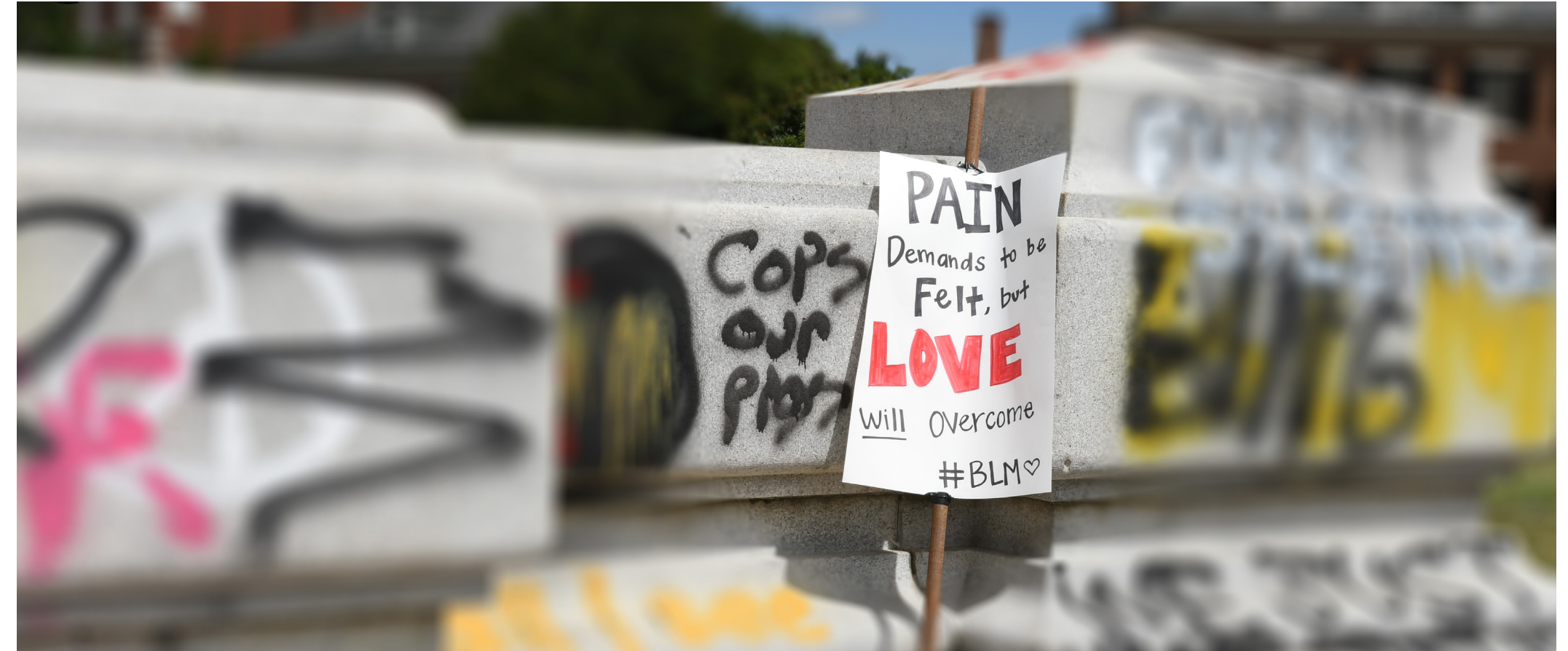


Pillars of Community



by Gilbert Lopez







Prologue

Communities shape who we are. Communities grow and evolve. In the aftermath of COVID-19, I began to question what it truly means to belong to a community. This journey became more than a curiosity—it became a mission to discover how we can transform our communities and strengthen our roles within them. As I explored this idea, I realized communities are sometimes something we find. But as a gay, brown, college student, I’ve often had to create my own community. Just as the saying goes, “You can’t pick your family, but you can pick your friends and your nose.” Okay, maybe that was a little corny, but the point is, I want to show how I see community and how people—all people—belong.

Working with a silo mentality is often not conducive to a collaborative work environment, and a silo mentality can lead to loneliness, silence, and a lack of hope. This is why I looked for community and meaning by attending the Walk for Peace, examining how drag queens are thriving in 2026, and documenting how our public schools benefit from organizations like *Communities in Schools* (CIS). These are all examples of ways we, as contributing members of society, can help avoid feeling like we are in a silo; these acts of hope and speaking up are examples of how we are able to leverage the good we can do for the benefit of our communities. These are

all examples of ways we as contributing members of society can help avoid feeling like we are in a silo; these acts of hope and speaking up are examples of how we are able to leverage the good we can do for the benefit of our communities.

Dr. Jamil Zaki’s book, *Hope For Cynics*, has had a profound impact on how I choose to look for the positive and avoid negativity bias. After reading Dr. Zaki’s book, my research

question slowly came into focus: In what ways do virtual spaces like gaming hubs and in-person communities leverage positivity and a shared sense of purpose to restore and maintain social connections following troublesome times such as lockdowns and schisms in political life? This question required me to go find those nuggets of positivity in our communities. It’s been an uplifting process to attend drag shows and witness how queer communities thrive, even while being labeled “unsafe” for children, even if just to read to them, or dismissed as “abnormal” and mentally unstable. From learning how organizations are working to help underprivileged schools and marginalized students in the city of Richmond, to Buddhist monks walking

thousands of miles to spread the message of peace in our world, these are moments that have helped me remember why life is worth fighting for.



During the development of this project, I had to consider several factors that affected my commitment to both my academic and professional careers. Work-life balance may be a taboo concept in some workplaces, but it is a reality for those of us who need to work, want to improve our minds, our communities, and our families, and yet still want to make time for our physical and mental health. To achieve these goals, I had to let go of one of the best employment experiences I have had since moving to Richmond. I made a commitment to see this project through to the end and to complete my degree, so I stepped away from my job as an admin assistant in our local public school system to create the balance and space necessary to fight for my goals.

Perseverance is very important to me, and my research has helped me find the hope to keep going. As I witnessed the Buddhist monks walking for peace and handing out flowers, a journey that brought them from Texas to Chester, Virginia, I saw that they were heckled by a small group of people who did not agree with their faith. The monks continued their walk, the journey that they embarked upon to spread a message of peace and love, not to bring harm to anyone; to the contrary, with their walk for peace, the monks were trying to offer our planet a chance for posterity. I witnessed some of Richmond's most iconic drag queens turn their safe space, Godfrey's, into a space to share their artform with a diverse crowd of patrons, including families, showing that they are not a harm to our society. These drag queens are pioneers



in that sense, similar to the group of drag queens Catherine Fargher highlights in her article on cLUB bENT. Fargher showcases how the drag queens who performed at cLUB bENT cultivated a queer multi-purpose community space that welcomed all and allowed a safe space to be born in Australia. That drag queens, like everyone else—regardless of their creed, their race, their nationality—need to work, is part of why I wanted to photograph them. Working is in itself a form of community and working-class people are just as important to our political life as are the wealthy and well-connected people who are often in positions of power.

This intrinsic need to find purpose in life is a common one, appearing even in the most fleeting and unexpected places—including at the margins of our communities. While taking photos near Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), I spoke to an unhoused man and asked if there was anything he needed. He told me he was fine, and that he was just vibing, unbothered by a lot of what was going on in the world around him. This brief interaction reminded me that life is

beautiful, and we can't take it for granted.

My journey to find these moments and to document them has really shaped and helped me grow as an individual. I want to give back to my community in whatever form I can, because community is the bedrock of what makes us human.

While working with Richmond Public Schools, I've been privileged to be able to collaborate with Communities

in Schools and see how this organization benefits all the communities they touch for our public schools. We are born into our familial communities, and then we venture out to find new ones in the journey of life and of growth. The journey from one community to the next is what is so beautiful about human nature. You'd be surprised how much joy you can be filled with after helping a family in need—there's nothing like it.

When supporting families in need, my observations have revealed the significant gaps these individuals face and how access to a strong, caring community can help meet those needs. It also reminded me that being an effective member of a community comes, in part, from that place within us that still believes in hope.

We all work, we all live to make it to the next day, but there, underneath that intrinsic need, is hope.

I have been extremely fortunate to have a strong support system to help me along the way. I couldn't have done this without my sister, who lent her artistic abilities in helping me understand how book design is done. With her patience and understanding, I was able to more clearly articulate my reflections on what I observed about maintaining and fostering diverse communities—from schools to families in Richmond, Virginia.

These photos strive to capture those glimpses of hope in a moment, evidence that these moments do exist and are real. Moments that cannot be replicated or replaced but can evoke feelings. Moments that may seem ephemeral to some but are the building blocks of multitudes of

existing and future communities to come. My research is a journey without an end, like a hope that knows no bounds and belongs to everyone.

The journey from one community to the next is what is so beautiful about human nature.





Pulse Nightclub Orlando, FL

On June 12, 2016... To honor the memory of the 49 lives lost in the Pulse shooting tragedy, a rainbow crosswalk was painted on the corner by the Pulse Nightclub. Even in mourning, color is powerful. But this exercise of the power of beauty, in the expression of identity and of place, led to the establishment of conservative local laws that deem this sidewalk and others like it in the community to be a “distraction” and unsafe for travelers. Fast forward to Summer 2025: the Florida governor orders the removal of all crosswalk art based on a law that targets the LGBTQ+ community. In the overnight hours of August 21, the rainbow crosswalk, with part of the Pulse memorial, is removed. However, soon after the sidewalk is removed, a community bands together to color in the crosswalk, despite arrest warnings, and activists and community members continue to “paint” the crosswalk with chalk. The construction of a more permanent memorial is planned by the city of Orlando in 2026.

Here, I have connected Orlando to Richmond with images of our rainbow crosswalks in each community, to remind us that there are many sites of LGBTQ+ beauty and power that exist across our amazing country. No community must stand alone.

I want to highlight how important this event was to me, as Pulse was one of my original places—where I discovered who I was—and a place where I could have been one of the victims as well. Being able to shed light through action—by showing up, demonstrating that we are not afraid, and affirming that we are here to stay—made the pilgrimage to document this act of community activism and mourning worth the journey.

The photos leading up to this section are to connect two different cities, their communities, and to indicate how we are together in a community—from Orlando, Florida to Richmond, Virginia.

a community mourns...



Bienvenidos al Monumento Conmemorativo Interino de Pulse

En honor y recuerdo de los 49 ángeles, sus familias, los sobrevivientes y todos quienes fueron afectados por la tragedia de Pulse.

El 12 de junio de 2016 a las 2:02 a.m., nuestra comunidad cambió para siempre cuando 49 vidas fueron arrebatadas y docenas de personas resultaron heridas en un tiroteo masivo durante la Noche Latina en Pulse, un club nocturno LGBTQIA+ seguro e inclusivo. En aquel momento, fue el tiroteo masivo más mortífero de la historia de Estados Unidos.

Desde ese trágico día, nos hemos concentrado en apoyar a las víctimas y sus familias, así como sanar y unir a nuestra comunidad con amor y compasión.

El municipio de Orlando está en el proceso de crear un monumento conmemorativo para rendir homenaje a los 49 ángeles. El monumento conmemorativo servirá como un lugar donde las familias de las víctimas, los sobrevivientes, los socorristas y nuestra comunidad puedan reunirse y recordar este momento en la historia de nuestra ciudad y nuestra nación. Este sitio también servirá para recordar al mundo que Orlando es y será siempre una comunidad inclusiva donde cada persona es bienvenida. Mientras se efectúa la planificación y diseño del monumento...

a community is multilingual

Welcome to the Pulse Memorial

their families, the survivors

was forever impacted
were injured in a mass
inclusive LGBTQIA+
shooting in U.S. history.

ing the victims and
community with love

manent memorial
ment memorial will
first responders
er this moment
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n inclusive

tilingüe



and full of color



Orlando, FL



Richmond, VA

Godfrey's Richmond, Virginia

Behind this simple two-toned sign in an unassuming neighborhood lies a world of magic, resilience, and over 30 years of drag history. Talented performers—female, male, transgender, and non-binary—have glided and pranced through these doors, captivating audiences with their dancing and singing.

This bar stands as a vibrant symbol of community for drag queens and their fans, welcoming families of all shapes and sizes. The drag queens of Godfrey's beautifully demonstrate how drag culture, as an artform, enriches and benefits everyone who walks through these doors to experience its magic.



a community finds joy...





From portraying Selena to Cher, these drag performers haven't just provided a safe space—they've created a stage where being gay is celebrated with pride and joy. As they perform to music by icons who have inspired generations, there's a sense of belonging and affirmation that radiates through the crowd. Local stars like Javon Love call this place home, sharing their talents and stories with unapologetic authenticity. Every visit here is a reminder that our identities are beautiful, our community is powerful, and our art is a celebration of who we are.















Thirsty's RVA 2026



Kickin' it in the community!



Ram Recovery - Creating Community Bonds

Rams Recovery at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) serves as an exemplary model of a collegiate recovery community (CRC), which, according to research, plays a crucial role in fostering long-term recovery and academic success among students with substance use histories (Laudet et al. 2016). Rather than perpetuating the isolation often associated with recovery, Rams Recovery intentionally cultivates connection through shared creative expression and mutual support. The April 12th talent show, which featured drag performances, poetry readings, and fashion showcases, exemplified the program's strength in creating opportunities for students to affirm their identities and demonstrate resilience in a public forum.

Scholars have noted that creative engagement is associated with increased self-efficacy and positive identity transformation during recovery (Slayton et al. 2010). By bringing together students, staff, and community members, the event underscored hope as a foundational and unifying theme—a “through line” that connects individual stories of healing to a broader, collective celebration. A unifying theme that aligns with theoretical perspectives on recovery capital, which emphasize the importance of social, cultural, and community resources in sustaining recovery (Cloud & Granfield, 2008). In this context, recovery is reframed not as a process of deprivation but as a journey of abundance, creative expression, and communal flourishing.

I am filled with gratitude for Dr. Means, whose joyful guidance and enthusiastic mentorship brought this book and event to life. His ability to help me see the beauty in each community and weave their stories together created an atmosphere of true celebration and unity. Watching Dr. Means perform in drag was not only inspiring but also a reminder of

how much joy, courage, and creativity drag brings to our communities. His example highlighted the happiness and pride that come from authentic self-expression, and showed us all how drag is—and always will be—a vibrant, uplifting force for connection and belonging.

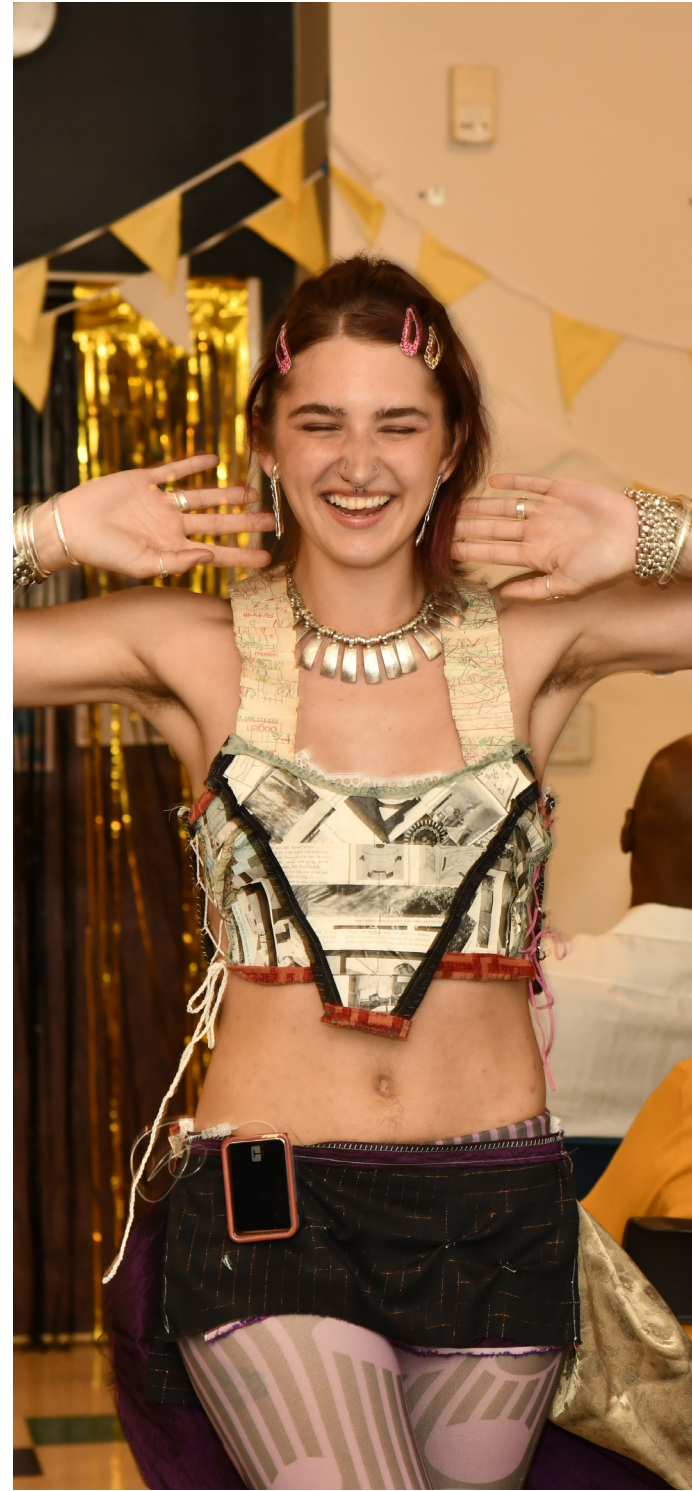
The “through line” connecting every poem, every runway walk, and every performance was an unwavering sense of hope. Hope is the foundational element that empowers a student to seek help, and it is that same hope that allows them to stand on a stage and share their art with the world. The talent show demonstrated that recovery is a beginning point of “opening things up” to new possibilities. Through the support of Rams Recovery, hope becomes a tangible, living force that transforms lives and creates lasting bonds within the VCU community.

The inclusion of drag art and fashion in the showcase served as a powerful metaphor for the recovery process itself. In recovery, individuals often undergo a process of “unmasking” and rediscovering who they are without the influence of substances. Drag and fashion allow for a radical, joyful reclamation of identity. These performances proved that the clarity found in recovery provides the perfect canvas for vibrant self-expression, allowing students to take center stage with renewed pride and visibility. The strength of Rams Recovery at VCU lies in its ability to transform the often-isolating journey of recovery into a collective experience of belonging. In a collegiate environment where social life is frequently centered around substance use, Rams Recovery provides a “brave space.” Rams Recovery is a community where vulnerability is not a weakness but a prerequisite for growth. By prioritizing safety and mutual support, the organization allows students to navigate their healing while remaining deeply integrated into the heart of campus life.





















John, who allowed me to take his photo, said he was just “vibing.”

Schools

As I reflect on my journey with this story about CIS and my work at Richmond Public Schools, I feel a deep sense of pride and joy in representing the Hispanic community in Southside Richmond. Being an RPS employee has been a privilege, allowing me to help our communities gain access to resources they previously lacked. Last Thanksgiving, I was able to help ensure that families in need at our school received a turkey and saw firsthand the community getting what they needed for the holiday break. The immense joy I felt was incomparable, and it reminded me of Dr. Zaki's research, which found that doing good for others provides as much dopamine as treating yourself. I truly believe there's both a societal and biological reward in simply being a good human being.













who?



Women's History Month

Attending the “Ladies First: Virginia Women in Hip Hop” event at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture represents a significant turning point in the development of this book. This Women’s History Month event provided an opportunity not only to support a fellow Melon researcher, Justice, but also to emphasize the importance of community, discourse, and the reasons for collective engagement. Central to this discourse is the concept of hope. Justice poignantly articulated that individuals cease to seek representation once they actively embody it. This notion correlates with my research, particularly in relation to Niall Brennan and David Gudelunas’ examination of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and the discourse surrounding visibility.

The researchers’ critique the adverse effects of inadequate diversity. Just like the panelists at the “Women in Hip Hop” event, all the drag queens Brennan and Gudelunas interviewed reflected how they were treated negatively for not “fitting in” a specific mold and not being desired by the male gaze. In a similar vein, the “Women in Hip Hop” panel brought up the point that the hip-hop and rap genres are increasingly characterized by the prominence of female artists who are not always afforded the space to authentically express their identities and represent themselves as they see fit without executive (and usually male) approval. I also think this event and the book highlight how heteronormative male dominance and machismo continue to surface, even as society has been slowly trying to correct and challenge those norms.

The theme of authentic self-representation, alongside the necessity of mutual support, surfaced consistently throughout the dialogue between all the amazing panelists and resonated profoundly with my research findings. As social beings, our capacity for connection constitutes one of our most significant strengths. The narratives shared by the resilient “women in hip hop” were particularly impactful, as they confronted and triumphed over misogyny, sexism, and the inherent challenges within the music industry with remarkable courage and grace. Their determination and solidarity serve as compelling reminders that genuine progress is achievable when women support one another. A guiding principle from my mother resonates in this context: if one does not have something constructive to contribute, it is better to remain silent. Kindness is a resource that incurs no cost, and every act of kindness contributes to the creation of communities where women—and all individuals—can flourish. These dialogues underscore that, despite ongoing obstacles, women continue to lead, uplift, and transform their communities for the better.





“Not seeing much masculine-presenting women representation in entertainment growing up forced me to look within and define authenticity for myself. That journey made me fall in love with creating - because when you create from truth, you stop searching for representation and start becoming it.”

- Justice

Mellon Research Fellow





A Walk For Peace

I feel incredibly fortunate to have witnessed the Buddhist monks on their pilgrimage from Texas to Washington, D.C., walking for peace. Their arrival at our Chester campus was met with a beautiful outpouring of support—a sea of people, united by hope and curiosity, eager to experience something meaningful. Instead of stepping back, the crowd leaned in, drawn together by the belief that goodness is alive in the world. It was inspiring to see so many embrace this moment of peace, regardless of differences. As the *Lady of Rage* said in her

“Women in Hip Hop” panel interview, “You have to show up and uplift our community, you have to feed it positivity.” That spirit was alive the day the Buddhist monks made it to our community: people gathered not just to observe, but to share in a celebration of perseverance and unity. Even those who questioned the monks’ journey were present, bearing witness to the incredible 2,300-mile walk for peace. It was a powerful reminder that when we come together, we can amplify hope and positivity in our world.

**a community reveres,
prays, respects, and hopes**





Fandoms

According to Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary a fandom is:

1. all the fans (as of a sport)
2. the state or attitude of being a fan

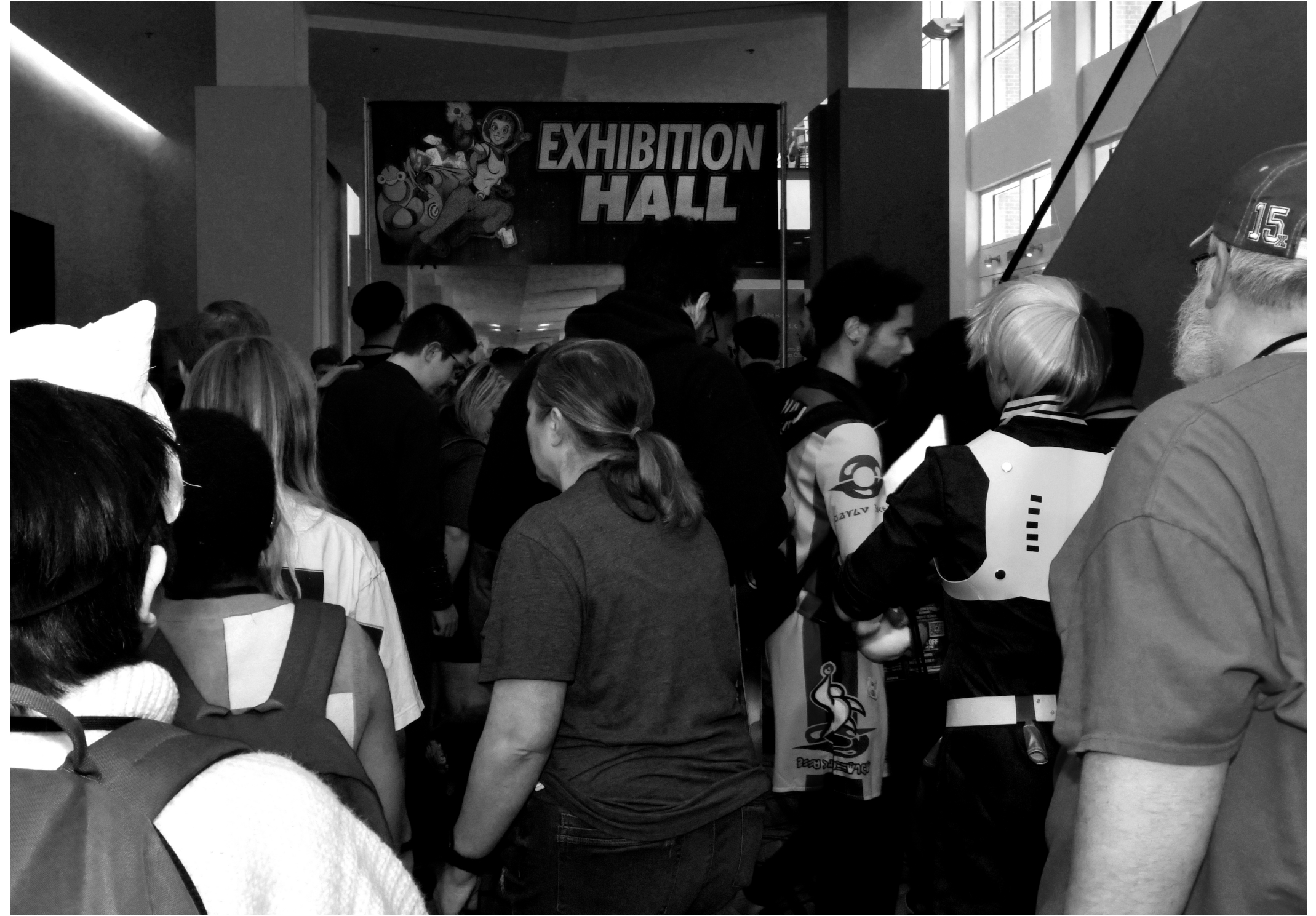
The first known use of the word “fan” was in 1903.

Examining the definition of “fan” reveals the longstanding and complex nature of this cultural identity. The nerd community along with geeks, otakus, and even wallflowers, particularly as it relates to trading card culture, represents a vibrant subculture characterized by both nostalgia and innovation. Participation in such communities often begins in childhood, as cultural touchstones like Saturday morning cartoons and popular television series during formative years foster early connections to various fandoms. Visual documentation from events such as Atlanta’s *Dragon Con* further illustrates the multiplicity of experiences within these spaces, as individuals—even siblings—can engage with the same environment through distinct intellectual properties and interests.

These subcultural spaces operate as crucial sites for social belonging, allowing participants to locate their community, or “tribe,” within a broader society. The excitement derived from discovering a sought-after Pokémon card parallels the joy others find in acquiring cosplay elements or interacting with admired figures at conventions. Importantly, the continued participation of younger generations demonstrates the enduring appeal and adaptive capacity of these communities, ensuring the ongoing vitality of fandom culture.











The Last of Us

I wanted to reflect on a documentary that beautifully captures the profound message of the video game *The Last of Us*, particularly its second part, which was developed and released during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Naughty Dog, the team behind the game, displayed remarkable adaptability, working to protect the integrity of the story amid unprecedented challenges.

The documentary reveals the hurdles they faced, including the necessity of transitioning to remote work, which resulted in some game elements being leaked to the public. Unfortunately, many fans viewed these snippets without grasping the full context, as the game was still in development.

The documentary also addresses a darker side of the response, where some fans threatened the motion capture actors with death and invaded their privacy, targeting their families simply because they were dissatisfied with what they had seen. This illustrates the complexity of community in gaming; while strong bonds exist among players, there are also instances of negativity fueled by prejudice.

For instance, a character's masculine features led some to unjustly assume she was transgender, resulting in vocal

transphobia and homophobia. One of the main characters, Ellie, is a lesbian, a representation I deeply connect with. Ellie's journey resonates with me, as it revolves around love, the heart of the game's message.



The documentary highlights that, despite the challenges, positivity can still thrive within the game. Naughty Dog's commitment to delivering a narrative that emphasizes community amid chaos is inspiring. The game tackles themes of tribalism through a world disrupted by a fungal pandemic, yet it showcases the resilience of communities, such as Jackson, the community our protagonists start out in the video game, where order and stability are cultivated through

governance, shared purpose, cooperation, preservation of culture, and emotional security.

The story of *The Last of Us* and its fandom powerfully explores various dimensions of community, illustrating how emotional bonds and relationships empower individuals to navigate life's challenges. It emphasizes the importance of nurturing a community, even when faced with prejudice and negativity, and encourages us to pursue positivity with unwavering determination.



“I love the message that Joel leaves Ellie at the end—‘no matter what, you keep finding something to fight for’-- that’s the type of hope I wish someone would give to me. It’s so important to fight for what you think is right.”

- Julia

Fellow Gaming Community Member







Epilogue

As I undertake the task of reflecting on the research and the transformative journey that culminated in this book, I am compelled to approach this moment with a profound sense of gratitude and intellectual humility. The trajectory that brought me here is not merely personal but emblematic of the broader forces of community, opportunity, and the enduring human capacity for growth. My upbringing in Manhattan, in a one-bedroom apartment shared with my mother and sister, situated me within the microcosm of urban life, where the boundaries of possibility often felt circumscribed by circumstance. For much of my early life, the prospect of higher education appeared remote, more a distant ideal than an attainable goal.

Yet, through a confluence of personal resolve and the generosity of mentors, friends, and institutional support, I found myself welcomed into academic spaces populated by some of the most intellectually rigorous and caring individuals I have ever encountered. This book, therefore, is both a scholarly and personal exploration of community in its manifold forms: from the vibrancy of queer culture to the transformative potential of public education, and the collective agency manifest in protest and activism. The central argument

animating this work is that the act of coming together—of forming intentional, supportive communities—enables individuals and societies to transcend adversity and cultivate environments where mutual flourishing becomes possible.

The choice of cover art, featuring Babes—a longstanding pillar of the LGBTQ+ community in Richmond—was a deliberate

decision rooted in both personal experience and sociocultural analysis. Since relocating to Richmond in 2016, I have observed firsthand the city’s dynamic processes of growth and change, often catalyzed by spaces like Babes that serve as both sanctuaries and engines of progress. Such places exemplify

the positive social change that is possible when marginalized communities are empowered to define their own narratives and futures. In integrating this symbol into my work, I sought not only to document but also to participate in the ongoing project of communal uplift and artistic representation.

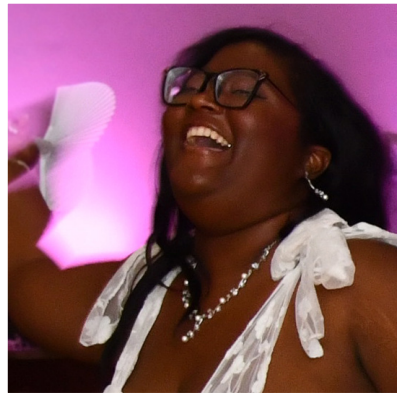
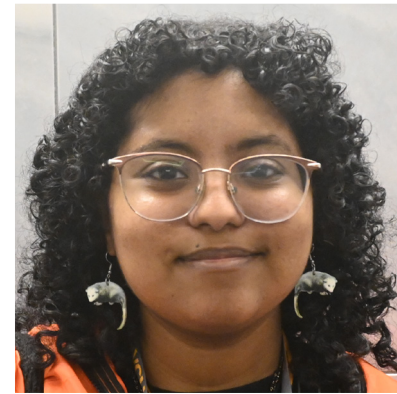
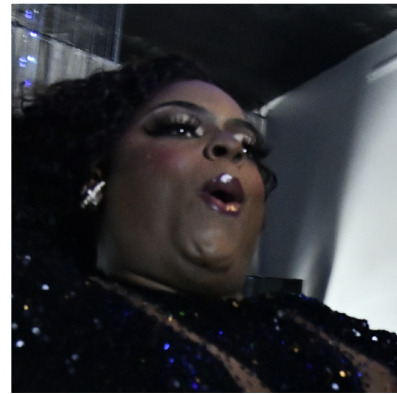
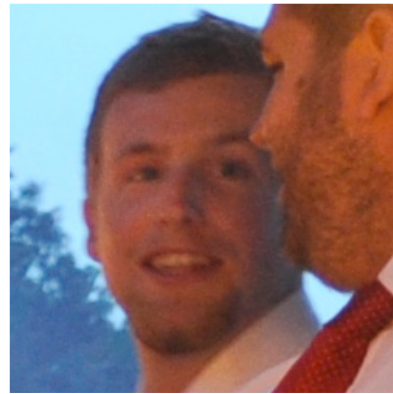
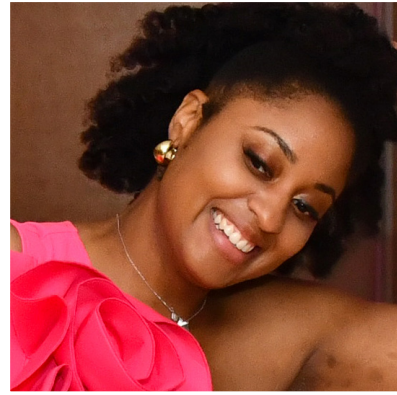
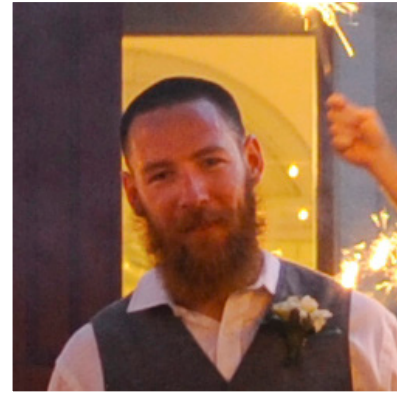
Intellectually, this project was shaped by my engagement with the writings of Benedict Anderson, particularly his exploration of nationalism and the imagined communities that bind people

together—even, at times, in negative or exclusionary ways. Anderson’s concept of the nation as an “imagined community” prompted me to interrogate the mechanisms by which belonging is constructed, and to consider how alternative, more inclusive forms of community might be realized. Where Anderson highlights the tribalistic tendencies of human societies, I am inclined to envision a broader, more capacious sense of belonging—one in which our many “huts” are united by shared aspirations for equity and growth, rather than divided by fear or hostility.

A parallel thread in my journey has been my development as a photographer, particularly in the context of wedding photography. My professional beginnings at Disney World in Orlando, Florida—where I captured moments of joy for visitors from around the world—offered a unique vantage point on the universal human desire for connection, celebration, and memory-making. As I transitioned from Orlando to Richmond, photography remained a constant, sustaining my creative practice even as my academic ambitions evolved. The opportunity to document weddings has been especially meaningful, as it places me at the intersection of intimacy and ritual, allowing me to witness and preserve moments of profound emotional significance. Of all the images I have captured, those taken at the altar—when anticipation and love are most palpable—remain my favorites, as they encapsulate the very essence of human togetherness.

The intellectual ethos underpinning this book has also been influenced by figures such as Michael J. Fox, whose advocacy of “incurable optimism” offers a counterweight to the pervasive negativity that often shapes public discourse. In the process of drafting, revising, and organizing this manuscript, I have endeavored to foreground narratives of hope, resilience, and constructive possibility. This approach resonates with contemporary psychological research, such as Dr. Jamil Zaki’s work on the “negativity bias,” which suggests that humans are predisposed to focus on adverse events or information. To counteract this tendency, I have sought to illuminate the often-overlooked instances of solidarity and kindness that animate our communities and provide a foundation for positive social progress.

In summary, the pillars of community explored in this book—queer spaces, educational institutions, activist movements, and creative practices—are not merely abstract concepts but lived realities that have sustained me and countless others. As I prepare to embark on the next phase of my academic journey at Virginia Commonwealth University, I hope that this work will contribute to ongoing conversations about inclusivity, representation, and the transformative potential of collective action. It is my aspiration that these reflections, grounded in both scholarship and observed, lived experience, will inspire others to recognize and nurture the communities that make such journeys possible for all.



Notes

Page 2: The inside cover photo features local Orlando, FL artist @bubb.aart lending a hand to preserving the memory of 49 lives lost at *Pulse Nightclub* in June of 2016, and protesting a local government's anti-LGBTQ+ policies.

Pages 4-5: From the 2020 Monument Ave. Demonstrations

Pages 6-7: From Boulevard Ave in RVA

Page 14: From one of the times I was shooting in *Godfrey's* when an actual engagement happened and I was there to take photos!

Page 17: This section was me documenting what is there in Orlando at this time. They have print outs and displays for the people who lost their lives that night. I wanted to get these archived as the location of *Pulse Nightclub* will be turned to a memorial in the next year.

Page 30: This spread is one of my favorites, I loved that I was able to incorporate Selena into this as well!

Page 40: This is from *Thirsty's*, one of my favorite gay bars in RVA. It's always been my secret hiding place, and my safe space. You see so many different events here, from a lot of subculture events to theater dancers like this photo!

Page 42: This was from Atlanta when I was there back in late August 2025. While I went to Orlando, I stopped here to see Jasmine Masters, who is from RuPaul's Drag Race, and an internet personality. Her drag show was filled with a lot of soul.

Page 44: Community garden in Northside, RVA

Page 46: This was a photo I took at the early stages of the book. I was walking around in the VCU area trying to start the research process of documenting the community in our city. I had asked John if I could take a photo of him and he said why not. He hopes I make him famous!

Page 49: Mary Mumford Elementary, I wanted to get the traffic sign of two people crossing together, I think that's a great way of showing connection on a level that we are conditioned to.

Pages 50-51: Photos from where I was working at the time in RPS - I was able to help during the 2025 Thanksgiving weekend in helping get meals to families in need, so I took some photos of my amazing co-workers as we were doing our best to help the community.

Pages 54-63: Photos from 2020 - I had them on my site as a separate set to document and respect the events that transpired here as a reminder. It was great to incorporate my images as I just recently started showing them. I also submitted the first photo into the juried art shot at Brightpoint.

Pages 74-77: These are photos from a friend that I used to show how fandoms are extensive, from a signed *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* lith to a super plush of a Pokémon to her *Magic: The Gathering* collection.

Page 76: Photos of a photoshoot I did for a cosplayer in RVA - coinciding with the fandom and convention photos throughout the book.

Page 82: Photos of myself and my sister, as she was a massive help for designing and making sure the book was made!

Page 84-87: I wanted to include one of my favorite video games into this journey, the *Last of Us* is a monumental game that covers all the themes I wanted to explore.

Pages 90-91: Moments from queer weddings I have photographed and wanted to include in my themes of love.

Page 94: The square composite photos serve as a way of showing the faces of a lot of the people I photographed. I wanted to show how my book, in itself, made a community, and I wanted that to be what I closed on.

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