

LGBTQ+ Initiative Reflection for October Justice Jottings By Beth Garascia

The *Disappearkers* by Marlon James has been getting a lot of press recently; this book, which is about violent homophobia in Jamaica, has gotten off the charts political acclaim, and was short listed for the Booker Prize. Dwight Garner of the NY Times states in his August 30 [review of the book](#) that it may be the novel of the century, deserving to be compared to Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. Because I'm a lover of good literature and I'm interested in the topic, I decided to read it.

I found the explicit sexual content in the first chapter and the brutal bigoted attack described in the second chapter difficult to read. Conversely, I wanted to understand James's work. As I looked over reviews of and listened to podcasts about this novel, I learned that it's based on an unconfirmed, highly rumored savage attack in Kingston in the 1980's. The author did extensive research about this incident, traveling to his native country and interviewing people to get a sense of gay Jamaican life at that time.

In response to a criticism about the brutality described in his book, James responded that he didn't understand the comment because all violence is gratuitous. Reflecting on the savagery in the book caused me to think about the hate crimes against and the bullying and verbal abuse of LGBTQ persons in the US. Anyone who follows the news can tell you that violence against this group is pervasive. However, I was not prepared for the extent of hate crimes, i.e. crimes that victimize individuals because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, listed on the [Wikipedia site on this topic](#). The number of malicious attacks unleashed on this community, particularly against trans women of color, from 1958 on is astounding.

So how do members of the LGBTQ community respond to attacks such as these and the constant barrage of news about savage physical assaults and unkind words? As a cisgender white woman, it's challenging for me to imagine the fear it would cause as well as the threat to a positive self-concept. Disappearing in some way, such as erasing one's identity or shutting down, is one way for gay people to survive, and the inspiration for the title of the book. It's how many in the LGBTQ community make it to tomorrow. Some may want revenge, a few go on to reinvent themselves, others are in denial. Many people want peace and acceptance, others want to be normal, remnants just want to die. Perhaps some are able to forgive and hopefully many find a way to fight back.

The desire to die, particularly among LGBTQ+ young people, is well documented. They are roughly [3.5 times as likely to attempt suicide](#) compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers. In addition, the [American Journal of Psychiatry](#) shows that suicide-

related behavior rates per 100,000 person-years are significantly higher among LGB individuals than heterosexual individuals.

One example of fighting back came as a response to the raid on Stonewall Inn on June 28, 1969. [The Stonewall Riots](#) were a series of spontaneous riots and demonstrations against a police raid that took place in the early morning of at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village. It's notable because it's seen as a major catalyst for today's LGBTQ rights movement. The raid did not go as planned. A sense of discomfort spread very quickly when police attempted to take some of patrons to bathrooms to verify their sex, and the women refused. Police also attempted to arrest some patrons. In an account of the riots, Michael Fader explained: "We all had a collective feeling like we'd had enough of this kind of shit. It wasn't anything tangible anybody said to anyone else, it was just kind of like everything over the years had come to a head on that one particular night in the one particular place and it was not an organized demonstration."*

It's my hope that Marlon James causes all of us to reflect with deep honesty on our response to the hate crimes, bullying, and lack of acceptance of LGBTQ persons in the US, Let's find ways to fight back against this destructive form of prejudice in whatever way we can.

*Carter, David (2004). *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution*. [St. Martin's Press](#). ISBN 978-0-312-34269-2.