

LGBT BOOKS TO PRISONERS

NEWSLETTER

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October 2015

2015 FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN UPDATES

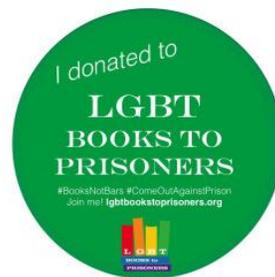
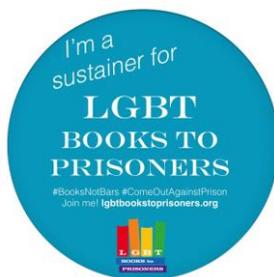
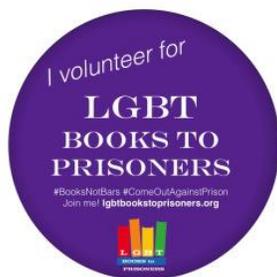
On October 11th 2015, National Coming Out Day, we launched our **2015 fundraiser**, which encouraged people to #ComeOutAgainstPrison and help promote #BooksNotBars. Over the 20 days of the campaign, the goal was to have one new person a day become a LGBT Books to Prisoners sustainer, someone who commits to supporting our work every month from now until the future. Sustainers allow us plan postage and book purchases, and let us to tell the people in prison who write to us that they'll continue to receive books and educational materials when they write to us. It also means that they can tell other LGBTQ, Two Spirit, genderqueer, and same gender loving people who are incarcerated that they can write to us for resources, books, and support.

We are pleased to say that, with your tremendous support, we did it! We have over 20 new sustainers, many new donors, and a number of existing sustainers who increased their monthly contributions. THANK YOU!

It's not too late to join this group and become a sustainer or donor yourself. See all the details on the **"Donate"** page our website: donating is easy through PayPal or check!

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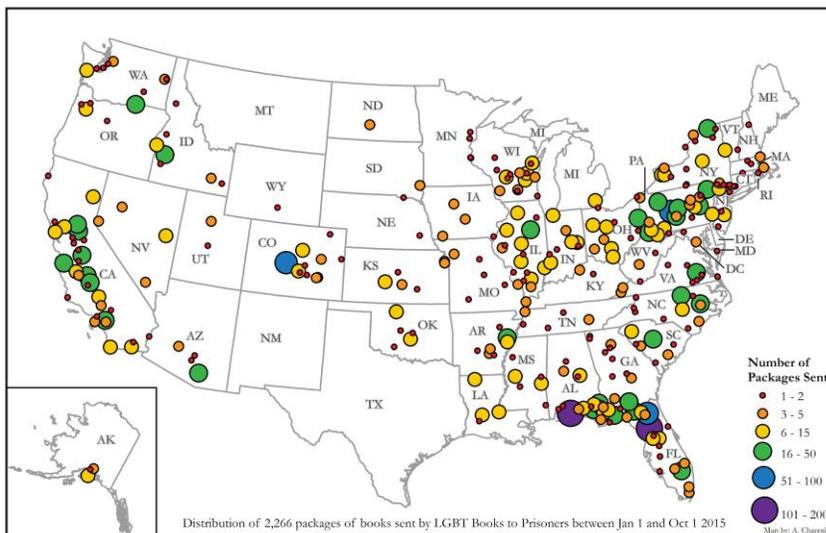
MORE PACKAGES SENT THAN EVER!

In 2014, LGBT Books to prisoners sent 1,908 packages of books to LGBTQ+ people in prisons across the United States. In the first nine months of 2015 alone, we sent over 2,200! With more volunteers, donors, and sustainers, we're on pace to send well over 3,500 this year, and maybe as many as 4,000!

This map shows where the books went between January 1 and October 1 of this year.

In summary, we sent:

- 2266 packages of books
- to people in 44 states and DC
- to people in 327 prisons and jails



LGBT BOOKS TO PRISONERS RECEIVES MIKE RIEGLE AWARD – with Teresa Nguyen



Over the weekend of October 16th and 18th, **Black and Pink** celebrated 10 years of organizing against the prison industrial complex. During their gala celebration in Boston, LGBT Books to Prisoners received the Mike Rieggle award. The Mike Rieggle award – named after journalist, gay liberationist, and prison rights activist Mike Rieggle – recognizes an organization or individual that keeps Mike’s vision of support for LGBTQ prisoners alive. The winner of the award is selected by the incarcerated members of Black and Pink. We are thrilled to have received this award; it recognizes that the people we serve find the work that we do meaningful and important.

Teresa Nguyen, one of the organizers of LGBT Books to Prisoners, went to Boston to receive the award on our behalf. Here’s what she has to say about the event:

“The weekend was packed with celebration, good work, informative and engaging workshops, healing, and open and honest conversations. The weekend started off with the ‘**Decade of Black and Pink - Friday Night Celebration**’ to celebrate the great work Black and Pink has done in the past 10 years supporting LGBTQ people in prison. There were lively performances (**Sasha Taylor** and local youth dancers), inspiring speeches (**Jason Lydon, CeCe McDonald, Bo Brown**), testimonials from those in prison, fundraising, giving of awards to organizations and individuals, dissemination of results from their survey of LGBTQ people in prison, and a dance party. Saturday was filled with workshops and conversations about our work (prison abolition, HIV criminalization, advocacy for those in prison, community organizing, navigating courts, know your rights training) spaces for individuals to engage in healing arts (e.g., massage, acupuncture, yoga) and sharing and telling of stories. The day ended with a screening of the powerful documentary, ‘**Out in the Night**,’ and discussion with the filmmaker and those featured in the documentary. Sunday was a day full of discussion and reflections about the current state and future of Black and Pink and **results from the LGBTQ people in prison survey**. It was amazing, empowering, and uplifting to be in community and solidarity with others who also want to dismantle the prison industrial complex.”



STAY TUNED... Black and Pink is hosting **Holiday Card-Writing Parties** and LGBT Books to Prisoners is joining the effort. The holiday season can be a really rough time for people in prison: they are often denied the ability to celebrate their traditions in the ways they choose. All too often people in prison do not have family and friends to reach out to them with cards or visits, making this time particularly isolating. By making cards, we hope to bring moments of joy, connection and kindness to LGBTQ people in prison while telling prison staff that people on the outside are watching.

We’ll post details on our [Facebook](#) page once we have everything set.

COLLABORATION WITH AGAINST EQUALITY – by Karma Chávez

I joined **Against Equality** as a core collective member in 2011 after I invited **Ryan Conrad**, a co-founder, to the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus. I was already becoming good friends with AE's other co-founder, **Yasmin Nair**, someone I'd known digitally for a long time. After I met Conrad, I became very invested in AE's project, and asked to become more centrally involved. AE is an online archive and publishing collective committed to preserving and producing materials that reflect radical queer thought and challenge the gay and lesbian mainstream. Since 2009, AE has self-published three books, each addressing the three pillars of the mainstream gay movement: marriage, military, and hate crime legislation.

In 2013, **AK Press**, which had distributed and printed our previous collections, approached us about publishing the three volumes in a single collection. We were incredibly excited about this opportunity, but it posed one dilemma: AE is committed to sending all of our materials for free to incarcerated people in the United States. If we were no longer the publisher of the material, we would no longer be authorized to send books inside.

After giving it some thought, and contemplating whether prisons would even recognize the difference between AE Press and AK Press, I mentioned to the other collective members that I thought there was an LGBT Books to Prisoners project in Madison. I was right. In early 2014, I sent a message to the organizers listed on the website, Irene and Melissa, and asked if we might partner. They were thrilled to do so. Since 2014, AE has donated more than 200 books to LGBT Books to Prisoners and nearly \$1000. In exchange for sending AE's books, I agreed to regularly volunteer with the project. I quickly became one of the primary organizers.

The relationship between Against Equality and LGBT Books to Prisoners is an important one and has resulted in so far sending almost all of those 200 books to people incarcerated in the United States.

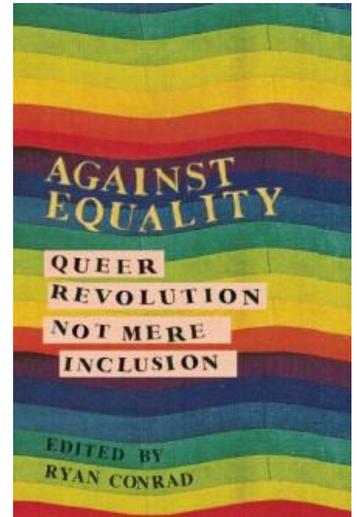
VOLUNTEER PROFILE – LUCAS ALAN DIETSCHKE



Many different people volunteer with books to prisoners: members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies, college students fulfilling course requirements, prison abolitionists, friends, community members, formerly incarcerated people, and many, many more. Each newsletter, we'll profile one of the people who joins us in the basement of **Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative**, fulfilling the reading requests of people in prison. This month, we feature Lucas Alan Dietsche:

"I am Lucas Alan Dietsche. I am currently 33 years old and finally finished with probation after 9

years. I was revoked during my probation and incarcerated for two years, one in jail awaiting to appeal and another year for my sentence. I was sent to Dodge Correctional and then to Stanley Correctional Institution. Dodge has an amalgamation of old books falling apart and old National Geographics. I read whatever I could. I had some college so I was able to use the prison as an ersatz university. In Stanley, they have a modest library. Parents and friends sent books that I needed such as dictionaries, books on radios, poetry, Marxist literature, etc. I wrote to books for prisoners for other leftist literature. I hardly watched television, as it was a distraction. I did have some sort of romantic and nostalgic view of the prison revolutionary in the style of Malcolm X, Mumia, Lenin, Trotsky, and George Jackson to keep my fluid mind electric. It was all great and I even published a poetry book while in prison. I wish there was a more selective resource of books, but I know resources are slim in this police-state economy. Many prisoners are seemingly illiterate, so reading is a way to challenge their own dire circumstances and oppression. Rehabilitation is only when they stretch their own mind and society that put them there."

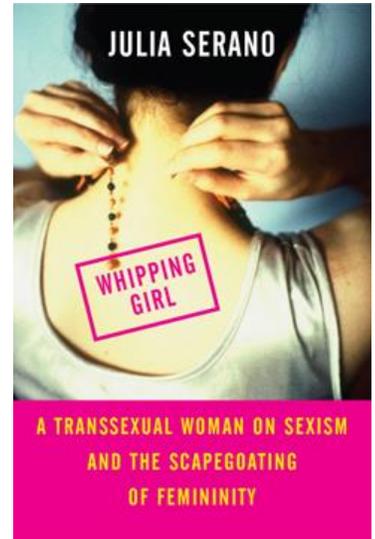
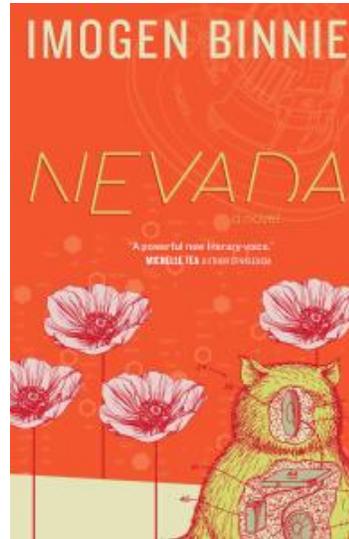


TRANS READING GROUP

In 2014, LGBT Books to Prisoners received a small grant from the [New Harvest Foundation](#) to set-up a trans reading group. Believed to be the first of its kind, the group encourages connections between trans women inside and outside of prison by facilitating a shared reading experience. Participants in prisons across the United States and living in Dane County, Wisconsin receive a copy of each book selection along with a set of questions about the book to send back. Once we receive all the questionnaires, LGBT Books to Prisoners compiles them (prisoners are not able to write directly to each other) and sends them back with another book and another set of questions.

Our first selection was [Julia Serano's](#) *Whipping Girl*.

Serano is participating in the group by answering people's questions. The responses, some of which are included below, were recently sent out with our next selection, [Imogen Binnie's](#) *Nevada*. Binnie helped design the next group of questions and she will also be responding to people's comments. It's not too late to read along too. [Email](#) us for more information and to receive the set of questions.



Selection of Responses to Whipping Girl, in the words of Trans Reading Group Participants:

Miss Erika: “What surprised me the most is gender description is so complicated.”

Ashely: “This was the first ‘trans’ book that I read that helped me put words to the pain, shame, and depression that I was feeling and it really helped me move forward and begin the ‘transition’ process. Two things did surprise and delight me. The first thing was the very personal details combined with an almost academic writing style. For me, it helped me intellectualize what I was feeling and let me know that I wasn’t the only one.”

Toni: “Lost for words. I did not no trans-people wrote books or at least I’ve never read one. I like it and loved. I have read pages that I could relate to.”

Victoria: “When I first received the book I loved the cover and also like the fact it had a lot of pages because we get locked down and I love to read. At first to be honest, I thought it might be boring, but after about 5 pages into it I was fascinated at all the information it contained... I was really surprised by how the lay out was and words were written with the definitions which was great do to the fact that a lot of us do not have the ability to find a good dictionary that would have the words and definitions.”

Fatima: “I have experienced a good deal of the same things that Julia has experienced. I am already stereotyped just being black, but on top of that being a transwoman leaves the door open for a host of other issues. Being in prison as a transwoman is a universe unto itself, at this facility I feel like we have nothing coming, so our experiences differ insomuch as Julia is in a forum where she is heard, I am not, we are not heard around here, but even here we are still stereotyped and ostracized... As a transwoman I have often been stopped and questioned by Police just walking down the street, as a potential prostitute.”

John: “As to my present environment, prison is a very difficult place to relax and be ourselves and be able to share and explain some experiences... The reason my own [transition] didn’t occur as her’s is on account I came to prison way back in 1979 or 1980 and back then not a word or any treatment were even mentioned. I did not start the injections until 2013... Back in 1980... [in] the prison system homosexuality was not even spoke about and most who were deep undercover were at high risk to lose their life – or to endure a serious assault by inmates or officers.”

Anastasia: “When standards call for the binary gender of male or female, because we use trans or transgender (I use trans woman and transgender woman interchangeably myself) the assumption is that we fit in a ‘third sex’ category. For me, it’s an issue where I am a woman, I am a female, but society doesn’t equate me as one, it’s not acceptable... She-Male, he-she, MtF, all hurt my identity as a woman.”

Ashley: “In chapter 14, Julia talks about trans-sexualization and how it made her ‘feel uncomfortable, intimidated, angry, or fearful.’ I too experienced this after my trans status was forced out into the prison/staff population and I all of a sudden became a sex-object! Now, it seems, all the prisoners and staff see is a sex-thing that wants to be hit-on, groped and propositioned! And I still look the same!”

Rhe, Rhe: “I’m transgender but is forced to live in a prison with men and prison guards that have issues with calling me a transwoman or transgender so they treat me like one of the fellas. So my experience is very different from Julia’s.”

Victoria: “To be honest there was a lot of new definitions and words that I never knew before. The definition for transgender, intersex, gender queer, gender variant are all new.”

Melissa: “I didn’t know a lot of things for instance, cis-gender or cis-sexism.”

Anastasia: “Subconscious sex and physical sex. I never heard the term subconscious sex, but that’s exactly what it is, although I had always called it my gender identity. I like the word (subconscious sex) better.”

Tatia-Marie: “Personally, I believe that if femininity is thought of as biologically illegitimate, then one is reduced to their sex as determined through examination of their genitals – and that trans-style femininity of the transitioned individual is deemed illegitimate as well – wrongly so. And, they’re denied of being genuinely accepted as a true female expressing distinctive and natural stylized behavior, personality, and unique character as well.”

Geri: When femininity is perceived as artificial, it implies that femininity “is ‘chosen’ or affected behavior, and as such is trivialized and/or can be quantified by subjective judgement of those watching/evaluating – and perhaps: gendering.”

Rhe, Rhe: “The dangers [of privileging cissexuals in research about trans people] are categorizing trans women as less or mentally damaged and allowing society to minimize the violence and hate crimes against transwomen. It also does not help that people from the LGBT communities also tend to keep transwomen separate or out of activist work.”

Cindy: “Professionals interested in the area of gender sociology and are in places of legislative authority have the problem of bias. They will never know what it is to be me.”

HELP US SUPPORT MORE TRANS WOMEN IN PRISON

LGBT Books to Prisoners is receiving more and more requests from trans women in prison. We need more trans books to help meet the demand. Ideally, books would be new and soft cover, but we’ll take hard cover and used books in this category. Send us an **email** to make arrangements, or choose a book from our wish lists:

- From our **A Room of One’s Own wish list** (Madison bookstore)
- From our **Amazon wish list**

BOOK REJECTIONS

When volunteers fill a package, they need to figure out the rules for each prison. We have a list with over 550 prisons and their rules, but sometimes books get rejected. Here’s why:

- *Against Equality* was rejected because of page 38: "Race and the Gay Community," which "presents a threat to the security, good order, or discipline of the correctional system or the safety of any person."
- One package was rejected because it had blank stationery and an envelope, and also because we included a personal note.

THANK YOU 2015 DONORS!

LGBT Books remains a volunteer-run, donation-funded organization. We believe that a large number of people showing support for an issue however they can will create change over the long term. People freely give their time, books, and expertise to support LGBT Books to Prisoners. This year, we have received financial support from the following donors (those marked with an asterisk* marks monthly donors):

- Adrienne S.
- Alison B.*
- Amanda G*.
- Anders Z.*
- Anne E.
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- Ben G.
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- Teresa N.*
- Tom S.*
- Tomás R-C.
- Virginia L.*
- Walid A.
- Wendy S.
- Will G.*

**We would also like to thank
book donors! THANK YOU!**

LGBT Books to Prisoners is a donation-funded, volunteer-run organization based in Madison, WI. We send books and other educational materials, free of charge, to LGBTQ-identified prisoners across the United States.

We receive support from:



And many volunteers and individual donors!