

## KAMAU POPE (HE/HIM, THEY/THEM) WGS ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

### HOW DID YOU COME TO BE INTERESTED IN WGS AS AN UNDERGRAD, AND WHAT MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES WITH WGS DURING YOUR TIME AT THE COLLEGE CAN YOU SHARE WITH US?

During my freshman year, I explored different majors, from music to communications to sociology. Still, I knew that the core of my interests lay in activism, and dismantling systems of oppression. It was not until my second year, where I sat in a class that aligned with my interest in social justice. This class, "Contemporary Social Issues," was a sociology class cross-listed with WGS that I took. This course highlighted different social justice issues and how they impacted people. It deviated from a traditional lecture format and gave us a chance to discuss our readings as a class in a circle. I enjoyed how dialogue could foster change and connection in a classroom. That next semester I immediately took "Introduction to WGS" with Alison Piepmeier. Following that class, I declared WGST as a major, and I knew that I could study the intersections of my own identities as a Black transmasculine person when paired with African American Studies.

A memorable moment for me was my internship, where I co-instructed [TA'ed] a course with Dr. Kristi Brian. That experience allowed me to see what it was like to foster dialogue among students like my prior WGS classes had. Since it was a class on Race, Gender, and Sexuality, it offered a chance to address and unlearn systems of oppression. It was this class that showed me how a classroom setting is an opportunity to facilitate change. I witnessed how classrooms and campuses are microcosms of society, and college students and instructors can be catalysts for change on campus that can support work in the community. I enjoyed that internship so much that I decided to co-instruct the course again the following semester.

### WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING SINCE GRADUATION? WHAT ARE YOUR ASPIRATIONS FOR THE NEAR FUTURE?

Since graduation, I worked for a year with Southerners on New Ground (SONG) as the South Carolina Organizing Fellow. This position aimed to foster community dialogue centered around justice in Charleston, Columbia, and Greenville, South Carolina, to build a strong membership base. After that yearlong fellowship, I continued to work and organize in non-profit with the Post-Landfill Action Network (PLAN) as Tour Coordinator. During my time with PLAN, I led two annual tours to different colleges and universities to highlight the harms of the linear consumption economy and developed students' leadership. During my time at PLAN, I also co-authored their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Mandate to support the organizational structure.

After working with PLAN, I have been a MA candidate in History researching LGBTQ activism across four decades, from 1960-1990. Some emerging themes of this research are that LGBTQ activists have stayed and organized in the South due to scarcity, fear, love, and the possibilities of radical change in this region. Additionally, through this research, I have been able to intertwine my interest in Black Joy as a revolutionary act of resistance. My work on Black Joy was accepted to the American Studies Association's 2020 conference for the "(Re)Imagining Trans Futures" panel. With an expected graduation of May 2021, I aim to continue to receive my terminal degree and become a tenured faculty member at a college institution. Regardless of where my career path takes me, I aim to continue doing work that shifts dominant master narratives, challenges white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism, and works to create a just and sustainable society for all marginalized people.

### HOW DID YOUR STUDIES IN WGS PREPARE YOU FOR YOUR WORK?

In many conversations I had with Alison Piepmeier, she highlighted how academics could be activist-scholars and conduct research that supports, promotes, and amplifies the lived experiences of people who have been historically marginalized. The degree gave me ample opportunities to unlearn systems of oppression and write in a way that is accessible to people inside and outside of academia. I often coin my writing to my pro-



**"IT WAS [DR. BRIAN'S CLASS] THAT SHOWED ME HOW A CLASSROOM SETTING IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO FACILITATE CHANGE."**

KAMAU POPE ('16)

fessors and peers during undergrad who helped me craft work that my "aunties and uncles" can talk about on a front porch over a sweet tea.

In my Introduction to WGS class, I jotted down the idea to research and unpack Black masculinity and how transmasculine people inform and deviate from the gender binary. That small note on a piece of paper transformed into my interest in queer theory and critical race theory as a scholar. My research documents LGBTQ history in the US South and examines how queer and trans people resist and exist in this region. My work requires decolonizing the archives and interviewing elder queer people to learn about their experiences. I attribute the program's interdisciplinary approach to how I conduct my research. I hope to continue the program's legacy by creating research as an activist-scholar that amplifies solutions, communities, and justice.