

First Friday News & Views

Monthly Newsletter of the *First Friday Breakfast Club, Inc.*

August 2019

Volume 24

Issue 8

The next FFBC meeting is
Friday, August 2,
2019
7:00 a.m.



FFBC Meeting Location:
Hoyt Sherman Place,
15th & Woodland,
Des Moines



R.S.V.P.

JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com

or phone (515) 288-2500

or the website
by Wednesday,
July 31.



FFBC Website:
www.ffbciaowa.org



Racism Revisited

by Jonathan Wilson

I occasionally do diversity trainings, particularly in the context of potential housing discrimination cases. The trainings that I do, and that are done by others, inevitably touch on myriad characteristics, including racism.

When introducing the subject of race, I often ask everyone in attendance, "Who in the room is a racist, please raise your hand." To date, I have been the only one in the room with a hand raised. I then facetiously marvel that, given the pervasive racism that persists in this country, only one person in the room -- me -- is a racist. I goad attendees on the subject, pointing out that according to the most recent polling, more than 64% of Americans today believe that racism is a serious problem, and more than 30% perceive that racism is a problem, but not a serious one. How serious it is or isn't tends to track the pigmentation of the skin of those responding to the polling. Predictably, a greater percentage of people of color see racism as a serious problem.

With near unanimity, Americans polled agree that racism is a pervasive problem -- only disagreeing over whether or not it's a serious problem. Against that backdrop, how is it possible that among the randomly selected, American attendees, no one but me -- the diversity *trainer* -- could be the only one present that would acknowledge being racist.

There's a reason. With near unanimity, the term racist has become a well-deserved pejorative term that no one wants to claim. [Note to Trump's base: "pejorative" means "bad"] Not claiming that label, however, doesn't make it go away. In fact, until it is seen as a real problem for every individual, every individual is less likely to do anything about it in their own lives.

When people say they are not racist and that they are blind to non-white skin color, what I hear is, "I am perfectly comfortable with my own level of internalized racism and intend to do nothing about it."



[continued on page two]

In fact, racism is like a many layered onion. It enables people to define themselves outside the problem by defining racism in a way that excludes them. If a racist were merely someone who believes in white supremacy and who is comfortable with an occasional lynching, that lets lots of folks off the "racist" hook. They can say to themselves that, because I disavow white supremacy and denounce lynching, I'm not a racist. If a racist were merely that last-described group, together with those who don't believe in equal pay for equal work, somewhat fewer are let off the "racist" hook, but many racists would still remain. There are more layers.



If a person feels uncomfortable with the thought that, given equal opportunity and pay, a person of color may well achieve more, earn more, or make a more positive contribution to society than they will, that person's secret discomfort is racism, pure and simple. If a person is okay with that disparate productivity, but when they see a person of color stopped at a street corner in a fancy, expensive car, and the thought crosses their mind that the purchase may have been thanks to affirmative action, drug dealing, or pimping, those thoughts are a manifestation of racism.

And when your son or daughter brings home a fiancé of another race. Well...that may be the final layer. And that layer is being exposed more and more as time passes. According to the 2010 US Census, there were 7.8 million inter-racial marriages in the United States. If they have a typical 2.5 children apiece, we're talking about 19.5 million mixed-racial people in America in a single generation. Whoever those mixed-race off-spring marry, it's another inter-racial marriage. America is browning inexorably [Note to Trump base; that means you can't stop it.] It's no wonder there's a rise in hate groups, especially among so-called white supremacists; they are folks who are fearful that when Caucasians are no longer the majority, people of color may treat them as their ancestors treated people of color. They are also people who want to feel superior to *someone* without actually doing the work of achieving superiority in whatever endeavor. I've seen pictures and behaviors of some so-called white supremacists, and they appear to have some work to do.

Racism is a learned condition; we're not born racist. Most often we "inherit" our racism from our parents and the communities in which we have grown to adulthood. That inheritance is fostered by fear and a lazy person's desire to feel better than someone -- anyone -- and skin color becomes an obvious identifier.



It is no surprise that President Trump sees potential political advantage in broadcasting racist sympathies. It's shameful, but not surprising, given the character of the man, and his own thirst for self-aggrandizement [Note to Trump base: that means blowing your own horn even when -- especially when -- it's not warranted]. Mister "stable genius" is neither stable or a genius. And he's a racist.

Mark Your Calendar

August's Speaker:

Bruce Koff

Our speaker in August will be Bruce Koff, a representative of the International Rainbow Railroad initiative. You won't want to miss this. You are also encouraged to invite some of your friends to attend!! Provide the name(s) of any anticipated guest(s) so we can have name tags for them at the registration desk.



Do Ya Wanna Funk?:

The Importance of Patrick Cowley

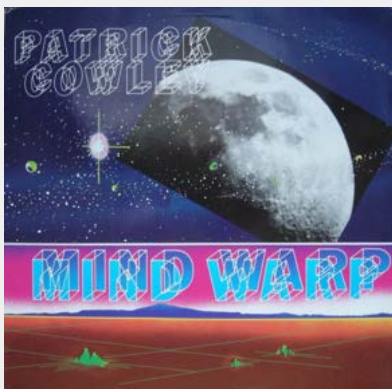
By Jordan Duesenberg



Over the next couple of months I'll be writing articles about both LGBTQ musicians (or influential members within the music industry) and musicians who had a large impact on our community (who may not be LGBTQ themselves) throughout modern history. For my first article, I couldn't think of a better musician to start with than Patrick Cowley. For anyone who knows me, they know that I am obsessed with disco music (to put it lightly). But before I actually fell in love with the genre, I thought disco music was just John Travolta dancing around to The Bee Gees in a leisure suit. That would soon change when I heard two songs at a leather bar in San Francisco that made me fall head over heels in love with the genre – Donna Summer's "I Feel Love" and Sylvester's "Do Ya Wanna Funk?" While Giorgio Moroder's production on Summer's track is (in my opinion) the best disco song of all time, it was Patrick Cowley's production on Sylvester's track I found myself more intrigued by, and that's also because Cowley was an extremely fascinating man that influenced dance music and gay culture better than anyone.

In 1971 Patrick Cowley moved to San Francisco to study music at a place he was particularly drawn to -- synthesizers -- an electronic musical instrument that was used mostly in prog rock at the time. It wasn't long before Cowley found himself immersed in the emerging disco scene popular amongst the thousands of gay men that flocked to the city. He soon started working the lights at one of the discos in San Francisco where he also met the soon-to-be legendary disco queen Sylvester, who he would also start playing the organ for. This was before Sylvester went disco and was more gospel-tinged R&B. One way or another Sylvester was able to listen to some of Cowley's synthesizer work and the two began to work with one another. Cowley played synthesizer on two of Sylvester's more famous tracks, "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)" and "Dance (Disco Heat)," off of *Step II*, and soon wrote a number of songs for Sylvester on his album *Stars*.

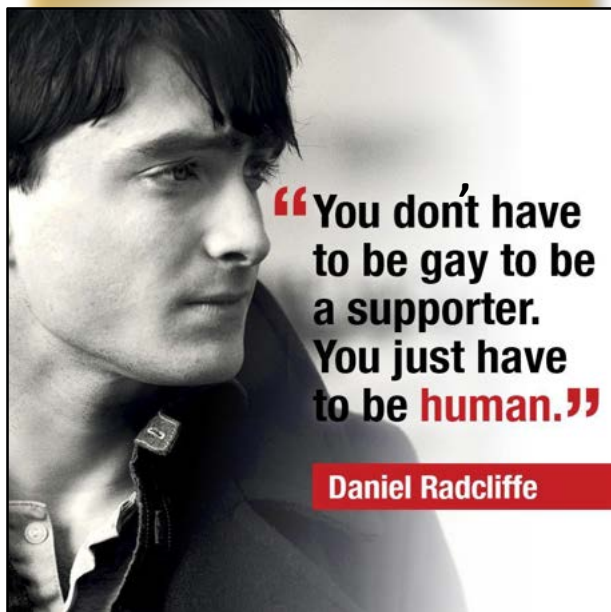
It wasn't until Cowley started putting out his own work that he would really solidify his place in the queer canon. Cowley would release his first 12" single called "Menergy" in 1981, which was incredibly suggestive and about the gay club scene at the time. It was a hit and he would quickly follow-up with his first album *Megatron Man* in the same year. It's important to note that what Cowley was doing at that time was releasing harder, faster, and more electronic-based disco which soon became known as "hi NRG disco," or just "hi NRG" -- which is essentially proto rave music which would soon dominate all of the world that decade and beyond. In fact, Cowley cofounded the hi NRG record label, Megatone Records, that same year as well. Despite all of these accomplishments, Cowley also became ill while on tour with Sylvester in 1981 -- which they would soon find out was AIDS. Cowley deteriorated quickly, but somehow briefly recovered. He got back to making music as soon as he was healthy enough, including his hit collaboration with Sylvester "Do Ya Wanna Funk?," a number of soundtracks for various gay pornographic films, and his masterpiece sophomore album *Mind Warp*. What was prominent about *Mind Warp* is it may be the first album about AIDS. Cowley knew he was dying of this strange new disease and he had to encapsulate how he was feeling into songs, so what makes up the album is very dark, very intense, yet strangely danceable -- a proto Techno in some ways. Cowley passed away November 12, 1982.



Patrick Cowley's place in history is important because he pushed synthesizer-based music to new heights, essentially defining a genre of music that defined gay culture in the 80s and beyond, and released visibly and audibly queer music at a time when that simply wasn't being done. Today, record labels like Dark Entries Records are still releasing unreleased Cowley works, including a number of soundtracks from Cowley's porn scores which are not cheesy porn music you might expect -- think dark sleazy ambient synthesizer based music. He's arguably more famous today than ever before and it's well deserved. He's an artist that I look up to and idolize, and I wish more people knew his name and appreciated what he has done for music and queer culture. I recommend everyone check out his work.

“What is straight? A line can be straight, or a street, but the human heart, oh, no, it's curved like a road through mountains.”

~ Tennessee Williams
A Streetcar Named Desire



Mark Your Calendars!

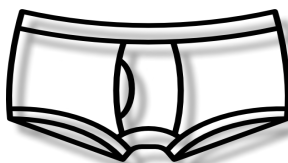
FFBC Speakers Announced:

September 6:
Suzanna DeBaca
(CEO of Business Publications)

October 4:
Jerry Foxhoven
(Former Director of Iowa
Department of Human Services)



Briefs & Shorts:



Thanks also to **Jordan Duesenberg** for his work on the FFBC website. Thanks to **Wade Petersen** for his work as our newsletter production editor. Thanks to **Ryan Weidner** for his work as our technology guru. *Thanks to all our contributors to the monthly newsletter!*

Mark your calendar for August 15, 2019, to attend the Capital City Pride sponsorship event at the Des Moines Art Center starting at 6:00 p.m. All are welcome.

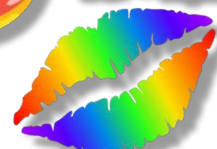
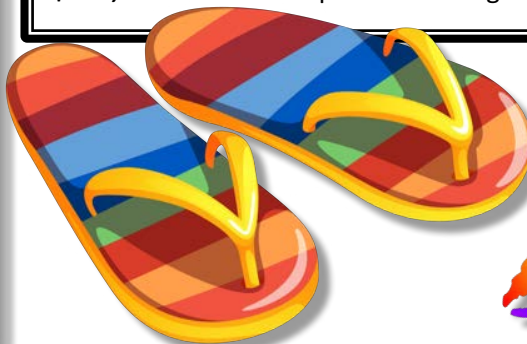
A special thank-you to those FFBC members and friends who have chosen to designate FFBC through the Donor Direct program of United Way. The contributions through United Way are tax deductible. Those who have chosen this means of supporting FFBC have gone to the trouble of completing their United Way campaign worksheet by designating FFBC as the beneficiary of their generosity. FFBC is an eligible recipient of such funding designations.

The next copy deadline for the FFBC newsletter will be **August 12, 2019**. If you have something on your mind, put it on paper and get it to me by the copy deadline. It'll be interesting, good therapy, or both.

Don't Miss the
DEADLINE!

Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. **Book donations are always welcome.** Thanks to **Scott Kuknyo** for helping coordinate the book exchange.

Consider a tax-deductible contribution to the FFBC scholarship fund, or a tax exempt testamentary gift, or both. We awarded eight scholarships this year. We've awarded more than **\$275,000** in scholarships to deserving Iowa high school students.



Midsommar

A Review by Mark Turnage



In May's film review, I discussed Jordan Peele's *Us*, and how Peele establishes himself as an auteur by translating similar themes and filming techniques into completely different narratives. Director Ari Aster is in the same vein as Peele: both are new to horror/suspense pictures, and both have recently released their second film in the same genre. But the difference between the two directors and their respective bodies of work--and the trap any auteur can fall prey to--is reinventing, not repeating themselves. While Aster is without question a spellbinding storyteller, a combination of repeating the same story beats and a sluggish second act rob *Midsommar* of what made that prior film, *Hereditary*, great: unpredictability.

College student Dani Ardor (Florence Pugh) clings to a stagnant relationship with her distant boyfriend, Christian (Jack Reynor), who is emotionally ill-equipped to handle her anxiety and panic attacks. His anthropologist friends Josh (William Jackson Harper) and Mark (Will Poulter) try to convince Christian to break up with Dani, but Christian is indecisive. When a horrifying fate befalls the rest of the Ardor family, Christian stays with a grief-stricken Dani out of obligation. After being caught misleading her, Christian reluctantly invites Dani on a trip to visit Hårga, the ancestral Swedish commune of the group's mutual friend Pelle (Vilhelm Blomgren), to partake in their nine-day Midsommar Festival. Upon arrival, Hårga seems otherworldly and idyllic; yet the longer the friends stay, the more disturbing the festivities and rituals become.

Hårga is an iconic setting for its imagery and mythology alone: the sun shines day and night, townspeople are clothed in white linen robes and wreathed in flowers, and the building interiors are decorated in floor-to-ceiling Hans Christian Anderson-style folk art that becomes more disturbing the longer you look at it. This is what Aster excels at: burning unforgettable images (and legends) into your mind that stay with you. He's clearly done his research on the nastiest bits of Scandinavian folklore. But in terms of an overall artistic message, *Midsommar* is more inconsistent. Like *Hereditary*, an emotionally unstable female protagonist, marred by family grief, encounters occult ties that slowly rip her apart from her social circle and her sanity to replace her current family unit with their own. Yet the narrative payoff feels disjointed: shocking moments of unflinching graphic violence happen, but they're expected, and fully foreshadowed. There's not meant to be any jump scares in this movie, but the creeping scares do feel like they creep too slowly.

Pugh's expressiveness magnifies Dani's emotions so much they become all-consuming displays of discomfort whenever she's onscreen. Her earnest bending over backwards to accommodate Christian and his (asshole) friends is truly painful to watch--and so are Christian's justifications and excuses for his increasingly selfish behavior. Combined with the hallucinogenic cocktails the commune passes around daily with their guests, and Aster's camera trick of spinning around a fixed point, *Midsommar* progressively becomes a whirlwind of surrealism, trippy visuals, and communal gaslighting--and that's the true horror of *Midsommar* -- what we do and tolerate to be accepted.

At two hours and twenty minutes, this is a slow-slow-burn, psychological horror film. See it if operatic folk horror is your jam, in the style of *The Wicker Man*, *Suspiria*, or *Deliverance*.



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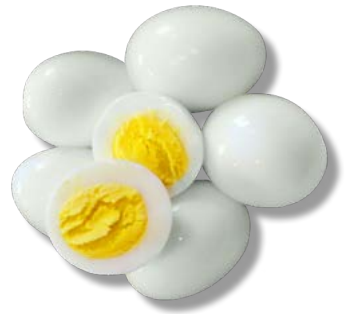


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First Friday
Breakfast Club, Inc.

Boiled Eggs

By Steve Person



I adore boiled eggs. I have since childhood. I have one for breakfast almost every day of the week. Having said all that, I must admit it took me a long time to learn the perfect method for creating these delightful morsels.

I have to hand it to supermarkets and their packaging of products. Next time you are at the market, look at all the various packages for eggs. I prefer those that come from cage-free chickens. They are more expensive but eminently more humane for the hens. Consider those products that convince humans to consume something that once lived a life of its own. I stopped eating red meat years ago after I found out the cruel and heartless methods used in killing animals. Knowing those creatures loved their own lives every bit as much as you and I love ours, the butchers (there is a correct term if ever there were one) hack meat away from bones and place them into inviting-looking packages on store shelves. Most people don't bother to think that those pink and red plastic-wrapped carrion once belonged to a living being. But I digress; back to eggs.

For years I boiled the heck out of eggs and sometimes was rewarded with perfectly prepared ones. More often than not, however, the yokes were either runny from not enough time in the hot water or encased in a gray coating that proved they were boiled too long. Finally, a friend I work with gave me her secret to preparing perfectly boiled eggs. It is so simple. I should have thought about it long before. She told me to put the eggs in cold water and bring the pan to a rolling boil. Once at that stage, turn the heat off and put a lid on the pan and keep it on the stove. Allow the eggs to steep in the hot water for fifteen to sixteen minutes. Then either run cold water over them or immerse them in an ice bath to stop the cooking. They are then ready for peeling.

Peeling. Now this is where the kind of egg used becomes crucial. I prefer white eggs for peeling as opposed to brown ones. According to a 2017 article written by Registered Dietician Taylor Jones, "There is no nutritional difference between brown eggs and white eggs." She also asserts there is no difference in the taste of brown versus white eggs, but some people—myself included—prefer the taste of brown eggs as opposed to white ones. Unfortunately, Ms. Jones does not consider the peeling of the various colors of eggs (and yes, Dr. Seuss, there is such a thing as green eggs). Brown eggs appear to me to have a sort of extra layer beneath the shell that makes them more difficult to peel. White eggs don't have that layer. I wish I knew what that layer was called.

About a year ago, I foolishly succumbed to one of those commercials that let the television viewer know that some new glorious products exist to make life easier. This particular one was called, "Egglettes" and promised that, if purchased, would produce the perfect boiled egg. Giddy with anticipation, I ordered two! Once the package arrived, I read the instructions. God, what a production! The individual plastic cups (made in China, of course) each received an egg. The steps one had to go through to gain boiled egg perfection were more complicated and time-consuming than the tried and true method mentioned above. After giving one of these packages to a friend, I kept the other and will use it as a gag gift this coming Christmas.

There is only one way to improve boiled eggs, and that is to use them to make deviled eggs. Ah! Now there is perfection!