



February 2021 NAAFA Newsletter

## **Black Women and Femmes in NAAFA's History**

*by Tigress Osborn*

## **In This Issue**

1. [Black Women and Femmes in NAAFA's History](#)
2. [Former NAAFA Board Member Carla DenHartog Has Passed](#)
3. [Fat Activist Linda Ramos Lost to COVID](#)
4. [CNSU Medical Students Provide Hope for the Future](#)
5. [February Antiracism Resources](#)
6. [NAAFA Chronicles](#)



Some time ago, I was tagged in an Instagram post about remembering that Black fat people are the roots of fat activism. The Instagrammer in question pointed out that if we are going to say things like "honor Black women & femmes," we should be backing that up by actually knowing fat activist history and naming the names of the people we mean. She named me. I was incredibly flattered. Who doesn't want to be included in the company of Juicy D. Light and Sonya Renee Taylor? But roots? Not me. I was born a few years after the fat liberation movement began, and I first heard of the size acceptance movement in the early 1990s. Fat activism has a much longer history than many people realize.

Months after that Instagram post, a journalist reached out to NAAFA and asked if one of us could write about the Black and Jewish women who founded NAAFA. No, none of us could do that. Black and Jewish women didn't found NAAFA. NAAFA was founded in NY in 1969 by Bill Fabrey,

7. [Fat Spring Reading List](#)
8. [Media and Research Roundup](#)
9. [Video of the Month](#)

## Video of the Month



### Why We Need a White History Month with Amber Ruffin

In this day when people are attempting to rewrite history at every turn, it's important to know, understand, and document events as they really happened.

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=jdRAuBuZMNQ>

### Quick Links

[NAAFA.org](https://www.naafa.org)

[Facebook Main Members Community End Bullying Now](#)

[Twitter](#)

a young, white, thin man who was motivated by the injustices his fat white wife faced. Asked now, Bill notes that NAAFA probably should have been doing outreach to Black folx in its early days. ([Bill and I discussed this history](#) last fall in the NAAFA Webinar Series.) There were Jewish women involved in the early days of NAAFA. Some of them helped found the [Fat Underground](#) in CA. Through recent interviews with people who were around during those years, I have not been able to identify any Black women who were involved in creating the Fat Underground, either. Since receiving that journalist's request, I have been trying to track down anyone who can tell me more about the first Black participants in NAAFA (if you can, please reach out at [chair@naafa.org](mailto:chair@naafa.org)).

NAAFA is recognized as the first fat activist organization. Although NAAFA is first--and at 52 years this year, the longest running fat rights organization on earth--we must acknowledge and understand that fat individuals who live unapologetically in a fatphobic society are defying expectations and thereby doing de facto fat rights work that benefits us. Their visibility as fat people is important. Certainly, there are Black women and femmes who fit that bill. Some of them are notable; others are everyday people who touched those around them but were not public figures.

There are also the champions of other social justice movements--especially Civil Rights, Black Pride, and the Movement for Black Lives--who were or are fat Black women and femmes. It's our duty to learn more about them and to recognize them as important to fat history whether or not they were important to the formally organized fat rights groups of their times. But we also need to be sure we are not coopting their legacies just so we can say fat community is diverse. What I mean is this: we must know, acknowledge, and respect the work of fat Black people as liberation leaders in a multitude of ways, but one of those ways cannot be pretending Black people were integrated into fat liberation movement in ways that they simply were not. This is also true for our activist heroes of other

[Instagram](#)

[YouTube](#)

Health At Every Size and HAES are registered trademarks of the Association for Size Diversity and Health, and are used with permission.

Join Our  
Mailing  
List

marginalized identities.

As the Chair of NAAFA a little past its half-century mark, I am only the second Black woman to lead this organization. (The first was Phyllis Warr, who served as Interim Chair in 2014-2015). Much of my work as an educator was focused on race and gender, and much of my goal as the creator of Full Figure Entertainment was about centering Black women. Frankly, NAAFA's history of leaving many BIPOC people feeling marginalized within fat community has been a challenge for me as a board member and was one of the reasons I had to do a tremendous amount of soul searching before accepting the chairing role. Ultimately, I accepted the Chair position because I believe the current Board and many NAAFA members are invested in creating a more inclusive fat community. I hope that the work we've done in the last few years shows that we are deepening a dedication to centering the most marginalized voices in fat community. We also plan to work harder to support other activist organizations and individuals who are committed to the same.

Highlighting the labor and love invested into the fat rights movement by Black women and femmes is essential to NAAFA's future. First, we have to know NAAFA's actual history rather than its idealized one. Where there's been actual erasure of Blackness from fat community narratives and fat activist archives, we need to rectify that. The same goes for the current body positivity movement (where it's much more accurate to say that Black women and femmes are indeed at the roots). Where there is an absence of Blackness because Black people were truly absent, we need to ask ourselves why. Then, we need to own the answers we find. And most importantly, we need to do better.

## **Former NAAFA Board Member Carla DenHartog has Passed**

*by Andy Doucette*



After a lifetime of joyful struggle and relentless advocacy for self and others, Carla Joy DenHartog passed away on the morning of November 16, 2020. She was 51 years old.

She was born in Urbana, IL as a first generation American and is survived by her father, Gerrit DenHartog, her stepmother, Lynne DenHartog, and her partner of 12 years, Andy Doucette.

Carla graduated from Kenyon College in Gambier, OH in 1991. Among her many academic honors, she earned the National Merit Scholarship, the Byrd Scholarship, and the Kenyon College Honors Scholarship. Her Kenyon friends knew her as the keeper of happiness, mistress of organization, and the saint of whatever the hell she wants.

Carla was a strong advocate for size acceptance, serving on the national Board of Directors of NAAFA from 1999-2003 and organizing the NAAFA Conference in Chicago in 2007.

Carla believed in Health at Every Size and was a staunch feminist and ally to the LGBTQIA+ communities. She was a supporter of Black Lives Matter, Planned Parenthood, and always advocated for the inclusion of people with disabilities.

Her knowledge of obscure, esoteric, and eclectic trivia enabled her to compete on Jeopardy in 2004, where she came in 2nd to Ken Jennings in Jennings' 9th game.

Carla was laid to rest on Wednesday, November 18th, in Green Mount Cemetery in Montpelier, VT in a green, natural burial.

## **Fat Activist Linda Ramos Lost to COVID** **by Gael MacGregor**

Linda Ramos, a founding member of the Size Acceptance for Empowerment (SAFE) group and long-time NAAFA member and activist, was taken from us on January 9, 2020 due to COVID-19. Linda was President of the Los Angeles Chapter of NAAFA for a number of years, overseeing such events as the chapter's



inclusionary and successful "Fattitude Festival" which invited all sizes, ages, and genders of people to attend, and featured performers, fashion shows, and vendors. Feisty and unapologetic, she also recorded Deb Perkins's song, "I Am Fat," which became an anthem for the size acceptance movement in the late 1990s.

Life is rarely about the big Hallmark moments, but about the little things. Whether an in-person or online friend, Linda's light was doing for others without fanfare or expectation, and with consummate love, friendship, plus a no-nonsense *"I can help with that"* attitude.

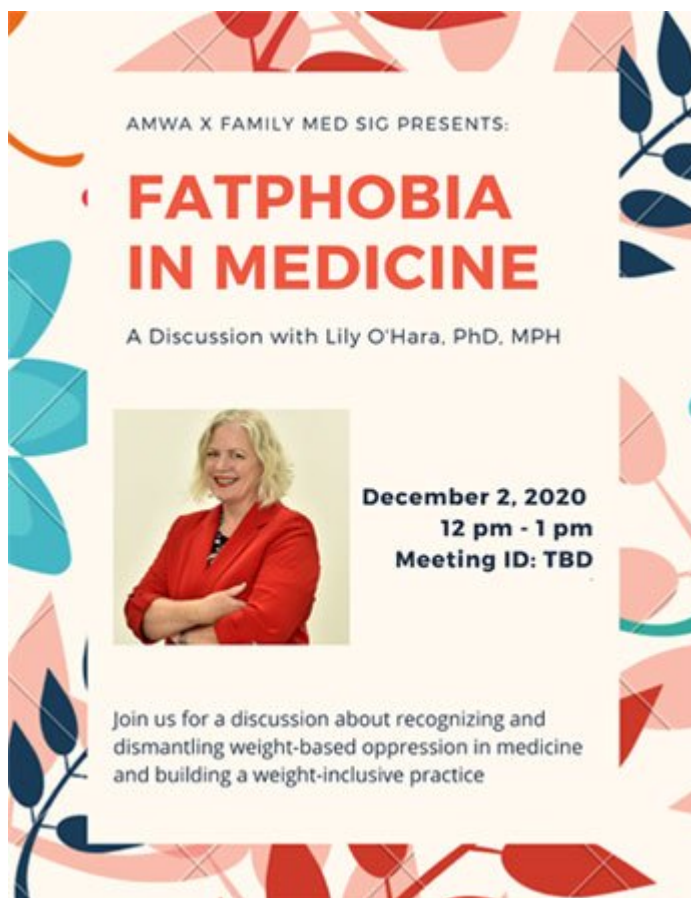
We can honor her example. Be the shoulder for someone's tears. Be the person who stands up against injustice when we see it. Really SEE others--

whether in person or on a computer screen. And most of all, truly LISTEN to others' voices so they, too, can be heard.

We extend our sympathies to Linda's life partner, Urix Martin, and will continue to hold her in our hearts.

## **CNSU Medical Students Provide Hope for the Future**

**by Lily O'Hara MPH, PhD**  
**Associate Professor of Public Health**  
**Qatar University, Qatar**



In December 2020, I had the great pleasure of presenting a webinar to medical students at California Northstate University (CNSU) on fat phobia in medicine. In the webinar, I discussed concepts related to weight-based oppression, and how fat people and people with larger bodies can experience such oppression in encounters with medical settings and medical practitioners.

I framed the issue around ethical care, and asked students to consider the possibility that the quality of care they provide and

that fat people receive (or not) is dependent on their own internalized attitudes, values and beliefs about fatness and fat people. We talked about how those internalized ideas translate into their behaviors and the social, economic, cultural and built environments in which they work.

The students were highly engaged in the discussion and genuinely interested in learning more about their options when working in a health service partnership with a fat person. For many, this was the first time they had even considered NOT weighing a client, NOT discussing their weight at every opportunity, or NOT making assumptions about fat people's behaviors or intentions. It was also the first time many of them had even considered their own internalized fat phobia, and how that might implicitly or explicitly

translate into the care they provide.

My thanks to Alexis Wildman and her team at CNSU for organizing the event, and to NAAFA for providing me with the opportunity to work with such impressive young medical students. I finished the webinar feeling hopeful that the next generation of doctors might finally dismantle fat phobia in medicine.

## February Antiracism Resources

February is Black History Month. While most of us were "educated" in U.S. history, much of the history of racism in America was whitewashed from that education. This month's antiracism resources give us links to historical facts that were so often covered up.

### [158 Resources to Understand Racism in America - Smithsonian Magazine](#)

These articles, videos, podcasts and websites from the *Smithsonian* chronicle the history of anti-black violence and inequality in the United States.

Here is an additional resource that you can share with your kids!

[The ABCs of Black History Month | African-American History](#)

## NAAFA Chronicles 61

For this month's Chronicles we present NAAFA's 61st newsletter, [Spring 1985](#).

For more, check out the "Chronicles" page of NAAFA's website, <https://naafa.org/chronicles>

## Fat Spring Reading List: Book Recommendations from the NAAFA Board

As you hopefully know, last fall we recommended several [books by fat Black authors](#). We were very excited to be able to arrange for three of them to join us for the [NAAFA Webinar Series](#), and we still hope to arrange for the other to join us in 2021. Thank you to all of you who supported our fall "semester" of fat book love!

For our next round, we asked our four newest board members to each choose a fat-relevant book. The variety of authors and subjects they've covered in just



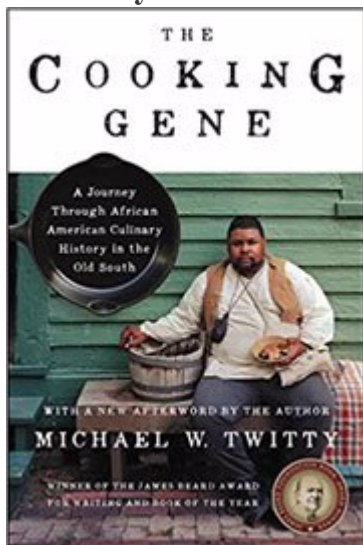


four picks is incredible. This spring, you'll read the works of an acclaimed Black chef and cultural historian, a disability justice icon, a hot new fiction writer, and a well-known fat activist. Once again, we'll host webinars featuring the authors. Plus, this time around, we'll also feature more about the books on our blog and host a Zoom book discussion of each book. Look for more on the [NAAFA Community Voices Blog](#).

If you're purchasing the books in print or audio format, we encourage you to order them through the publisher or your favorite independent publisher. Also check for these books in your local library. If they don't have them, recommend them (or donate a copy if you're able!) so that more fat authors are accessible.

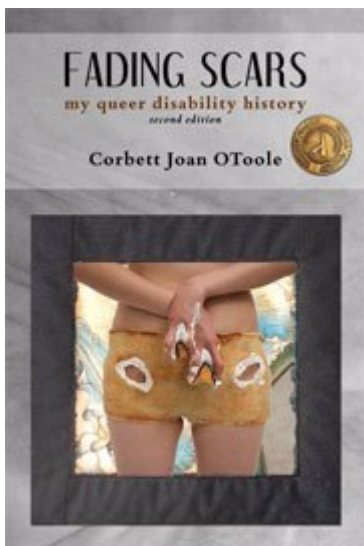
Note: Don't worry about rushing to catch up for February. We'll give you time to get the book and read the book before we schedule our first book club discussion.

## February



[The Cooking Gene: A Journey Through African American Culinary History in the Old South](#) by Michael Twitty (recommended by Elaine Lee)

## March



[Fading Scars: My Queer Disability History](#) by Corbett Joan O'Toole (recommended by Kathryn Hack)

### April



[One to Watch](#) by Kate Stayman-London (recommended by Amanda Cooper)

### May



[Fat!So?](#) By Marilyn Wann (recommended by Marcy Cruz)

## Media and Research Roundup by Bill and Terri Weitze

January 31, 2020: Da'Shaun Harrison speaks from their own experience as a fat child to explain why dieting and forced exercise is child abuse in the form of punishing a child because of their (natural) body size.

<https://wearyourvoicemag.com/forcing-children-to-lose-weight-is-child-abuse>

September 17, 2020: Following an acute coronary event, researchers find that both central obesity (fat around the abdomen) and peripheral obesity (fat around the thighs and buttocks) correlate to lower risk of in-hospital and 1-year mortality.

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41366-020-00679-0>

December 2020: A study finds no increase in blood loss or immediate postoperative complications due to fatness ("obesity") during simultaneous total knee replacement surgery; and, in fact, transfusion needs may be lower due to higher basal blood volume.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.knee.2020.01.012>

January 22, 2021: A recent study claims that, while increasing physical activity levels provides benefits across all BMI (body mass index) categories, such benefits do not completely offset the risk of cardiovascular events. The press took this in a predictable direction.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/eurjpc/zwaa151>

<https://nypost.com/2021/01/22/being-fat-but-fit-isnt-really-possible-study-says>

January 28, 2021: A recent study finds that metformin taken to treat type 2 diabetes lowers the risk of estrogen receptor-positive breast cancer (the most common type) but increases the risk of estrogen receptor-negative types of breast cancer.

<https://www.webmd.com/breast-cancer/news/20210201/metformin-could-help-prevent-some-breast-cancers>

[https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2021-02/osu-sts020121.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2021-02/osu-sts020121.php)

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annonc.2020.12.008>

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annonc.2020.12.014>

January 31, 2021: Because fat bodies appear more mature than they are, fat girls are often subjected to adultification. Marquisele Mercedes discusses how this affected her own life, and how it can be a common experience for black girls.

<https://humanparts.medium.com/fat-girls-of-color-bear-the-weight-of-adultification-da8ef439fa41>

February 2021: Researchers looking at obesity's association with improved survival for patients with coronary artery disease confirmed this protective effect in a class of patients during stress echocardiography testing.

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41366-020-00655-8>

February 1, 2021: After years of struggling with an eating disorder, Colleen

Werner gave up on dance because of her naturally larger body. She is now a member of Black Sheep Ballet, a virtual dance company, founded by professional ballet dancer Brian Syms, trying to make ballet more inclusive and diverse.

<https://www.today.com/tmrw/black-sheep-ballet-aims-make-ballet-more-inclusive-accessible-t207096>

February 2, 2021: A study that looked at weight trends over two generations finds that those who start in the "normal" range of BMI and progress to overweight as they age have the longest life expectancy.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/02/210202085451.htm>

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annepidem.2021.01.003>

February 8, 2021: As they age, many people develop elevated glucose hemoglobin and/or impaired fasting glucose and are diagnosed as have "prediabetes". However, a recent study finds that progression to diabetes is relatively rare, suggesting that prediabetes need not be treated aggressively in older adults.

<https://www.medpagetoday.com/endocrinology/diabetes/91099>

<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2020.8773>

February 8, 2021: Lara Phillips-Alvarez argues that instead of a body positivity movement, there should be a body neutrality movement where a body is just a body and there is no value placed on one body over another.

<https://dbknews.com/2021/02/08/body-neutrality-self-love-society>

February 8, 2021: A woman's TikTok post calls out fitness instructors who make food something to fear and exercise something to counteract the food you eat.

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/woman-calls-fitness-instructor-damaging-151624392.html>

---

*Founded in 1969, NAAFA, the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance, is a non-profit human rights organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for fat people. NAAFA works to eliminate discrimination based on body size and provide fat people with the tools for self-empowerment through public education, advocacy, and member support.*

On the web: <https://naafa.org>

Comments: [pr@naafa.org](mailto:pr@naafa.org)

***Any products or services mentioned in articles in this newsletter are for information only and should not be considered endorsements by NAAFA.***

