

# The Year

# of

# Joyful Resistance

FOREWORD BY  
ADRIENNE  
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Photograph by Zay Monae

Hell is no match for  
collective joy.  
Welcome to the golden age  
of protest partying.

# HOW IT

can we think of celebrating right now when so much of the past year has pointed us toward despair? The regressive battles for bodily sovereignty; the wave of patriarchal, homophobic, and transphobic policymaking; law enforcement trying to hold us in obedience with escalating violence; so-called global leaders who would have us deny the realities of climate change and pandemic vulnerability. In light of all that, well, where *is* the light? Some days, numbness and hopelessness can feel like our only available options.

This overwhelm isn't accidental—it's straight out of the oppression playbook. One way to control people—to keep them in a scarcity mindset of desperation—is to deny them the power of pleasure and the erotic. Freedom fighter and poet Audre Lorde once defined eroticism as a bridge between the political and the spiritual—a “provocative force,” marked by an open and fearless capacity for joy, that awakens our refusal to accept the current systems.

“Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama,” Lorde wrote. Once we reclaim our right to satisfaction, in other words, justice and

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liberation can be among our most pleasurable experiences.

In 2019, I published a book called *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, a series of conversations between myself and other movement leaders who have found and generated our own celebratory practices aimed at making our necessary revolutions feel irresistible. And that is the lens I encourage us to hold up to this difficult moment. When we peer through it, we can feel our aliveness begin to pour through. Old institutions can disintegrate and crumble. This is a lens of possibility and of profound delight.

Here, you'll find radiant evidence of communities across the U.S. resisting socialized despair this year through celebration, creativity, music, and dance. These gatherings look like parties because they are. It is in the bleakest landscapes of oppression that our pleasure practices are most needed, to signal what we are moving toward. They are purposeful in collectivizing access to good lives, community care, shared abundance, and safety.

These photos prove how interconnected and miraculous we really are. They are more than a look back—they're an open invitation to practice a future worth surviving into.

ADRIENNE MAREE BROWN is a writer, activist, musician, and doula. She is the author or editor of several published texts and the founder of the Emergent Strategy Ideation Institute, where she is the writer in residence.



#### **Ebony Beach Club Beach Bounce**

THE CAUSE: Transforming the relationship between Black Americans and the beach

THE GATHERING: September 18, Los Angeles, California

“Black people have historically been barred from beaches—pools too. And while we carry that trauma with us, Ebony Beach Club is about saying, *Fuck it, we're going right back to the war zone and we're going to have a blast.* The first event we did in April, about 150 people came. We started throwing one every month, and by September, 5,000 people showed up. It's self-governed, everyone doing their own thing: taking surf lessons, sitting in the water, dancing, doing yoga. It's not just a turnup—it's tribal and electric. There's synergy in the space, connectivity to the earth and each other.”

—Brick Howze, founder

Photographs by Zay Monae



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- 1. Abortion Shower.
- 2. Star Garden Stripper Strike Fundraiser.
- 3. froSkate Meetup.



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**Star Garden Stripper Strike Fundraiser**

**THE CAUSE:** Raising money for dancers striking for safer work conditions and job security  
**THE GATHERING:** May 30, North Hollywood, California

"As strippers, we hear that sexual assault and manhandling just come with the territory. Collectively, we've had enough. This spring and summer, my fellow dancers and I went on strike. During that time, we held pop-up strip-show fundraisers to help striking strippers who were sacrificing income for the cause. We also picketed: The goal was to limit the amount of money the club took in by enticing customers to chill with us outside instead. We used our skills to create a fun party environment and entertain everyone—and it worked. Now, we're taking steps toward unionizing with Actors' Equity Association. It's not over, but we're getting close!"

—Lilith, lead organizer

Photographs by Alyson Alliano

**Abortion Shower**

**THE CAUSE:** Organizing for repro rights and fundraising for abortion patients  
**THE GATHERING:** August 27, Tucson, Arizona

"Culturally, we honor people who have babies, showering them with gifts and love. So we wanted to create a safe place where people could share abortion resources and joy. Everyone really threw down. We had a cake printed with the SCOTUS justices' images, and my friend who's a burlesque dancer sat on their faces. We put together abortion care packages with medical supplies and things that make people feel good: a spa certificate, a joint, my homie's mixtape. This event raised \$3,200, which we'll put toward future organizing and support efforts. Mutual aid can be fun and sexy. We know what's best for each other."

—Alejandra Pablos, creator and community justice organizer

Photographs by Jessica Blanco

**froSkate Meetup**

**THE CAUSE:** Building BIPOC community through skateboarding  
**THE GATHERING:** June 4, Chicago, Illinois

"Our froSkate meetups exist to center BIPOC joy in a world where we're constantly getting beat down. You're not really thinking about much else when you're on your board—you're just trying to land this trick, or maybe you're just cruising, thinking about how beautiful your surroundings are and how the wind feels on your face. Skating creates a feeling of euphoria that needs nothing else, a feeling I think everyone, but especially Black and brown people, cherishes because we need those radical moments of joy. I'm a strong believer in abolition as well as transformative and restorative justice. With froSkate, I am able to actively practice that."

—Karlie Thornton, founder

Photograph by Norma Ibarra Lapiro



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REPORTING BY MELANIE CURRY, ELIZABETH KIEFER, OLIVIA LAPEYROLERIE, ERIN QUINLAN, AND ASHLYN ROBINETTE

- 4. Arm the Girls Stun Gun Kiki Ball.
- 5. Resistance Revival Chorus Juneteenth Weekend Celebration.
- 6. Vote! Daylong Concert and Art Market.
- 7. Clown Music Parade.

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### Clown Music Parade

**THE CAUSE:** Counterprotest against an all-men's anti-abortion march  
**THE GATHERING:** October 15, Boston, Massachusetts

"We heard there was going to be a men's-only protest to abolish abortion—a 'somber march' where they would be dressed in suits, like they're concerned protectors of the community. Someone on Reddit made a joke about dressing up as clowns and following them. Within a week, a few of us organized it. I bought makeup, wigs, and red noses; people brought instruments. We ended up with a marching band of clowns counterprotesting along the entire route, playing 'Entry of the Gladiators' and 'Pop! Goes the Weasel.' This was about using comedy as a tactic and purposefully having fun. Now I want to have musical clownings everywhere this men's group shows up."

—K\*, organizer

Photograph by Tom McLaughlin

### Arm the Girls Stun Gun Kiki Ball

**THE CAUSE:** Fundraising and self-defense for trans and queer femmes  
**THE GATHERING:** June 17, New York, New York

"We're a DJ collective. Our original idea for Arm the Girls was to change the narrative about trans life, violence, and death, to show that we can be our own source of power. It started as a photo project but turned into a self-defense program, mutual-aid resource, and nightlife series. Ballroom is an underground scene—one of the only safe spaces many Black and brown queer and trans people have to feel authentic and empowered. This kiki ball raised about \$10,000 to help support community members, and we gave out 300 stun guns and pepper sprays. It was lit, but as an organizer, I'm also interested in the long-term impacts: safety for our community on a comprehensive level."

—DJ Guardian Guerrilla Pump, lead organizer and cofounder, We Are the Ones We've Been Waiting For

Photograph by Ramie Ahmed

### Resistance Revival Chorus Juneteenth Weekend Celebration

**THE CAUSE:** Breathing joy into protest by uplifting women and non-binary singers  
**THE GATHERING:** June 18, Kingston, New York

"This was the second performance our chorus has done for Juneteenth. It was in a historic church, in this really profound, beautiful space. The sound was echoing off the wood as we sang 'Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around.' And you could just feel the energy coming back from the crowd. Music inspires; it brings hope. It reminds people what joy feels like and what it sounds like. We need that so people can get up the next morning and feel like they can fight another day."

—Zakiyah Ansari, chorus member

Photograph courtesy Resistance Revival Chorus

### Vote! Daylong Concert and Art Market

**THE CAUSE:** Registering new voters and increasing turnout at the polls  
**THE GATHERING:** October 2, San Antonio, Texas

"In San Antonio, our voter turnout numbers aren't good. So our goal was to throw an event that felt very spirited. People were excited to have resources available to them in a festive environment. It was definitely a party."

—Ann Enzinger, organizer

"I wanted to be a part of this specifically because of everything that's going on with women's rights—to go up there onstage and be a strong female presence and tell people to get out there and vote. We have this punk song called 'Bad News.' It sounds angry, but it's actually about how we're all in this together and we're only going to get out of it if we unite."

—Bridgette Norris-Sanchez, lead vocalist, HoneyBunny

Photographs by Shaun Alvarado