

SLASH

culture & community

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FIRST
ANNIVERSARY
ISSUE!

THE YOUNG & INSPIRED

CELEBRATING THE NEXT
GENERATION OF BLACK
LGBT MOVERS & SHAKERS

ALSO: FILMMAKER
FAITH TRIMEL
PLAYWRIGHT
LAURINDA D. BROWN
& BRAVE SOUL COLLECTIVE'S
MONTE J. WOLFE
& METRO TEEN AIDS'
ISAIAH WEBSTER



Growing up has never been easy, and today's black LGBT youth aren't buying into the "too young" mentality. The following stories feature some amazing young people, all under 30, who have been moving and shaking at an early age. They're all about change, equality and community. They are...

THE YOUNG & INSPIRED

Compiled by Jamil Fletcher

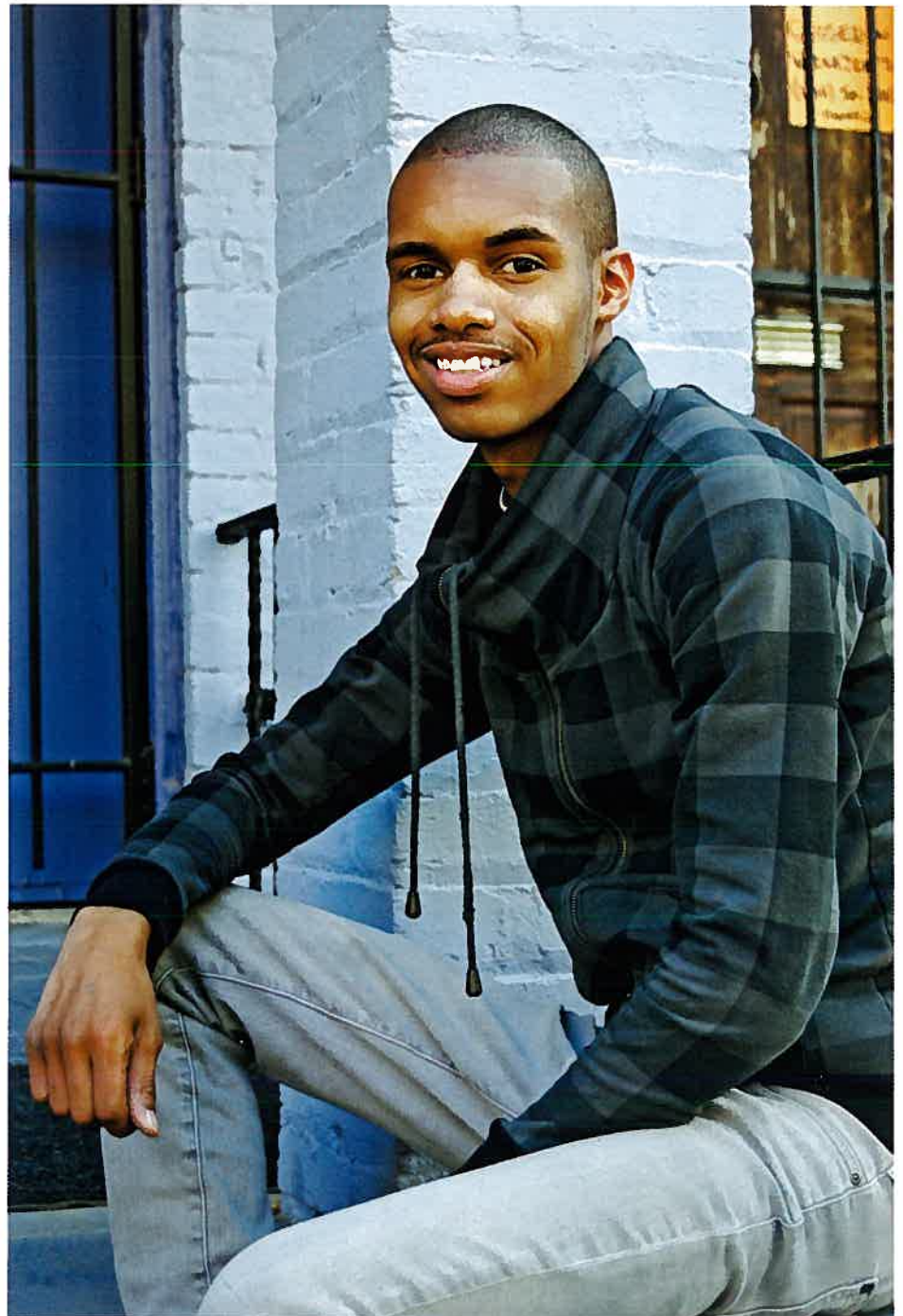
ANTHONY CORTEZ RILEY

Words/Photo Michael-Christopher

It has been said that youth is wasted on the young; that's not the case for Anthony Cortez Riley, who has made the most of his 21 years. Riley is on the road to being an expert in LGBTQ youth advocacy—and has already met President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama at the White House, as an invited guest.

Riley lives just outside of Washington, D.C. in Waldorf, a suburban Maryland town. Although just thirty miles south of the District, Riley used to feel as if he was the only same-gender-loving person around. "I didn't know a whole lot of gay people," he says. "I went to Dupont Circle [in Washington, D.C.] because that's where I heard they hung out." While there, Riley stumbled upon a copy of *Metro Weekly*, a local gay magazine, and chanced across something that would greatly enhance his life. "I saw an ad for a youth group that hosted gay events that was a safe space," he says. That group was SMYAL—the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League—a service organization dedicated to promoting productive lives for LGBTQ youth while providing counseling, health and wellness education, and safe social activities.

After a thorough googling, Riley decided to attend the organization's events, and soon became more involved and informed. "I didn't know about LGBT issues," he confesses. "Like, there's no employee protection in Virginia" where Riley works as a government defense contractor. Riley was shocked when he realized that he was not protected from losing his job because of his sexual orientation. "I didn't know how much I allowed myself to normalize many of the stigmas associated with the LGBTQ community," he says. "The lack of visibility in my own community



made me less aware of issues that other [LGBTQ persons] faced.”

This realization led Riley to become a youth advocacy intern; he learned how to raise awareness about LGBTQ youth needs, through educating the community, lobbying government officials and designing campaigns to create safer spaces for youth. Now, Riley is one of the youth leadership specialists who help facilitate the program at SMYAL.

The concepts of advocacy, activism and volunteerism are not new to this young man. As a small child, Riley remembers seeing a firehouse being built in his neighborhood and vowing to his parents, “I’m going to work there someday.” Riley made good on his childhood promise and became a volunteer firefighter at age 17, and has encouraged friends to follow suit. In high school Riley also participated in the Best Buddies program, which creates one-to-one friendships for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

An example of Riley’s continued activism occurred recently while he was shopping for a pair of “skinny jeans.” Riley, a small-framed man, found himself at Forever 21, a store geared to young women. After making his selection, Riley asked the salesperson where he could try on the pants. The perplexed salesperson had to seek advice from her manager, as there was no separate room for him to try on clothing. While waiting for his fate, Riley Tweeted the situation to his friends, feeling he was bound for discrimination. His friends, including an employee of the now-defunct *Washington Blade*, had his back. Thankfully, the manager granted Riley access to the main fitting room, averting a civil rights standoff. Nonetheless Riley, with his backup troops, was ready.

Riley’s hope is that other young people will begin to follow in his footsteps. “I think a lot of youth have gotten away from volunteering. They ask me, ‘You’re doing this and that...for free? Who does that?’” Apparently, someone who’s going places. Riley was chosen to represent SMYAL at the White House’s first LGBTQ reception in June 2009, where he met the President and First Lady. Who knows? If Riley sets his sights on it, perhaps 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. will be his next place of employment.



Photo: MC

ANGEL BROWN

Angel Brown, a native of Washington, D.C., has been active in the nonprofit social justice and social change arena for the past thirteen years. At 29, she is currently the director of Community Outreach & Partnerships for Metro TeenAIDS, a nonprofit community health organization dedicated to supporting young people in the fight to end HIV/AIDS. Over the years Brown has served as a trainer, organizer, educator, artistic director, performer and advocate in the fight against HIV/AIDS and social stigma. Her work began at the age of 15 as an HIV-prevention peer educator; she has been going full-steam ahead ever since. She is actively involved in the youth, people of color, and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities.

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