

IFQT S1E7 BONUS FEED SWAP WITH Queer News Podcast

“Change the Pattern: The AIDS Quilt Travels the South with Purpose”

[First aired Oct 4, 2022]

[00:00:00] **Alex Masse:** Hey everyone! It's Alex Massey here, and welcome to our first I'm Feeling Queer Today Feedswap! Today is April 18th, National Transgender HIV Testing Day. This day is observed to shine a light on the disproportionate impact of HIV on the transgender community and to promote HIV testing, prevention, and care among transgender, non binary, and other gender diverse people.

Calling attention to AIDS and HIV awareness, today, we're going to be sharing an episode from a podcast we love called Queer News. Hosted by Anna Deshawn, Queer News is an intersectional approach to a news podcast where race and sexuality meet politics, entertainment, and culture. In this special episode, Change the Pattern, the AIDS quilt travels the South with purpose, Anna shares her experience covering the 35th anniversary of the AIDS memorial quilt in San Francisco and the emotional impact of viewing it up close and personal for the first time.

Further, the episode highlights the staggering reality that, while the South comprises only 38 percent of the population, it represents over half of all new HIV diagnoses. You'll also learn about the Call My Name project, a program that ensures the stories of black and brown lives lost to HIV and AIDS are honored with panels on the AIDS Memorial Quilt.

Anna really takes you on this journey with her, and it's a deeply touching episode. It feels like a privilege to tag along. Her energy and empathy are both contagious in equal measure. We hope you enjoy the queer news episode we are sharing today! If you like what you hear, you can catch new episodes every Monday at 7am central, and check out the show notes for ways you can support Anna DeShawn and this powerful podcast.

Also check out our social media, at the Future Perfect Project on all platforms, for bonus content about this episode, featuring an interview with me, Anna, and I'm Feeling Queer Today co producer Samuel Smalls Jr. Now let's take a listen to Change the Pattern, the AIDS Quilt Travels the South with Purpose.

We hope you enjoy it and learn something new.

[00:01:49] **Anna DeShawn:** Family, it's your favorite queer radio personality, Anna Deshawn, with our queer news for today. Now I want to make you a promise. We will continue to bring you the latest in queer news, culture, and politics. So if you're digging our intersectional take on the daily, Consider joining the Q crew, the Q crew is our monthly membership program.

We started to help us grow the podcast with your help. We can bring you more stories celebrating our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and comrade communities.

Now family, you all remember back in June when the Q crew funded me to cover the 35th anniversary of the AIDS memorial quilt in San Francisco. I was blown away by your

willingness to support this work. The financial gifts of the Q crew afforded me the opportunity to see the quilt up close and personal for the very first time.

There are so many moments of that trip I could share. And I will, in a podcast that drop on World AIDS Day, which is December 1st. Feel free to put a reminder in your phone right now, because it's going to be good. But, when I was on the lawn in San Francisco, walking the aisles of the quilt, and I do mean aisles, as there were 350 blocks laid out, which represented 3,000 panels.

3,000 stories of people who have lost their lives to HIV AIDS. And listening to the soundtrack of the names being read. And understanding that the average age of a person on the quilt is 33. Understanding that each panel quilt is different. is six by three, roughly the size of a coffin, telling a story of remembrance through art and words.

There was a deep, I mean, deep emotional response that came over my entire body. Tears just began to drop because when you walk through a display of the AIDS quilt. You understand it is more than the largest community arts project ever in the world. You understand that it transcends needle and thread. As the manager of the Call My Name Project, Jada Harris likes to say, there is quilt magic.

And I know this for sure because I have experienced myself. Now the Call My Name Project exists in an effort to honor the black lives lost to HIV AIDS, and I could explain it, but it's way better coming from Jada herself. Take a listen, family.

[00:04:33] **Jada Harris:** Call My Name is a program that's specifically designed to increase the number of African American people in all marginalized communities, black and brown people.

Now you put the quilt end to end, it's 56. 3.

How many of you think it's the black folk?

Less than a mile. That's why we want to call our names because it's our tradition. It's what we do as people. We call the names of our dead. Because they know, we know that they are also living in the spirit world. Right? That's what we do. We call the names. And what do we do in our communities? We quilt!

[00:05:19] **Anna DeShawn:** That's right. We pour libations. We have altars. We honor our ancestors. We quilt. The Call My Name project was the magnet that drew me to cover the quilt display in San Francisco. And now, through funding from Gilead Sciences, the quilt is going on tour in the South. This tour is called Change the pattern and it kicked off in Jackson, Mississippi, at the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum.

And guess who was there? No, no, no. For real. Guess. Come on, fresh off her first Emmy win. The Cheryl Lee Ralph was in the building and I got to meet the legend too. She was very sweet. Now, Cheryl Lee has been an advocate for HIV AIDS for over 30 years with her organization, the Divas Foundation. She walked to the mic with her very own panel she curated behind her and she did this:

[00:06:24] **Sheryl Lee Ralph:** I am an endangered. Species. But I sing no victim song. I am a woman. I am an artist and I know

where my voice belongs.

[00:07:03] **Anna DeShawn:** Oh, can we talk about the chills and the energy in that space and y'all know she wasn't done, right? We're just going to let Cheryl Lee Ralph preach a little bit. Take a listen.

[00:07:18] **Sheryl Lee Ralph:** You see, what you all don't realize is 33 years ago, when I started talking this talk and walking this walk, people told me I was stupid.

They told me I was stupid because They told me to shut up. They told me God would find no favor in me. Because I spend too much time talking about those people.

And a little church girl in me said, Who are those people? Because there, but for the grace of God, go I and when they said, you must be one of them and I said, Oh, I am absolutely a human being and it was very difficult. And then launching divas at a time when people were not paying attention to people of color and this disease.

You heard it said it was known classified as a gay white man's disease. But from day one I saw black folks getting sick and die, and they weren't just black gay people, they were black gay, gay and straight people. They were not just men, they were men and women. That wasn't just one section of our community that was hit from day one, it was all of us.

But every doggone year we raised our voices to say, This is a black and brown people's problem. This is a woman's problem. This is a child's problem. So, every year I have a visitation of spirits. All the brothers, all the women, all the trans, all the drag come on and they say, Bitch!

You better work.

[00:09:48] **Anna DeShawn:** Now, I told y'all she was preaching, right? Okay. Now, I want y'all to know that the quilt wasn't just on display in the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum. It could be seen throughout Jackson as well at the Jackson Medical Mall, Jackson State University Student Center, Craftsman's Guild, the Jackson Welcome Center, and the Capital Pride Celebrations.

Also, let me note that Jackson wasn't the only city in Mississippi where folks could go see the quilt. It was also in Hattiesburg and Greenville. Of course, making it the largest display of the quilt in Mississippi history. Now, you may be asking, why Mississippi? Why the South? So, a couple little known facts that I want to share with you, okay?

The South comprises 38 percent of the U. S. population, but get this, It represents over half, yes, over half at 52 percent of all new HIV diagnoses. Mm hmm. Now, let me drop another one on you. Out of the 17 states defined as being in the South by the U. S. Census, 13 of them have HIV specific criminal laws or statues on the books.

And 11 of them have actually prosecuted people for living with HIV. HIV criminalization is still very real. Family, I'm sharing these stats because you need to know. I didn't know. We all need to know that we still have a long way to go before we see zero new infections. Because how did we get from San Francisco in 1981 to the South in 2022?

How did we get here? Now I'm going to dig into that more during that podcast I was telling you about, the one dropping on world AIDS day, December 1st, 2022? the one you've put a reminder in your phone already to listen to that one, I'm digging into these very questions with thought leaders from around the country and specifically in the South.

So you got that reminder, right? Okay. Okay. Okay. The week long celebration of change. The pattern was powerful. It was even lamented with a Jackson proclamation that September 28th. Through October 4th is Change The Pattern week, the people doing this work family, I've met them, they are doing God's work, divine work, they are warriors, and I can't wait to tell more of their stories.

Honestly, I can't wait for you to hear their stories. The executive director of the Southern AIDS Coalition, Daphina Ward, who is the truth, period, with a T, mm hmm, periodt, said, "We can't just talk about HIV to end HIV. That was so incredibly profound to me. Because we have to change the pattern in all facets that affect Black life.

We have to change all the patterns."

Y'all know, I always end the podcast with a word and I could have ended it with Daphina's word because that was enough. Okay. But today I want to end the word with Cheryl Lee Ralph and a song that was born during the change, the pattern week led by HIV advocate LS. If you know the song, sing along or hum to yourself, if you out here in the streets.

And if you don't know it, you will, by the time the song ends. Until next time, family, peace.

[00:13:12] **Sheryl Lee Ralph:** Here we are talking about change, the pattern, Jackson. The pattern is deep. Y'all don't have clean water. It was okay when black folks would drop in dead of this disease. It was so okay. They didn't want to talk about it.

Was so okay. They didn't want to remember their families. It was so okay. Was so accepted. Change. The. Pattern. Change. The way we think change the way we love ourselves.

[00:14:24] **Anna DeShawn:** This podcast is a production of E3 radio, your number one queer radio station playing queer music and reporting on queer news in high rotation.