

# VACCINATED at the BALL

A TRUE STORY ABOUT TRUSTED MESSENGERS BY Josh Neufeld

A "HOUSE" IS A GROUP OF LIKE-MINDED LGBTQ+ PEOPLE WHO JOIN TOGETHER FOR COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT.

IT'S A FAMILY. THEY ARE PEOPLE THAT SHARE THE IDENTITY OF BEING **BLACK** AND **QUEER** WITH YOU AND THEY JUST WANT TO MAKE SURE THAT YOU ARE SAFE.



NOEL GREEN

"YOU HAVE A MOTHER, YOU HAVE A FATHER, YOU HAVE A SISTER, YOU HAVE A BROTHER. YOU HAVE SOMEWHERE TO STAY."



"YOU'VE GOT SOMEONE THAT ENCOURAGES YOU. YOU HAVE SOMEONE THAT GETS YOU TO SCHOOL, BACK AND FORTH TO APPOINTMENTS."

IN CHICAGO HOUSE BALLS, PEOPLE IN THE LOCAL **BLACK LGBTQ+** COMMUNITY COMPETE FOR PRIZES IN VARIOUS CATEGORIES.



HOUSE BALLS -- WHICH ARE NOW HELD IN CITIES ALL OVER THE WORLD -- **CELEBRATE** BLACK & LATINO LGBTQ+ CULTURE.



**RANDI SINGER, NATASHA CROOKS, AND REBECCA SINGER** (ALL THREE PHDS) ARE WITH THE COLLEGE OF NURSING, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS CHICAGO.



**NOEL C. GREEN** IS MANAGER OF OUTREACH AND CARE ENGAGEMENT AT THE CHICAGO CENTER FOR H.I.V. ELIMINATION.



**JAHARI STAMPS** IS A HOUSE FATHER WITH THE HOUSE OF FERRÉ AND A CHICAGO HOUSE BALL "LEGEND."

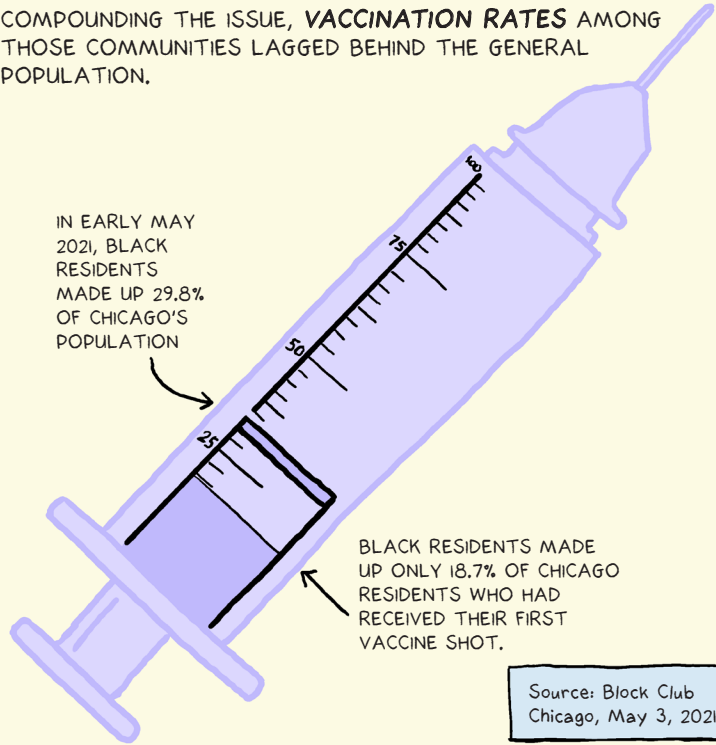
ALL OF THEM HAVE LONG BEEN ENGAGED WITH PROMOTING **PUBLIC HEALTH** IN CHICAGO.

LAST YEAR, THEY SAW THAT COVID-19 WAS DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTING CHICAGO'S **BLACK AND LATINO** COMMUNITIES--



--AND EVEN MORE SO ITS **LGBTQ+** MEMBERS.

COMPOUNDING THE ISSUE, **VACCINATION RATES** AMONG THOSE COMMUNITIES LAGGED BEHIND THE GENERAL POPULATION.



Source: Block Club Chicago, May 3, 2021.

**JAHARI** IS A **CO-INVESTIGATOR** WITH US.

HE'S ALSO A **DANCER**, A **RAPPER** AND A **SINGER**. JAHARI AND I TALKED ABOUT HIM USING HIS CREATIVITY TO FURTHER HIS WORK IN THE **LGBTQ+** COMMUNITY.



GIVEN HIS HOUSE BALL CONNECTIONS, JAHARI SUGGESTED THAT RANDI'S AND NOEL'S GROUPS PARTNER TOGETHER TO BRING **COVID VACCINES** TO THE SEASON'S UPCOMING BALLS.

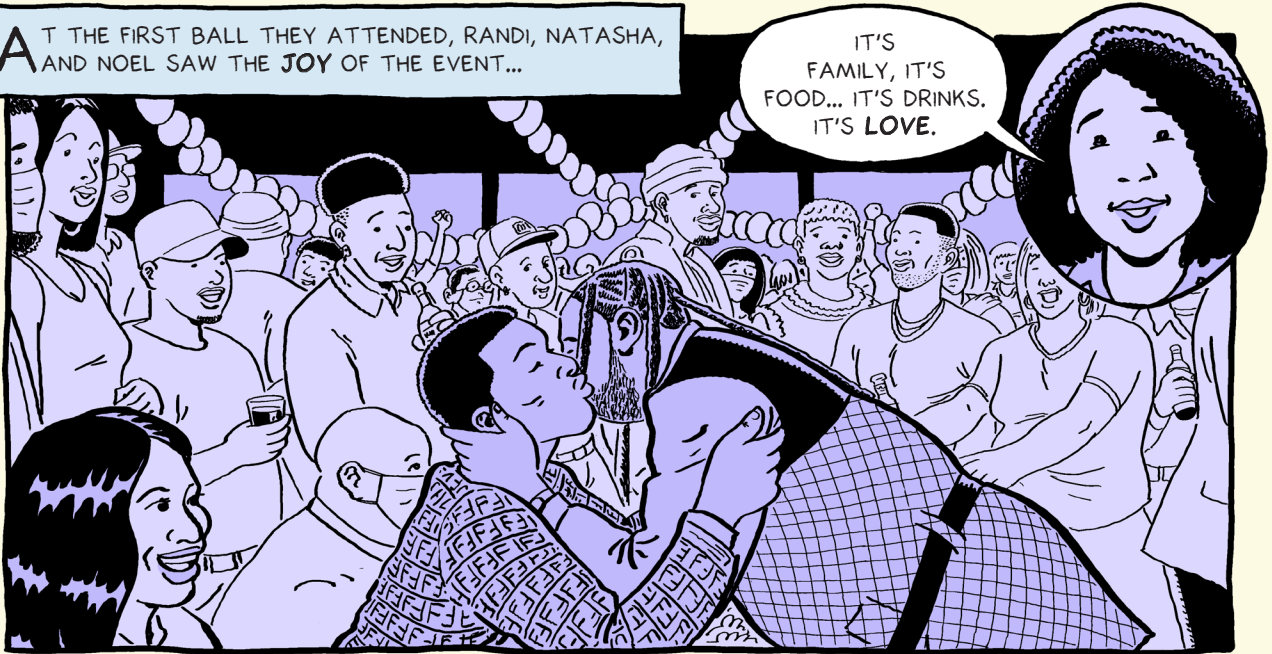
HE KNOWS **EVERYBODY**. HE'S INTRODUCED US TO SUCH AMAZING PEOPLE.

JAHARI CALLED ME UP AND WAS LIKE, "YOU GOTTA MEET **RANDI**."



AT THE FIRST BALL THEY ATTENDED, RANDI, NATASHA, AND NOEL SAW THE JOY OF THE EVENT...

IT'S FAMILY, IT'S FOOD... IT'S DRINKS. IT'S LOVE.



-- BUT ALSO THE REAL NEED FOR VACCINATIONS AGAINST COVID.

IT WAS PACKED TO THE BRIM.

WE WERE VERY STRESSED ABOUT THE VACCINATION COMPONENT.



ONE REASON FOR THE LOW-VACCINATION RATE IN THIS COMMUNITY WAS...

LACK OF ACCESS. THEM FEELING LIKE THEY HAVE TO TRAVEL TOO FAR OR IT JUST WASN'T READILY AVAILABLE TO THEM.

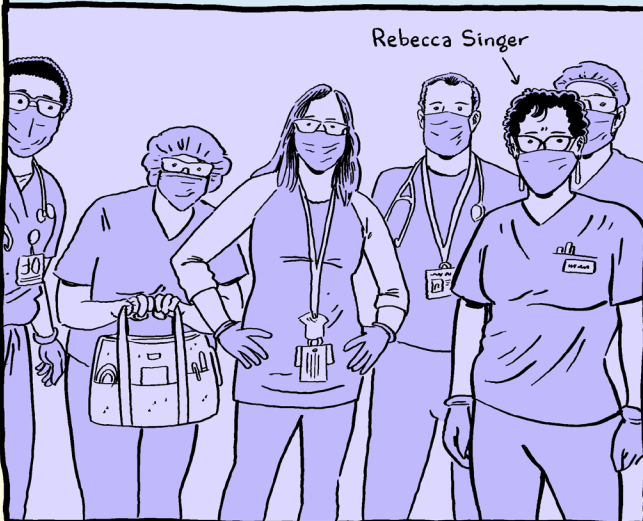
SO THE TEAM DECIDED TO...

...BRING VACCINATIONS TO THEM SO THAT IT WAS ACCESSIBLE, IT WAS FREE, AND IT ACTUALLY SOLVES THE ISSUE.



THEY CONNECTED WITH CHICAGO'S COVID RAPID RESPONSE TEAM (A DECENTRALIZED, INTERPROFESSIONAL GROUP OF NURSES, RESIDENTS, STUDENTS, AND FACULTY)--

Rebecca Singer



-- AS WELL AS LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY LEADERS LIKE JAHARI AND FATHER KENTRELE GUCCI...



...AND BEGAN PLANNING.

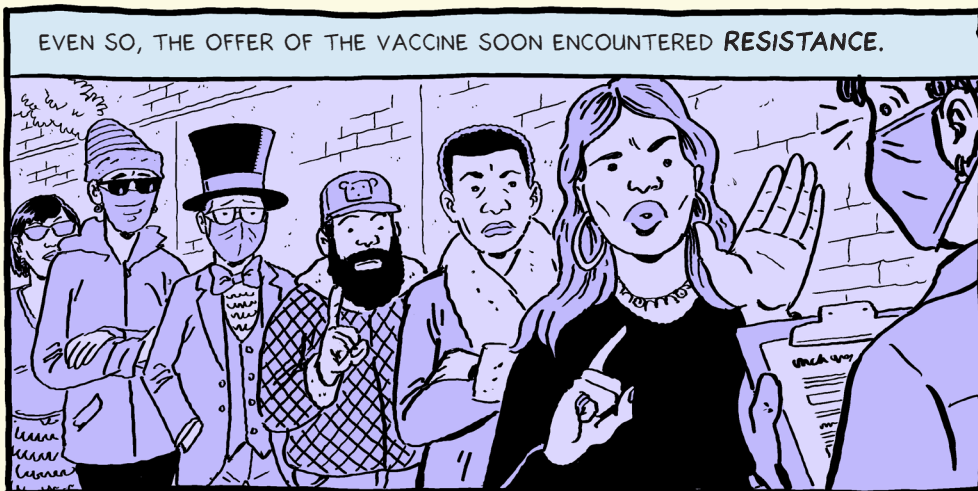


TO MAKE THE PROCESS MORE EFFICIENT AND CONVENIENT, THEY DECIDED TO OFFER THE **JOHNSON & JOHNSON** ONE-SHOT VACCINE.

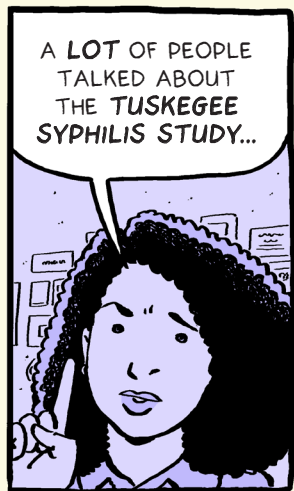


AND TO GET THINGS STARTED, **JAHARI** HIMSELF GOT VACCINATED.

IF I WAS GOING OUT IN MY COMMUNITY TO BE AN ADVOCATE FOR VACCINATIONS, IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO **BE THE MESSAGE** THAT I BRING.



EVEN SO, THE OFFER OF THE VACCINE SOON ENCOUNTERED **RESISTANCE**.



A LOT OF PEOPLE TALKED ABOUT THE **TUSKEGEE SYPHILIS STUDY...**

IN THE INFAMOUS **TUSKEGEE EXPERIMENTS** OF THE MID-20TH CENTURY, THE **U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE** WATCHED HUNDREDS OF BLACK MEN SUFFER AND DIE FROM **SYPHILIS** IN ORDER TO "**BETTER UNDERSTAND**" THE DISEASE.

EVEN FOR JAHARI-- AN INTEGRAL MEMBER OF THE TEAM -- GETTING VACCINATED HADN'T BEEN AN EASY DECISION...

I HAD ALL THE QUESTIONS. I WAS **EXTREMELY** APPREHENSIVE.

OF COURSE YOU REVISIT THE **TUSKEGEE** SITUATION AND ALL THE OTHER SITUATIONS WHERE OUR MEDICAL INFORMATION HAS BEEN **MISUSED** OR PROFITED OFF US WITHOUT US GETTING ANYTHING BACK.



I AM VERY WELL AWARE OF THIS COUNTRY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH **AFRICAN AMERICAN** PEOPLE AS IT PERTAINS TO MEDICAL PROCESSES.

THERE'S A LOT OF MISTRUST -- "OH **GREAT**, WE'RE THE TEST CASES AGAIN."



SUCH AS **J. MARION SIMS'** 1840s EXPERIMENTS ON BLACK WOMEN AS HE DEVELOPED THE FIELD OF GYNECOLOGY...

AFTER MARION SIMS: GYNECOLOGIC SURGEON, CIRCA 1952, FROM "GREAT MOMENTS IN MEDICINE" SERIES BY **ROBERT THOM**.

MISINFORMATION ALSO FUELED MUCH OF THE HESITANCY ON DISPLAY.

THE GOVERNMENT IS PUTTING MICROCHIPS IN THE VACCINE, TRYING TO INFECT YOUR BODY.

I DON'T WANT ANYONE PLAYING WITH MY BODY OR WITH MY GENES.

I DON'T THINK IT'S SAFE.

I DON'T THINK IT'S SAFE -- I HAVE DIABETES.

I DON'T THINK IT'S SAFE -- I WANT TO TALK TO MY MOM.

I DON'T LIKE PUTTING THINGS IN MY BODY THAT I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY ARE.

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS COVID-19!

I DON'T WANT ANYONE PLAYING WITH MY BODY OR WITH MY GENES.

I'VE SEEN TIKTOKS THAT SAY IT WAS DEVELOPED TOO QUICKLY.

I HAVEN'T BEEN SOCIAL DISTANCING THIS WHOLE TIME AND I'VE BEEN FINE.

ANYONE PLAYING WITH MY BODY OR WITH MY GENES.

I CAN CONTRACT IT I AM VACCINATED.

THE GOVERNMENT IS PUTTING MICROCHIPS IN THE VACCINE, TRYING TO INFECT YOUR BODY.

I'VE SEEN TIKTOKS THAT SAY IT WAS DEVELOPED TOO QUICKLY.

WE HEAR, "PEOPLE ARE DYING, PEOPLE ARE DYING," BUT IF YOU DON'T KNOW ANYONE WHO HAS DIED FROM IT...?

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I'VE SEEN TIKTOKS THAT SAY IT WAS DEVELOPED TOO QUICKLY.

I DON'T THINK IT'S SAFE.

AND AS DR. LISA A. COOPER OF JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY HAS EXPLAINED...

IF THE REST OF SOCIETY IS SUBJECT TO MISINFORMATION, IT AFFECTS PEOPLE WHO ARE ALREADY **VULNERABLE** IN A LARGER WAY.

WATCH THIS VIDEO...

PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT AS EDUCATED... DON'T HAVE **ACCESS** TO PEOPLE WITH GREATER INFORMATION.

IF [SO], YOU ARE AT THE **MERCY** OF SOCIAL MEDIA OR WHOEVER.

YOU DON'T KNOW **WHO** TO TRUST.

DESPITE THE TEAM'S TALKING TO **HUNDREDS** OF ATTENDEES OF THE BALL THAT DAY, ONLY A FEW PEOPLE AGREED TO BE VACCINATED.

THERE WAS A LOT OF **PUSHBACK**.

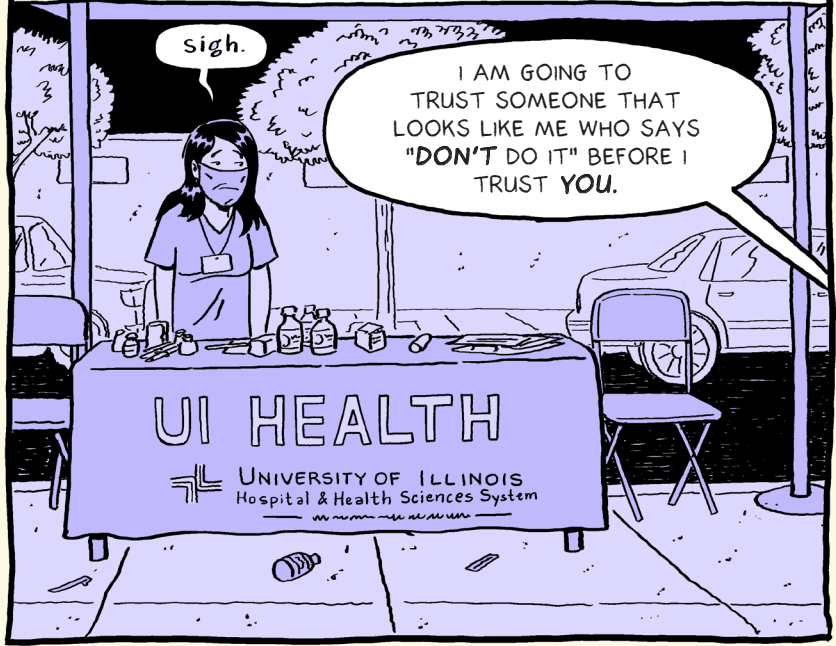
FROM PEOPLE WHO JUST DID NOT WANT TO ENGAGE WITH THE VACCINE...



"...TO THAT IT WAS DONE OUT IN THE OPEN SO PEOPLE DIDN'T WANT TO BE, LIKE, **MAINLINED** OR **TEASED** BY PEOPLE WHO HAD BEEN ANTI-VAX."

sigh.

I AM GOING TO TRUST SOMEONE THAT LOOKS LIKE ME WHO SAYS "**DON'T DO IT**" BEFORE I TRUST YOU.



WE'VE ALL LIVED IN **FEAR** FOR SO LONG WITH COVID, AND [GETTING VACCINATED] IS JUST ANOTHER PIECE OF COVID.



**K**NOWING ANOTHER HOUSE BALL WAS COMING UP ON THE SCHEDULE, THE TEAM **REAPPRAISED** THEIR STRATEGY.

**JAHARI'S** INPUT WAS ESSENTIAL...

IN ORDER FOR THIS TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN ANY REGARD IT HAS TO COME **FROM** THE PEOPLE WHO REPRESENT THE COMMUNITY THAT WE'RE GOING OUT AND WORKING WITH.

THE PEOPLE WHO REPRESENT THE COMMUNITY NEED TO BE THE **FACE** OF THE WORK.



AND THEY IMPLEMENTED A **TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH**, UTILIZING THE **DIFFUSION OF INNOVATION THEORY**.

A **TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH** IS ABOUT UNDERSTANDING THAT MEMBERS OF THIS COMMUNITY HAVE ALREADY HAD SO MANY **NEGATIVE** EXPERIENCES WITH INSTITUTIONAL MEDICINE AND THE GOVERNMENT.

THERE'S A BIG BARRIER TO **TRUST** THAT HAS TO BE **OVERCOME**.



THE **DIFFUSION OF INNOVATION THEORY** LOOKS AT HOW -- AND HOW **FAST** -- NEW TECHNOLOGIES SPREAD.

THERE'S ALWAYS THOSE PEOPLE WHO WE LOOK AT AS **EARLY ADOPTERS**.



Let's get this done!

THEIR EXPERIENCE WILL DICTATE WHETHER THOSE **MID-STAGE ADOPTERS** WILL SAY ...

Hey, let me find out.



"THE **LATE-STAGE ADOPTERS** ARE THE ONES WHO ARE **MOST AT RISK**."



"THEY HAVE BEEN THE MOST **VULNERABLE**. THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED THE MOST **HARM**."

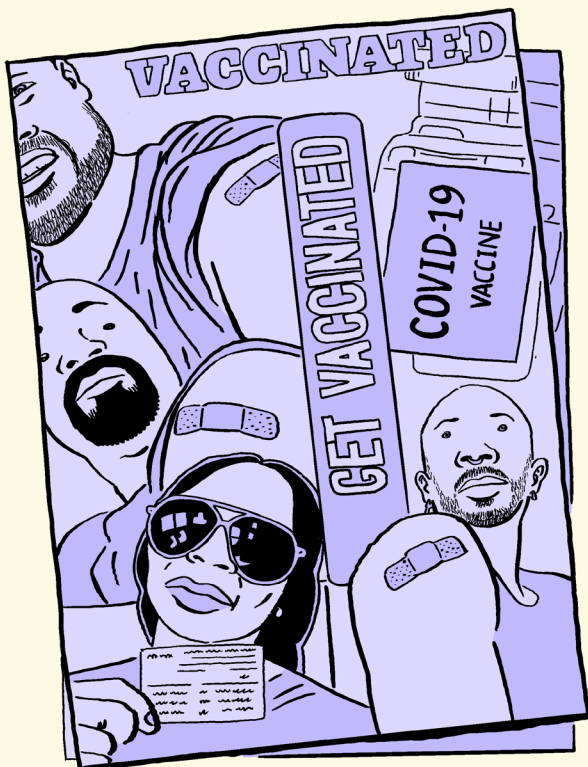
"THEY LOOK TO THE EARLY- AND MID-STAGE ADOPTERS AS THEIR **CAVEAT OF KNOWLEDGE** AND TO TELL THEM THAT IT'S **SAFE**."



Hmm...



IN ADVANCE OF THE NEXT EVENT, **PALM CARDS** WHICH FEATURED HOUSE BALL ICONS AND LEGENDS WHO WERE PROMOTING VACCINATION WERE PRINTED AND DISTRIBUTED TO THE HOUSE BALL COMMUNITY.



ON THE DAY OF THE BALL, THOSE SAME LEADERS SHOWED UP AT THE VENUE TO FURTHER **ENCOURAGE** BALL-GOERS TO GET VACCINATED.



**INCENTIVES** FOR ATTENDEES INCLUDED GUARANTEEING ONE'S PLACE IN LINE FOR ENTRY TO THE BALL...

...**PRIVACY** FOR THOSE GETTING VACCINATED...



...AND **FREE ENTRY** FOR THOSE WHO GOT THE SHOT.



WE HAD **SO** MANY PEOPLE COMING UP TO US AND SAYING, "I SAW YOU AND **MARIO\*** ON THE PALM CARDS AND THAT'S WHAT MADE ME FEEL AT EASE ABOUT GETTING VACCINATED."



\*Legendary Father **Mario Balenciaga**

EVEN THE M.C. OF THE BALL GOT THE SHOT -- AND POKED FUN AT VACCINE MISINFORMATION.

MAKE SURE YOU GUYS GO DOWNSTAIRS AND GET VACCINATED!

THEY [GOT ME]. I AM NOT A **MUTANT** NOW. I AM **NOT** A **MUTANT**!

MAKE SURE YOU GUYS GET VACCINATED. Y'ALL SEE [I GOT] MINE.

ALTHOUGH WE DIDN'T HAVE THIS BIG MASS NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS WHO GOT VACCINATED AT EITHER EVENT, THE THING I WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE IS: SO MANY PEOPLE -- THEIR MINDS BEGAN TO BE **CHANGED**.

THE **CONVERSATIONS** BEGAN TO BE HAD.

LATER THAT YEAR, JAHARI AND THE TEAM ORGANIZED ANOTHER MIND-CHANGING VACCINATION EVENT -- **#JAMOUTSAVELIVES.\***

WE'RE USING OUR VOICES  
THEY FEEL LIKE THEY TAKIN' THEIR CHOICES  
THE MISINFORMATION, THE COMMUNICATION  
IT'S TIME THAT WE QUIET THE NOISES

-- WHERE JAHARI RECEIVED HIS **BOOSTER SHOT**.

WHEN YOU SEE THE **PALM CARDS**, WHEN YOU SEE THE **VIDEO**, IT'S **LEGENDS** OF OUR COMMUNITY THAT ARE REPRESENTED --

-- AS OPPOSED TO A **CIS-GENDER CAUCASIAN MALE** OR FEMALE TRYING TO DELIVER A MESSAGE TO A **BLACK OR BROWN PERSON** ABOUT WHY THEY **SHOULD** BE DOING THIS.

THE WHOLE TEAM -- AS WELL AS UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS COLLEGE OF NURSING COLLEAGUES CRYSTAL PATIL, PhD, AND ALICIA MATTHEWS, PhD -- WROTE AN EDITORIAL IN THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES.



# Ballroom Icons and the Power to Promote COVID-19 Vaccination Among Black and Brown LGBTQ+ Individuals

BY JAYME ROSS, MD, MPH, AND ALICIA MATTHEWS, PhD, AND CRYSTAL PATIL, PhD

WITH EVERY VACCINE GIVEN, THAT IS ONE LIFE SAVED.



## RACE, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, AND GENDER IDENTITY



WHEN YOU SEE ALL THESE PEOPLE AROUND YOU DYING FROM THIS THING, IT WAS A **NO-BRAINER** FOR ME TO USE MY VOICE AND MY PLATFORM.

TO SET AN EXAMPLE FOR MY SONS AND DAUGHTERS AND THE COMMUNITY I CALL FAMILY, I HAVE TO BE THE **MESSAGE** THAT I BRING.



NOTHING IS MORE **SATISFYING** THAN KNOWING SOMEONE MADE A HEALTHY CHOICE BECAUSE OF SOMETHING YOU DID.

NEVER THE END.