



# First Friday News & Views



Monthly Newsletter of the First Friday Breakfast Club, Inc.

September 2023 / Volume 28 / Issue 9

Next Meeting

Friday

September 1

7:00 a.m.



Location

Hoyt Sherman

15<sup>th</sup> & Woodland

Des Moines



September

Speaker

C.J.

Petersen



Website

[ffbc Iowa.org](http://ffbc Iowa.org)



## Blood Donation Policy Change

by Byron Huff, Board President

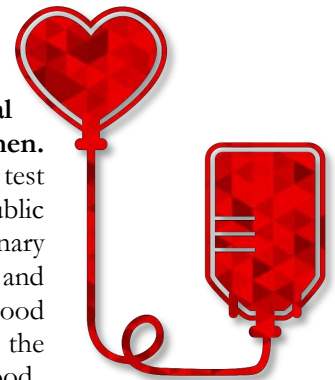
I thought I would talk about the history of blood donation in the United States, given a change in policy regarding gay men. While researching for this article, I found there has been a history of discrimination.

The first blood bank in the U.S. was started at Cook County Hospital in Chicago in 1937 by Bernard Fantus, who also coined the term “blood bank.” This led to blood banks popping up in other big cities.

African American physician Charles Drew is credited as the father of the modern blood bank. Those early blood banks did not have standardized ways of collecting, testing, preserving and handling blood. He earned his Doctor of Medical Science degree in 1940 at Presbyterian Hospital in NYC based on his seven months studying not only these aspects of creating a successful blood bank, but also the recruiting and screening of donors and training of collection staff. During World War II, Drew developed and led the Blood for Britain program, a U.S. effort to send blood plasma overseas to help wounded soldiers and civilians. This led to a national blood banking pilot program in 1941, for which Drew briefly served as assistant director (he also came up with the concept of bloodmobiles during this time!). Drew’s accomplishments were especially notable because they came during a time when segregation or exclusion of Blacks from many aspects of society was the norm. In fact, the initial national blood program did not accept blood donations from Blacks and later separated their donations from the rest of the population’s, a practice without any scientific basis that Drew vehemently opposed and protested; this practice stopped around 1950.

**The policy that banned men who have sex with men from donating blood for life was created early in the AIDS epidemic (nearly 40 years ago) when the U.S. Surgeon General estimated that 70% of people with HIV were gay or bisexual men.** At the time, blood could be screened for HIV antibodies, but the test wasn’t perfect and could not catch every HIV infection. The U.S. Public Health Service issued its first, cautiously worded, exclusionary recommendations on March 4, 1983: “Sexually active homosexual and bisexual men with multiple partners” should refrain from blood donation. But even those words were modest in comparison with the 1986 federal regulations that banned all gay men from donating blood.

On December 23, 2014, Dr. Margaret Hamburg, commissioner of the FDA, announced that her agency had decided to amend a policy in place since 1986. The old policy barred any man who had had sex with another man between 1977 and the present from donating blood. The new policy excluded only those men who had had sex with another man within the last year. Dr. Hamburg said the scientific evidence justified the new policy.



[continued on page 2]


## ["Blood Donation" continued from page 1]

On April 2, 2020, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced that it was updating its policy regarding blood donations from men who have sex with men (MSM), reducing the deferral period from 12 months to three months.

On May 11, 2023, the FDA's guidance caught up to the science, at least for the most part. Risk is assessed based on behavior rather than on orientation. Some gay men will still be excluded, even with the update, but the FDA touted the change as a significant milestone for the agency and the LGBTQI+ community.

The updated guidance says anyone who has had a new sexual partner, more than one sexual partner in the past three months, and anal sex in the past three months, would be deferred. The FDA said it believes that using the three-month benchmark reduces the risk of getting a donation from someone with a recent HIV infection that may not know it yet, even if they've been tested. But the guidance doesn't take into account people who should be safe if they are using condoms in such situations. People who are taking medicine like pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) are also being deferred under the current policy. The FDA believes that while the medicines are safe and effective, they might cause an HIV test to show up as negative even if there is actually an infection. The new guidelines have people wait three months after their last PrEP pill, or two years if they had a long-acting PrEP injection.

It's up to individual blood centers to decide whether and when they want to make it. Some small blood centers were able to make the change quickly, according to America's Blood Centers Chief Medical Officer Dr. Jed Gorlin; his group is the national organization for independent community-based blood centers.

 **Starting August 7, 2023, the Red Cross, the organization that provides about 40% of U.S. blood and blood components, will use the latest FDA guidance to determine whether someone is eligible to give blood, regardless of their sexual orientation.**

The Human Rights Campaign applauded the changes, but said they could be even better tailored to reduce risk to the blood supply and enable more people to give blood. The group said the FDA should focus on data regarding the risks posed by people on PrEP medications.

While the latest changes to blood donor policy are significantly improved by not singling out gay men, we can hope the rules can further evolve to become more inclusive while protecting the blood supply.



## Briefs & Shorts



Thanks to **Rick Miller** for introducing our August speaker, **Kendra Weston**. Thanks to **David Cotton** for managing our website, to **Nicholas Williams** for managing our Microsoft IT infrastructure, and to **David Wilfahrt** for managing FFBC's finances. Thanks to **Wade Petersen** for his work as our newsletter editor. *Thank you to all our contributors to the FFBC newsletter!*

The **deadline** for the **October newsletter** will be **September 25**. If you have something on your mind to share, type it up and email it to Wade ([wadecpetersen@gmail.com](mailto:wadecpetersen@gmail.com)) by the deadline.



**Fundraising efforts** are ongoing to fund our scholarship program. To date we have awarded over **\$450,000** for scholarships to Iowa high school seniors who have done remarkable, courageous things to reduce homophobia and teach about LGBTQ issues in their schools and communities. Please consider a tax-deductible **contribution** online or by sending a check.



A special thank-you to those FFBC members and friends who have chosen to designate FFBC through the **Donor Direct** program of **United Way**. 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.



**United Way**

# oneiowa

**LGBTQ  
HEALTH AND  
WELLNESS  
CONFERENCE**

**TAKING PRIDE IN  
LGBTQ HEALTH**

**SEPTEMBER 26 & 27  
THE GRADUATE - IOWA CITY**

We are thrilled to announce the expansion of the **One Iowa LGBTQ Health and Wellness Conference** from a local to a regional event! Our aim is to address the pressing need for inclusive healthcare information for the LGBTQ community in Iowa, especially in light of recent challenges we've faced, such as the Gender Affirming Care Ban and the rollback on abortion rights. Now, more than ever, this conference will serve as an essential platform to support and uplift inclusive healthcare.

We invite healthcare professionals, administrators, and LGBTQ community members to join us under the theme **"Taking Pride in LGBTQ Health."** The conference will focus on promoting comprehensive well-being for LGBTQ individuals in Iowa. We have carefully crafted three tracks: technical, administrative, and community, to allow anyone working in healthcare to benefit from the event. From front desk staff to surgeons, we welcome all to join us at the event!



# Future Speakers

**October 6:**

**"Coming Out"  
Panel Discussion**

**November 3:**

**T.B.D.**

**December 1:**

**Rev. Gregory Neal**  
Gay Pastor of Grace United  
Methodist Church, DSM

**January 5:**

**Jennifer Konfrst**  
Iowa House Minority Leader

**February 2:**

**Ben Page**  
Director, Des Moines  
Parks and Recreation

**March 1:**

**Rob Sand**  
Iowa State Auditor



**Fall  
SOFTBALL**

WEDNESDAY NIGHTS  
CAMPBELL RECREATION AREA  
CLIVE, IA  
COMPETITIVE AND RECREATION LEAGUES  
SIGN UP WITH QR CODE OR LINK IN BIO

**6-10PM** SEPTEMBER 6 - OCTOBER 11



**PRIDE**  
SPORTS LEAGUE  
OF CENTRAL IOWA

PRIDESPORTSLEAGUE.ORG



# Foreign Ownership of Iowa Farmland

by Jonathan Wilson

Iowa's junior U.S. Senator, Joni Ernst (I was tempted to use the term "lesser" U.S. Senator, but Senator Grassley has managed to set that bar really low), wants provisions added to the anticipated U.S. farm bill to "strengthen" the Department of Agriculture's ability to investigate foreign investment into farmland, as well as to establish a database of foreign owners available to the public. So far, so good. It's almost always good to collect information and make it readily available to the public. Her proposal goes further. It would ban foreign owners from participating in farm service agency programs, and "require consideration for retroactive divestment" for foreign real estate owners (*Des Moines Register* 06/22/23). Ernst is quoted saying, "We can't say that people will be pushed out, or that land would be taken from investors and sold," which creates some confusion about what "retroactive divestment" even means. The confusion itself will make the purchase of farmland less desirable and that, in turn, will mean that Iowa farmland owners who want to sell will get less per acre.

**I think that Ernst's proposal violates the law against unintended consequences and is counter to some basic principles of a free market.**

Several years ago, when I was serving as chair of the Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE), I attended a White House briefing. Among other topics discussed, one of the presenters was asked about the balance of payments deficit, especially between the United States and China, caused by China selling more goods to U.S. consumers than the U.S. was selling to the Chinese. The presenter informed us that **there was no balance of payments deficit**, and that there couldn't be a balance of payments deficit. That got my attention. He went on to explain that, while the



Chinese (and some other countries) were definitely selling more merchandise to U.S. consumers than the merchandise the U.S. was selling to Chinese consumers (and those in other countries), the Chinese (and other countries) weren't just sitting on that difference, they were spending it – spending it on capital assets in the U.S. (regarding China, think here: commercial real estate, AMC Entertainment, Legendary Entertainment, General Motors, Cirrus Wind Energy, Complete Genomics, First International Oil, IBM – P.C. division, Motorola Mobility, Nexter Automotive, Riot Games, Spotify, Snapchat, Hilton Hotels, General Electric Appliance Division, Smithfield Foods, Terex Corp., Triple H Coal, and Zonare Medical Systems). According to economic think-tank Paulson Institute, "Chinese firms and investors own a controlling majority in nearly 2,400 U.S. companies."

It put me in mind of the early European settlers in this country. They gave the indigenous people such things as beads, mirrors, and similar trinkets, and the indigenous people gave them "Pennsylvania." The Chinese (and others) are giving us TVs, cell phones, autos, electronics, and the like, and we're giving them "Pennsylvania." What goes around seems to come around.

The bottom line? If you're an owner of Iowa farmland and want to sell and get the highest price per acre, having the government eliminate or reduce the number of foreign potential buyers will reduce the pool of potential buyers, and that means you'll likely get less per acre. When that happens, you'll have Senator Ernst to thank.



CAPITAL BEARS  
DES • MOINES • IOWA

## Capital Bears

Capital Bears is an inclusive group which focuses on providing the LGBTQIA+ community a safe and accepting social network. They strive to offer a good space to share ideas and meet individuals. Their purpose is to create an atmosphere of social acceptance among individuals who identify as bear, otter, cub, admirer, or supporter.

[www.capitalbears.org](http://www.capitalbears.org)



# September Speaker C.J. Petersen



**C.J. Petersen** previously served as Communications Director for former U.S. Senate nominee Admiral Mike Franken. Following his candidacy for the Iowa state senate in 2020, C.J. worked to build civic engagement among rural Iowans, including taking part in a rural queer working group to improve political engagement for queer people who live in rural spaces. He has worked in the legislature for Rep. Sami Scheetz and continues to work as a public servant in the office of Iowa’s State Auditor.

Born and raised in southwest Iowa, C.J. grew up using American Sign Language at home and is hard of hearing. Living at the intersection of the LGBTQ+ and disability communities, C.J. strives for inclusion and acceptance for all who want to participate in the political process. A current student at the University of Iowa majoring in political science, C.J. believes there’s nothing wrong with constant growth and education. He and his husband live on a small farm in rural Audubon County, home of Albert the Bull, where they are active in their community.

C.J. believes the best way to achieve results when working with others is to remember that nobody’s always right and that a broken clock is right twice a day.”

## Imperial Court of Iowa Presents

# Red Bow Ball

*Sunday, September 10th  
Doors Open at 4:00 PM  
Show Begins at 5:00 PM*

at



An Evening of Entertainment and  
HIV/AIDS Remembrance  
and Awareness



*Net proceeds to benefit*



# Speaker Series

[Tickets are free, but you must register online]

September 14 / 6:00 P.M. / Temple Theater

## Jeffrey Marsh

As a pundit for cable news, Jeffrey Marsh was the first openly nonbinary activist to appear on national television. Jeffrey is also the first nonbinary author with a “Big 5” publisher, Penguin Random House. Jeffrey’s best-selling self-esteem guide *How To Be You*, is an innovative, category-non-conforming work that combines memoir, workbook, and spiritual self-help.



# Kendra Weston and the Lavender Legal Center

by Gary Moore

It was another First Friday Breakfast Club (FFBC) at our usual host location Hoyt Sherman Place which today was dressed up with its new front lawn and outside performance area. I continue to be amazed at the quality of speakers FFBC provides every month. This morning Rick Miller, a long-time FFBC member and former Board member, introduced **Kendra Weston** of Cedar Rapids. For those who may not know, Rick taught in Newton Public Schools where he taught Kendra for seven years in his classes. Rick noted a number of accomplished people graduated from the Newton Public Schools, and Kendra is one.

Kendra earned her juris doctor degree from the University of Nebraska College of Law in 2016. Kendra has always been drawn to the public interest arena. Their desire to have a career in the nonprofit world was solidified when they served as an AmeriCorps VISTA after undergraduate studies. As a student attorney, she worked on family-based immigration law, and post-graduation, she represented children in their parents' custody and divorce cases. Kendra was a founding board member for the LGBTQ+ Youth Center in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. It was during this time that Kendra began to look for more ways to serve the LGBTQ community. And thus, **Lavender Legal Center** was born to provide hope and resilience for LGBTQ Iowans.

Kendra's previous volunteer and community work had shown her the lack of legal representation for LGBTQ youth in many parts of the state as well as the nation of which in great part is because LGBTQ people and youth tend to have lower incomes and suffer from poverty and violence more than the general population. Lavender Legal Center was established to help alleviate legal issues arising out of these inequities. Common cases that Lavender takes are:

- **Family recognition (including adoptions and guardianships): Although marriage equality is now law that does not necessarily mean that children of that marriage include a birth certificate with both legally married parents on the birth certificate which then can have further legal ramifications.**
- **Name and gender marker changes: Getting a name change does not change your driver's license or other vital records. That can be affected by even the county you live in. This can effectively cause outing the transitioned.**
- **Last will and testament**
- **Advance directives (living wills and durable power of attorney)**
- **Education and youth issues: Complicated by new state legislation**
- **Trans Health Care: Complicated by new state legislation**

The fine details of living as an LGBTQ family and the legal system can be a lot for families and individuals to navigate. Marriage rights did not settle parental rights and is but one reason Kendra and the Lavender Legal Center discuss the importance of adoption.

Kendra discussed a number of the Lavender Legal Center's successes touching on each of these inequity areas. In addition to the legal representation and advice, the center also does advocacy and education. Kendra noted helping a 10-year-old student who transitioned during the Covid break by helping the family deal with school and others using other community resources to ease the transition back to school.

In addition to a very informative presentation, the question-and-answer part of Kendra's presentation was one of the best I have experienced at FFBC. Jonathan Wilson's broad-based experience and law background brought several poignant points. Supervisor Mat McCoy noted that he often receives questions in these areas and each time was like reinventing the wheel trying to find answers. It was just another one of the many fascinating presentations I have been lucky enough to experience in my 20 years of forcing myself out of bed to be at FFBC and always glad I did.



August Speaker



# August Meeting Photo Gallery

Photos by  
Gary Moore & Wade Petersen



Rick Miller introduced Kendra Weston (a former student of his while teaching in Newton)

# DSM Magazine 2023 LGBTQ+ Legacy Leader Awards



Photo from *DSM Magazine*



## 2023 Honorees:

(pictured above from left to right)



- Rich Hendricks**, Quad Cities pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church; a leader in eastern Iowa's LGBTQ community
- Rick Miller** of Des Moines, a pioneer in Iowa's LGBTQ rights movement and archivist of the Des Moines Pride Center
- Laurie Phelan** of Farrar, founded nonprofit iJAG to help Iowa students graduate and find meaningful employment
- Scott Valbert** of Des Moines, an advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion at several of the city's largest corporations
- Aime Wichtendahl**, a Hiawatha city councilor and Iowa's first transgender elected official
- Rich Salas** of Des Moines University will be honored as an ally for his work to improve health care for LGBTQ patients

Over the years, Iowa's LGBTQ community has had a positive influence on our state. Representing a wide range of vocations and avocations, they have led with creativity, vigor and compassion, solving problems and helping build a state that we all can be proud to call home.

In tribute to such inspiring contributions, *dsm* magazine, One Iowa, and American Equity will celebrate the 5th annual LGBTQ Legacy Leader Awards on **September 14, 2023**, from 4 to 7 p.m. at the **River Center**. They will also recognize an ally of the LGBTQ community, someone whose contributions to equality and justice have helped ensure that gender and sexual orientation must not be stigmatized or marginalized in the culture of Iowa.

To register, go to [dsmmagazine.com/lgbtq-legacyawards-2023/](https://dsmmagazine.com/lgbtq-legacyawards-2023/)



"I want people to fall in love with themselves and to be really proud and full of joy for the space they take up. If someone else appreciates the space you take up, then that's icing on the cake."

-- Jonathan Van Ness, *Queer Eye*



## FFBC Membership

FFBC membership is open to men who self-identify as gay, bisexual, or transgender, and their allies. We welcome all guests, regardless of sexual orientation or gender. Meetings are held the first Friday of every month from 7:00 a.m. - 8:15 a.m. at Hoyt Sherman Place in Des Moines. The following membership and guest rates help us cover our food and facility costs.

### **In-Person Meeting Rates (Members & Guests)**

**Annual Rate: \$180**  
(12 consecutive meetings)

**Quarterly Rate: \$48**  
(3 consecutive meetings)

**Month-by-Month: \$18**

**First Time or One-Time Attendee: \$15**

**Full-time Student: \$8**

**There is no charge to attend via Zoom.**

### **Payment Options**

**Cash or check at the meeting**

**Credit card prior to the meeting at [www.ffbciaowa.org](http://www.ffbciaowa.org); visit the Membership tab**

### **Meeting Schedule**

**6:30 a.m. - Doors open**  
**6:45 a.m. - Breakfast service begins**  
**7:00 a.m. - Meeting begins**



 **exchange**  
connecting families creating community

### **September Events**

**9/5 & 19 Trans & Non-Binary Youth Connect Group**  
6-7pm

**9/13 & 27 Q & A Youth Group** 5-6:30

**9/22 Game Night**  
6-8pm

**9/29 CommUNITY Meal**  
6-7:30

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**3614 6 Ave, DSM**

# Corndogs and Hypocrisy



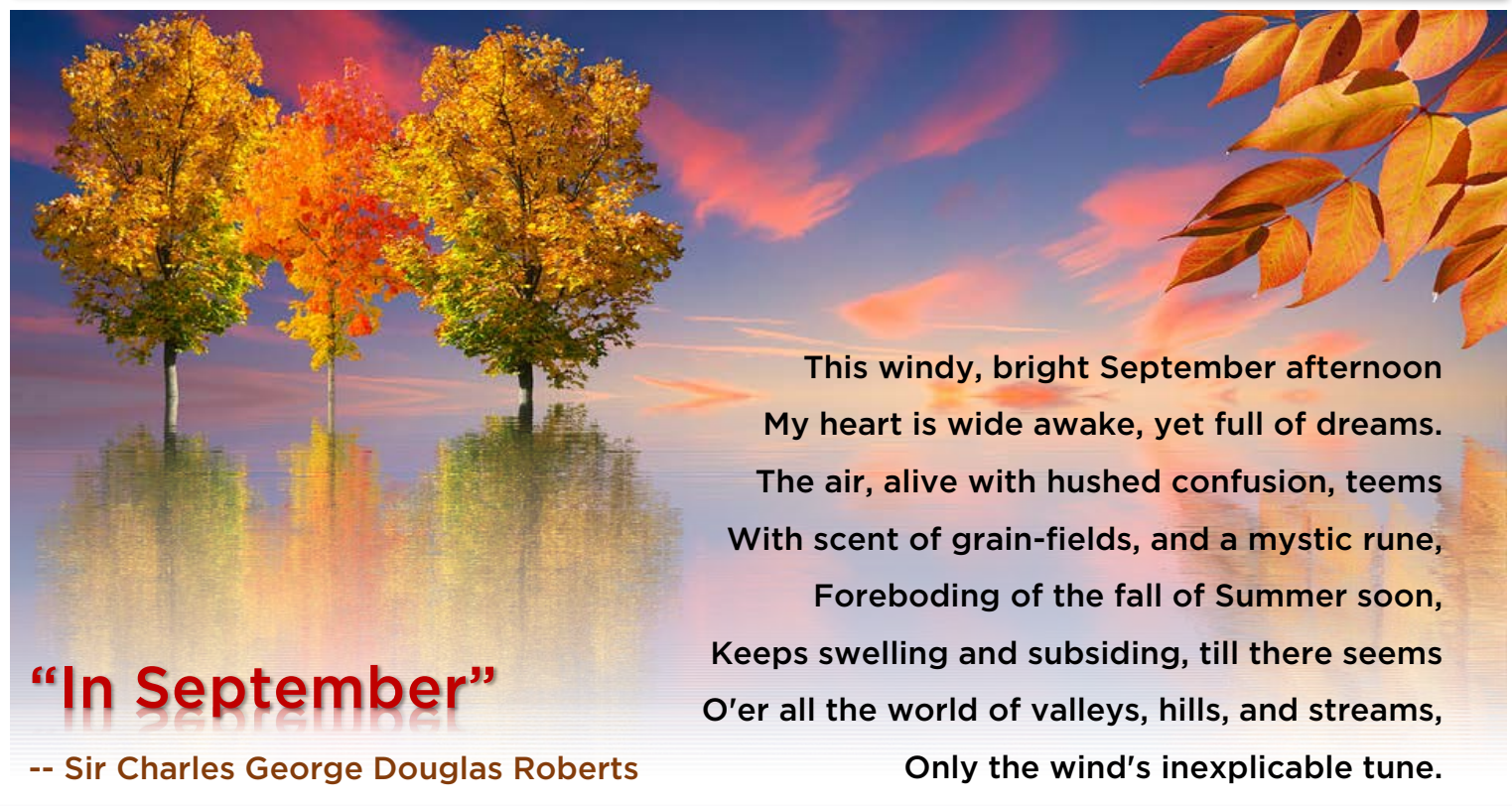
by Supervisor Matt McCoy  
Polk County, 1<sup>st</sup> District

Florida's thin-skinned **Governor Ron DeSantis** sidestepped a question at the Iowa State Fair related to how he would respond if his children turned out to be gay or transgender, saying he would respond to the matter privately, "We would leave that between my wife and I. We'll handle it privately."



As the single largest instigator of hateful legislation directed at eroding parental rights for LGBTQ+ kids and their parents, the hypocrisy the governor exhibited demonstrates the lack of humanity and empathy that someone who wants to be commander-in-chief should exhibit. Hundreds of Iowans with children under the age of 18 are now tracking north to Minnesota to receive gender-affirming care as a result of Iowa's gender-affirming care ban brought by another heartless and intensely political governor. All parents are asking for is the ability to do what's best for their children and to deliver the gender-affirming healthcare that they need to keep their children alive and thriving.

Republicans, to this date, have not paid a price for this parental rights overreach only because transgender issues do not poll well with the general public due to lack of understanding and relational application. It's more important than ever that members of the protected LGBTQ community use their voices and speak out against these cruel Republican politics of hate and ignorance. Our children's very lives are at stake. As for the thin-skinned Governor Ron DeSantis, may he find no refuge in Iowa.



## "In September"

-- Sir Charles George Douglas Roberts

This windy, bright September afternoon  
My heart is wide awake, yet full of dreams.  
The air, alive with hushed confusion, teems  
With scent of grain-fields, and a mystic rune,  
Foreboding of the fall of Summer soon,  
Keeps swelling and subsiding, till there seems  
O'er all the world of valleys, hills, and streams,  
Only the wind's inexplicable tune.



# Barbie

A Film Review by Mark Turnage



She's Barbie, and he's just Ken—but is her movie everything it's dolled up to be? Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* is a sunny, pastel tribute to classic films of Hollywood past, with its use of practical effects, mobile sets, and choreographed musical numbers harkening back to the era when Barbie first debuted. Despite some pacing issues in the third act, *Barbie*'s message of feminist empowerment satirically and smartly unpacks traditional gender norms like a Dream House wardrobe through its witty narrative, but also with powerful star turns by its leads.

Margot Robbie brings the eponymous doll to life with just the right amount of friendly optimism and infectious enthusiasm in her own Barbie World: Barbieland, a colorful imagination realm where every Barbie (read: woman) is a successful and respected professional (but also a doll, who doesn't need to drink, eat, or have anxiety). Ken (Ryan Gosling), like all other Kens in Barbieland, vies for (his) Barbie's attention: with jobs like "beach" and "suit" compared to Barbie's "doctor" and "President," Ken's successes and living arrangements are far more vague and far less important (for comedic effect), and no Barbie is dependent on a Ken. But when Barbie starts having an existential crisis that upends her idyllic everyday life, she's advised to seek out the Oracle of Barbieland: Weird Barbie (an iconic Kate McKinnon), who tasks her to travel to the "real world" to find her purpose and her owner—the girl whose real-world negative feelings are materializing through Barbie and causing her crisis. Naturally, Ken tags along—but their discoveries about the real world (sexism, the patriarchy) bring new perspectives to both Barbie and Ken that transform them and Barbieland forever.

Gerwig's no stranger to feminist empowerment—her previous films (*Lady Bird*, *Little Women*) have tackled the same subject ably through the lens of a modern family drama and a period piece. But with *Barbie*, Gerwig adds satire to her arsenal, and it's the most potent weapon for the film's incisive gender comedy. The real world's near-total contradiction to Barbieland provides for the film's biggest laughs (and a couple cringes thanks to the real-world impact of legislating women's bodily autonomy). Robbie's "Stereotypical Barbie" is the ideal foil for feminist cultural commentary, even on Barbie herself, such as when a snarky teenage girl reads Barbie to filth for being "consumerist propaganda," "terrible for women's body image," and a "fascist," to which a tearful Barbie incredulously exclaims, "I don't control the railways or the flow of commerce!" Mattel, the company, is also present as a troupe of all-male bumbling suits headed by Will Ferrell, who proudly touts how diverse his company is by how many gender-neutral bathrooms it has. The physical comedy is meant to appeal more to the "kid's movie" side of the audience, and for the most part, it works, while giving the adults dialogue to chuckle at. The tone of this film, especially in Barbieland, captures the feeling of unseen children building a narrative while playing with their toys—it's a sign of Gerwig's deft directorial touch how that feeling carries emotional intelligence with it, too.

Speaking of gendered comedy and representation, there isn't a non-binary or trans Barbie in the film (perhaps too much of an envelope to push?), and even a small bit of representation there would have made a landmark film legendary. The film prides itself on seeing success and beauty in every woman through Barbie and her careers, and that should include those outside the gender binary—dolls aren't just for girls anymore. The third act packs a punch with a passionate monologue about the impossible societal expectations fitted on women, but it almost seems like telling the (more informed) audience what they already know and want to change. Gerwig saves her most mind-expanding material for the very end, a smash cut that's simultaneously funny, shocking, and extremely relevant. With childlike wonder, adult insight, and clever humor, it's a combination that makes "Barbie" box-office gold. Or is it pink? See it in a theater near you.

## Board of Directors

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Contact Us At: [info@ffbciowa.org](mailto:info@ffbciowa.org)

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## Publication



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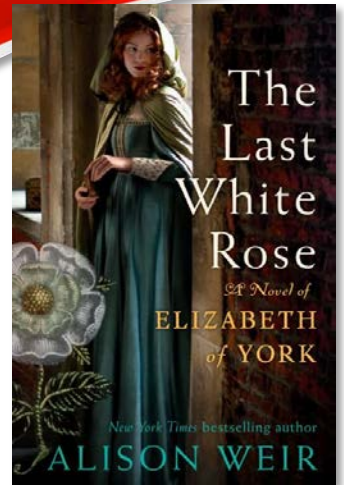
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## The Last White Rose

A Novel of Elizabeth of York

by Alison Weir

A  
Book  
Review by  
Steve Person



Alison Weir is a renowned historian of English history and especially of the Tudor Dynasty. Her nonfiction works range from Medieval times into the beginnings of the English Renaissance.

Elizabeth of York was the last of the Plantagenets. That dynasty ruled England and Ireland from Henry II (1154-1189) until the defeat of Richard III (1483-1485) at the Battle of Bosworth Field. The Earl of Richmond, later Henry VII, hailed from the House of Lancaster. The Wars of the Roses (1455-1487), pitted the House of Lancaster against the House of York. Both houses claimed their right to the English throne since both evolved from the Plantagenet Dynasty. The symbol of the Lancastrians was the red rose. The Yorkists wore the white rose. Hence the name of the civil war that pitted both houses against each other.

Once Henry VII established the Tudor Dynasty, his aim was to unite England and prevent further civil strife. Easier said than done. In 1486, Henry married Elizabeth of York, the Plantagenet survivor. The marriage united both warring houses, and a new Tudor rose united the red and white roses into a single entity. Truth be told, Elizabeth had the stronger claim to the English throne than Henry, but the English preferred their rulers to be male since the few times that women in their history ruled ended disastrously.

The marriage of Henry and Elizabeth resulted in the births of Arthur, Prince of Wales, Henry (later Henry VIII), Mary Tudor (later Queen of France), and Margaret Tudor (later Queen of Scotland). Henry and his councilors made excellent matches for his and Elizabeth's children with one glaring exception. Arthur, Prince of Wales, became engaged to marry the Spanish princess, Katherine of Aragon. While that union seemed advantageous to both England and Spain, upon the marriage of the two young people, Arthur died suddenly of what was then known as "the sweating sickness." His death possibly occurred before he and Katherine consummated their nuptials.

Young Henry Tudor (later Henry VIII) became betrothed to Katherine shortly after Arthur's death. Henry loved her very much despite her being six years senior to him. From its outset, the marriage caused consternation among some even though the Pope issued a dispensation making the marriage valid. A passage from Leviticus in the Old Testament claims that a brother cannot marry the widow of his brother. In later years, Henry VIII, eager to get a male heir, used that argument to claim the marriage invalid. Katherine became the first of his subsequent six wives.

Elizabeth, mother of Henry VII's children, unfortunately died at the age of 37, leaving behind a bereft young Henry (Henry VIII) and his sisters. Elizabeth never tried to assert her better claim to be queen regnant, and she and Henry VII actually loved each other, a rather uncommon situation in the marriages of royalty in those times.

Alison Weir does an excellent job of allowing her readers to grasp the intricacies of the many characters in the book who frequently have the same, or similar names, and expertly guides them with precision and understanding.

A rather interesting footnote to Elizabeth of York: she is, supposedly, the representation of the Queen of Hearts in a deck of playing cards. Take a look the next time you open up a deck.