

'I feel like we are still celebrating pride': Black LGBTQ+ residents reflect on Black Lives Matter movement, Annapolis pride parade



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Pride has never just been a block party for Lynne Edwards Tucker.

She attended her first celebration in Baltimore as a teenager, just a few years after the 1969 uprising at [New York's Stonewall Inn](#) started it all. Since then, she's changed — growing more confident in her skin as a Black woman and as a lesbian. The world has changed too, but for Edwards Tucker, pride has always been about fighting for the equal treatment of all people.

"Pride is where we can share victories, share sorrows, and show support," Edwards Tucker said. "It's not a Black thing, not a white thing, not a Hispanic thing."

This year, though there will be no jubilant rainbow parades, that mission is still manifesting.

Amid the coronavirus pandemic that canceled nearly all in-person LGBTQ+ pride events, Edwards Tucker has seen younger generations take to the streets, begging for a world in which Black people won't be killed for the color of their skin and a world where all people are treated equally.

The protests roared first in Minneapolis, where video of a white police officer killing a Black man first surfaced on the internet, and where [angry protesters lit a police precinct up in flames](#), then quickly erupted in nearly 2,000 cities around the world, including dozens in Maryland.

Nearly a month after [the killing of George Floyd](#), peaceful marches, protests and vigils continue in Anne Arundel County where the Black community is still seeking true change and an end to systemic racism.

Annapolis Pride has replaced its in-person parade with [a virtual discussion about combating racism](#), homophobia and transphobia at 4 p.m. Saturday. Monday, they will partner with Black Lives Matter activists for a march in solidarity for all Black lives. The group will meet at City Dock at 5 p.m.

"It did my heart good to see so many people come out and support (the Black Lives Matter movement), Black, white, straight, gay," Edwards Tucker said.

Edwards Tucker is 63 years old — making her particularly vulnerable to the highly-contagious coronavirus — so she hasn't been out in the streets. Instead, the mother of five sinks her teeth into other forms of activism, like letter-writing, and makes sure she is still an attentive mentor to LGBTQ+ students, faculty and staff at Anne Arundel Community College in her role as the Rainbow Network coordinator.

Though the LGBTQ+ community has seen two major victories in the past five years — the legalization of same-sex marriage by the Supreme Court and the recent ruling preventing LGBTQ+ employment discrimination — the fight is nowhere near over.

Courtney Bardell, 30, marches for racial justice during LGBTQ+ pride month.

"Our work isn't done," said 30-year-old Severn resident Courtney Bardell.

The force of the vibrant community is needed behind the Black Lives Matter movement, she said.

Bardell, who identifies as a lesbian, said it's been heartening to look around at protests and see the familiar faces of her white, LGBTQ+ friends.

White members of the community must use their privilege to amplify the demands of the Black Lives Matter movement and fight for true equality, Bardell said.

"If you're all about pride, you're all about equality," Bardell said, referring to the non-Black members of the LGBTQ+ community. "There are a lot of people fighting for you, now it's your turn."

Though the community can't gather for typical pride month festivities, there is another urgent and related cause to focus on, Bardell said, "it feels like we are still celebrating pride."

Bardell shared her identity with her family and friends four years ago, prompted by a mass shooting at the Pulse LGBTQ+ nightclub in Florida that left 49 people dead and 53 others wounded. The massacre [took place on the club's Latin Night](#), and many of [the victims](#) were Latino or Black.

She had only just started to visit LGBTQ+ specific nightclubs herself, and the fear of violence due to her identity led her to worry about dying without her family knowing who she truly is.

In coming to understand the history of both the Black and LGBTQ+ communities and her identity, Bardell said the fight for LGBTQ+ rights and the fight for dignity for Black lives are nearly inextricable.



Protester Keanuu Smith-Brown marches down a closed down Forest Drive near Chinguapin Round Road. Marches and rallies were held in Annapolis Tuesday evening to protest the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis police custody and bring attention to the Black Lives Matter movement.

"Black lives matter, and pride was built on Black lives," Keanuu Smith-Brown said.

As he marches forward in the streets of Annapolis, hoping for a future where he doesn't have to fear for his life due to his identity as a Black, gay man, Smith-Brown is also looking back.

"How do we even get to the point where we walk in the streets and hold hands and kiss?" the 24-year-old asked. "It's the people that came before us. We have to honor that even more than before."

The new president of the District 30 Democratic Club said he is thinking of what he can do to contribute to a future where a young Black, gay man doesn't have to wonder if he can show affection to his partner in public or even at a Black community cookout, where his straight family members are certainly free to publicly display affection for their dates.

"Being Black and gay is one of those combinations, damn, I have this burden to bear," Smith-Brown said. "But at the same time, I just thank God I'm alive. My ability to be where I am right now — still living — is an honor."

He said he feels called to fight for a better future for people like him, and his transgender brothers and sisters, inspired by the early LGBTQ+ rights activists that paved the way.

Black trans women are believed to have thrown the first bricks or bottles at police, [inciting the uprising](#) at Stonewall Inn after plainclothes officers raided the clandestine gay bar in Greenwich Village, arresting LGBTQ+ patrons because same-sex acts were still illegal in every state but Illinois.

Amid the national reckoning on race, at least two Black trans women — Dominique "Rem'mie" Fells and Riah Milton — have been reported dead, prompting a wave of protests, and [a discussion about the violence transgender people of color face in their daily lives](#).

"What is our purpose if we don't even reflect that same courage? What would it all have been for?" Smith-Brown asked. "I am who I am. I have a long way to go but I am so ready to face it."

Elaina Jones grew up in Pasadena, where she did not know anyone who was like her: Black and LGBTQ+. Now, she hopes sharing her story will help others know they are loved and accepted. Photo courtesy of Elaina Jones.

During this time in which racism is being debated on a national stage, it can be easy to be bogged down by pain and fear, said Elaina Jones, who turns 20 on Sunday. To combat the negativity, Jones is clinging to a memory from New York Pride 2019, which she calls the most moving experience in her entire life.

While watching the parade, Jones was approached by women wearing "[Free Mom Hugs](#)" shirts — these groups are common at LGBTQ+ pride events, where individuals sometimes have rocky relationships with their parents after coming out. The woman asked if she could hug Jones, and told her she was beautiful, loved and accepted for who she is: a Black, pansexual woman.

"Being at pride, it's just all love," Jones said. "That can be really refreshing especially living in the very, very scary world we are living in right now."

She grew up in Pasadena and attended Chesapeake High School. Though she did not know anyone else who was Black and LGBTQ+ like her, she knows there are people out there who maybe haven't yet been ready to embrace their true identity.

"You can be gay and you can be Black and you can be a woman. Own that. It can be an amazing thing," Jones said. "And don't stop fighting."

Watching from afar as young activists fight for a better future for Black people and for people of all gender and sexual identities, Edwards Tucker recalls how she thought about her sexuality when she was coming of age in the 1970s.

"Back then you had to keep it in the closet," Edwards Tucker said. "Just seeing how gay people were treated, you could lose your job or your life."

She referred to her identity as a Black, lesbian woman as a “triple whammy” of oppression. And described complicated bureaucratic processes she endured with her partner for more than a decade before they were allowed to legally wed.

Despite everything, Edwards Tucker is joyful. She is willing to engage in conversation with anyone. She said she is encouraged by progress.

She looks forward to a world free from racial or LGBTQ+ discrimination in health care and housing, hopefully, she said, in the lifetime of her 16-year-old son.

“Knowing America, who knows? But, I pray.”



Lynne Edwards Tucker, right, and her wife Janet Tucker, of Annapolis, celebrate Pride Month during the times of COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement. They pose at the Dr. Martin Luther King memorial at the Anne Arundel Community College.