



# Under the Microscope

Magnifying Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts in BE

## HAPPY PRIDE MONTH!!!

### INTERSECTIONS OF ART/ACTIVISM/RESEARCH IN HIV/AIDS



**MARK HARRINGTON**

TAG Co-Founder and  
Executive Director



**JOY EPISALLA**

AIDS Activist and Visual  
Artist, a founding  
member of fierce pussy



**SUR RODNEY (SUR)**

Writer, Curator, Archivist,  
Visual AIDS Project



**GREGG GONSALVES**

TAG Co-Founder,  
Associate Professor of  
Epidemiology at Yale  
School of Public Health



**MICHAEL COX**

Black & Pink MA Executive  
Director, Member of the  
Special Commission to  
Study the Health and  
Safety of LGBTQI Prisoners

**JUNE 16, 2021**

**1 -2:30 PM EST**

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

REGISTER @

[bit.ly/intersections\\_advocacy](https://bit.ly/intersections_advocacy)

Viewing Instructions for:

[How to Survive a Plague](#)



WOMEN'S  
& GENDER  
STUDIES



## Event: Intersections of Art/Activism/Research in HIV/AIDS Advocacy

We welcome the MIT community to join us for a webinar on the "Intersections of Art/Activism/Research in HIV/AIDS Advocacy" on **June 16th from 1-2:30 pm**.

We will have a panel discussion with Mark Harrington, Joy Episalla, Gregg Gonsalves, Sur Rodney (Sur), and Michael Cox. We encourage everyone to watch the documentary *How to Survive a Plague* in advance (free for MIT personnel at [bit.ly/documentaryMIT](https://bit.ly/documentaryMIT)). This film highlights the HIV/AIDS advocacy movement of the 80s/90s, and specifically features the organizations ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, an international, grassroots political group working to end the AIDS pandemic) and TAG (Treatment Action Group, a research-based AIDS advocacy organization).

Register now at [bit.ly/intersections\\_advocacy](https://bit.ly/intersections_advocacy)!

This event is sponsored by MIT LGBTQ+ Grad, the MIT Women's and Gender Studies Program, the Institute Community and Equity Office, the MIT Biological Engineering Graduate Student Board, and MIT LGBTQ+ Services.

## Links & Updates

### The Education working group has a blog!

The most recent blog post celebrates AAPI Heritage Month with podcasts from Eugene Lee Yang and Tracy K. Smith and a spotlight on MIT History professor Emma Teng! Visit [deimitbe.wordpress.com](https://deimitbe.wordpress.com) for this and other posts!

### Thank you to:

Mirna Gouda and Anjali Chadha for being the graduate and undergraduate student representatives on the DEI Officer search committee!

### The values grad DEI working group recently held a successful event focused on obtaining graduate student feedback for a to-be-updated department values statement!

## Spotlight: Corban Swain's *An Inquisition on Liberation*

by Catherine Della Santina & Christine Zheng



In a belated reporting on an exquisite slam poetry performance, we highlight on our own Corban Swain's *An Inquisition on Liberation*, which was shared with the broader MIT community on [February 10<sup>th</sup>](#) in the 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Celebration of Martin Luther King. As the title may portend, this piece both begins and ends by asking two central questions:

*What does liberation look like?*

*Will you like how it looks when we're free?*

Though these questions, of course, remain unanswered in his five minute long speech, Swain uses the time to explore the dichotomy of Black achievement and Black liberation, to look at his own path to academic success through that lens, and to ask what it would be like if we committed to upholding equity and justice here at MIT. Swain leaves the audience with the powerful call to action: "Let's honor the marginalized on not on our terms, but on theirs."

In speaking with Swain about his inspiration and motivation for the piece, he shared that throughout his undergraduate tenure at Washington University in St. Louis, poetry became a key form of expression as a medium that "communicates a feeling, a cause for justice, [and] a call to action and solidarity." Those who have been in the audience for Swain's performance of pieces like *Intellectual Brother* and *The Silence of Michael Brown* can undoubtedly speak to the power with which these calls to action are made, in between lines of beautifully woven metaphors and carefully constructed narratives. Swain notes that much of the weight and emotion behind his words are best conveyed through speech because "when you're sharing something deeply moving, or sharing a part of yourself, or saying something very scathing and looking right in ... someone's eye, the whole audience is feeling that." Even in a virtual setting, Swain's dynamic cadence and compelling style of delivery continue to bring the words to life through the screen.

Despite being a national competitor in slam poetry, Swain still doesn't consider himself a poet because of the important differences between more classical poetry styles and the medium of [spoken word](#) which first took hold in the 1980s and is often attributed to Marc Kelly Smith (a.k.a. 'Slampapi' of Chicago). Swain likens the distinction to that of watercolor from acrylic paint—two different mediums with different nuanced capabilities. In a clever turn of phrase, he describes the purpose of the slam poetry movement as "giving rhyme and reason" to personal experiences that often reference bold, heavy issues such as race, gender, class, sexuality, discrimination, war, religion and more.

*An Inquisition on Liberation* fits in well with this tradition, as it explores the complex history and context of race in higher education and consequently poses questions that we must address in our efforts to center those at the margins and build justice from our missteps. Swain brings forth these ideas through a series of questions that expand upon [Dr. D-L Stewart's](#) proposition that we stand for equity & justice over diversity & inclusion. The distinction between these pairs of terms represents the deeper intention behind approaching these issues. As Swain explains, diversity and inclusion can lead to "representation, even in non-insignificant numbers, but this alone is not evidence that the culture, and the climate, and the environment is being made welcoming, honoring, supportive, and [that] people feel able to navigate as their whole selves." Until the most minoritized among us feel able and supported to do so, we must continue to pursue transformative efforts to promote equity and justice.

Corban also credits [Kimberly N. Foster's](#) work as influential in the crafting of the work discussed here and thanks friends [Yaritza](#), [Solome](#), [Ufuoma](#), [Christian](#), and [Kirsty](#) for their contributions throughout his writing process.

## Upcoming Events

June 9th 11am-12pm	<b>MIT Forum for Equity: Women and Leadership</b> <a href="#">Register here</a>
June 16th 1-2:30pm	<b>Intersection of Art, Activism, and Research in HIV/AIDS Advocacy Panel</b> <a href="#">Register here</a>
June 19th 10am-10pm	<b>Juneteenth MFA Community Celebration</b> Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (On-site) <a href="#">Link</a>
June 23rd 12-1pm	<b>Diversity in Financial Planning with Dr. Miranda Reiter</b> <a href="#">RSVP here</a>

## Contact Us

Feedback? Upcoming events? Want to get involved?

Get in touch at: [be-dei-comms@mit.edu](mailto:be-dei-comms@mit.edu)

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