

FFBC

First Friday News & Views

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

March 2019

Volume 24

Issue 3

The next FFBC meeting is
Friday, March 1,
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,
February 27.



FFBC Website:
www.ffbciaowa.org



Not the Man I Once Was **DESTROY RACISM**

by Jonathan Wilson

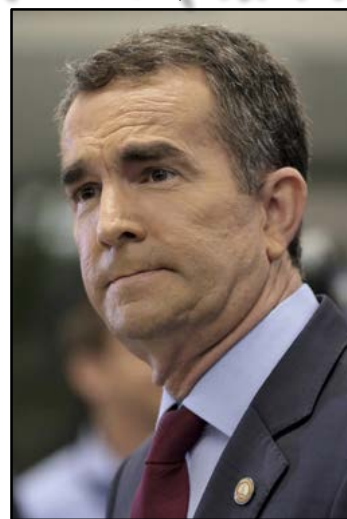
Virginia's Democratic Governor, Ralph Northam, has drawn national attention because of his page in a medical school yearbook that featured him with pictures of a person in "black face" and another in KKK garb. They are not flattering images and have prompted Democratic leaders in the state, and legions of others, to call for his resignation. His situation was complicated because of his inept response to the controversy, first admitting the authenticity of the pictures and apologizing for them in a video recorded statement, and then deciding that he was not one of the pictured people after all, while admitting doing "black face" on another occasion. Not a particularly compelling defense.

He's not the first public figure to be called to task for statements and conduct in years gone by. And the national discussion has prompted folks to scramble for a politically palatable way to address past transgressions, real and perceived.

Real ones are those that were clearly wrong, legally, morally, or both, when they were committed. They are in a category unto themselves and require a latter-day response that differs from responding to a *perceived* transgression.

Perceived transgressions change with the passage of time and evolving social mores. So, for example, Northam's yearbook was published some 35 years ago, and as a sign of the times, it's notable that the medical school apparently thought that the photos were perfectly suitable for publication. As American poet James Russell Lowell so aptly wrote, "Time makes ancient good uncouth." While that's definitely true, even 35 years is probably not enough time to explain away that level of insensitivity -- although we are talking about the state of Virginia. Sensitivity on such a subject may have been slower getting there than some other places. Around 1997, I can remember being in Florida and happening upon a public park where a KKK rally was unapologetically in full swing. It was horrifying, but real.

I can still recall a Thanksgiving Day conversation among extended family and an uncle saying matter-of-factly that "darkies just have chicken stealin' in their blood and can't help themselves." Get this, he was actually trying, albeit ineptly, to make a progressive, compassionate statement about people of color. He was saying that people of color should be forgiven for their shortcomings. It's not their fault.



[continued on page two]

I can also recall, as a small child, having a best friend who was African American, until I grew old enough to recognize our different skin pigmentations and that he was inexplicably treated differently. I stopped having him as a best friend, subconsciously wanting to avoid "guilt by association." Reflecting upon that childhood experience over the years, with an increasing sense of shame, has informed my maturing process into adulthood.

I served for three years as national Chair of the Council of Urban Boards of Education, a consortium of the largest school districts in the country, most of which enroll a majority of racial minority students. Their school boards were similarly dominated by people of color and, believe you me, I got one hell of a further education on matters of racial prejudice and injustice that a white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant guy from Iowa could not possibly get back home. To my credit, there was a time when I was participating remotely in a radio talk show being broadcast in California. After a half hour or so of Q&A, the host took a commercial break and was talking to me off mic. Based on things I'd been saying, he said, "So you're African American, is that right?" It struck me that I was not the man I once was.

The point is that we should always be learning and better informing our understanding of those who are different from ourselves in one way or another. Whether that's race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, culture, handicapping condition; you name it. Keeping up with ever-changing "political correctness" is a good thing, not meant for the culturally lazy, the inconsiderate, the un-empathetic, or the egotistically self-satisfied. I recall a Caucasian Iowa farmer who had two teenage sons who invited two African American teens from the South to visit his farm in an exchange program. At one point he said to the four young men, "You boys go and do such-and-such." The words were the same, but what was heard was decidedly NOT the same. His guests were taken aback. The farmer had a needed teaching-and-learning moment. The next day he was not the man he once was.



Public figures need to be judged more by who they have become rather than who they once were. Demonstrating who they have become, so that people can judge them more fairly, is not an exact science. It may require more for some people or some transgressions than others. But we are never going to find perfect people measured against universal, never-changing values. Time does make ancient good uncouth, and that's inevitable and is a good thing.

Christians should readily understand this because Jesus "grew in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and Man" (Luke 2:52). Jesus was wiser at the end of his life than he was at the beginning.

My problem with Trump is that, unfortunately, he remains the man he once was. He is culturally lazy, un-empathetic, inconsiderate, and egotistically self-satisfied. Those are deplorable traits, and he appeals to many people who share those traits.



Mark Your Calendar

March's Speaker:

John-Paul Chaisson-Cardena



Our speaker in March will be **John-Paul Chaisson-Cardena**, consultant/owner at Transition Facilitator Group. He was fired as head of Iowa 4-H because of his support for trans youth. 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.

Our Logo's 4-Leaf Clover



In 1620, Sir John Melton walking in the fields find any shall, in a small while after, wrote: "If a man four-leaved grass, he find some good thing."

LGBT people are like a four-leaf clover. We are perfectly natural and normal – not normative, mind you, but completely normal and authentic. A natural variant whether by nature or choice, it doesn't really matter. If by nature, we have no choice. We should be protected as with other unchosen characteristics. If by choice, it's no different than choosing to be Presbyterian or choosing not to be a fundamentalist bigot. That "choice" is supposed to be an exercise of constitutionally protected freedom.

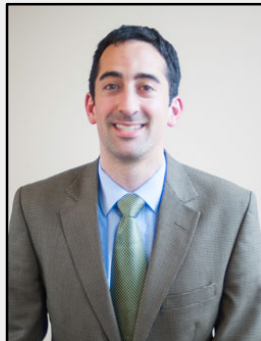
We exist. Our minority status does not diminish our legitimacy, our authenticity, or our value. Each of us is like a four-leaf clover.



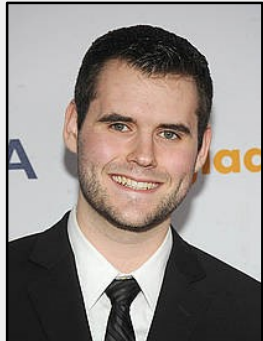
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Mark Your Calendars!

FFBC Speakers
Announced:



April
Josh Mandelbaum
Des Moines Councilman
and developer



May
Zach Walls
Iowa Senator

***Morality is doing
what's right no matter
what others tell you.
Religion is doing what
you're told no matter
what's right.***

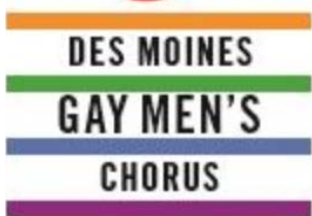
Unbreakable

*A musical look at the
strength it takes to be gay
in the U.S.A., sung in a
historical narrative.*

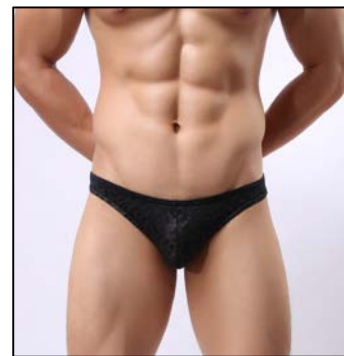
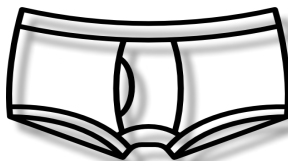


March 30

Drake Sheslow
Auditorium



Briefs & Shorts:



Thanks to **Kevin Chorniak** for introducing our February speaker, **Brad Anderson**, Executive Director of AARP Iowa. 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!*

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 **March 11, 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. Caring is sharing.

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. Our annual fundraising drive is currently in progress.

Don't Miss the
DEADLINE!



Revitalizing Des Moines Neighborhoods

By Supervisor Matt McCoy



The City of Des Moines has big plans for revitalizing neighborhoods and it comes with a big price tag – a price tag that the city is hoping Polk County will largely contribute to.

There is no doubt, this work is needed. The City has neglected neighborhoods for decades while investing money and efforts into downtown. This investment in downtown has repaid itself many times over as it has become a thriving and, dare I say, vibrant community that serves as an economic engine for the entire region. The investments that were made downtown were smart and forward-thinking, setting into motion an inertia that will ensure continued success downtown for many generations to come.

The collateral damage, however, was that residential neighborhoods were neglected and now will require tens of millions of dollars worth of work over the next several decades to improve the housing stock, to lift our neighborhoods up, to improve home valuations and, ultimately, to stabilize the City of Des Moines' tax base. Polk County believes in this important work and is excited to be a partner in this work.



The work started with the hiring of CZB, a nationally-known consulting firm with extensive experience in neighborhood revitalization. CZB recently completed a year-long evaluation of the City of Des Moines Neighborhood Revitalization Program and the neighborhoods themselves. This work culminated in a thorough report that contained two recommendations:

- 1) **A comprehensive re-evaluation of the City's Neighborhood Revitalization Program** – this would include a close look at their processes, procedures, zoning and building ordinances, code enforcement, and more. Essentially, it would restructure all of the processes that allowed the City to fall into this neglected condition and get back ahead of the curve.
- 2) **A pilot project for neighborhood revitalization.** Four neighborhoods were selected to serve as the initial pilot for this project. The neighborhoods include Oakpark/Highland Park, Columbus Park, and a portion of Drake and 48th/Franklin. The planning process is well underway with residents and other stakeholders participating in focus groups. This will result in a plan that the City of Des Moines and Polk County can commit to funding – including a range of improvements for home owners, such as first time home buyer assistance, beautification, and home repairs.

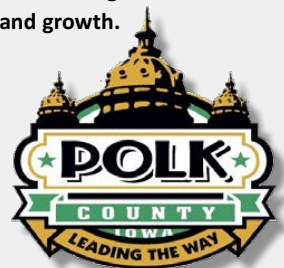
The hope is to see a surge in valuations in these neighborhoods that would drive economic development and an identification of a successful model that can be applied to other neighborhoods that are in need of attention. The neighborhoods that they will be targeting are those that can be described as being “in the middle of the pack.” The plan has put Des Moines neighborhoods on a scale that ranges from “Very Healthy” to “Very Unhealthy”:

- 1) Those that are near the “Very Healthy” end of the spectrum are thriving and seeing high tax valuations. These neighborhoods do not need work but perhaps would benefit from improved affordability.
- 2) Those that are in or near the “Very Unhealthy” end of the spectrum would need a substantial investment to see meaningful improvement. These neighborhoods and home-owners are already experiencing a significant investment from state and federal resources as well as non-profits such as Habitat For Humanity, Neighborhood Finance Corporation, and Rebuilding Together.
- 3) Neighborhoods that fall in the middle of that range are where the City has opportunity to see a long-term impact on the overall health of the City – both in financial terms and in quality-of-life. This describes the homes located in four pilot neighborhoods, which will need an average of \$80,000 worth of investment per home. To see an overall turn-around in the neighborhood work is anticipated on 15% of the homes in each neighborhood. This work is expected to spur investment and growth.

Without a significant investment in the neighborhoods in the middle of the range, the City will see them continue to slide into the Very Unhealthy category, making the problem unmanageable.

There is no doubt, this will be an expensive endeavor, and the return on investment won't be seen for decades. But this work is vital to ensuring the long-term success of our region. It will be successful with collaboration from both the public and private sectors in our community.

The passage of the Local Option Sales & Services Tax is a critical piece to ensuring the funding of this much needed work (reminder to get out and **vote YES on LOSST on March 5!**)

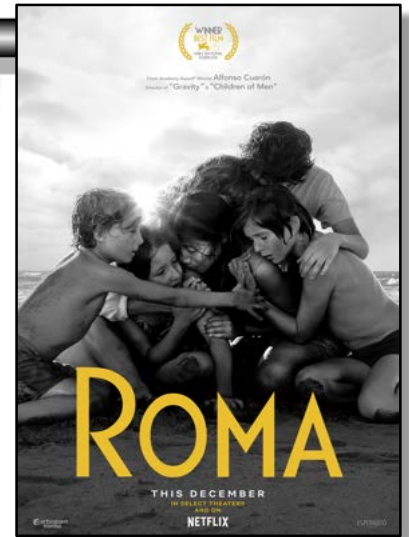


Without this work, failing neighborhoods in Des Moines will drag property values down and, over time, all of the communities in Polk County will share in that pain. The Polk County Board of Supervisors agrees that this work is critical in continuing the growth of our entire region and will be making a financial commitment to seeing that this work gets done. We have a long way to go in building this model and filling in the details, but Polk County is excited to partner in these efforts.

Roma

(2019 Netflix Film)

A Movie Review by Mark Turnage



Oscar season is upon us, and even as recently as a year ago, the idea that a film under the banner of an independent streaming service-turned-film studio could have a director like Alfonso Cuarón (*Gravity*, *Tu Mama Tambien*, *Children of Men*) attached to write, produce, and direct, would have seemed radical. But “radical” is exactly what *Roma* is: a semi-autobiographical passion project that takes a slice-of-life portrait of 1970s Mexico City and distills it into an emotional, deeply immersive personal experience of motherhood.

Filed in black-and-white with Spanish subtitles, *Roma* is tied with *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) for the most Oscar nominations received by a non-English language film, at ten—including Best Picture. It ticks the “boxes” that the Academy loves: exotic setting, period piece, and its lead actress, Yalitza Aparicio, had no acting experience prior to *Roma*. Yet it excels in bringing depth and dimension to her character Cleo, a stoic yet determined housemaid working for a middle-class family in Mexico City.

Cuarón’s choice to establish Cleo’s relationship to the family dynamic of the household for the first half of the film grounds and accentuates the emotional impact of the second half’s character-defining moments; this provides beautiful opportunities for his majestic cinematography and establishes Mexico City and its surrounding landscape as a character. Cleo is loved and respected by the four young children of the household and their mother-in-law Theresa, but somewhat taken for granted by the family matriarch, Sofia, and her husband, Antonio. As it becomes clear what the family’s routine is, it becomes apparent what isn’t: the relationship between husband and wife is deteriorating, and between family trips to visit wealthy relatives and ask for advice, Sofia frequently vents her frustration on Cleo, only to quickly apologize. Cleo’s home life is a mirror of her personal one—outside the home, on the bustling and noisy streets of Mexico City, her boyfriend Fermi professes his love for her and his hobby of martial arts, only to disappear when she tells him she’s pregnant. When she confronts him, Fermi denies it and threatens both her and their unborn child with violence.

The male characters in *Roma* range between “not great” and “terrible”—their infidelities, betrayals, and womanizing constantly create hostile, painful, and uncomfortable situations for everyone around them. At best, their responses are uncaring; at worst, they threaten violence. The men in *Roma* aren’t heroes or family men, but despite the contrast in response between Sofia and Cleo, the women in *Roma* band together to support one another and are stronger for it.

This connection proves to be a life-saving bond when an ordinary day becomes a terrifying mob uprising with an unexpected twist that forces Cleo’s premature delivery, and Cuarón creates a harrowing riot/delivery scene that’s a gut-wrenching cinematic tour-de-force. From here to the end of the film, the emotional connections that Cleo has forged reach full circle and help her come to terms with herself and who her true family is.

Roma is a film about women—the fortitude they demonstrate in times of crisis, the bond of maternity and family, and a powerful story of what it means to be a mother. See it and experience a film that’s definitely Oscar-worthy.

Roma is available for streaming on Netflix.



Aging: It's not Over Until It's Over

by Bruce Carr



Our guest speaker on Friday morning, February 1, 2019, was Brad Anderson, the new Iowa State Director of AARP (before 1999 called the American Association of Retired People). This appearance – Anderson's second in front of FFBC – was intended to change our view of what aging really is through a new AARP initiative called *Let's Disrupt Aging* (#DisruptAging).

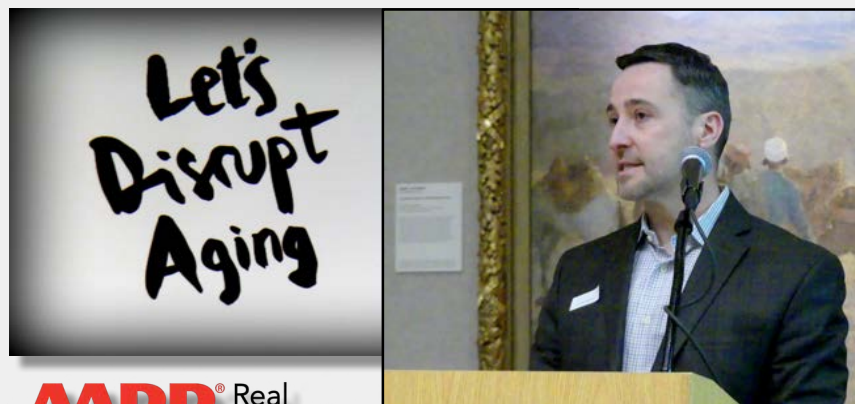
Brad's point was that our understanding of aging needs to be refocused: from decline, disability, and lifelessness, to vitality, ability, and initiative. "What you do after 50 can be just as amazing as what you've done before 30." Every statistic shows that the median age in almost every geographical category and every employment category is rising: there are just more people in older age-brackets than ever before – and they want and deserve better attention and services.

As for AARP, it is by far the largest membership organization in the state, with some 367,000 members -- over twice as many as, for example, the Iowa Farm Bureau. Brad Anderson hopes to boost Iowa AARP's attention to legislative advocacy. Their current primary focus is on passage of the 2018 Iowa Care Act, which will mandate that a family caregiver's name be recorded when their loved one is admitted to a hospital; that the caregiver be informed when their loved one is to be moved or discharged; and that the caregiver be instructed in the medical tasks they will need to perform at home.

You can hear, or re-hear, a complete audio recording of Brad Anderson's talk and the Q&A following, by going to our Website, <ffbc-iowa.org>, and clicking on the "Speakers" tab.



Photos by Gary Moore



AARP® Real Possibilities
Iowa

FFBC Member Kevin Chorniak introduces speaker Brad Anderson



Iowan Brad Anderson earned his B.A. in political science from North Carolina State University in 1997, and he immediately joined the senatorial campaign of John Edwards – which has led to an extensive and diverse career in political advocacy for candidates and causes on the social-service side of the spectrum. Candidates whose campaigns he's aided include Tom Harkin, Dave Loebsack, Amy Klobuchar, Claire McCaskill, and Gaby Giffords. He worked for both of the Obama campaigns here – directing the effort state-wide in 2012 and producing 43,000 more Iowa votes for Obama in 2012 than in 2008. Anderson ran as the Democratic candidate for Secretary of State in 2014 (this was the occasion for his first appearance before the FFBC, in October 2013), but lost to Paul Pate by less than two percentage points of the vote.

As a partner with Link Strategies from 2004 to 2015, Anderson managed numerous campaigns, from local ballot initiatives to statewide and national races. He led a bi-partisan statewide coalition for the Iowa's Water & Land Legacy campaign that resulted in development of the Natural Resources & Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund in 2010; was instrumental in the development and messaging of the 2011 Johnston Public Safety Building bond referendum, which passed with 82 percent of the vote; and in 2015, he formed Iowa Pays the Price, a bipartisan organization aimed at increasing transparency in how presidential campaigns are funded.

Anderson has most recently, since February 2015, served as Executive Director of Above + Beyond Cancer, an Iowa-based cancer survivorship non-profit (whose author, oncologist Dr. Richard Deming, spoke at FFBC in March 2015), and Of Counsel to the multi-client firm Precisions Strategies since 2016. He was engaged as director of Iowa AARP in early 2018 and has been on the job since last June. Brad Anderson lives in Des Moines with his wife Lisa and their two children and dog, Gracie Caramel. You can reach him at Iowa AARP at 600 East Court Avenue, Suite 100, Des Moines IA 50309, phone 866/554-5378.

Gayest Songs of the 80s

by Jordan Duesenberg

If you've read any of my previous articles, it's probably no mystery that I am an obsessive fan of music. I do enjoy current music; it's hard not to appreciate and recognize that there is an abundance of out musicians (Troye Sivan, Haley Kiyoko, Adam Lambert, Mykki Blanco, Frank Ocean, etc.) and/or allies today that represent our community (Lady Gaga, Ariana Grande, etc.). But I also enjoy music from decades past, particularly the 70s and 80s, and in my years of fervently listening, collecting records, and spending an embarrassing amount of time on the Internet learning as much as I can, I've concluded that the 1980s were the most in your face, gayest period of time for music, even more so than today. Beyond the obvious out musicians like Elton John and Freddie Mercury, and pop stars like Diana Ross and Madonna, who made songs especially for the gay community, there were all sorts of super queer bands like Dead or Alive, Culture Club, Frankie Goes To Hollywood, Erasure, Pet Shop Boys, Bronski Beat, Kajagoogoo, etc., who made major hits (I should mention that not all of the bands mentioned were "queer bands," but had queer band members and definitely catered to the community).

But what really shocks me is how in-your-face "gay" some songs were in the 80s (some with even gayer music-videos to compliment). Here are what I consider the five most outrageously gay songs of the decade that are more daring than anything you'll find released today, almost all were made for the gay community that either became popular amongst the greater population or stayed in the gay underground:

- **"Relax"** – Frankie Goes to Hollywood (1983) – it's pretty obvious that this song is about sex if you just listen to the lyrics, so much that it was banned from BBC Radio, despite growing more and more popular. Personally, I always thought the new wave, hi NRG fusion sounds made it sound like a soundtrack to a gay leather bar in the 80s. Funny enough, the original music video features just that. The original video featured the band in an Ancient-Roman themed S&M club (filmed in an actual gay sex club), full of hot leather daddies, sexual innuendos, and as much gay camp as you could ever want or need. MTV banned the video and they had to film a boring version for airplay, so a lot of people may have missed out on how gay this song and video actually are. God bless the internet.

- **"Walk the Night"** – Skatt Bros (1979/1980) – technically this ridiculously sleazy track was released in November of 1979 on the Skatt Bros' debut album "Strange Spirits," with infamous disco label, Casablanca Records, but it wasn't until 1980 that the song caught on and was re-released as a single and became popular amongst gay men. The Skatt Bros name alone is too gay to function, and was meant to be a joke (equally gross and hilarious). This song is a cruising anthem, back when such a thing existed before cell phones and apps. There's a video on YouTube where someone paired this song with the scene from the film *Cruising*, where Al Pacino dances ridiculously in the gay bar after trying poppers. I recommend everybody watch for a good laugh.

- **"So Many Men, So Little Time"** – Miquel Brown (1983) – I mean, what more can I say? Just look at the title of the song and listen to the lyrics. The hi NRG beat, from famous gay British DJ and producer Ian Levine, also gave it that 80's gay sound. It's said that this song was an anthem at legendary gay mega-clubs like The Saint in New York City and San Francisco's Trocadero Transfer. The music video also features Miquel Brown walking around what I'm only assuming is a bathhouse full of sexy Castro Clones who are awkwardly lifting weights and dancing around her, shirtless and in short shorts. So many men, so little time indeed...

- **"Is It All Over My Face?"** – Loose Joints (1980) – Loose Joints was a band that was put together by gay musician and producer Arthur Russell, who made artsy-experimental disco in New York in the 70s and into the 80s. Fun fact: Russell was actually born in Oskaloosa, IA. He would go on to produce his own material, but it is his band, Loose Joints's 1980, single, "Is It All Over My Face?" that became a gay anthem. Originally released with male singers, singing sexually suggestive lyrics (I mean look at the title) over this funky disco track, the track was re-worked with female vocalists by popular (gay) New York DJ Larry Levan and played repeatedly at Paradise Garage where it caught on (however it never caught on amongst the white clientele at The Saint), and then became a New York anthem on its own right after being played on the radio due to its popularity at The Garage. It's unfortunate that the queer influence was lost on a lot of people.

- **"Cruisin' the Street"** – Boys Town Gang (1981) – This song is probably the most obscure on the list, but essential listening nonetheless. If you've ever been to San Francisco and been to the bar Moby Dick (which reminds me a lot of Iowa's Blazing Saddle), they actually had a record label in the 70s and 80s called Moby Dick Records which pumped out some crazy-good and crazy-gay disco tracks. "Cruisin' the Street" is one such record, which is about cruising for men, where the track goes on to mention all infamous gay hotspots across the country (Boys Town, Santa Monica, Castro, etc.). If you listen to the extended version over 17 minutes, there is a hilarious dialogue between two men, a female prostitute, and two police officers who end up joining in on the fun. Honestly, I can't make this stuff up.



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Queens of the Conquest: England's Medieval Queens

By Alison Weir

A Book Review by Steve Person

Members of my extended family, knowing I am an anglophile through and through, gave me this book as a Christmas gift. It is not a book I would have chosen for myself, and, truth be told, I was not anxious to read it, but read it I did. Fortunately, it turned out to be a gem of a book. Alison Weir is an excellent writer and weaves the intricacies of the medieval world of England and France with compelling thoroughness. This is the first of four books Weir intends to write about this period of history, a period generally not given to the accomplishments of the women of that historical era.

In the Introduction, Weir states, "This first book in the series focuses on the consorts of the Norman kings of England. Four of them were called Matilda; therefore, in the interest of clarity, I have referred to them as follows: Matilda of Flanders, Matilda of Scotland, the Empress Maud and Matilda of Boulogne."

Matilda of Flanders married William, Duke of Normandy, who invaded England in 1066 at the Battle of Hastings, and defeated the Saxon King Harold. Hence the title, The Conqueror. Princesses of the time held value as marriageable property to cement alliances between fiefdoms. The chronicler William of Malmesbury observed, "Kingship and love make sorry bedfellows and sort but ill together." From all accounts, however, William and his wife genuinely loved one another.

Henry I, son of The Conqueror, married Matilda of Scotland, his first wife. Among their progeny was Maud who, at age 11, married the Holy Roman Emperor Heinrich V, spent much of her early life in the German states, and became greatly beloved by the people. Matilda of Scotland died, and Henry later married Adeliza of Louvain. She bore him no children.

Upon Henry I's death in 1135—evidently he died from eating a poisonous lamprey—Stephen, Count of Blois, usurped the English throne from Maud, Henry's daughter, and a long period of civil war ensued. Stephen married Matilda of Boulogne and remained steadfast in support of her husband and his tenuous claim to kingship.



Maud, Empress of the Holy Roman Empire, became a widow upon the death of Heinrich V. She subsequently married Geoffrey, Count of Anjou, and spent many years in England trying in vain to gain her rightful claim to the throne from Stephen. One of the Empress Maud's children with Geoffrey became Henry II of England, bringing the disastrous civil war to an end and the beginning of the Plantagenet line. Henry II married Eleanor of Aquitaine, thus, with her enormous land holdings, becoming ruler of the largest swath of Europe and England since the Roman Empire. It makes for fascinating reading.

