



HIDDEN VOICES

LGBTQ+
Stories in
United States
History



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1776, the Friend succumbed to a contagious and severe fever that spread throughout the region. Awaking from the illness, the Friend stated that the Friend had died, and instead the Friend's physical body now housed the "Friend of Life from God," a genderless entity whose mission was singularly

Lennie Hodgers wanted to serve and, after hearing from several young men that the medical examination of new recruits consisted of little more than a quick physical checkover in full clothing, decided to try his luck. On June 6, 1862, Hodgers walked into the local recruitment office and enlisted as Albert D. J. Cashier.

Despite identifying as a man, questions about his gender identity came up frequently. "The Hall would not let us wear women's clothing," he was asked by a Captain. "Whether hee were a man or a woman" Hall said. "Both man

Whitman loved the city streets and the people he encountered on them. They ultimately shaped and informed his celebrated poetry. He rejoiced in ordinary things and ordinary people, and he believed in humanity's fundamental dignity.

Introduction to HIDDEN VOICES: LGBTQ+ Stories in United States History

Like Ah Ming, who lived in both worlds, is an example of what we now call intersectionality, the overlapping identities that are a part of LGBTQ+ lives in the United States and beyond.

The *Hidden Voices* LGBTQ+ Project

The *Hidden Voices* LGBTQ+ project was initiated to help New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) students learn about and honor the innumerable people who questioned and broke the normed expectations of gender and sexuality, and who were therefore often hidden from the traditional historical record. These individuals influenced the social, political, artistic, and economic landscape in so many ways, and their contributions continue to shape our history and identity.

The NYCDOE is committed to supporting learning environments that reflect the diversity of New York City, as outlined in the Diversity in New York City Public Schools policy statement.¹ In a city as large as ours, students need to see their voices and identities reflected back in their curriculum. Furthermore, we believe that everyone benefits from diverse and inclusive schools and classrooms where all students, families, and school staff are supported and welcomed. This work is essential to the NYCDOE’s vision of Equity and Excellence for all NYCDOE students. The NYCDOE’s policies, procedures, and initiatives frame this work. They are supported by frequent, intentional conversations centered on respect, social justice, and fairness. These are the vehicles we use to create an equitable culture throughout the NYCDOE and our school communities. As a key component of that work, the Office of Curriculum, Instruction, & Professional Learning, within the Division of Teaching & Learning, develops high-quality instructional resources that are culture- and gender-inclusive, accessible, and offer students opportunities for deep cognitive engagement. These resources also provide teachers with support in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy that values the families, knowledge, and experiences of students.

This second volume of the *Hidden Voices* project is the product of a collaborative effort between the NYCDOE and multiple institutions and scholars. These include the Museum of the City of New York, the New-York Historical Society, the National Archives at New York City, and leading historians. Together, we have undertaken our own historical inquiry project: asking questions about which voices to include here and why (which led to some disagreements and difficult compromise!); diligently researching the final selection of

¹ New York City Department of Education, “[Diversity in New York City Public Schools](#),” *Diversity in Our Schools*, 2020.

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individuals to find the right combination of primary and secondary source documents; and finalizing these pluralistic voices into an outline of United States history that has long been overlooked.

The final project involved much decision-making, editing, and revision. The 20 individual profiles featured in this instructional resource are just some examples of the range of people who can be integrated within the broader historical narrative. They are hardly exhaustive. There are many more individuals we could have included. And indeed, some topics required “group portraits” to capture some of the broad events for which a single individual seemed insufficient.

NOTE: This book includes the use of language and topics that refer to the discrimination and violence faced by LGBTQ+ people historically and in the present day. It is important to recognize situations with the potential to (re)traumatize when presenting documents with challenging content, and to provide proper context to their use. The authors of this book suggest teachers set guidelines for students when engaging with this content to ensure empathetic and thoughtful engagement.

What Are Hidden Voices?

Often in the traditional teaching and learning of history, diverse figures are excluded from the shared historical narrative. This curriculum companion offers a critical alternative. In this instructional resource, a hidden voice represents a person or a group of people whose experiences have been historically under-represented in narratives, textbooks, and other media. These exclusions mean that students are not learning the full

Teaching students the different, and often conflicting, issues that affect diverse groups in the United States will help them better understand the factors that contributed to the birth, growth, and development of the nation, and to develop empathy for the points of view, perspectives, and experiences within various groups.

story of our past. As a result, students may wonder, “Where am I in history?” By using an inclusive approach to teaching history, we enrich and strengthen students’ understanding of history and their sense of place in America’s historical narrative. Intentionally including “hidden voices” gives students personal connections to the events, people, and movements that make history and can create entry points for learning about important historical themes in a way that sparks the interests of New York’s heterogeneous community of learners. Further, it allows them to view themselves as change-makers and active creators of history today, tomorrow, and beyond.

“Where
am I in
history?”

Surfacing hidden voices and integrating them into the curriculum does not mean we ignore traditional historical figures or attempt to diminish their importance. Students should still study the role of Abraham Lincoln in the Civil War; but let them also uncover the incredible stories of people like Albert Cashier, born into a female body who dressed as a man to join the Army. Not only are these stories intensely interesting, bringing the people of history to life, but they also let students know that questions of gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation have existed for a long time. In this way, history can exist as a form of support to marginalized and/or underrepresented youth. Discovering hidden voices and

their important perspectives and experiences enriches and deepens our understanding of United States history and the individuals and groups of people whose contributions to our nation are significant, but whose voices are either unheralded, unrecorded, or forgotten over time.

To assist with this integration, this guide aligns with the *Passport to Social Studies* curriculum. *Passport* is the citywide K–12 curriculum developed by NYCDOE educators that provides teachers with resources to expose students to the diversity of multiple perspectives and foster the historical thinking skills necessary to develop an authentic understanding of the past and its influence on the present and the future. *Passport to Social Studies* also helps educators cultivate civic responsibility and awareness, nurture inquiry and critical thinking, and employ culturally responsive practices.

Because it is aligned to *Passport to Social Studies*, this resource guide can help teachers facilitate and explore inclusive learning experiences that validate the diverse perspectives and contributions of LGBTQ+ individuals and groups. A unit about Civil Rights can feature Bayard Rustin, his radical leadership, and the controversies around his identity. The story of Rebecca Primus and Addie Brown personalizes the struggles for African American women after the Civil War, and Miguel Braschi’s court case highlights the workings of our justice system as well as deeply important questions about family, the law, and citizenship. Many of these profiles can be paired with each other, or even grouped together, as students engage with them to analyze larger historical questions. The selections included in *Hidden Voices* encourage educators to honor the complexity of culture, develop an appreciation for differences, and ensure that instructional materials reflect a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives.

Of course, New York City is its own classroom. There are places to visit, as well as repositories and museum exhibitions filled with archival documents that students can analyze for historical context. We have included a map at the back of this book to point you toward places to visit. There are online exhibits geared to LGBTQ+ history such as the New York Public Library’s “Stonewall 50: A Guide Honoring the 50th Anniversary of the Stonewall Riots and LGBTQ history,”² “The LGBTQ Religious Archives Network,”³ or the “NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project.”⁴ These content-rich online collections empower students to act as historical detectives, bringing the people they see in photos or the names they encounter in primary sources back to life in a local context to which they can relate.

2 [Stonewall 50: A Guide Honoring the 50th Anniversary of the Stonewall Riots and LGBTQ History](#), The New York Public Library.

3 [LGBTQ Religious Archives Network \(LGBT-RAN\)](#), a program of the Center for LGBTQ and Gender Studies in Religion at the Pacific School of Religion.

4 [NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project](#), a project of the Partner Program of the Fund for the City of New York.

The selections included in *Hidden Voices* encourage educators to honor the complexity of culture, develop an appreciation for differences, and ensure that instructional materials reflect a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives.

Importantly, the representative examples of the hidden voices included in this resource guide are by no means definitive or exhaustive. The guide highlights the stories of 20 fascinating people—individuals who helped make this country a place like no other. Their voices, along with the five Portrait of an Era pieces, will enhance students' appreciation for, and widen their awareness of, America's diverse and collective history.

Teaching students the different, and often conflicting, issues that affect diverse groups in the United States will help them better understand the factors that contributed to the birth, growth, and development of the nation, and to develop empathy for the points of view, perspectives, and experiences within various groups.

The Benefits and Challenges of Teaching LGBTQ+ History

by Daniel Hurewitz, Associate Professor of History at Hunter College, and Robyn C. Spencer, Associate Professor of History at Lehman College and the CUNY Graduate Center.

This instructional resource contains “hidden voices” from America’s story, each playing a dynamic role in the nation’s past—and fundamentally shaping the culture, the politics, or the very fabric of our collective society.

Including these hidden voices and stories in social studies and history classes enriches the curriculum in a variety of ways. First and foremost, doing so gives teachers the opportunity to add LGBTQ+ lives into the collection of stories they share with students. Without a doubt, that not only changes the way students think about the gendered and sexual identities of individuals in the past, but it demonstrates the fact that LGBTQ+ lives are currently—and have always been—a vital part of the American story. It normalizes the existence of LGBTQ+ communities in a way that can both improve the self-esteem of LGBTQ+ students today and defuse some of the anxiety and hostility that other students sometimes feel about them.

At the same time, talking about LGBTQ+ lives broaden the set of questions we can bring to thinking about the past with students. For instance, the decisions that thousands of 19th- and 20th-century Americans made to live in single-sex societies—whether the miners of the Gold Rush or the reform-minded women of the settlement house movement—now look less like unhappy choices, and more like affirmative ones. Choosing to be a miner was not just to forlornly give up the company of women in exchange for the possibility of wealth; it might very well have been to opt happily into a society of men. Similarly, the women who passed as men and enlisted in the Army during the Revolution or the Civil War might be analyzed not as simply being patriotic or finding a way to make an independent living but carving out a transgender life for themselves or challenging the very norms of femininity.

The addition of these voices to the story of the past brings history to life and empowers students to discover new historical actors and ask new questions of familiar figures and eras: How and why did the goals of civil and human rights groups in the United States expand to include issues of sexuality in the turbulent 1960s? How did the definition of family and marriage change over time and what role did understandings about sexuality play in those definitions? What is the history of the inclusion and exclusion of LGBTQ+ people in arenas like sports and military service? How do LGBTQ+ people fit into the politics of United

Uncovering these hidden voices means challenging both that history of homophobia and the secrecy it generated.

States medical history? How did artistic expression within LGBTQ+ communities affect American culture?

These are exciting issues to discuss with students. But LGBTQ+ lives have rarely been included in the American narrative. In part, of course, that exclusion reflects a long history of homophobia and exclusion, and excavating these voices is part of a long battle for rights and recognition. But sometimes people shielded their identities from view as a survival strategy in the face of discrimination and persecution by religious authorities, the medical community, or the state. Uncovering these hidden voices means challenging both that history of homophobia and the secrecy it generated. Whatever the specific context, the hidden nature of these voices and their large-scale disappearance from history reveals a complicated reality, and the ongoing tensions between equal rights and discrimination that mark our long road to progress.

Even teachers who are excited by that challenge and want to include this material may feel nervous about doing so. Three key worries often stand in their way.

First, many educators feel less informed than they would like to be about LGBTQ+ history. They did not study it in college or graduate school and feel daunted by the idea of teaching it. This resource has been developed with that concern in mind. We have provided “An Overview of United States LGBTQ+ History,” just before the “Portraits of an Era and Profiles,” and a “Glossary of LGBTQ+ Terms” at the back of the book. Educators can share these with students or use the resources themselves. Either way, we hope that these curriculum resources will increase educators’ comfort with teaching LGBTQ+ history and provide the necessary foundation for beginning this work. This is also an opportunity to be co-researchers with students when there is more to uncover.

Secondly, many teachers already feel uncertain about how to make content depth and breadth choices while integrating new topics into their established course scope and sequence; incorporating LGBTQ+ history into our classes does not mean adding extra days of content into our units of study. Rather, it means incorporating LGBTQ+ individuals and concepts into topics that are already being studied. For instance, the NYCDOE Social Studies Scope & Sequence already includes the study of the Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz Age; adding LGBTQ+ content simply means selecting Ma Rainey as one of the historical figures that we use to bring this era to life. Similarly, settlement houses are already included in our discussion of the Progressive Era; adding LGBTQ+ content might simply

mean noting that Jane Addams did not create Hull House on her own, but with the support of the woman who was her first life partner. The history of Settlement Houses also includes the concept of Boston Marriages. As teachers, to present a more representative history means centering this history rather than obscuring or neglecting it. LGBTQ+ stories do not take away from the content we are already teaching; they allow us to deepen and enrich it in new ways.

Finally, teachers often fear that talking about LGBTQ+ people will lead them, almost inevitably, into uncomfortable discussions of sex and sexual behavior with their students. But think how much we talk about marriages and heirs when we discuss the history of royal families in Europe. Sex is clearly a central element of that history, but we ably talk around it; the sex stays off-screen. And much the same is true in describing the lives of LGBTQ+ people. While we may need to define “transgender” or “lesbian” for students, we do not need to describe the sexual activities of these historical individuals.

In truth, despite these fears, in very few cases will we be introducing our students to notions of same-sex intimacy or LGBTQ+ identities. Given the cultural landscape students live in, they are likely already encountering these realities on television or through social media. Instead, our role—as in so much of our teaching—is one of providing a context and a historical framework for understanding the world in which they are already immersed. Our role is to contextualize LGBTQ+ lives and make sense of the historical developments that have brought us to the present.

Significantly, in taking on this work, we have the potential to make a profound impact on students and schools beyond the classroom walls. Many educators regularly encounter casual homophobia in their classrooms; it sometimes seems like an inevitable part of the students’ world. But by doing this work, we have the opportunity to begin to change that culture. Research from the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) makes clear that when even one or two teachers in a school begin talking about LGBTQ+ people and their lives in a serious and respectful way, the school climate alters dramatically.¹ Those teachers’ words, tone, and actions lead to a diminishment of homophobic behavior across the school, and their efforts lift the morale and emotional status of LGBTQ+ students. This is a critical part to play, especially considering the existing vulnerability of these students. By beginning this work, and finding others to carry it forward, teachers can have a tremendous social impact at their school and in the ongoing lives of students.

This ongoing work enriches our students, provides them with a fuller and truer history of their country and culture, and ensures our communities, cultures, and society become more supportive of LGBTQ+ people.

¹ [National School Climate Survey](#), GLSEN, Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network.

How to Use the Resource Guide

The *Hidden Voices* project provides examples of people who have contributed to the rich history of the city and the country. Sample activities and resources are provided so that educators can add these voices to the curriculum, not teach them separately. For example, the story of Ma Rainey can be used alongside the *Passport to Social Studies* curriculum in Grade 8 Unit 4. Rainey’s profile and related documents add depth and a personal perspective to lessons on the Harlem Renaissance. By adding her profile and using the resources when teaching the Harlem Renaissance, students can see that an open LGBTQ+ performer was, contrary to societal norms at that time, widely accepted and celebrated, and consider why this was so remarkable. In addition to the voices provided, students and teachers can work together to explore history and uncover their own hidden voices.

Overview of Portraits of an Era and Profiles

Hidden Voices is, by and large, a collection of biographies. The editorial team chose the 20 profiles to offer multiple points of entry into discussing the way notions of gender and sexuality were evolving at different moments in United States history.

Nonetheless, there are key periods in LGBTQ+ history for which no single individual seemed able to be fully representative—especially forgotten moments when same-sex intimacy was much more accepted in American society. Those moments or stages have been captured here with five short essays that we are calling “Portraits of an Era.” The eras discussed are not fundamentally new; rather the portraits invite teachers and students to view these familiar periods through the lens of gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ+ lives.

Each Profile in this book is presented in a rough chronology determined by the birthdate of the individual presented. The profiles are organized around recurring components: focus questions, notes, a biography, illustrative images, connections to *Passport to Social Studies*, quotations, grade band appropriate questions, additional resources, and relevant documents to support student analysis. This design is intended to support flexible use across grades. On pages 13–16 Albert Cashier’s profile is annotated to explain each component found in the profiles in more detail.

Four Question Types

Throughout this resource guide, there are four types of questions to use with students.

Focus Questions: At the beginning of each profile there are questions, many of them are directly from the unit overviews of the *Passport to Social Studies* curriculum guides. These questions are designed to help teachers make direct connections to different aspects of the curriculum.

Thinking About Questions: At the end of each profile there are a number of questions that are coded (**E/M/H** for elementary/middle/high) based on grade-level appropriateness and relevance. These questions can be used to prompt student thinking about the profile.

Document Analysis Questions: After the biography of each profile, a set of documents has been selected for students to analyze in order to deepen their understanding of that particular profile. Each document includes questions to scaffold a student's interpretation and understanding.

Enduring Questions: Below are non-person-specific questions that guided the creation of this volume and that can be used across the guide for each of the profiles included. These questions can be used by teachers to make connections across the hidden voices, or to prompt students to think about each person's role in history. These questions also prompt us to think more deeply about hidden voices as a concept, but also about the place each of these people should hold in history:

- Why should we commemorate or memorialize the life of this person?
- How do these profiles contribute to our understanding of how we learn history?
- How do historians learn about the past? Is the “telling of” history or the learning about history neutral? Why or why not?
- What does the story of this person tell us about the history of the United States that we did not know before?
- How does the profile of this person enrich our understanding of United States history?
- Why and how have historical narratives centered particular individuals? Whose history has not been centered? Why? What can be done to reconstruct particular historical narratives?
- How do we distinguish between a prominent historical figure and a hidden voice?
- How are a society's values reflected in the people and things they choose to memorialize?

Profile Features

Profile subject → **Albert Cashier**

Profile subtitle → The Transgender Man Who Fought in the Civil War

Author → by Edward T. O'Donnell

Each Profile or Portrait of an Era was written by prominent New York City institutions or scholars in the history of gender, sexuality, and women's history.

Focus Questions

How did the efforts of individuals and groups influence the causes and effects of the Civil War?
What are a nation's responsibilities to its citizens after major conflict?
What were the successes and challenges of reuniting the nation following the Civil War?

Note Specific to Profile

NOTE: The term transgender did not exist in Albert Cashier's lifetime. He would not have referred to himself in this way, nor would his contemporaries. Cashier did live and identify as male, though he was assigned female at birth. The term transgender is used in this profile with its current definition and understanding, rather than to denote historical identification or self-identification. This profile uses the pronouns he, him, and his to reflect how Cashier lived and identified for the majority of his life.

In recent years, historians have uncovered many stories about women who posed as men in order to serve in past American wars. Deborah Sampson, for example, fought in the Continental Army during the American Revolution under the name of Timothy Thayer, and Sarah Emma Edmonds served in the Union Army during the Civil War, going by the name Frank Thompson. In these cases, Sampson and Edmonds were women who posed as men in order to fight. Jennie Hodgers, aka **Albert Cashier** (1843–1915), a person who, by all accounts, was what we would term **transgender** today, presents a different perspective on this phenomenon.

Albert Cashier was born Jennie Hodgers in Clogherhead, Ireland, in 1843. How he came to America is not clear. One account said he stowed away on a ship; another claimed that he immigrated as a young child with his family to upstate New York. One thing is clear—he grew up in poverty, never learning to read or write. He was eighteen years old and living in Illinois as a woman when the Civil War broke out in April 1861.

52 Hidden Voices: LGBTQ+ | Profile: Albert Cashier

Profile text

Fifteen months later, in July 1862, President Abraham Lincoln issued a call for an additional 300,000 volunteers for the Union Army. Jennie Rodgers wanted to serve and, after hearing from several young men that the medical examination for new recruits consisted of little more than a quick once-over in full clothing, decided to try his luck. On August 6, 1862, Rodgers walked into the local recruiting office and enlisted as Albert D. J. Cashier. With the stroke of a pen, he became Albert D. J. Cashier, Private First Class, Company G, 95th Illinois Infantry Volunteers.

After weeks of training, Albert Cashier left Illinois with his regiment on November 4, bound for Kentucky to serve under the command of Major Ulysses S. Grant. For the next three years Cashier and the 95th would see some of the fiercest fighting of the war, including the siege of Vicksburg, the Red River Campaign, and the Battle of Guntown in Mississippi. In all, Albert Cashier fought in more than 40 battles and earned a reputation for bravery and tenacity under fire. On one occasion, at the siege of Vicksburg, he was briefly captured, but escaped after grabbing a guard's rifle and knocking him senseless.

Remarkably, Cashier escaped the war without serious injury, a fact that allowed him to keep his identity a secret. Decades later, after his sex assigned at birth was revealed, fellow soldiers were shocked. Said one of them, "I never suspected at any time all through the service that Cashier was a woman." Another attested that Cashier, "seemed to be able to do as much work as anyone in the Company."

In 1865, four months after Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered and the Civil War came to a close, the 95th Illinois was mustered out of service. Cashier and his fellow soldiers returned to Illinois, where they were honored with a huge public rally. Then they returned to civilian life.

Albert Cashier remained Albert Cashier, leaving behind for good the female identity of Jennie Rodgers. He cast about for a while as a farmhand before taking a job as a dry goods clerk in the town of Saunemin, Illinois. He stayed there for the next forty years, working as a farmer (including janitor and lamplighter), and living in a small house he bought.

Every year on Decoration Day, the precursor to our Memorial Day, he and his fellow soldiers marched in the local parade. And every year on Election Day, Albert Cashier and his fellow soldiers voted. That Jennie Rodgers and all other American women were prohibited

This 1864 photograph shows Albert Cashier in the uniform of the 95th Illinois Regiment, the unit that he fought with during the Civil War. By enlisting under the name Albert D. J. Cashier, he was able to establish himself as a man in the new world, leaving behind his birth name and gender. At the time, someone judged to be female would not have been allowed to fight as a soldier, to vote in peace time, or to have many of the subsequent jobs Cashier held.



Albert D. J. Cashier, of Company G, 95th Illinois Regiment, November 1864, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

Relevant Document with Caption

Images embedded in the profile with context and citations that provide further information about the Profile or Portrait of an Era.

Hidden Voices: LGBTQ+ | Profile: Albert Cashier

Quote

Quotations by or about the subject of the profile.

Jennie Rodgers wanted to serve and, after hearing from several young men that the medical examination for new recruits consisted of little more than a quick once-over in full clothing, decided to try his luck. On August 6, 1862, Rodgers walked into the local recruiting office and enlisted as Albert D. J. Cashier.

Albert Cashier kept secret his biological sex until 1911. While working as a groundskeeper on an estate, he was struck by a car in the driveway and suffered a broken leg. During the subsequent medical examination, the doctor discovered that Albert was biologically a woman. Cashier pleaded with him not to reveal his identity and the doctor agreed. But Cashier's injured leg and advanced age meant he could no longer work. As a consequence, the doctor made arrangements for him to be admitted to the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home in Quincy, Illinois—a retirement home for ex-military personnel.

The staff at the home accepted Cashier as a man, but eventually discovered his secret. In 1914, the state of Illinois, apparently believing Cashier delusional for claiming to be Private Albert D. J. Cashier, sent him to the Watertown State Hospital for the Insane. Soon the federal government's Pension Bureau was alerted to the strange case. It launched an investigation to see if Cashier was entitled to the veteran's pension he'd been receiving since 1890. After careful

review of the evidence, and interviews with dozens of Cashier's fellow soldiers in the 95th, the Bureau decided that "Rodgers" and Cashier were one and the same and it maintained the pension.

Albert Cashier lived 18 months at the Watertown State Hospital where, unfortunately, the staff insisted he wear women's clothing. He died on October 10, 1915. He was given a funeral with full military honors and was buried beneath a marker that read: Albert D. J. Cashier, Co. G, 95th Ill. Inf. More than six decades later, in 1977, the local townspeople of Saunemin, Illinois, added another larger headstone in Sunny Slope Cemetery that bore witness to his extraordinary story:

Albert D. J. Cashier
Co. G, 95 Inf. Civil War
Born
Jennie Rodgers
In Clogher Head, Ireland
1843-1915

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Hidden Voices: LGBTQ+ | Profile: Albert Cashier

Passport Connections by Grade, Unit, and Lesson

Suggestions for relevant grades, units, and/or lesson plans in the *Passport to Social Studies* curriculum.

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 8

- Unit 1: Launching the Unit: Gallery Walk Activity
- Unit 1: Unit Pre-Assessment

Grade 11

- Unit 2: Expansion, Nationalism, and Sectionalism

Thinking About Questions

Individual-specific questions, coded by grade band, to prompt student thinking about each profile.

Thinking About:

Albert Cashier

- How were gender roles defined in mid-19th century America? **M/H**
- Why do you think there were multiple women who dressed as men to fight in American wars? **E/M/H**
- What was Cashier's reputation in the Civil War? What does this reveal about gender equality? **E/M/H**
- What were some liberties afforded to Cashier as a man that he would not have enjoyed as a woman? **M/H**
- How was Cashier treated once his sex assigned at birth was discovered? How do the differences in his treatment, by different groups and over time, reveal social conflict around gender identity? **M/H**
- What connections can be drawn to the United States military today? How does the military embody the tension between tradition and progress? Provide specific examples to support your response. **M/H**

Additional Resources

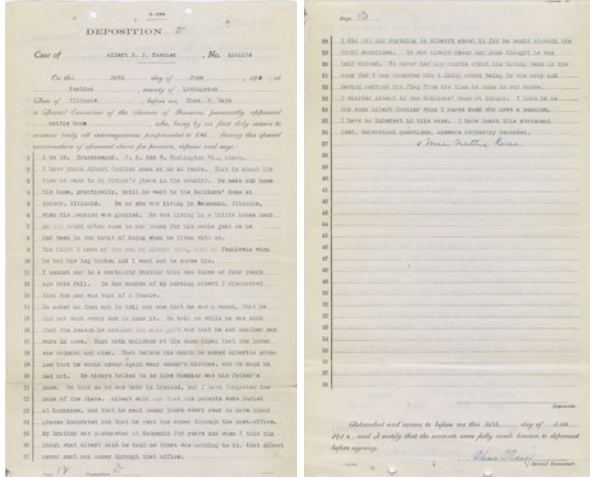
A list of books, articles, and/or websites that provide additional or contextualizing information for each profile.

Additional Resources

- ["Civil War Biography: Albert Cashier aka Jennie Hodgers"](#) by American Battlefield Trust
- ["Jennie Hodgers, aka Private Albert Cashier"](#) by the National Park Service
- ["In Civil War, Woman Fought Like A Man For Freedom"](#) by Linda Paul

Deposition D in the Case of Albert D. J. Cashier

Much of what is known about the Albert D.J. Cashier's experience in the Civil War is based on the information gathered from files created when Albert Cashier applied for his Union pension. The pension file has several depositions, or sworn statements, taken from different individuals who knew him. Cashier, who was nearing the end of his life, also provided a deposition at this time. The images below are the original deposition as it appears in the National Archives; the second page of this document is the transcription of the deposition along with its citation.



Relevant Documents with Questions

Primary and secondary sources, along with a contextualizing headnote, citation, and document-specific questions coded by grade band.

Deposition D in the Case of Albert D.J.Cashier continued:

Deposition D

Case of Albert D. J. Cashier, No. 1001132

On this 20th day of June, 1914, at Pontiac, county of Livingston, State of Illinois, before me, Chas. F. Cain a Special Examiner of the Bureau of Pensions, personally appeared Nettie Rose, who, being by me first duly sworn to answer truly all interrogatories propounded to her during this special examination of aforesaid claim for pension, deposes and says:

I am 56. Housekeeper. P. O. 828 Washington St., above. I have known Albert Cashier some 44 or 45 years. That is about the time he came to my father's place in the country. He made our home his home, practically, until he went to the Soldiers' Home at Quincy, Illinois. He or she was living in Saunemin, Illinois, when his pension was granted. He was living in a little house near us and would often come to our house for his meals just as he had been in the habit of doing when he lived with us.

The first I knew of the sex of Albert being that of femalewas [sic] when he had his leg broken and I went out to nurse him.

I cannot say to a certainty whether this was three or four years ago this fall. In the course of my nursing Albert I discovered that the sex was that of a female.

He asked me then not to tell any one that he was a woman, that he did not want every one to know it. He told me while he was sick that the reason he assumed the male garb was that he and another man were in love. That both enlisted at the same time, that the lover was wounded and died. That before his death he asked Albert to promise that he would never again wear women's clothes, and he said he had not. He always talked to me like Cashier was his father's name. He told me he was born in Ireland, but I have forgotten the name of the place. Albert said one that his parents were buried at Kankakee, and that he sent money there every year to have their graves decorated and that he sent the money through the post-office. My brother was postmaster at Saunemin for years and when I told him about what Albert said he told me there was nothing to it, that, Albert never sent any money through that office.

I did not say anything to Albert about it for he would stretch the truth sometimes. He was always queer and some thought he was half witted. We never had any doubts about him having been in the army for I can remember him talking about being in the army and having carried the flag from the time he came to our house. I visited Albert in the Soldiers' Home at Quincy. I know he is the same Albert Cashier whom I nurse dand [sic] who drew a pension. I have no interest in this case. I have heard this statement read, understood questions, answers correctly recorded.

Mrs. Nettie Rose

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 20th day of June 1914, and I certify that the contents were fully made known to deponent before signing.

Chas. F. Cain

Citation: *Deposition D, Case of Albert D. J. Cashier*, No. 1001132, Local Identifier: XC-2573248, Approved Pension File for Private Albert D. J. Cashier, Company G, 95th Illinois Infantry Regiment, Case Files of Pension Applications Based on Service Completed in the Years 1817 to Approximately 1903, Record Group 15, Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, ARC Identifier 36605129.

- Summarize the main idea of this deposition from Albert Cashier's housekeeper, Nettie Rose. M/H
- Why did Rose use the adjective "queer" and others use the term "half witted" to describe Albert Cashier? M/H
- What evidence does Rose provide to confirm that Cashier served in the army? E/M/H
- What does the deposition show us about views of gender identity during the early 20th century? M/H

Hidden Voices: LGBTQ+ | Profile: Albert Cashier

57

An Overview of United States LGBTQ+ History

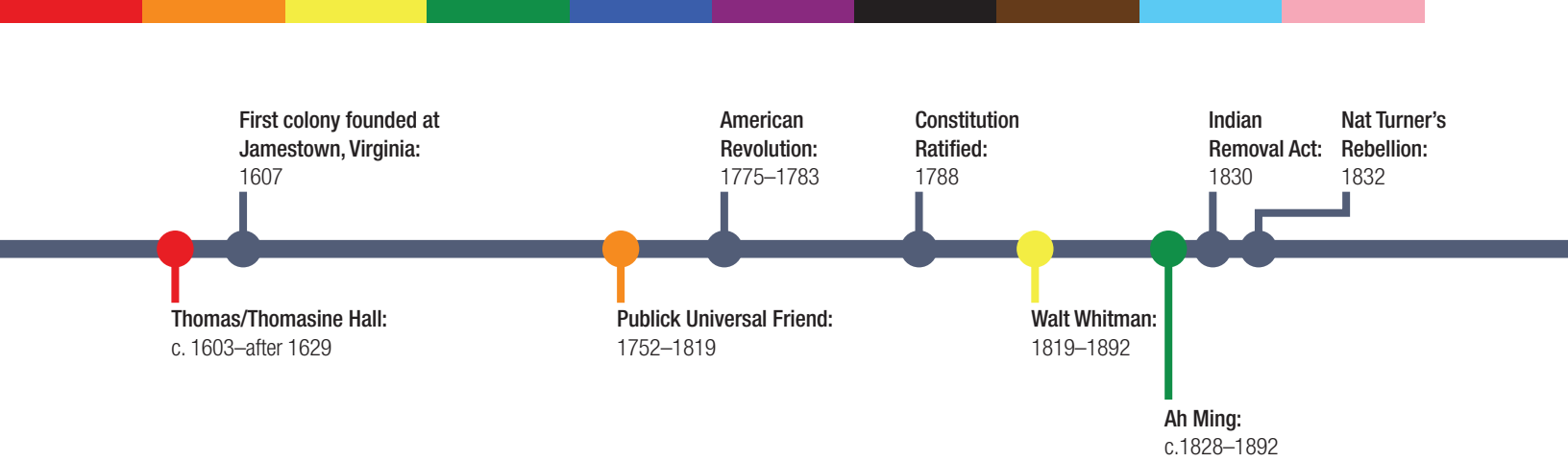
*by Bonnie J. Morris, Author and Visiting Lecturer Women's Studies,
University of California Berkeley*

NOTE: names in bold are individuals or events that are examined in the subsequent pages of this book.

Most historians agree that there is evidence of homosexual activity and same-sex love, whether such relationships were accepted or persecuted, in every documented culture. We know that homosexuality existed in ancient Israel simply because it is prohibited in the Bible, whereas it flourished between both men and women in Ancient Greece. Substantial evidence also exists for individuals who lived at least part of their lives as a different gender than assigned at birth. From the lyrics of same-sex desire inscribed by Sappho in the 7th century BCE to youths raised as the opposite sex in cultures ranging from Albania to Afghanistan; from the “female husbands” of Kenya to the Native American **Two-Spirit** individuals, alternatives to the Western male-female and heterosexual binaries thrived across millennia and cultures.

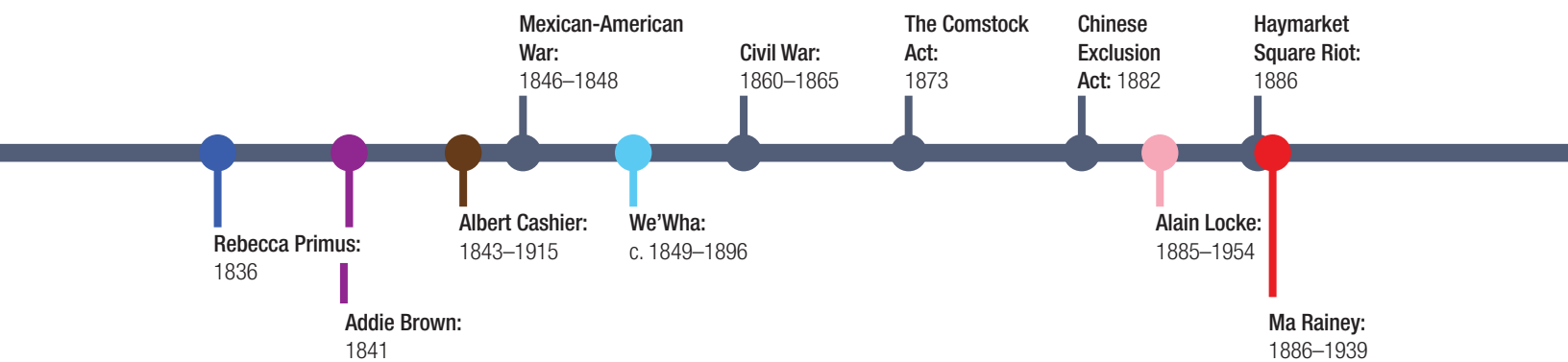
However, this relatively peaceful acceptance of individuals who lived outside of these binaries in different Indigenous civilizations met with harsh opposition from European and Christian colonizers in the 16- and 1700s. In the age of European exploration and empire-building, many European cultures officially condemned such behavior. As travelers, missionaries, and diplomats began encountering Native American, North African, and Pacific Islander cultures accepting of Two-Spirit people or same-sex love, they conveyed shock in their diaries and journals. Many European invaders objected to any deviation from a limited understanding of masculine and feminine roles, and their eyewitness reports proliferated false beliefs that homosexual practices were foreign, savage, or evidence of a medical problem or lower racial hierarchy. Thus, what might have been learned about same-sex love or gender identity in these native societies was often buried in shame and scandal.

Nonetheless, same-sex companionship thrived across these cultural encounters. Wartime conflict between emerging nations often fostered strong alliances between men in conflict and frontier zones. At the same time, the departure or deaths of male soldiers left women behind to live together and forge domestic lives. In communities where it was frowned upon for unmarried males and females to mingle freely, same-sex relationships regularly filled



the void. Indeed, by the 19th century, women often developed intimate culturally accepted relationships, such as that of **Rebecca Primus** and **Addie Brown**, or the elite women who lived in **Boston marriages** by the end of the century.

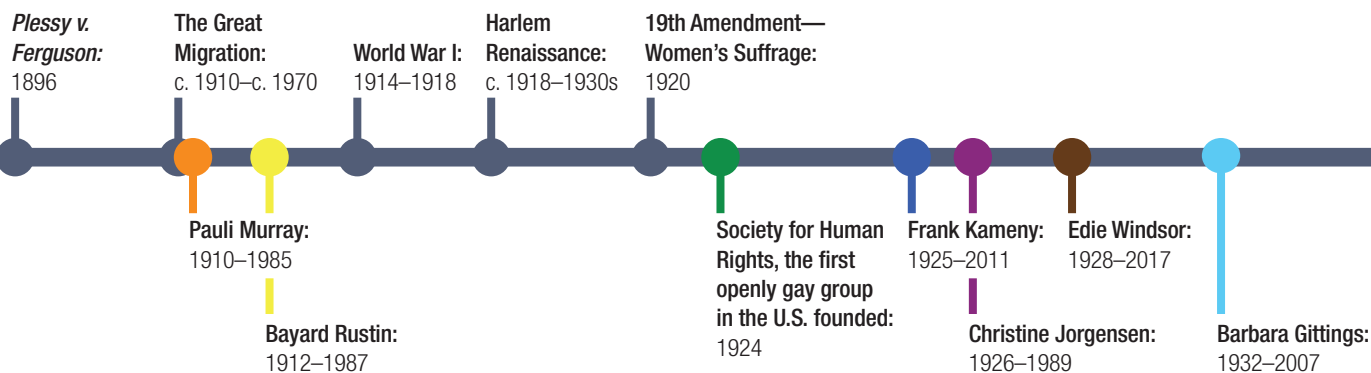
Where European dress—a clear marker of gender—was also enforced by missionaries, we find another complicated history of both gender identity and resistance. Biblical interpretation made it illegal for a woman to wear pants or a man to adopt female dress, and sensationalized public trials warned against “deviants” but also made such martyrs and heroes popular: Joan of Arc is one example, and the chilling origins of the word “faggot” include a stick of wood used in public burnings of gay men. Despite the risks of defying severe legal codes, cross-dressing flourished in the years of empire, both in Europe and North America, and colonial Americans seemed to embrace gender nonconforming individuals, like **Thomasine Hall** and the **Publick Universal Friend**. Some women and girls, economically oppressed by the sexism which kept them from jobs and educational opportunities, passed as male in order to gain access to coveted experiences or income. For instance, some women disguised themselves as men in order to fight in the military (Deborah Sampson), to work as pirates (Mary Read and Anne Bonney), or attend medical school. This was a choice made by many women who were not necessarily transgender in identity. But some did so for extended periods of years, and both men and women who lived as a different gender were often only discovered after a medical crisis—as happened to the Civil War veteran **Albert Cashier**—or their deaths. The extreme differences in gendered clothing and grooming made “passing” surprisingly easy in certain environments. As the story of **We’Wha** demonstrates, however, transgender people were not universally scorned in the 19th century. In fact, roles in the arts where women were banned from working required that men be recruited to play female roles, often creating a high-status, competitive market for those who might identify as trans women today. In venues from Shakespeare’s theatre to Japanese Kabuki, this acceptance of cross-gender performance made the theater an often-accepting sanctuary for individuals like **Ah Ming** who built careers based around gender disguise and illusion.



In Western history, we find little formal study of what was later called homosexuality before the 19th century. Early efforts to understand the range of human sexual behavior came from European doctors and scientists including Carl von Westphal (1869), Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1882), and Havelock Ellis (1897). Their writings were contradictory. At times, they wrote sympathetically about the concept of a homosexual or bisexual orientation occurring naturally in an identifiable segment of humankind; in other moments, Krafft-Ebing and Ellis labeled “third sex” people as degenerate and abnormal. Their criticism was balanced in the popular culture by the “love of comrades” that poet **Walt Whitman** celebrated. Sigmund Freud, writing in the same era, did not consider homosexuality an illness, but rather that bisexuality was an innate aspect of human development. Yet Freud also felt that lesbian desires were an immaturity that women could overcome through heterosexual marriage and male dominance.

Their ideas only gradually trickled down to a curious public through magazines and presentations, and slowly arrived in the United States. But interestingly, even as their theories were beginning to circulate in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, gay, lesbian, and transgender activity became increasingly visible in urban centers such as Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. In New York, LGBTQ+ social activities flourished in Greenwich Village and were a dynamic part of the Harlem Renaissance scene of the 1920s, particularly as curated by **Alain Locke**. Indeed, the blues music of African American women (like **Ma Rainey**) showcased varieties of lesbian desire, struggle, and humor. Within Prohibition’s defiant speakeasy culture, these performances, along with male and female drag stars and the **Pansy Craze**, introduced a gay underworld to straight patrons.

The disruptions of World War II complicated this growing visibility. On the one hand, the war uprooted formerly isolated gay men and women and thrust them into single-sex environments, whether as soldiers, war workers, or volunteers; the war facilitated the creation of LGBTQ+ community life. And studies such as Alfred Kinsey’s 1948 report on male sexuality suggested a far greater acceptance of homosexual behavior than previously understood. At the same time, LGBTQ+ people were officially barred from military service

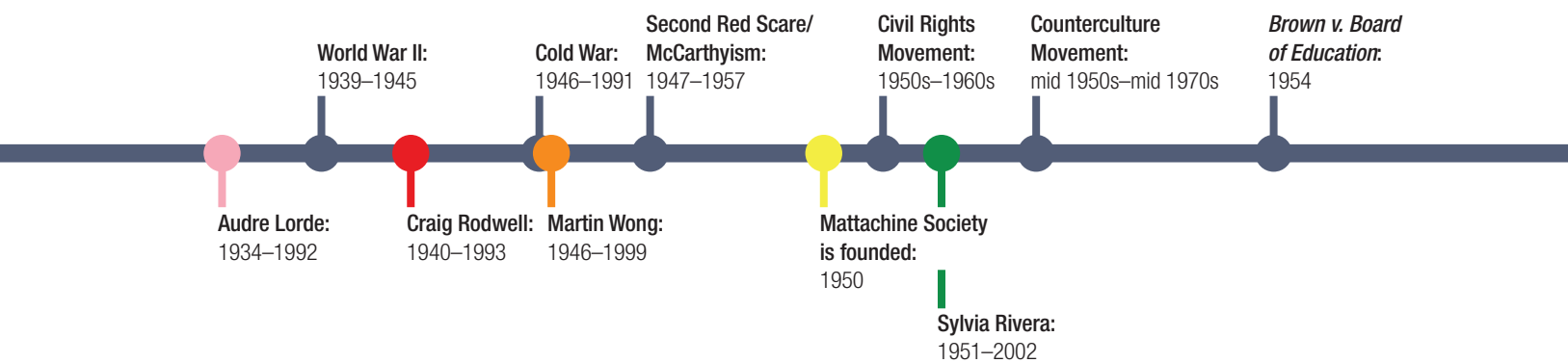


and marked as mentally and psychologically unsound. As the war concluded, they became targets of more aggressive scrutiny. Even as **Christine Jorgensen** was celebrated as a transgender icon, a nationwide **Lavender Scare** took hold, and federal investigations of homosexuals holding government jobs during the early 1950s turned into bans against them in all civil service and government-related jobs across the country, as well as raids and arrests at gay and lesbian social spaces.

These oppressive developments gave birth to a generation of activists, like **Frank Kameny**, **Barbara Gittings**, Allen Ginsberg, and Harry Hay, who reacted with anger as their lives were deemed second-class under the law. Borrowing ideas and strategies from leftists, black activists, artists, and others, they launched the first sustained American political movement for an end to the criminalization of gays and lesbians, their treatment as mentally ill, and their discrimination in employment. Calling themselves the homophile movement, the first organization they formed was the Mattachine Society, founded in Los Angeles in 1950 by Harry Hay and Chuck Rowland. It took the lead in identifying gay men and lesbians as an oppressed cultural minority. It was followed by other West Coast groups, including One, Inc., founded in 1952, and the first lesbian support network, the Daughters of Bilitis, founded in 1955 by Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin. Through meetings and publications, these organizations began offering support and outreach to thousands.

These groups soon found encouragement from prominent sociologists and psychologists. In 1951, Donald Webster Cory published *The Homosexual in America*, asserting that gay men and lesbians were a legitimate minority group, and in 1953 Evelyn Hooker, Ph.D., won a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to study gay men. Her groundbreaking paper, presented in 1956, demonstrated that gay men were as well-adjusted as heterosexual men, often more so. Nonetheless, throughout the 1950s and 60s, gay men and lesbians continued to be at risk of being jailed, losing jobs and child custody, or placed in psychiatric lockup.

By the mid-1960s, the black civil rights movement, led in part by **Pauli Murray** and **Bayard Rustin**, won new legislation outlawing racial discrimination. Inspired by them, in 1965 the first gay rights demonstrations took place in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., led



by longtime activists Kameny and Gittings; and in 1967, **Craig Rodwell** opened the first LGBTQ+ bookstore in the country. A turning point came on June 28, 1969, when patrons of the popular Stonewall Inn in New York's Greenwich Village fought back against ongoing police raids of their neighborhood bar. The riots involved a diverse array of New Yorkers, including people of color, bisexuals, and transgender patrons like **Sylvia Rivera**. In the wake of Stonewall, the homophile movement rapidly became more strident, and renamed itself the gay liberation movement. Stonewall has been commemorated since the 1970s with pride marches held every June across the United States.

The gay liberation movement of the 1970s achieved dramatic goals, including convincing the American Psychiatric Association to stop diagnosing homosexuality as a mental illness. Several states began decriminalizing same-sex behavior and many cities passed ordinances protecting LGBTQ+ people from discrimination. As the movement grew, myriad political organizations sprang up, often at odds with one another. Frustrated with the male leadership of most gay liberation groups, lesbians influenced by the feminist movement of the 1970s formed their own collectives, record labels, music festivals, newspapers, bookstores, and publishing houses, and called for lesbian rights in mainstream feminist groups like the National Organization for Women (NOW). Gatherings such as women's music concerts, bookstore readings, and lesbian festivals well beyond the United States were extraordinarily successful in organizing women to become activists, though they also felt racially discriminatory to critics, like poet and essayist **Audre Lorde**. The feminist movement against domestic violence also assisted lesbian mothers who wanted to leave heterosexual marriages while retaining custody of their children.

Religious acceptance for gay men and women of faith began to expand, as the first out gay minister was ordained by the United Church of Christ in 1972. Other gay and lesbian church and synagogue congregations soon followed. Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) formed in 1972, and offered family members greater support roles in the gay rights movement. Political action exploded through the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the Human Rights Campaign, the election of openly gay and lesbian representatives like Elaine Noble and Barney Frank, and, in 1979, the first march on Washington for gay rights.

The Daughters of Bilitis, considered to be the first lesbian rights organization founded: 1955

Miguel Braschi: 1956–1990

FDA approves first oral contraceptive as contraception: 1960

Cooper Do-nuts Riot: May 1959

“Freedom Rides”: 1961

Illinois becomes the first U.S. state to remove sodomy law: 1962

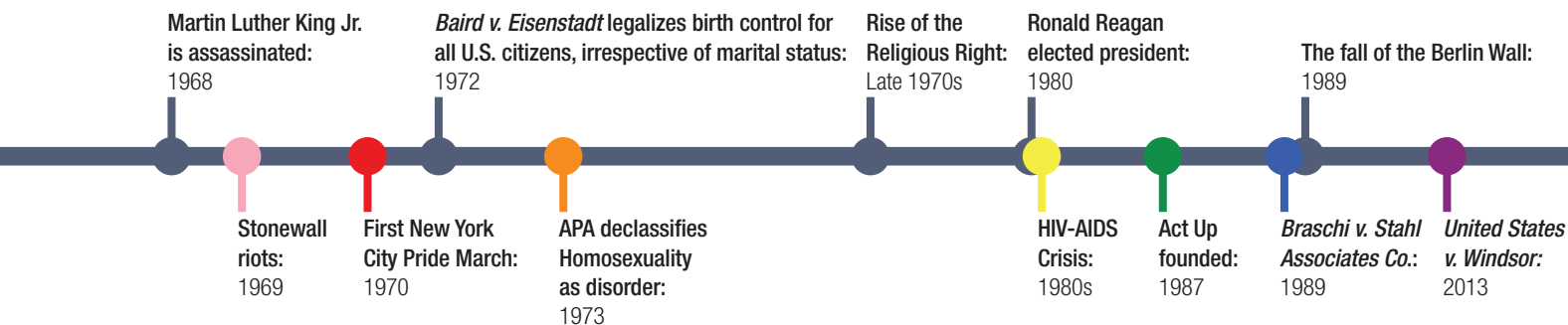
March on Washington: 1963

Compton’s Cafeteria Riot: August 1966

The increasing expansion of a global LGBTQ+ rights movement suffered a major setback during the 1980s, however, as gay male communities were decimated by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. When the virus appeared, the federal government took very little action, in part to appease right-wing religious movements that insisted that AIDS was a punishment against homosexuality. Indeed, as the virus spread its reach, sick and dying men, women, and children were often treated with indifference and hostility, whether by hospitals, city agencies, or school administrators—leaving gay communities to form their own social welfare organizations. Eventually, demands for greater compassion and funding led to renewed political coalitions between gay men and women, angry street actions from new activist groups like the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and Queer Nation, and legal challenges by the likes of **Miguel Braschi**. Enormous marches on Washington drew as many as one million gay rights supporters in 1987 and again in 1993, as LGBTQ+ Americans began demanding full rights as American citizens. As part of that effort, one wing of the gay movement called for an end to the military’s ban on gay, lesbian, and bisexual soldiers. While candidate Bill Clinton seemed inclined to eliminate that regulation, as president he established the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy which, despite its more lenient-sounding name, led to even more service members being discharged.

During the last decade of the 20th century, however, public sentiment began to shift. Millions of Americans watched as actress Ellen DeGeneres came out on national television in April 1997, heralding a new era of gay cultural visibility, including for artists like Keith Haring and **Martin Wong**. As a result of hard work by countless organizations and individuals, the 21st century heralded new legal gains for gay and lesbian couples. Same-sex civil unions were recognized under Vermont law in 2000 and Massachusetts became the first state to perform same-sex marriages in 2004. In 2003, in the *Lawrence v. Texas* decision, the Supreme Court ended state sodomy laws, making gay and lesbian Americans finally free from criminal classification.

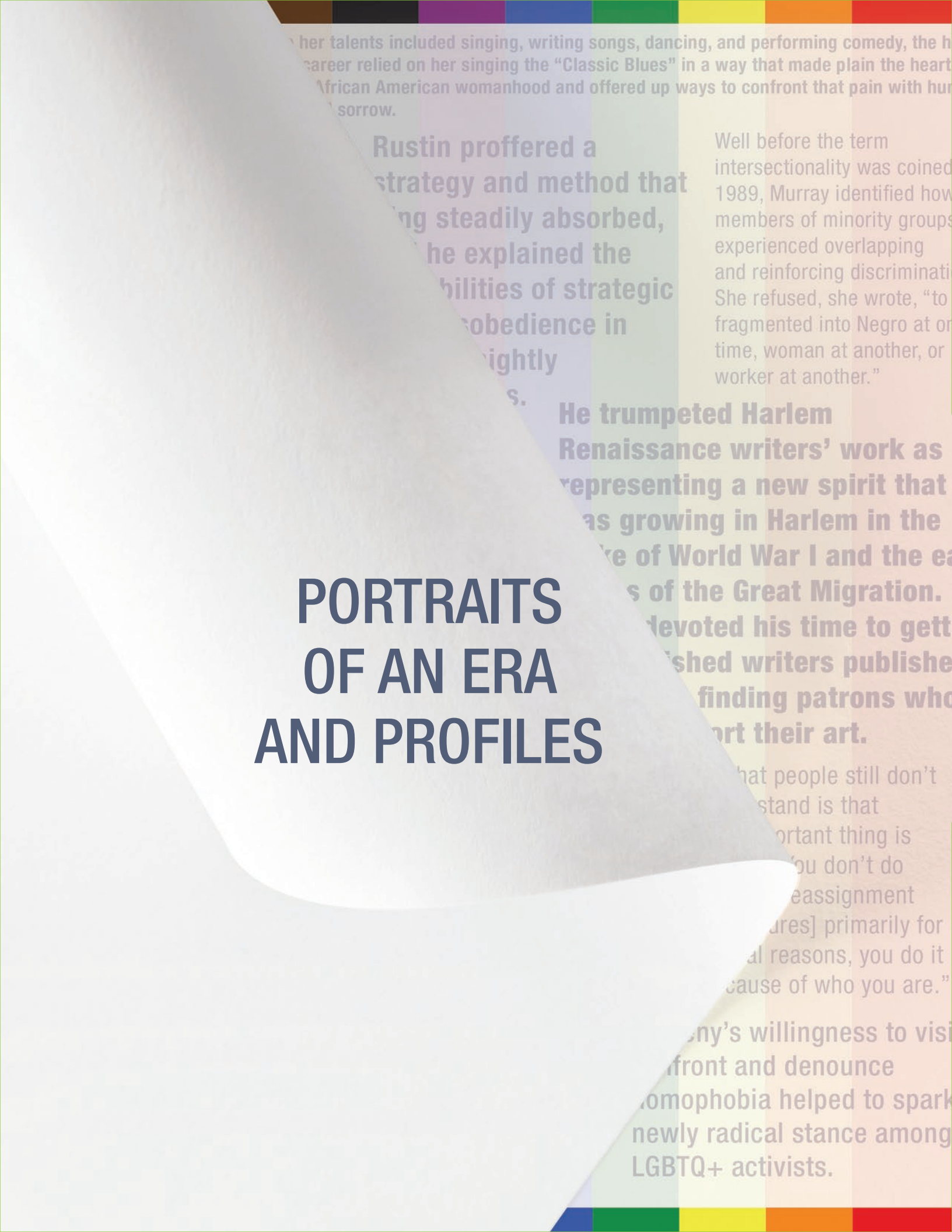
The first part of the 21st century saw new emphasis on transgender activism and the increasing usage of terminology that questioned binary gender identification. Images of transgender women became more prevalent in film and television. “Transphobia,”



“cisgender,” as well as the use of other more inclusive pronouns such as “hir” and the singular application of “they” and “them,” became more standardized.

While gains toward greater acceptance were made, there were also setbacks, even inside the larger LGBTQ+ community. For example, tensions between lesbian and transgender activists flared, in one instance a long-running Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival was boycotted by national LGBTQ+ groups over its policy of excluding transgender women. It is speculated that the decision not to continue the annual festival after its 40th anniversary was due to an unwillingness to admit transgender women into the organization or as attendees. This instance is just one of the many public, physical gathering spaces that once defined gay or lesbian activism (bars, bookstores, women’s music festivals) that had begun to vanish around that time. Indeed, while internet activism burgeoned, physical community in some places seemed to diminish, and the term queer replaced lesbian and gay identification for many younger activists.

Perhaps the complex situation in the United States was best captured by events between spring 2015 and spring 2016. On the one hand, in late spring 2015, Alison Bechdel’s lesbian-themed Broadway production *Fun Home* won several Tony awards, former Olympic champion Bruce Jenner transitioned to Caitlyn Jenner, and the Supreme Court, following up on its decision about **Edie Windsor**, recognized same-sex marriage in *Obergefell v. Hodges*. The Academy Awards celebrated films with both lesbian and transgender themes, *Carol* and *The Danish Girl*, and the Supreme Court had avowed that a lesbian family adoption in one state had to be recognized in all states. By spring 2016, however, the federal government began to rescind protections for transgender students and soldiers, and the United States saw an uptick in violence against LGBTQ+ individuals. Most dramatically, in June 2016, a gunman attacked revelers at the LGBTQ+ Pulse Club in Orlando, killing 49 mostly Latinx gay men, drag queens, and lesbians of color in the deadliest incident of violence against LGBTQ+ people in United States history. The Pulse killings underscored how LGBTQ+ activism intersects with issues of race, class, gender identity. It also made clear that how important our work is to promote tolerance and acceptance through education.



PORTRAITS OF AN ERA AND PROFILES

her talents included singing, writing songs, dancing, and performing comedy, the h
career relied on her singing the "Classic Blues" in a way that made plain the heart
African American womanhood and offered up ways to confront that pain with hur
sorrow.

Rustin proffered a
strategy and method that
ing steadily absorbed,
he explained the
ibilities of strategic
obedience in
ightly

Well before the term
intersectionality was coined
1989, Murray identified how
members of minority group
experienced overlapping
and reinforcing discriminati
She refused, she wrote, "to
fragmented into Negro at on
time, woman at another, or
worker at another."

S. He trumpeted Harlem
Renaissance writers' work as
representing a new spirit that
as growing in Harlem in the
of World War I and the ea
s of the Great Migration.
devoted his time to gett
ished writers publishe
finding patrons who
ort their art.

that people still don't
stand is that
important thing is
you don't do
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[ures] primarily for
al reasons, you do it
because of who you are."

ny's willingness to visi
front and denounce
omophobia helped to spark
newly radical stance among
LGBTQ+ activists.



Portrait of an Era: Two-Spirit People

by Sage Milo and Regan de Loggans (Mississippi Choctaw/K'iche' Maya)

The first “Portrait of an Era” focuses on the profoundly different ways that Native American nations think about and celebrate gender compared with subsequent European colonizers. Some nations and tribes are matrilineal in organization and many give space—and even honor—to people who straddle the gender divide. Beginning in 1990, many LGBTQ+ Indigenous people began using the term Two-Spirit to collectively describe the Indigenous **gender gradience**¹ among varying communities. Gender practices and sexuality are varied among the hundreds of Indigenous nations of the Americas, and many groups do not have universal practices. It is important to not romanticize or essentialize the beliefs and practices of Indigenous groups. This is the definition from the Two-Spirit Society of Denver:

“The term two spirit refers to another gender role believed to be common among most, if not all, first peoples of Turtle Island (North America), one that had a proper and accepted place within indigenous societies. This acceptance was rooted in the spiritual teachings that say all life is sacred and that the Creator must have a reason for making someone different. This gender role was not based in sexual activities or practices, but rather the sacredness that comes from being different.”²

Two-spirit is a complex role and identity that modern-day Two-Spirit individuals can use to reclaim traditions related to gender identity, sexual orientation, spiritual identity, and traditional roles.³ The term Two-Spirit (a translation of *niizh manidoowag* from Anishinaabemowin⁴) was created by the Third Annual Spiritual Gathering of Gay and Lesbian Native People in 1990 to encompass Indigenous people who do not identify as a single gender or, in present times, identify as LGBTQ+.⁵ It has since been adopted as an all-encompassing or umbrella term for the varying gender gradiences and sexualities within Indigenous communities. Gender diversity, in terms of the existence and designation of more than two genders, exists in many Indigenous cultures and can include multiple genders.

1 Gender gradience refers to the spectrum of gender roles, identities, and sexualities within Indigenous communities.

2 [“What does “Two-Spirit” Mean?”](#) InQueery, them, December 11, 2018.

3 [“Two-Spirit \(2S\),”](#) Toronto PFLAG.

4 Anishinaabemowin is the language of the Anishinaabe nation.

5 [“Two-Spirit,”](#) OUT:Saskatoon.

During the mid-19th century, George Catlin created two large collections of paintings featuring Indian portraits, genre scenes, and western landscapes. According to many, his paintings reflect a deeper understanding of the complexity and diversity of Native American nations. It is argued that Catlin was one of the few white Americans to travel extensively among the Native Americans that he painted, and his paintings reflect a humanity that few other whites sought to represent. However, Catlin presented a settler colonial view of Indigenous people. His paintings are often characterized as exploitative of his subjects, and he reflected the intolerance to cultural difference such as the practices of people who today might identify as Two-Spirit. Note that the term **b******* in this image's title is an outmoded, pejorative, and racist term.



George Catlin, *Dance to the Berdache—Saukie*, oil on card mounted on paperboard, 1861/1869, overall 18 1/2 in. x 24 7/8 in., Paul Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, 1965.16.133.

Colonial accounts of Indigenous people beginning in the 17th century record some of the gender gradience found in Indigenous communities. These accounts—while biased and denigrating of Indigenous communities—recorded the differing languages and terms used by Indigenous communities to characterize gender, sexuality, and spirituality among their people. Starting at colonial contact (and maintained contemporarily), European settlers questioned and repudiated cultures that embraced the gender gradience of Indigenous people as barbaric, uncivilized, and disreputable, going so far as to label gender variance an “abominable vice.”⁶ Europeans viewed men living as women as cowardly, assumed that the Natives did not realize they were doing anything “wrong,” and labeled Two-Spirit practices as wicked. European missionaries assumed that this “evil” would be eradicated with the spread of Christianity in the Americas. The existence of Two-Spirit people was a significant factor in Europeans’ viewing Native Americans as “savages.” They violently condemned what they defined as evil, and that which contradicted and threatened their traditional gender roles.⁷

In addition to colonial violence towards Indigenous people, and as Indigenous

communities have been forced off their ancestral land, Two-Spirit people experienced (and continue to experience) extreme violence from settlers that was and is unique to their gender role and status.⁸ Some examples of this horrific treatment include feeding Two-Spirit people to dogs, cutting of their hair, using slurs to define them, and forcing them to wear clothing that matched the colonizers’ binary gender system.⁹

Most Indigenous communities have specific terms in their own languages for the gender-variant members of their communities and the social and spiritual roles these individuals fulfill; with over 500 Native American nations, attitudes about sex and gender are very diverse. Even with the modern adoption of pan-Indian terms like Two-Spirit, not all cultures will perceive Two-Spirit people the same

6 Sophie Mayer, “This Bridge of Two Backs: Making the Two-Spirit Erotics of Community,” *Studies in American Indian Literature*, Series 2, V. 20, Spring 2008, 1–26.

7 Vicki L. Eaklor, *Queer America: A People’s GLBT History of the 20th Century* (New York: New Press, 2008), 17.

8 Rebecca Nagle, “[The Healing History Of Two-Spirit, A Term That Gives LGBTQ Natives A Voice](#),” *HuffPost*, June 30, 2018.

9 “Two-spirit People: Then and Now,” Lecture, University of New Mexico Rural and Community Behavioral Health, February 14, 2014.

way.¹⁰ For example a Cree ‘Two-Spirit’ person from the Plains area could go by *aayahkwew* (roughly translates to “neither man nor woman”) while a Mohawk ‘Two-Spirit’ person could go by *Onón:wat* (I have the pattern of two spirits inside my body).¹¹

Adoption of the term Two-Spirit by a number of Indigenous people from varying nations indicates a shift from a focus on sexuality in the colonial sense, to a concept of gender roles and gender analysis based in traditional Indigenous knowledge and reclamation.

10 “[Two-Spirit](#),” Indian Health Service: The Federal Health Program for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

11 “[Two-Spirit](#),” OUT:Saskatoon.



Thomas/Thomasine Hall

Beyond the Binary in Colonial Virginia

by Sage Milo

Focus Questions

How did political, economic, and social factors affect the development of the colonial regions?

What are American foundations for liberty and freedom?

NOTE: There are limited extant historical records about Thomasine/Thomas Hall's life. In the most cited records that do exist, Hall's trial in the *Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia: 1622–1632*, Hall uses male and female genders and pronouns as well as the names Thomasine and Thomas. This profile uses Thomasine/Thomas Hall or simply the surname Hall throughout.

Little is known about the life of **Thomas/Thomasine Hall** (c.1600–c.1660), and what we do know about this individual comes from a court record from Colonial Virginia in 1629. But that single court record opens up our historical eyes to how sex and gender were viewed and understood in the early colonial era.

Hall appeared before the court after being accused of being sexually intimate with a local maid; for an unmarried person like Hall, that would have constituted a crime in Early America. From the court testimony, however, it seems that the more pressing matter was not the charge of sexual misconduct, but the community's confusion about whether Hall was a man or a woman.

Hall's story was indeed complex, and it is uncertain, in today's language, how Hall would identify; perhaps as an intersex or nonbinary person, perhaps something else. According to various witnesses, Hall was born around 1600 near Newcastle upon Tyne in England (although the exact date of Hall's birth is unknown). Hall testified to being "Christened by the name of Thomasine and soe was called and went Clothed in woemans apparel."¹ At the age of 12, Hall was sent to live with an aunt in London, where it seems that Hall continued to present as a woman. But at the age of 22,

¹ This, and all other quotes from the court, are taken from Henry Read Mollwaine, ed. *Minutes of the Council and General court of colonial Virginia* (Richmond, VA: The Colonial Press, 1924), 194–195.

This house is part of the Jamestown Settlement, a “living history museum” located in Jamestown, Virginia. Inaugurated on the 350th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown in 1607, the Settlement includes the original James Fort, a Powhatan First Nation settlement, replicas of colonizer’s ships, and homes built in the traditional style of the first English settlers in Jamestown like the one pictured below.



Richard Cummins, *Recreated House at Jamestown Settlement*, May 11, 2014, Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, Alamy Stock Photo.

Despite identifying as Thomas, questions about Hall’s identity came up because Hall would sometimes wear women’s clothes. Asked by a Captain Basse “whether hee were man or woeman” Hall said “that hee was both man and woeman.”

one of Hall’s brothers was pressed into military service, and Hall “cut of his heire and Changed his apparell into the fashion of a man and went over as a souldier in the Isle of Ree.”² Upon returning from military service, Hall went to Plymouth and began presenting as a woman again, making lace and other needlework, which were women’s occupations at the time. But given the opportunity to sail to America, Hall “Changed againe his apparell into the habit of a man and soe came over into this Country.” It seems that upon arrival in Virginia, Hall identified as Thomas Hall, and worked as an indentured servant on a plantation.

Despite identifying as Thomas, questions about Hall’s identity came up because Hall would sometimes wear women’s clothes. Asked by a Captain Basse “whether hee were man or woeman” Hall said “that hee was both man and woeman.”

Members of Hall’s community went further than asking about Hall’s identity, though, and at different points took it upon themselves to examine Hall’s genitalia directly; in some cases, Hall may have agreed to such examination, likely in order to avoid further abuse and harm. For example, when Francis England and Roger Rodes were alone with Hall, Rodes approached Hall and said, “I will see what thou carriest,” and the two threw Hall down and stripped Hall, testifying later that the examination convinced them Hall “was a perfect man.” Captain Basse, following an examination, concluded that Hall was a woman. Several other examinations took place by officials and community members alike, arriving at differing conclusions.³

With a decision that seems decidedly modern, the judge eventually chose not to err on either side of the binary and force Hall into a single category. Instead, he ordered “that it shall bee published in the plantacion where the said Hall lyveth that hee is a man and a woeman, that all the Inhabitants there may take notice thereof and that hee shall goe Clothed in mans apparell, only his head to bee attired in a Coyfe and Croscloth [a head wrap worn by women] with an apron before him.”

2 The English were involved in two battles on the Isle of Rhe, in 1625 and 1627, which would put Hall’s year of birth at c. 1603–1605.

3 Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay/Lesbian Almanac: A New Documentary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 72.

This illustration shows unmarried women being brought to the Virginia colony, from England, as “potential wives for settlers.” In the time of Thomas/Thomasine Hall, women often had little agency in their lives, and were expected to follow their fathers’, brothers’, or husbands’ decisions. Even as they came to the New World, they were not considered settlers themselves.



Howard Pyle, 1621 arrival of fifty-seven unmarried women transported by the Virginia Company as potential wives for settlers, 1882, Colorized Illustration, Jamestown, Virginia, Lebrecht Music & Arts / Alamy Stock Photo.

It is a surprising decision. Historian Jonathan Ned Katz suggests that the judge’s decree points to a willingness in colonial Virginia not to emphasize sexual differences as vital. The judge seems comfortable in allowing Hall to be both a man and a woman, which suggests something fairly lenient about colonial culture. At the same time, the judge’s order made clear that Hall had to be recognizable by the other inhabitants; no longer would it be possible for Hall to move back and forth between identities. No further public record of Hall exists, however, so the judge’s solution may have satisfied all involved.

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 7

- **Unit 1:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 17: The First Colonies: Jamestown, Roanoke, and Plymouth
- **Unit 1:** Lesson 12: Role of Women in Early America

Grade 11

- **Unit 1:** Forming a Union: Colonial and Constitutional Foundations

Thinking About:

Thomas/Thomasine Hall

- Where might we look for evidence of how gender is defined in 2020? Where might we look for evidence of how gender was defined 400 years ago in early colonial Virginia? **M/H**
- How are our society's beliefs today about gender (e.g., expectations, jobs, roles in a community, etc.) different or similar to the beliefs in the 17th-century colonies when Thomas/Thomasine Hall was alive? **M/H**
- What are some reasons we know so little about Thomas/Thomasine Hall? What does that tell us about historical evidence from Virginia in the early 1600s? **M/H**
- At which points did Hall's presentation of gender change and why? What does this demonstrate about Hall? **M/H**
- Should one's gender identity be treated as a private matter or shared publicly (e.g., on your license, given on college applications, etc.)? Provide reasons and specific examples to support your point of view. **M/H**
- How can we interpret the judge's orders to make the court's decision regarding Hall's gender and clothing publicly known? What other information might be helpful to have when interpreting the judge's decision? **M/H**
- What might Hall's choice of clothing and identification at different points tell us about Hall's identity? **M/H**
- What is the significance of the fact that what we know about Hall comes from legal and court documents? How might the story have been different if we had other sources? **M/H**

Additional Resources

[“Intersex Brochures”](#) by *InterACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth*

[Life Story: Thomas\(ine\) Hall](#) by *Women & the American Story (WAMS) from the New-York Historical Society*

[“Changed . . . into the fashion of man”: The Politics of Sexual Difference in a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Settlement”](#) in *Journal of the History of Sexuality* by Kathleen Brown

[“Seeing Eye to ‘I’”](#) by Ren Tolson

Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia

This document is a short excerpt from the minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, written on the “8th daie of Aprill,” 1629. The neutral language used to discuss Thomas/Thomasine Hall’s life, and the fact that the discussion is presented like any other piece of business in the minutes, contribute to an overall sense of Hall as an anomaly, but not one who was necessarily persecuted in the ways a modern audience might expect.

Thomas Hall exaiied faith that hee being borne at or neere *Newcastle vppon Tyne* was as hee hath beene often tould Chriftned by the name of *Thomasine* and foe was called and went Clothed in woemans apparell there vntill the age of twelue yeares at w^{ch} age the said Exaiats mother sent him to his Aunte in *London* and there hee lyved ten[?] ye[ares] vntill *Cales Accon*, at w^{ch} tyme a brother of his being p^lffed for that service this exaiate Cut of his heire and Changed his apparell into the fashion of man and went over as a fouldier in the *Ifle of Ree* being in the habit of a man, from whence when he was retorned hee came to *Plymouth*, and there hee changed himselfe into woemans apparell and made bone lace and did other worke wth his needle, and fhortly after Shipping being ready for a voyage into this Country hee Changed againe his apparell into the habit of a man and foe came over into this Country.

Thomas Hall exaiied faith that hee being borne at or neere *Newcastle vppon Tyne* was as hee hath beene often tould Christned by the name of *Thomasine* and soe was called and went Clothed in woemans apparell there untill the age of twelve yeares at w^{ch} age the said Exaiats mother sent him to his Aunte in *London* and there hee lyved ten[?] ye[ares] untill *Cales Accon*, at w^{ch} tyme a brother of his being pressed for that service this exaiate Cut of his heire an Changed his apparell into the fashion of man and went over as a souldier in the *Isle of Ree* being in the habit of a man, from whence when he was retorned hee came to *Plymouth*, and there hee changed himselfe into woemans apparell and made bone lace and did other worke wth his needle, and shortly after Shipping being ready for a voyage into this Country hee Changed againe his apparell into the habit of a man and soe came over into this Country.

Citation: Henry Read McIlwaine, ed. *Minutes of the Council and General court of colonial Virginia* (Richmond, VA: The Colonial Press, 1924), 195.

- Based on the language used in this document, what can we infer about the understanding of gender in Colonial Virginia? **M/H**
- What can we learn about a community from records such as court minutes? **E/M/H**
- How do you think court proceedings in Colonial Virginia differed from or were similar to court proceedings in America today? **E/M/H**

Thomas/ine Hall, The Courts, Gender Norms, and Power

Kathleen Brown is a historian of gender and race in early America and the Atlantic World. This excerpt on Thomas/Thomasine Hall appears in her award winning study of colonial Virginia, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*. In this passage, Brown explains how the authority of colonial elites was based on the policing of gender and sexuality.

The plantation commanders [of colonial Virginia] and General Court Justices who examined Thomas/ine Hall were elite men who could boast only a fragile and partially legitimated authority. Charged with protecting private property and labor arrangements of masters, colonial leaders faced difficulties without precedent in England. Lacking the longstanding traditions of manorial law and elite family dominance that encouraged stability of ownership in many of England's rural counties, Virginia appeared to be a place in which both property and power were up for grabs. The military regime of Company governors and the continuing use of brutal corporal punishments during the 1620s attests to the difficulties of inculcating a proper respect for the property and authority of elite men in a colony in which everyone's claims to power had shallow roots. . . .

Most serious for the colonial government's crisis of legitimacy, however, was the absence of other institutional and informal mechanisms of social control. The lack of church courts, well-established families, extended kin networks, and dense neighborhood settlements made the policing of moral offences—including slander, drunkenness, and sexual misdemeanors—difficult. The means by which Hall made his way into the legal process illustrates the situation in the late 1620s and 1630s. No minister reported Hall's antics; no family members testified to his appearance at birth or described his metamorphoses. Instead, female neighbors, fellow servants, and Hall's masters picked up the institutional slack.

Plagued by unruly settlers and a lack of supporting institutions, Virginians's elite planters may have had the best hope of constructing a legitimate authority in the colony in their capacity as adjudicators of gender relations. During the 1620s, the colony's General Court punished cases of fornication, bastardy, and invalid marriages. After the establishment of county courts in 1634, justices of the peace took over many of these functions. Through regulations of sexual behavior and status, Virginia's judges articulated their authority in ways felt by ordinary colonists in their daily lives.

Citation: Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

-
- Why did the colonial elites in Virginia use court cases about gender relations and gender norms to assert their authority? **M/H**
 - Why did Thomas/ine Hall's gender nonconformity threaten colonial power in Virginia in the early 1620s? How might this have been different in England? **M/H**
 - What does Thomas/ine Hall's case tell us about the relationship between elite Virginians and servants such as Hall? Does gender matter in its relationship to social class in this case? If so why? If not, why not? **H**



Publick Universal Friend

Gender Nonconformity in the Revolutionary Era

by the New-York Historical Society

Focus Questions

How did political, economic, and social factors affect the development of the colonial regions?

What does it mean to be free?

What role did New York play in the development of the new nation?

What were the geographic, economic, political, ideological, and social effects of the nation's growth in the 19th century?

NOTE: Following the Publick Universal Friend's religious conversion, the Friend asked not to be referred to with gendered pronouns. To respect these wishes, this profile uses "the Publick Universal Friend," "the Friend," or simply "P.U.F" when referring to this person. Additionally, to best recognize the Friend's choices, this profile also uses the archaic spelling "Publick" rather than "Public."

The story of the **Publick Universal Friend** (1752–1819) is remarkable for several reasons. In an era and society when a person identifying or living as a gender different from the one assigned at birth was something kept hidden, and positions of power in the nation's institutions were reserved for men, the Publick Universal Friend boldly emerged as a religious leader who was publicly gender nonconforming. Powerful male preachers dominated the time in which the Friend lived, and people who were different were often seen as outsiders. Yet the religious awakening of these outsiders, and the Friend, remains a significant aspect of the movement between the First and Second Great Awakening. The Friend is a remarkable historical figure who could be described for representing queerness before queerness had a name.

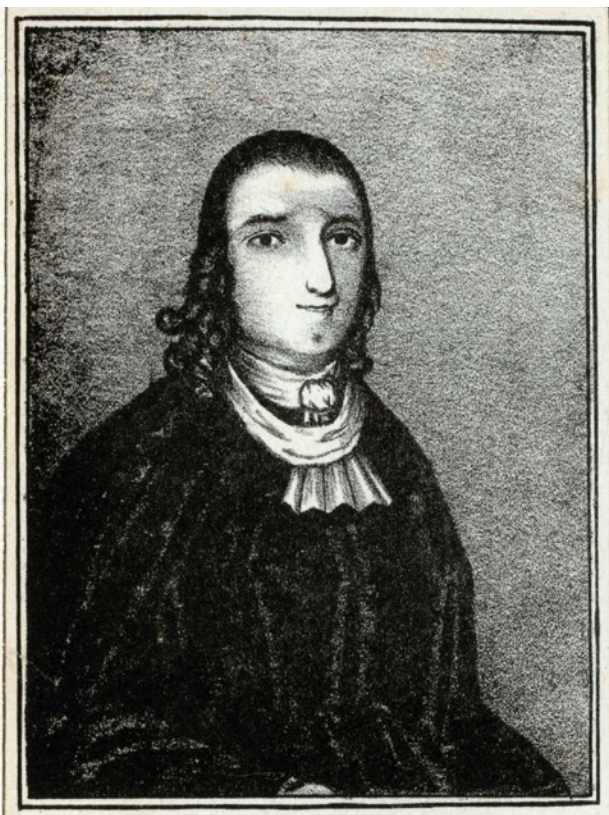
The Publick Universal Friend, named Jemima Wilkenson at birth, was born in Rhode Island on November 29, 1752 and identified as female at birth. The Friend was the eighth child in a family

of twelve children. The entire family attended the local Quaker Meeting House. The Friend's father never remarried and raised his children as a widower, following his wife's death when P.U.F. was a child.

In the Publick Universal Friend's early 20s, a religious group called the New-Light Baptists traveled through the region. The New-Light Baptists were an intensely religious group who held revival meetings with leaders who made impassioned speeches and encouraged a deep spiritual commitment to God. The Friend was drawn to the intensity of these meetings.

In 1776, the Friend succumbed to a contagious and severe fever that spread throughout the region. Awaking from the illness, the Friend stated that Jemima had died, and instead the Friend's physical body now housed the "Spirit of Life from God," a genderless entity whose mission was singularly spiritual. A preacher and a prophet, the Friend lived in God's service and no longer identified with gender, insisting on being called the Publick Universal Friend, or the Friend, and repudiating gender-based pronouns. To some, the Friend, as the embodiment of spirituality on earth, was a saint. The Friend dressed in a combination of male and female clothing, including men's vests and women's skirts, coiffed with short hair, and ringlets in the back.

Few contemporaneous images of the Friend exist. This illustration, made in 1880, was based on a posthumously published image from 1821.



Thomas Addis Emmet, [Jemima Wilkison \[i.e. Wilkinson\]](#), 1880, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, The New York Public Library.

A week after the Friend's rebirth, the Friend delivered a public sermon preaching about the spiritual awakening. The congregation at the Quaker Meeting the Friend had attended did not believe in the rebirth, rejecting the Friend as a heretic, and dismissed the Friend from the community. However, the Publick Universal Friend was not deterred and began traveling throughout the New England and Mid-Atlantic regions preaching to followers in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. The Friend first enlisted family members as followers, but the Friend's flock grew to include a diverse group, including intellectual elites and the wealthy as well as the poor and oppressed. Known as the Universal Friends, they idolized their leader, the Publick Universal Friend, as "the Messiah Returned" or "Christ in Female Form," claims that other religious groups and individuals refuted.

In November of 1784, the Publick Universal Friend published a pamphlet titled, "The Universal Friend's Advice to Those of the Same Religious Society," with guidelines and practices for followers of the group known as Universal Friends. The Universal Friends were encouraged to honor God's teachings, treat others as they

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wished to be treated, and pursue a righteous and peaceful life. The Friend integrated Christian ideas about sin with Quaker tenets of pacifism when preaching, supporting respectful relationships with Native Americans as well as presenting anti-slavery beliefs. The Friend’s non-gendered identity and insistence on a direct connection to God following a rebirth made the P.U.F. unique, but many of these teachings were similar to other religious leaders of the Second Great Awakening. The Friend’s ability to communicate with spirits differentiated the Friend and provided legitimacy in a time when a queer preacher would not otherwise have earned people’s respect.

Women were a large part of the religious revivals of the late 18th and early 19th centuries known as the Second Great Awakening. They were the primary audiences of religious meetings and were sometimes invited to preach. In fact, the Friend advocated for women’s equality. However, the Publick Universal Friend’s refusal to adhere

to traditional gender roles made the Friend an outsider in a movement that was increasingly opening to more people. The Friend’s story attracted a significant amount of both positive and negative attention. Large crowds would come out to hear the Friend’s sermons. Some attendees were supporters who sought religious salvation. Others were curious bystanders who wished to see the so-called spiritual being who was neither male nor female. There were also critics in attendance who believed the Friend was a dangerous fanatic who threatened the world with lies, unholy thoughts, and sexual immorality.

Many of the Friend’s followers believed that the Friend was a savior, like Jesus Christ. This belief led to tension with other religious groups. In 1788, the Universal Friends established the town of Jerusalem in New York, working together to fund this haven. The town was designed to be a safe place for the Universal Friends to practice their faith and fulfill God’s will. In its first few years, its population consistently increased.

Over time, the community of Jerusalem shrank. Fewer new followers moved to Jerusalem, and others chose to leave the community because of disputes over land ownership and religious beliefs. The Friend “left time” in 1819. The Friend’s followers did not refer to this as the Friend’s death because they believed the Friend died with Jemima in 1776.

Fascination with the Publick Universal Friend continued after 1819. Many historians researched the Friend’s life and tried to determine the “truth.” Posthumously, biographies were published that claimed that the Friend was leading a religious hoax. Authors pointed to the Friend’s dress and rejection of female pronouns as proof of mental instability. Most of these texts refer to the Friend as Jemima Wilkinson.

In the last decade, scholars have started to construct new narratives and analyses of the Publick Universal Friend's life. These new histories, based on recent scholarship, seek to understand how the Publick Universal Friend fits into the larger history of gender, religion, and LGBTQ+ identity in the United States.

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 4

- **Unit 4:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 1: Launching the Unit

Grade 7

- **Unit 1:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 22–23: Role of Women in Early America
- **Unit 4:** Lesson 15: The Second Great Awakening

Grade 11

- **Unit 2:** Expansion, Nationalism, and Sectionalism

Thinking About:

The Publick Universal Friend

- Why do you think the Friend asked to not be referred to with gendered pronouns? **M/H**
- What might the Friend's choice to not be referred to with gendered pronouns tell us about gender roles in the late 18th century and how gender was constructed in this era? **M/H**
- Why did the Friend attract such large audiences? What were people's different motivations for attending the Friend's sermons? **M/H**
- Why do you think people were drawn to the Friend? **E/M/H**
- Why do you think some people were threatened by the Friend? **E/M/H**
- Do you think that the events surrounding the Revolutionary War influenced the Publick Universal Friend? If so why? If not, why not? **M/H**
- In what ways did the Publick Universal Friend borrow from previous social and religious traditions? In what ways did the Friend deviate from previous traditions or influence new practices that developed during the Second Great Awakening? **M/H**
- How does the Friend's life fit into the broader history of the Second Great Awakening? **M/H**
- Were the Publick Universal Friend's religious beliefs and practices more of a cause or result of the Second Great Awakening? **H**

Additional Resources

[“History Detectives: Universal Friends”](#) by PBS

[“Jemima Wilkinson”](#) by *Encyclopædia Britannica*

[“Life Story: The Public Universal Friend \(1752–1819\)”](#) by the New-York Historical Society

The Public Universal Friend: Jemima Wilkinson and Religious Enthusiasm in Revolutionary America
by Paul B. Moyer

A Preacheress of the Eighteenth Century

David Hudson, a lawyer in upstate New York who was actively trying to smear the Society of Universal Friends, published the biography, *History of Jemima Wilkinson: A Preacheress of the Eighteenth Century*, two years after the Publick Universal Friend's death in 1819. As part of his ongoing efforts to win a court case disputing the land ownership claims of the Society of Universal Friends, David Hudson wrote the biography to tarnish the legacy of Publick Universal Friend, portray the Friend's followers as fools, and negatively affect people's view of the Society of Universal Friends. David Hudson's book is more than 200 pages in length, the first excerpt below describes Publick Universal Friend prior to the Friend's rebirth. The second passage is the book's concluding paragraph. Note that Hudson uses she/her pronouns in the biography when referring to the Publick Universal Friend.

She continued thoughtful and serious, and instead of the pursuit of pleasure, religious subjects principally engrossed her attention. She had always shown a fondness for books, and had read many of the common place productions within her reach; light and airy tales, novels, romances, newspapers and poetry, occupied chiefly her attention at home, and served as pretext for refusing to take upon herself a due share of the domestic duties of the family.

...

In contemplating the career of this extraordinary personage, there is in the mind of many, some difficulty in determining her true character. Her life, conduct and professions present a chapter of contradictions, and a series of gross absurdities. Her followers believe her to be their savior; many charitably disposed persons are of the opinion that she labored under a partial mental derangement, and was herself the victim of an unfortunate delusion by which she was deceived into the belief, that she was constituted, by divine appointment, a special messenger of grace and mercy to a lost and dying world; others there are, and by far the greater number of those that knew her, who believe her to have been canting hypocrite, pretending to a character which she knew she did not possess, and that the principal object of all her labours was to secure the means of gratifying her own appetites.—The first supposition cannot be true; the second is *possible*, and the last *probable*. But it is the business of History to record facts, and the privilege of the reader to draw his own conclusion.

Citation: David Hudson, *History of Jemima Wilkinson: A Preacheress of the Eighteenth Century; Containing an Authentic Narrative of Her Life and Character, and of the Rise, Progress and Conclusion of Her Ministry* (Geneva, New York: S. P. Hull, 1821), 17, 207-208.

-
- Who do you think was the intended audience of this biography? **E/M/H**
 - What are the examples of Hudson's bias in these excerpts against Publick Universal Friend and the Society of Universal Friends? **M/H**
 - How is Hudson attempting to reinforce traditional gender roles in this book? Why do you think he is doing this? **M/H**
 - How does Hudson use pronouns and gender-based stereotypes to attempt to discredit the Publick Universal Friend? **E/M/H**
 - What might someone assume about the Friend from the title of this biography? Based on your knowledge of the Friend, would those assumptions be accurate? **M/H**
 - Considering David Hudson's purpose for writing the biography and his bias, can this biography be used as reliable evidence about the Friend's life? How would you separate the facts about the Friend from the sensationalized writing and conjecture presented in Hudson's book? **H**

Historical Marker of the Friend's Home

This marker stands at the site of the Publick Universal Friend's house, built c. 1790 in Jerusalem, New York. The Friend moved to the Finger Lakes Region of Upstate New York from Rhode Island following the Friend's rebirth. In addition to living in upstate New York, the P.U.F. established a religious community called the Society of Universal Friends. Upstate New York was the center of the religious revival movement known as the Second Great Awakening.

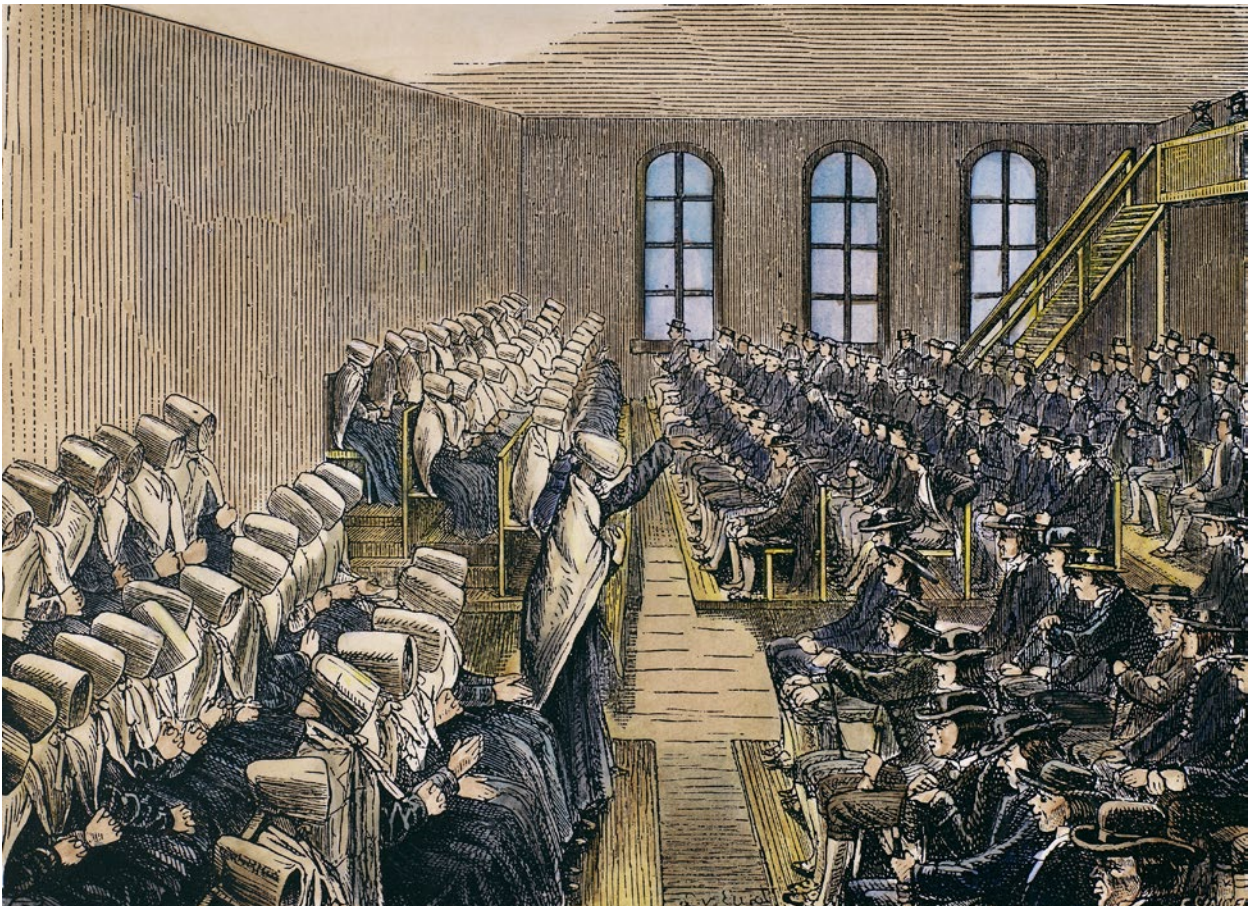


Citation: Lisa M. Harper, *Historical Marker of the Friends Home*, 2020, Yates County History Center.

- What conclusions can you draw based on this sign about the Friend's importance in the region where the Society of Universal Friends was established? **E/M/H**
- What information would you include on a New York State Historical Marker about the Publick Universal Friend? **M/H**

Society of Friends Meeting House

Quakers (also known as Friends) are a Protestant Christian denomination. The house of worship for Quakers is the Friends Meeting House. This undated colorized illustration depicts the characteristics of Quaker religious practice in the meeting that challenged the practices of other denominations, including their insistence on equality for women, the right to speak in Meeting for Worship, and to preach the Gospel. A minister did not lead a Meeting House. Friends believe each human being can access God directly through the light within or “that of God in every one.” The Publick Universal Friend was raised in a Quaker family before founding the Society of Universal Friends.



Citation: Ernst von Hesse Wartegg, *Philadelphia: Quäkerkirche*, colorized illustration of wood engraving, Nord-Amerika, seine Stadt und Naturwunder, das Land und seine Bewohner in Schilderung, Leipzig, Sarin Images/Granger.

- What can we learn about Quaker meetings from this illustration? **E/M**
- Based on this image, how would the Publick Universal Friend’s experiences attending the local Quaker Meeting House have differed from the experiences of young people practicing other religions common in the Northeast at the time? **H**
- How might the characteristics of a Quaker meeting have influenced the Friends’ guidelines and practices for the meetings of the Society of Universal Friends? **M/H**



Walt Whitman

Celebrating New York and the “Dear Love of Comrades”

by Bonnie Smith

Focus Questions

What were the geographic, economic, political, ideological, and social effects of the nation’s growth in the 19th century?

How did the efforts of individuals and groups influence the causes and effects of the Civil War?

What were the successes and challenges of reuniting the nation following the Civil War?

Above all else, **Walt Whitman** (1819–1892), the renowned American poet, was an enthusiast. He celebrated the United States and its rapid transformation across the 19th century, as it industrialized and expanded and filled with new residents. He was especially captivated by the hustle and bustle of New York and its rising tide of craftsmen and laborers, new immigrants, and longtime residents. In many ways, the poems he penned were songs about the expansive embrace the country was offering. And at the heart of that embrace, for Whitman, was the great love that could exist between men—a love that at times meant the love of comrades embarked on a shared mission and, at other times, that of lovers.

Whitman was born in West Hills, Long Island, in 1819, but his family moved to Brooklyn when he was four. His parents often struggled to make ends meet. Because of alcoholism, his father was an unsteady breadwinner for his family of nine children. Whitman left school at age 11 to help support the family, serving first as an office boy to lawyers and then with printers. He continued in printing, interspersed that with teaching and journalism, all the while writing poetry.

In Brooklyn, where the excitement of urbanization struck his imagination, he made friends with dockers, carters, cabbies, cooks, and every other kind of worker. Some of these people provided topics for essays and other items. Whitman included these ideas in the newspapers he worked for and even in the one that he started and briefly ran by himself. When he needed funds he

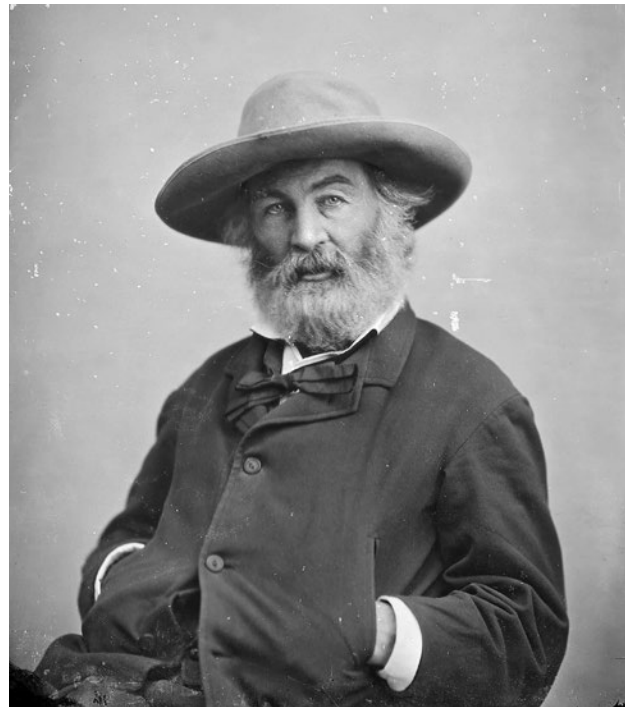
taught school, though it was hardly his favorite occupation. He also wrote a novel urging temperance (rejection of alcoholic drinks)—given the problems stemming from his father and brother’s alcoholism. Despite this, he was known among many in polite society as being rowdy and rough.

Whitman loved the city streets and all the people he encountered on them. They ultimately shaped and informed his celebrated poetry. He rejoiced in ordinary things and ordinary people, and he believed in humanity’s fundamental equality. His enthusiasm for the personal and the commonplace shaped his verse—especially *Leaves of Grass*, which he first published in 1855 and continued to refine for decades. He changed words, added new items, and reworked his message. In the 1860 edition, Whitman began including poems that celebrated affection between men. In one piece, he described a day filled with impatience but how his mood suddenly shifted “when I thought how my dear friend my lover was on his way coming, O then I was happy.”

Whitman praised American democracy and attributed its strength to the bonds of affection and friendship, what he called “the manly love of comrades.” For him, democracy and the “love of comrades” were inseparable, and he championed the lowest as equal to the highest. As he wrote in *Leaves of Grass*:

**I pick out some low person for my dearest friend,
He shall be lawless, rude, illiterate—he shall be one condemned by others for deeds done;
I will play a part no longer—Why should I exile myself from my companions?
O you shunned persons! I at least do not shun you,
I come forthwith in your midst—I will be your poet,
I will be more to you than to any of the rest.**

Walt Whitman believed his poetry should be of and for the common man. These were the men he loved, his “comerados,” he called them. During the Civil War his brother was wounded, and Whitman searched army hospitals looking for him. He was so moved by the devastation and devotion he saw among the soldiers, he spent the next three years volunteering as a war nurse. This portrait was taken during that period. The portrait’s photographer, Mathew Brady, is perhaps the most famous artist to document the Civil War.



Mathew Brady, [Walt Whitman](#), c. 1860–c. 1865, Local Identifier 111-B-1672, Mathew Brady Photographs of Civil War-Era Personalities and Scenes, Record Group 111: Records of the Office of the Chief Signal Officer, National Archives at College Park, MD, 525875.

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In England, Edward Carpenter, a contemporary gay intellectual writer and activist, celebrated that “Whitman was before all a lover of the male.” But Carpenter also felt that he saw in *Leaves of Grass* “the meeting ground of the human race. There every nationality, every creed, every trade, every atom of humanity is represented, and all are fused in the great loving soul that overbroods them.”¹

During the Civil War, Whitman left Brooklyn to locate his brother George, who had been wounded at the Battle of Fredericksburg. Arriving in Washington, he searched army hospitals unsuccessfully until he traveled further to Virginia, where George was recuperating. The condition of the wounded soldiers he met so moved Whitman that he settled in Washington for the next three years tending hospitalized soldiers, writing letters

for them, running errands, and bringing them welcome treats. “I believe no men ever loved each other,” he later wrote, “as I and some of these poor wounded, sick, and dying men love each other.” From this experience came his poems about soldiers in *Drum Taps* and *Sequel to Drum Taps*, with the latter including his heartbreaking elegies on the death of Abraham Lincoln in “O Captain! My Captain!” and “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d.” Although Whitman had never met Lincoln, he came to love and revere him during his time in Washington.

The United States government had given Whitman a job so that in his spare time he could perform his charity work for soldiers and their families. Yet he temporarily lost that job because of the controversy his poetry aroused. For one thing, it did not use elegant language and spoke of the ordinary United States citizen and worker. Even more, the sensual nature of his writing inspired criticism, with its descriptions of muscular youths and lithe girls’ bodies, its celebrations of swimming naked, and amorous thoughts.

Nonetheless, Whitman’s sensual candor made him an inspiration to gay intellectuals around the world. As he grew older and suffered a stroke, Whitman lived with his brother and sister-in-law in Camden, New Jersey, where he was visited by Oscar Wilde, Edward Carpenter, and other luminaries of the gay avant-garde. Whitman wrote after that Wilde “had the good sense to take a great fancy to me.” Years later, Wilde told a friend, “the kiss of Walt Whitman is still on my lips.” Increasingly Whitman became a hero to sex reformers; today almost all see him as launching modernity—including sexual modernity—and a poet of true democracy.²

1 Edward Carpenter, *Days with Walt Whitman* (London: George Allen, 1906) 58.

2 It should be noted that Walt Whitman’s beliefs and writing were not universally democratic or progressive. His collected works include writing that can only be described as racist and in support of the removal, if not genocide, of Native Americans.

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 7

- **Unit 5:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 14:
Key Leaders

Grade 11

- **Unit 2:** Expansion, Nationalism, and Sectionalism

Grade 8

- **Unit 1:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 7:
Lincoln's Legacy

Thinking About:

Walt Whitman

- How did Whitman weather the economic insecurities of his day? **M/H**
- What evidence exists in Whitman's writing about his sexuality? What do we know? **M/H**
- How does the period of time in which Whitman lived shape our understanding of his sexuality? **H**
- How does a society determine that something is "controversial?" Think of ideas, images, topics that would have been controversial in Whitman's day but are less so now. What shifts (political, social, and economic) have occurred over time that help explain these differences? **H**
- What events, individuals, and ideas influenced Whitman's poetry? What role did his own identity play in his work? **M/H**
- How did Whitman's experiences during the Civil War shape his world view and writing? **M/H**
- Why is it important to discuss Whitman as a gay or bisexual man in America? **H**

Additional Resources

Cambridge Companion to Walt Whitman edited by Ezra Greenspan

Walt Whitman's Mystical Ethics of Comradeship, Homosexuality and the Marginality of Friendship at the Crossroads of Modernity by Juan A. Herrero-Brasas

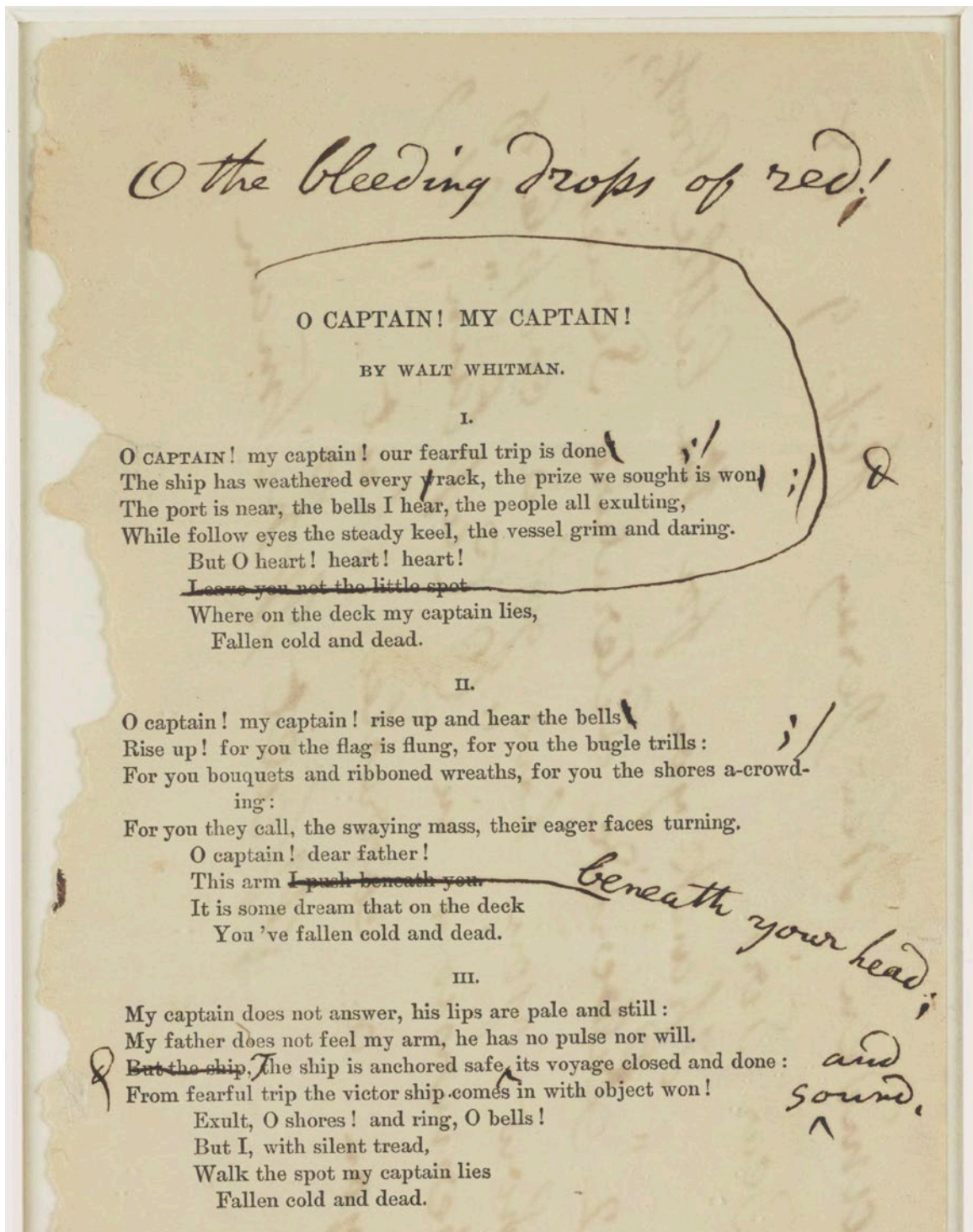
Walt Whitman: A Life by Justin Kaplan

Walt Whitman by David D. Reynolds

Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography by David D. Reynolds

O Captain! My Captain!

Walt Whitman wrote this verse in 1865 at the time of Lincoln's assassination. He modified it lightly over the years, as it became a poem memorized and recited by school children and by adults. Lincoln's death afforded him another opportunity for the comfortable expression of manly love. This early version of the poem "O Captain! My Captain!" includes Whitman's notes. A transcription of the poem follows the image.



O Captain! My Captain! *continued*:

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
 But O heart! heart! heart!
 O the bleeding drops of red,
 Where on the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
 Here Captain! dear father!
 This arm beneath your head!
 It is some dream that on the deck,
 You've fallen cold and dead.

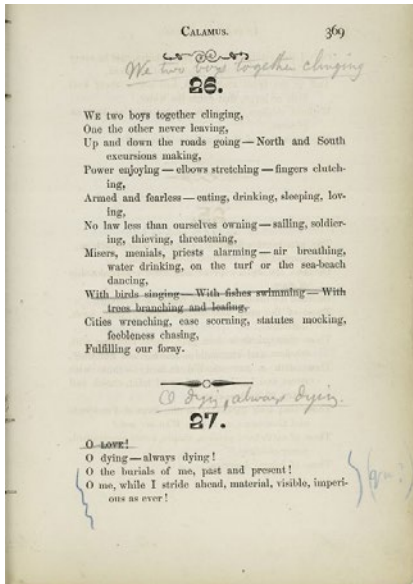
My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;
 Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
 But I with mournful tread,
 Walk the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

Citation: Walt Whitman, "[*O Captain! My Captain!*](#)" *printed copy with corrections*, 1888, Walt Whitman Papers: Literary file; Poetry; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, mss77909, box 1.

- What is the tone of this poem? **M/H**
 - Why does Whitman not mention Abraham Lincoln's name in the poem? **M/H**
 - What is the meaning of calling Lincoln "my captain"? **M/H**
 - Whitman is known for innovation in poetry and for being modern. What aspects of this poem would have been considered innovative at the time? How innovative does this poem seem to you? **H**
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We Two Boys Together Clinging

Walt Whitman included this poem in the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* as well. Even though the poem has been read as homoerotic, others have interpreted it as describing the fraternity of men, perhaps of soldiers. This early version of the poem “*We two boys together clinging*” includes Whitman’s notes. A transcription of the poem follows the image.



**We two boys together clinging,
One the other never leaving,
Up and down the roads going—North and South
excursions making,
Power enjoying—elbows stretching—fingers clutch-
ing,
Armed and fearless—eating, drinking, sleeping, lov-
ing.
No law less than ourselves owning—sailing, soldier-
ing, thieving, threatening,
Misers, menials, priests alarming—air breathing,
water drinking, on the turf or the sea-beach
dancing,
With birds singing—With fishes swimming—With
Trees branching and leafing,
Cities wrenching, ease scorning, statutes mocking,
feebleness chasing,
Fulfilling our foray.**

Citation: Walt Whitman, “*We two boys together clinging*, *Leaves of Grass*,” 1860-1861, Rare Book Division, The New York Public Library.

- Although the poet speaks of “boys,” is this a poem about children? **H**
- What kinds of activities do they engage in? What kind of experience do they seem to be having? **H**
- Is there anything about this poem that may have been deemed controversial during Whitman’s time? Would it be interpreted the same way today? **H**
- How does this poem compare to or relate to “O Captain! My Captain!”? **H**

Walt Whitman Letter to William O'Connor

Walt Whitman wrote this letter to William D. O'Connor in September of 1866. O'Connor, a United States government official who had also been a poet and editor, publicized and praised Whitman's poetry. Whitman lived with O'Connor and his wife for five months when he first moved to Washington. When Whitman was fired from his government job by an official who saw his poetry as obscene, O'Connor helped get him a new position. In this letter Whitman explains the aims of his poetry.

I assume that Poetry in America needs to be entirely recreated. On examining with anything like deep analysis what now prevails in the United States, the whole mass of current poetical works, long and short, consists either of the poetry of an elegantly weak sentimentalism, at bottom nothing but maudlin puerilities, more or less musical in verbiage, arising out of a life of depression and enervation, and producing depression and enervation as their result;—or else that class of poetry, plays, &c, of which the foundation is feudalism, with its ideas of lords and ladies, its imported standards of gentility, and the manners of European high-life-below-stairs in every line and verse. Such to me is the existing condition of poetry; such the product of the poets and poems of the time. To me, nothing can be more utterly contemptible. Instead of mighty and vital breezes, proportionate to our continent, with its powerful races of men, its tremendous historic events, its great oceans, its mountains and its illimitable prairies, I find a few little silly fans languidly moved by shrunken fingers. [My ambition is] to give something to our literature which will be our own; with neither foreign spirit, nor imagery nor form, but adapted to our case, grown out of our associations, boldly portraying the West, strengthening and intensifying the national soul, and finding the entire fountains of its birth and growth in our own country.

Citation: Walt Whitman, "Letter to William O'Connor," Yale Walt Whitman Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library; The transcription presented here is derived from *Walt Whitman, The Correspondence*, ed. Edwin Haviland Miller (New York: New York University Press, 1961-1977), 1:287-288.

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- What is Walt Whitman trying to convey about the intent of his writing in this letter to William O'Connor? **M/H**
 - What does Whitman see as the "existing condition" of poetry in the United States? According to this letter, what is Whitman's vision for how he would like to influence literature in the United States to better represent the nation? **M/H**
 - What should be the relationship of American culture to that of the European traditions? **M/H**
 - Why is it important to discuss Whitman's nationalism alongside his identity as a queer person in the 19th century? **M/H**



Albert Cashier

The Transgender Man Who Fought in the Civil War

by Edward T. O'Donnell

Focus Questions

How did the efforts of individuals and groups influence the causes and effects of the Civil War?

What are a nation's responsibilities to its citizens after major conflict?

What were the successes and challenges of reuniting the nation following the Civil War?

NOTE: The term transgender did not exist in Albert Cashier's lifetime. He would not have referred to himself in this way, nor would his contemporaries. Cashier did live and identify as male, though he was assigned female at birth. The term transgender is used in this profile with its current definition and understanding, rather than to denote historical identification or self-identification. This profile uses the pronouns he, him, and his to reflect how Cashier lived and identified for the majority of his life.

In recent years, historians have uncovered many stories about women who posed as men in order to serve in past American wars. Deborah Sampson, for example, fought in the Continental Army during the American Revolution under the name of Timothy Thayer, and Sarah Emma Edmonds served in the Union Army during the Civil War, going by the name Frank Thompson. In these cases, Sampson and Edmonds were women who posed as men in order to fight. Jennie Hodgers, aka **Albert Cashier** (1843–1915), a person who, by all accounts, was what we would term **transgender** today, presents a different perspective on this phenomenon.

Albert Cashier was born Jennie Hodgers in Clogherhead, Ireland, in 1843. How he came to America is not clear. One account said he stowed away on a ship; another claimed that he immigrated as a young child with his family to upstate New York. One thing is clear—he grew up in poverty, never learning to read or write. He was eighteen years old and living in Illinois as a woman when the Civil War broke out in April 1861.

Fifteen months later, in July 1862, President Abraham Lincoln issued a call for an additional 300,000 volunteers for the Union Army. Jennie Hodggers wanted to serve and, after hearing from several young men that the medical examination for new recruits consisted of little more than a quick once-over in full clothing, decided to try his luck. On August 6, 1862, Hodggers walked into the local recruiting office and enlisted as Albert D. J. Cashier. With the stroke of a pen, he became Albert D. J. Cashier, Private First Class, Company G, 95th Illinois Infantry Volunteers.

After weeks of training, Albert Cashier left Illinois with his regiment on November 4, bound for Kentucky to serve under the command of Major Ulysses S. Grant. For the next three years Cashier and the 95th would see some of the fiercest fighting of the war, including the siege of Vicksburg, the Red River Campaign, and the Battle of Guntown in Mississippi. In all, Albert Cashier fought in more than 40 battles and earned a reputation for bravery and tenacity under fire. On one occasion, at the siege of Vicksburg, he was briefly captured, but escaped after grabbing a guard's rifle and knocking him senseless.

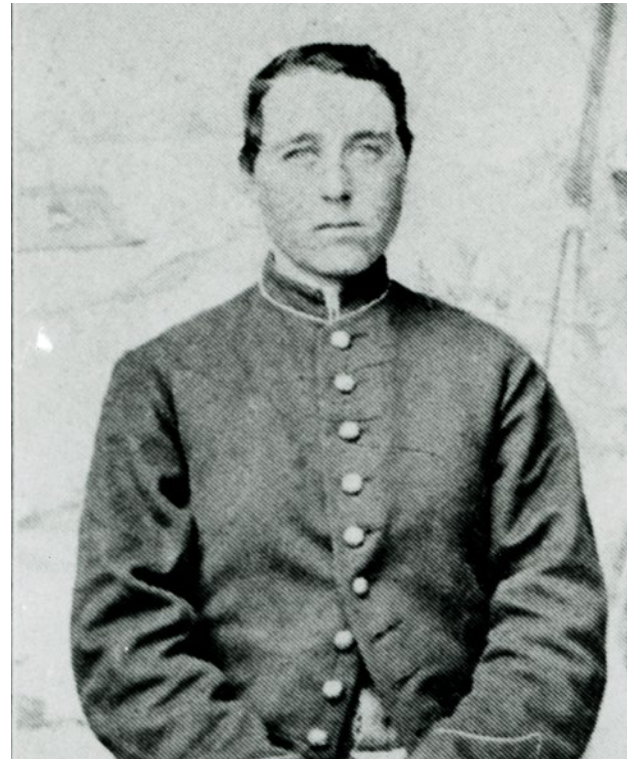
Remarkably, Cashier escaped the war without serious injury, a fact that allowed him to keep his identity a secret. Decades later, after his sex assigned at birth was revealed, fellow soldiers were shocked. Said one of them, "I never suspected at any time all through the service that Cashier was a woman." Another attested that Cashier, "seemed to be able to do as much work as anyone in the Company."

In 1865, four months after Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered and the Civil War came to a close, the 95th Illinois was mustered out of service. Cashier and his fellow soldiers returned to Illinois, where they were honored with a huge public rally. Then they returned to civilian life.

Albert Cashier remained Albert Cashier, leaving behind for good the female identity of Jennie Hodggers. He cast about for a while as a farmhand before taking a job as a dry goods clerk in the town of Sanemin, Illinois. He stayed there for the next forty years, working in many capacities (including janitor and lamplighter), and living in a small house he bought.

Every year on Decoration Day, the precursor to our Memorial Day, he donned his Union Army uniform and marched in the local parade. And every year on Election Day, Albert Cashier voted—something that Jennie Hodggers and all other American women were prohibited from doing in that period.

This 1864 photograph shows Albert Cashier in the uniform of the 95th Illinois Regiment, the unit that he fought with during the Civil War. By enlisting under the name Albert D. J. Cashier, he was able to establish himself as a man in the new world, leaving behind his birth name and gender. At the time, someone judged to be female would not have been allowed to fight as a soldier, to vote in peace time, or to have many of the subsequent jobs Cashier held.



Albert D. J. Cashier, of Company G, 95th Illinois Regiment, November 1864, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

Jennie Hodgers wanted to serve and, after hearing from several young men that the medical examination for new recruits consisted of little more than a quick once-over in full clothing, decided to try his luck. On August 6, 1862, Hodgers walked into the local recruiting office and enlisted as Albert D. J. Cashier.

Albert Cashier kept secret his biological sex until 1911. While working as a groundskeeper on an estate, he was struck by a car in the driveway and suffered a broken leg. During the subsequent medical examination, the doctor discovered that Albert was biologically a woman. Cashier pleaded with him not to reveal his identity and the doctor agreed. But Cashier's injured leg and advanced age meant he could no longer work. As a consequence, the doctor made arrangements for him to be admitted to the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home in Quincy, Illinois — a retirement home for ex-military personnel.

The staff at the home accepted Cashier as a man, but eventually discovered his secret. In 1914, the state of Illinois, apparently believing Cashier delusional for claiming to be Private Albert D. J. Cashier, sent him to the Watertown State Hospital for the Insane. Soon the federal government's Pension Bureau was alerted to the strange case. It launched an investigation to see if Cashier was entitled to the veteran's pension he'd been receiving since 1890. After careful

review of the evidence, and interviews with dozens of Cashier's fellow soldiers in the 95th, the Bureau decided that "Hodgers" and Cashier were one and the same and it maintained the pension.

Albert Cashier lived 18 months at the Watertown State Hospital where, unfortunately, the staff insisted he wear women's clothing. He died on October 10, 1915. He was given a funeral with full military honors and was buried beneath a marker that read: Albert D. J. Cashier, Co. G, 95th Ill. Inf. More than six decades later, in 1977, the local townspeople of Saunemin, Illinois, added another larger headstone stone in Sunny Slope Cemetery that bore witness to his extraordinary story:

Albert D. J. Cashier
Co. G, 95 Inf. Civil War
Born
Jennie Hodgers
In Clogher Head, Ireland
1843–1915

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 8

- **Unit 1:** Launching the Unit: Gallery Walk Activity
- **Unit 1:** Unit Pre-Assessment

Grade 11

- **Unit 2:** Expansion, Nationalism, and Sectionalism

Thinking About:

Albert Cashier

- How were gender roles defined in mid-19th century America? **M/H**
- Why do you think there were multiple women who dressed as men to fight in American wars? **E/M/H**
- What was Cashier's reputation in the Civil War? What does this reveal about gender equality? **E/M/H**
- What were some liberties afforded to Cashier as a man that he would not have enjoyed as a woman? **M/H**
- How was Cashier treated once his sex assigned at birth was discovered? How do the differences in his treatment, by different groups and over time, reveal social conflict around gender identity? **M/H**
- What connections can be drawn to the United States military today? How does the military embody the tension between tradition and progress? Provide specific examples to support your response. **M/H**

Additional Resources

[“Civil War Biography: Albert Cashier aka Jennie Hodgers”](#) by *American Battlefield Trust*

[“Jennie Hodgers, aka Private Albert Cashier”](#) by the *National Park Service*

[“In Civil War, Woman Fought Like A Man For Freedom”](#) by Linda Paul

Deposition D in the Case of Albert D. J. Cashier

Much of what is known about the Albert D.J. Cashier's experience in the Civil War is based on the information gathered from files created when Albert Cashier applied for his Union pension. The pension file has several depositions, or sworn statements, taken from different individuals who knew him. Cashier, who was nearing the end of his life, also provided a deposition at this time. The images below are the original deposition as it appears in the National Archives; the second page of this document is the transcription of the deposition along with its citation.

3-289

DEPOSITION

Case of Albert D. J. Cashier, No. 1001132

On this 20th day of June, 1914, at
Pontiac, county of Livingston
State of Illinois, before me, Chas. F. Cain
a Special Examiner of the Bureau of Pensions, personally appeared
Nettie Rose, who, being by me first duly sworn to
answer truly all interrogatories propounded to her during this special
examination of aforesaid claim for pension, deposes and says:

1 I am 56. Housekeeper. P. O. 828 W. Washington St., above.
2 I have known Albert Cashier some 44 or 45 years. That is about the
3 time he came to my father's place in the country. He made our home
4 his home, practically, until he went to the Soldiers' Home at
5 Quincy, Illinois. He or she was living in Saunemin, Illinois,
6 when his pension was granted. He was living in a little house near
7 us and would often come to our house for his meals just as he
8 had been in the habit of doing when he lived with us.
9 The first I knew of the sex of Albert being that of female was when
10 he had his leg broken and I went out to nurse him.
11 I cannot say to a certainty whether this was three or four years
12 ago this fall. In the course of my nursing Albert I discovered
13 that the sex was that of a female.
14 He asked me then not to tell any one that he was a woman, that he
15 did not want every one to know it. He told me while he was sick
16 that the reason he assumed the male garb was that he and another man
17 were in love. That both enlisted at the same time; that the lover
18 was wounded and died. That before his death he asked Alberto prom-
19 ise that he would never again wear women's clothes, and he said he
20 had not. He always talked to me like Cashier was his father's
21 name. He told me he was born in Ireland, but I have forgotten the
22 name of the place. Albert said one that his parents were buried
23 at Kankakee, and that he sent money there every year to have their
24 graves decorated and that he sent the money through the post-office.
25 My brother was postmaster at Saunemin for years and when I told him
26 about what Albert said he told me there was nothing to it, that Albert
27 never sent any money through that office.

Page 17 Deposition D

Page 18

28 I did not say anything to Albert about it for he would stretch the
29 truth sometimes. He was always queer and some thought he was
30 half witted. We never had any doubts about him having been in the
31 army for I can remember him talking about being in the army and
32 having carried the flag from the time he came to our house.
33 I visited Albert in the Soldiers' Home at Quincy. I know he is
34 the same Albert Cashier whom I nurse dand who drew a pension.
35 I have no interest in this case. I have heard this statement
36 read, understood questions, answers correctly recorded.
37 Nettie Rose
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Deponent.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 20th day of June
1914, and I certify that the contents were fully made known to deponent
before signing.

Chas. F. Cain
Special Examiner.

Deposition D in the Case of Albert D.J.Cashier *continued*:

Deposition D

Case of Albert D. J. Cashier, No. 1001132

On this 20th day of June, 1914, at Pontiac, county of Livingston. State of Illinois, before me, Chas. F. Cain a Special Examiner of the Bureau of Pensions, personally appeared Nettie Rose, who, being by me first duly sworn to answer truly all interrogatories propounded to her during this special examination of aforesaid claim for pension, deposes and says:

I am 56. Housekeeper. P. O. 828 Washington St., above. I have known Albert Cashier some 44 or 45 years. That is about the time he came to my father's place in the country. He made our home his home, practically, until he went to the Soldiers' Home at Quincy, Illinois. He or she was living in Saunemin, Illinois, when his pension was granted. He was living in a little house near us and would often come to our house for his meals just as he had been in the habit of doing when he lived with us.

The first I knew of the sex of Albert being that of female was [sic] when he had his leg broken and I went out to nurse him.

I cannot say to a certainty whether this was three or four years ago this fall. In the course of my nursing Albert I discovered that the sex was that of a female.

He asked me then not to tell any one that he was a woman, that he did not want every one to know it. He told me while he was sick that the reason he assumed the male garb was that he and another man were in love. That both enlisted at the same time; that the lover was wounded and died. That before his death he asked Albert to promise that he would never again wear women's clothes, and he said he had not. He always talked to me like Cashier was his father's name. He told me he was born in Ireland, but I have forgotten the name of the place. Albert said one that his parents were buried at Kankakee, and that he sent money there every year to have their graves decorated and that he sent the money through the post-office. My brother was postmaster at Saunemin for years and when I told him about what Albert said he told me there was nothing to it, that, Albert never sent any money through that office.

I did not say anything to Albert about it for he would stretch the truth sometimes. He was always queer and some thought he was half witted. We never had any doubts about him having been in the army for I can remember him talking about being in the army and having carried the flag from the time he came to our house. I visited Albert in the Soldiers' Home at Quincy. I know he is the same Albert Cashier whom I nurse dand [sic] who drew a pension. I have no interest in this case. I have heard this statement read, understood questions, answers correctly recorded.

Mrs. Nettie Rose

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 20th day of June 1914, and I certify that the contents were fully made known to deponent before signing.

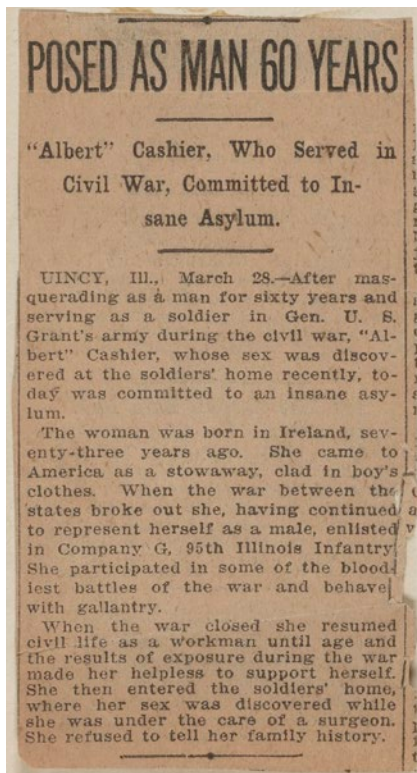
Chas. F. Cain

Citation: [Deposition D, Case of Albert D. J. Cashier](#), No. 1001132, Local Identifier: XC-2573248, Approved Pension File for Private Albert D. J. Cashier, Company G, 95th Illinois Infantry Regiment; Case Files of Pension Applications Based on Service Completed in the Years 1817 to Approximately 1903; Record Group 15:Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs; ARC Identifier 36605129.

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- Summarize the main idea of this deposition from Albert Cashier's housekeeper, Nettie Rose. **M/H**
 - Why did Rose use the adjective "queer" and others use the term "half witted" to describe Albert Cashier? **M/H**
 - What evidence does Rose provide to confirm that Cashier served in the army? **E/M/H**
 - What does the deposition show us about views of gender identity during the early 20th century? **M/H**

Posed as Man 60 Years

The Washington Star was a daily newspaper published in Washington D.C. For much of the time that the *Star* was published, it was the newspaper of record for the Nation's Capital. The short article does not mention that when Cashier was committed to the Watertown [Illinois] State Hospital for the Insane, his Union Army Uniform was taken from his possession and he was forced to wear women's clothing.



POSED AS MAN 60 YEARS

“Albert” Cashier, Who Served in Civil War,
Committed to Insane Asylum

[Q]UINCY, Ill., March 28.—After masquerading as a man for sixty years and serving as a soldier in Gen. U. S. Grant's army during the civil war, “Albert” Cashier, whose sex was discovered at the soldiers' home recently, today was committed to an insane asylum.

The woman was born in Ireland, seventy-three years ago. She came to America as a stowaway, clad in boy's clothes. When the war between the states broke out she, having continued to represent herself as a male, enlisted in Company G, 95th Illinois Infantry. She participated in some of the bloodiest battles of the war and behav[e]d with gallantry.

When the war closed she resumed civil life as a workman until age and the results of exposure during the war made her helpless to support herself. She then entered the soldiers' home, where her sex was discovered while she was under the care of a surgeon. She refused to tell her family history.

Citation: “Posed as Man 60 Years” *Washington Sunday Star*, March 29, 1914, Case of Albert D. J. Cashier, No. 1001132, Local Identifier: XC-2573248, Approved Pension File for Private Albert D. J. Cashier, Company G, 95th Illinois Infantry Regiment; Case Files of Pension Applications Based on Service Completed in the Years 1817 to Approximately 1903; Record Group 15:Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs; ARC Identifier 36605129.

- What does the article show us about views of gender identity during the early 20th century? **M/H**
- Why might Cashier's story have been significant enough to report in a newspaper? **E/M/H**
- How are these two documents different? **E/M/H**



Portrait of an Era: Boston Marriages

19th Century Acceptance of Female Intimacy

by Bonnie Smith

The second “Portrait of an Era” leaps forward to the 19th century and the way elite American culture accepted great intimacy between men and between women. The focus here is on **Boston Marriages**, the lifelong relationships and domestic arrangements established by many middle-class women who chose to live their lives with other women. Although such arrangements were later scorned by sexologists, for many decades such women were among the trailblazers of American social and political organizing, leading campaigns for women’s suffrage and other Progressive Era reforms.

Across the 19th century, elite women’s intimate relationships with other women were celebrated in American culture. By the end of the century, such relationships were often labeled **Boston marriages**. The practice arose in the 19th century as elite and some middle-class women gained economic independence, often through work. As these so-called “New Women” began to emancipate themselves from their families, some also resisted the insistence that they marry a man. Historian Lillian Faderman defined Boston marriages as “committed relationships between two women who, having gone to college and then found decent-paying jobs, could set up a household together rather than marry men out of economic need.”

Boston marriages were most visible among some of the nation’s most celebrated authors, scholars, activists, and social reformers. According to historian Faderman, the fight for a woman’s right to vote was “largely led by women who loved other women,” including Susan B. Anthony. “It was a grueling battle,” wrote Faderman. “Their intimate relations helped them endure and stay focused on their elusive goal through years of discouragement.” Well-known activists such as labor advocate Florence Kelley and temperance leader Frances Willard both lived with women companions, as did the president of Bryn Mawr College, M. Carey Thomas, and author Sarah Orne Jewett. Jane Addams founded the Chicago settlement house, Hull House, with her first life partner, Ellen Starr, and built her internationally recognized career while traveling and staying close to her second partner, Mary Rozet Smith. Interestingly, historian Faderman argued that through Hull House, Addams opened the door for other young women to gain social freedom: “By founding a settlement

house, where educated women could operate independently of their families and where they could help people in need... she actually found a way to help great numbers of women leave the prison of the domestic sphere and enter the public sphere.”

Increasingly, Boston marriages existed across a widening economic spectrum. For some middle-class women, living independently depended on the availability of jobs in the expanding service economy, which itself employed educated women at lower wages than men received. Telephone and telegraph operators, secretaries, teachers, and librarians were some of the positions that women filled. Such women, out on their own, lived in all-women clubs or apartment complexes, sometimes founded by women philanthropists. Some rented a suite of rooms, while others teamed up with another woman to rent or buy a house.

Author Henry James enshrined the elite Boston marriage in his 1880s novel *The Bostonians*. In this novel he featured a Boston heiress, Olive Chancellor, as so smitten by the young feminist orator, Verena Tarrant, that she hoped to become her “protectress and devotee” and to join her in a “union of the soul.” (To be sure, beyond elite women, researchers are also beginning to find rural women, including enslaved women and poor agricultural workers, who coupled up in some way during the 1800s.)

Often these women shared beds, wrote passionate letters, and demonstrated physical affection for one another. Addams wrote a love poem to Smith, her second partner, in which she described stumbling upon her while absorbed one day in the work of the settlement house: “blind and deaf those years / To all save one absorbing care, / And did not guess what now I know: / Delivering love was sitting there!” Many women’s letters make clear the romantic nature of their relationships, though at the time the sexual possibilities in their cohabitation went unremarked by others, largely as a result of the 19th century notion of women as passionless. Women living together were hardly imagined as engaged in sexual intimacy, given that they were assumed to lack sexual feelings. Perhaps as a result, historians today continue to debate just how sexual some of their relationships were.

By the start of the 20th century, sexology emerged as a new “science,” closely connected to psychology. Both sexologists and psychologists wrote extensively about same-sex desire—which they labeled “sexual inversion”—and about people who embraced homosexual identities. Suddenly these well-regarded women and their long-standing relationships began to be viewed with suspicion. Lovers began to burn their letters, and the era of the Boston marriage raced to a close.



Rebecca Primus and Addie Brown

An African American Romance in the 19th Century

by the New-York Historical Society

Focus Questions

What does it mean to be free?

What specific challenges faced young Black women during Reconstruction?

In what ways did social roles and expectations change in the 19th century?

How did they stay the same?

What are American foundations for liberty and freedom?

Rebecca Primus and Addie Brown had typical lives for middle- and lower-class Black women in 19th century New England. They worked, gossiped about family and friends, and discussed politics. Fortunately for historians, they recorded these experiences in letters, which are the only way we know about their lives and their love for each other.

Rebecca Primus (1836–1932) was born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1836. Her parents were part of Hartford’s small, but politically active, Black middle class. Primus’s great grandfather was an enslaved African who gained his freedom fighting in the American Revolution. Primus studied at a local African Free School and attended services at a church involved in the abolitionist movement. Her parents ran a boarding house for Black men and women seeking work.

Addie Brown (1841–1870) did not have the luxury of a well-connected middle-class upbringing. She was born in 1841, and her father died when she was very young. She spent some of her childhood living with an aunt in Philadelphia. By the time she was eighteen, she was living in Hartford and writing letters to her best friend and “beloved sister,” Rebecca Primus.

Historians do not know how Primus and Brown met. Brown may have been a boarder at the Primus house or been introduced to the Primus family through a mutual connection. What is known is that by 1859, the two women were very close. Only Brown’s letters to Primus exist today. However, her letters suggest that Primus responded with similar frequency. Brown’s letters are full of romantic

Both women experienced challenges and relied on each other for emotional support. In their letters, they expressed to each other their hopes and dreams openly.

community of Black citizens. Maryland had not seceded during the Civil War, but had only just abolished slavery before Primus arrived, and resisted allowing African Americans to have full equality. As a Black woman living there, Primus often encountered racism and worried about the success of Reconstruction. She hoped her work would contribute to Black equality and freedom.

Unlike Primus, Brown never received a formal education, and her work was about survival. However, Brown was literate and read as much as possible in her little free time. She worked as a domestic servant for both White and Black families in Connecticut and New York. She cleaned homes, took

This 1870 print from Harper's Weekly shows a classroom for freed people in the South taught by an African American teacher. With emancipation, there was a great demand for education. Schools were opened in the South by the Freedmen's Bureau as well as by missionary organizations and aid societies from the North. Rebecca Primus worked in a school for the formerly enslaved in Maryland.



“Colored School—Object Teaching,” *Harper's Weekly*, February 26, 1870, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, The New York Public Library.

care of children, and sewed. Brown's life was a nomadic one. She moved wherever she was able to find work, often living in the homes of her employers. As a domestic worker, Brown had little financial stability and encountered sexual and physical harassment. She often wrote to Primus about her low wages and her reliance upon her employers.

In November 1865, months after the Civil War ended, Primus moved to Maryland to teach formerly enslaved people. She was one of many young, single, educated Black women to travel south to teach during Reconstruction. She believed that her work was not only about providing an education, but also building a

community of Black citizens. Maryland had not seceded during the Civil War, but had only just abolished slavery before Primus arrived, and resisted allowing African Americans to have full equality. As a Black woman living there, Primus often encountered racism and worried about the success of Reconstruction. She hoped her work would contribute to Black equality and freedom.

Unlike Primus, Brown never received a formal education, and her work was about survival. However, Brown was literate and read as much as possible in her little free time. She worked as a domestic servant for both White and Black families in Connecticut and New York. She cleaned homes, took care of children, and sewed. Brown's life was a nomadic one. She moved wherever she was able to find work, often living in the homes of her employers. As a domestic worker, Brown had little financial stability and encountered sexual and physical harassment. She often wrote to Primus about her low wages and her reliance upon her employers.

In early 1867, Brown began to work as a domestic servant at Miss Porter's, an elite private boarding school for white girls in Farmington, Connecticut. She was encouraged to use the school's library and did so regularly. She often wrote in her letters that she hoped to use her growing knowledge and stable job to create a new life for herself. Around this time, Brown also received a marriage proposal from a long-time acquaintance, Joseph Tines. Brown wrote to Primus that she was unsure about the institution of marriage and sometimes felt unhappy about the idea. However, she knew that marriage would give her more stability and the opportunity to no longer be a live-in servant. In 1868, Brown

married Joseph Tines and her letters to Primus stopped. Little is known about Brown's life after her marriage. Tragically, she died of unknown causes in 1870 at age 28.

Shortly before Brown's death, Primus returned to Hartford. The charitable organization that had sponsored Primus' work dissolved, and she could not afford to remain in Maryland without pay. Three years later, she married Charles Thomas, a formerly enslaved landowner and educator whom she met in Maryland. The two stayed in New England for the rest of their lives. She died in 1932 at the age of 95.

While romantic friendships were well documented among white women of the 19th century, Brown's letters provide a rare glimpse at such a relationship between two women of color. Many women found comfort in strong female friendships in the 19th century. It was common for these friends to share homes and even beds. The sexual nature of these relationships varied, but romantic female friendships and partnerships were more socially accepted in the 19th century than in the 20th. Through Brown and Primus's letters, historians can confirm that these types of relationships existed among Black women as they did among white women.

Both Brown and Primus traveled to new places and worked in challenging environments. Primus used teaching to bring the power of education to the free Black community. Brown worked and studied with a goal of financial security and independence. Both women experienced challenges and relied on each other for emotional support. In their letters, they expressed to each other their hopes and dreams openly. Eventually, both women settled into marriage and traditional gender roles. But before that time, they explored intimacy with a peer who understood the challenges of being a woman—more precisely, a Black woman—in a nation divided by gender and race.

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 7

- **Unit 5:** Lesson 13: Women During the Civil War

Grade 8

- **Unit 1:** Lesson 8: Reconstruction and African Americans

Grade 11

- **Unit 2:** Expansion, Nationalism, and Sectionalism
- **Unit 3:** Post-Civil War America Industrialization, Urbanization and the Progressive Movement

Thinking About:

Rebecca Primus and Addie Brown

- What similarities and differences can you identify between the lives of Rebecca Primus and Addie Brown? What opportunities/challenges did each encounter? **E/M/H**
- What role did education and schooling play in each woman's life? **E/M/H**
- Why do you think both women valued education so deeply? **M/H**
- How did each woman experience life during and after the Civil War? **M/H**
- What specific challenges faced young Black women in this time period? **M/H**
- Primus was a teacher in Connecticut before moving to Maryland. Why do you think she took the job in Maryland? What was she hoping to accomplish? **E/M/H**
- Both women wrote about their hopes for Black equality in America. Why is it important to learn about women who were writing and thinking about these ideas? **M/H**
- Consider the time period when Brown was writing. Why might a woman be hesitant to marry? **M/H**
- Brown describes the two women kissing and sleeping in the same bed, but historians do not know the full extent of their sexual relationship. Does not knowing this information matter? Why or why not? **H**
- Why do you think it is important to study the relationship between Brown and Primus? **H**
- Why do you think there is more information about white women in romantic friendships and partnerships in the 19th century than Black women? **H**

Additional Resources

Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends: Letters from Rebecca Primus of Royal Oak, Maryland, and Addie Brown of Hartford, Connecticut, 1854–1868 by Farah Jasmine Griffin

Letter from Addie Brown

The letters between Addie Brown and Rebecca Primus reflect romantic feelings and love. During this time period letters provided an opportunity for individuals to make their personal thoughts known to others in a way that they were not able to do publicly otherwise. The letters between Brown and Primus also reflect a 19th century tendency to present love as universal and undying.

Darling I will try and express my feelings when
I see you better. O it's useless for I can't.
Rebecca, when I bid you good by it's seem to
me that my very heart broke. I have felt wretched
ever since. Sometime I feel that I could not
live one hour to another. My Darling Friend I
shall never be happy again unless I am near
you eather here or on earth or in heaven. Since
you have left me I want nothing. O Rebecca,
why can't I be with you? Will I never have that
pleasure? Don't tell me no, for I must.

Citation: Addie Brown, letter from Addie Brown to Rebecca Primus, November 3, 1861, Primus Family Papers Collection, 44012, The Connecticut Historical Society.

- Most of Primus and Brown's relationship was long distance. We do not know how often they saw each other in person. What evidence in this letter suggests a deep commitment to one another? **M/H**
- Brown expressed love for Primus, but eventually chose to marry Joseph Tines. Is there evidence in this letter to suggest possible reasons for her decision? What evidence supports or challenges the reasons she made this choice? **M/H**
- Based on this letter, what do you think the relationship between Addie Brown and Rebecca Primus was? What other evidence would you need to find to support your interpretation? **H**



We'Wha

Celebrated Lhamana Person

by Sage Milo and Regan de Loggans (Mississippi Choctaw/K'iche' Maya)

Focus Questions

How did United States' settler colonialism disrupt the lives of Indigenous individuals, tribes, and nations?

What can one person's life tell us about the effects of settler colonialism?

NOTE: Gender is a dynamic category that can mean different things to different cultures and individuals. Importantly, the decisions about gender identity should be an autonomous decision individuals and groups make, not dictated by outside norms or as part of a larger settler colonial project. It is important to note that Lhamana is a gender category defined by Indigenous people, not by American settler traditions. Some contemporary Lhamana participate in the larger Two-Spirit community, however, these terms are not synonymous.

Two-Spirit is a term that was first used by Indigenous activists in the early 1990s. The term has subsequently been used by Native Americans as a means to self-identify. It was also a way to reclaim and redefine historical Native American figures like We'Wha who had been referred to by racist and pejorative terms by white anthropologists and other scholars.

Make sure that students are aware that specific Native American tribes and nations have historically defined their own autonomous conceptions of gender—different from white settler definitions or categories defined within an LGBTQ+ framework.

We'Wha (c.1849–1896), a member of the Zuni tribe, was born around 1849. This was shortly after the United States acquired New Mexico, including Zuni land, a year after the Mexican-American war. In the latter half of the 19th century, anthropologists, missionaries, traders, and other settlers descended on this territory, often posing a threat to Zuni culture and survival as they pursued their own—and, in some cases, the federal government's—agendas.

We'Wha dressed in a combination of traditionally male and female attire, performed both male and female roles, and was referred to using the term **Lhamana**. In Zuni culture, Lhamana engaged in both male and female tasks; their physical appearances also included both genders' traits.

We'Wha dressed in a combination of traditionally male and female attire, performed both male and female roles, and was referred to using the term Lhamana. In Zuni culture, Lhamana engaged in both male and female tasks; their physical appearances also included both genders' traits. According to Will Roscoe, "An 1881 census lists We'Wha's occupations as 'Farmer; Weaver; Potter; Housekeeper.'" At that time in Zuni culture, farming was considered a male pursuit, weaving was done by both men and women, and pottery and housework were women's activities.¹

In 1879, representatives of the United States Bureau of Ethnology led by James Stevenson arrived in Halona Idiwan'a, or Middle Place, the Zuni homeland. Stevenson's wife, Matilda Coxe Stevenson, accompanied him and took over his studies after he died in 1888. The Stevensons encountered We'Wha who, because of her vast knowledge of Zuni religion, traditions, and culture, was the ideal Zuni to provide the information their research required. We'Wha was active within community ceremony. According to Stevenson, We'Wha frequently offered prayers at feasts, "was

We'Wha was a Two-Spirit member of the Zuni nation who lived in Halona Idiwan'a, which is now part of the state of New Mexico. The term b***** in this image's title is an outmoded and pejorative way of referring to the broad indigenous American category of Two-Spirit people—individuals who transgressed gender. Different nations had different Two-Spirit identities, and while We'Wha's story tells us about her experience in the Zuni nation, it can only hint at the much larger constellation of gender-transgressing identities, terms, and practices that existed before the European colonization of the Americas.



John K. Hillers, *We-Wa, a Zuni berdache, full length portrait*, c.1871–c.1907, Smithsonian Institution. Bureau of American Ethnology. 1897–1965, Series: Photographic Negatives of Native American Delegations and Archaeology of the Southwestern United States, 1879–1907, Record Group 106: Records of the Smithsonian Institution, 1871–1952, ARC Identifier: 523798.

¹ Will Roscoe, "We'Wha," *Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender History in America*, ed. Marc Stein, vol. 3, Gale Virtual Reference Library (Charles Scribner's Sons: 2004), 266–268.

the chief personage on many occasions,” and regularly participated in a ceremony that required a Lhamana. Matilda Stevenson called We’Wha “the most intelligent of the Zuni tribe” and remarked upon We’Wha’s eagerness to learn. Will Roscoe claims that We’Wha’s relationship with Matilda Stevenson evolved into a friendship.²

In 1886, We’Wha traveled to Washington, D.C., with the Stevensons as a Zuni ambassador. For six months, We’Wha lived with the Stevensons, assisted with their research, experienced Washington’s art and culture, and met with high-ranking government officials, including President Cleveland. During her time in Washington, We’Wha lived as and was acknowledged to be a woman.

Throughout We’Wha’s stay, the newspapers used female pronouns, writing of the Zuni “princess” or “priestess.” As part of the Stevensons’ research, We’Wha demonstrated Zuni weaving, posing for pictures engaged in that task at the Smithsonian Institute and on the National Mall.

We’Wha’s friendship with Matilda Coxe Stevenson lasted until We’Wha’s death in 1896. Stevenson journeyed to New Mexico to be with We’Wha before she died. In her study *The Zuni Indians*, published in 1904, Stevenson recalled We’Wha saying, “Mother, I am going to the other world. . . . Tell all my friends in Washington good-by. Tell President Cleveland, my friend, good-by. Mother, love all my people; protect them; they are your children; you are their mother.”³

Stevenson inappropriately referred to We’Wha using male and female pronouns in her study. The photos Stevenson’s research produced, problematically published without We’Wha’s consent, would be accessed and referenced in literature about Two-Spirit people in the 20th and 21st centuries.

As the federal government forced Native Americans onto reservations and the Indian Wars raged in the post-Civil War era, Two-Spirit people found themselves in even greater danger than other Indigenous people. Many were persuaded by their tribes to assimilate or go underground in order to avoid the brutality and violence they would face if captured. Two-Spirit lives and cultures, once revered in the tribes where they existed, faded.⁴ Against this backdrop, We’Wha’s life and impact exists as evidence of the power and capability of Indigenous Two-Spirit people.

2 Roscoe, “We’Wha.”

3 Matilda Coxe Stevenson, *The Zuni Indians: Their Mythology, Esoteric Fraternities, and Ceremonies* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1905), 312.

4 “[Two-Spirit](#),” Indian Health Service: The Federal Health Program for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 4

- **Unit 2:** Lesson 3: Male Gender Roles in Native American Society
- **Unit 2:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 8: Female Gender Roles in Native American Society
- **Unit 2:** Lesson 4: Native American Stories and Traditions
- **Unit 2:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 11: Native American Clans

Grade 8

- **Unit 2:** Lesson 7: Nativism, Assimilation, and Cultural Preservation
- **Unit 3:** Lesson 2: The Railroad and Indian Territory Losses
- **Unit 3:** Lesson 3: Native American Assimilation

Grade 11

- **Unit 3:** Post-Civil War America Industrialization, Urbanization, and the Progressive Movement

Thinking About:

We'Wha

- What does We'Wha's life tell us about the exploitative characteristics of colonialism? **M/H**
- Was Matilda Coxe Stevenson's friendship with We'Wha exploitative? If yes, how? **M/H**
- What can we learn from We'Wha's community roles? **E/M/H**
- How does We'Wha's life challenge colonial gender norms? **E/M/H**
- What does We'Wha's life tell us about the spectrum of Two-Spirit identities? **M/H**

Additional Resources

["8 Things You Should Know About Two-Spirit People"](#) by Tony Enos

["Respect for LGBT and Two-Spirit People Essential to Decolonization"](#) by *Two Row Times*

["Two-Spirits, One Heart, Five Genders"](#) by Duane Brayboy

We'Wha Weaving

John K. Hillers worked for John Wesley Powell, the first director of the United States Bureau of Ethnology. At first Hillers photographed the landscape and geography of the West and began to photograph the Indigenous people who lived in the region. For over twenty years Hillers documented the diverse cultures and practices of many different Native American Nations. We'Wha, a member of the Zuni nation, was an Lhamana, a male-bodied person who adopts social roles traditionally performed by women. According to white observers, including the white missionary George Wharton James and ethnologist Matilda Coxe Stevenson, We'Wha was a talented and expert weaver. Note that the term b***** in this image's title is an outmoded, pejorative, and racist term.



Citation: John K. Hillers, *We-Wa, a Zuni berdache, weaving*, c. 1871–c. 1907, Smithsonian Institution. Bureau of American Ethnology. 1897–1965, Photographic Negatives of Native American Delegations and Archaeology of the Southwestern United States, 1879–1907, Record Group 106: Records of the Smithsonian Institution, 1871–1952, ARC Identifier: 523796.

- We'Wha's occupations included that of weaver in the 1881 census. Weaving was traditionally a skill used by both men and women in Zuni culture. Why would weaving be an important skill for a community member? **E/M**
- Ethnology is the study of culture, specifically comparatively looking at how cultures are the same and different. Why would We'Wha have been chosen to be photographed by John K. Hillers, who worked for the first director of the United States Bureau of Ethnology? **M/H**



Ah Ming

Drag Performance in Boomtown San Francisco's Chinatown

by Bonnie J. Morris

Focus Questions

How do people, policies, and technological advances shape a nation?

What were the experiences of immigrants in America?

Was America's response to the challenges of growth and progress aligned to its ideals of democracy?

While there are many gaps in the historical record pertaining to the life of Chinese immigrant **Ah Ming** (~1828–1892), what is known is that he was a very important figure in San Francisco as a successful drag entertainer in the late 19th century. He was so popular that at one point he held a \$6,000 per year contract, the equivalent of approximately \$165,000 today, a huge salary for the 1890s, to perform at a theater on Washington Street. Ah Ming nonetheless lived at a time when both Chinese immigrants to the United States and American-born LGBTQ+ people could be treated as criminals, and even denied due process of law.

Someone like Ah Ming, who moved in both worlds, is an example of what we now call intersectionality, the overlapping identities that are a part of LGBTQ+ lives in the United States and beyond.

Chinese men and queer men of many different heritages found a home in San Francisco, a city whose population exploded in the Gold Rush. With the flood of new arrivals, San Francisco awkwardly yielded space for many “outsider” groups in the late 1800s. Racial segregation, for instance, drove the creation of a separate Chinatown district in the heart of the city, where Chinese immigrants were forced to develop their own social and economic life. Nonetheless, the city's dynamic world of nightclub shows for male audiences often brought disparate San Francisco

denizens together. Tourists, many of them white, came into San Francisco's Chinatown to enjoy daring performances that were not allowed in other American cities at the time. Although San Francisco became increasingly famous for its Chinese and queer districts, both areas were routinely raided by police searching for illegal activity like gambling or prostitution; what is more, those who lived in these overlapping spaces did not always know about or respect one another's different lived experiences. Someone like Ah Ming, who moved in both worlds, is an example of what we now call **intersectionality**, the overlapping identities that are a part of LGBTQ+ lives in the United States and beyond.

Chinese theatre, like many communities worldwide, had long valued men who, onstage, portrayed women both humorously and convincingly in plays and revues. Such an artist eventually became known as a female impersonator in the West and was often, though not always, a person we might today identify as gay or transgender. Some actors simply needed work, and traditionally, in different regions of East Asia, only men were allowed to appear onstage as actors in important styles of theatre such as Kabuki (Japan) and the Chinese Opera. Young men who could pass as women with high voices, stylized movements, and a feminine appearance were sought after and often paid well to play the part of a woman in a stage drama. In China, this even meant learning to walk as if on bound feet, a fashion practice that sadly wounded and limited many elite women in China's past.

For a very long time in European culture, too, women were not allowed to act onstage or sing in front of men. Shakespeare, in England, staged his famous plays with young men playing female roles. By the 1800s, minstrel and vaudeville shows across the United States often featured men dressed as women, sometimes as women of color. Their performances were sometimes celebrated for their artistry, other times for their comedy. And to varying degrees in the 20th century, some queer men and women delighted in being cross-dressing performers who seemed to reveal that what is "male" or "female" could be an act, based upon certain clothes, makeup, or hairstyles.

Cross-gender performances may have been especially popular in San Francisco, for in the wake of the Gold Rush, the city became a predominately male city, with a ratio of 12 men to each woman. Out in the mining areas, men often played the role of women at all male "stag" dances; in the city proper, men often performed cross-gender acts in vaudeville and minstrel shows. Even in the city's Chinatown, Ah Ming was not the only drag performer, and the others were well-recognized too.

Many Chinese men had journeyed to California to join the Gold Rush of the late 1840s, part of a flood of international migrants who came in search of fortune. The Chinese were treated particularly poorly by white miners, however, and as California became a state in 1850, more whites joined in a campaign to exclude them. "The Chinese Must Go" was one hateful slogan, followed by laws excluding all Chinese immigrants and forbidding those men already in California to send for wives or brides. These political conditions skewed the male-female ratio even higher in Chinatown than in the rest of the city—perhaps 100 times higher—and created a cohort of Chinese men who could neither marry nor start families. Hungry for amusement, they nonetheless created associations, gaming clubs, and other opportunities to enjoy their very limited freedom in America, including performances where men performed as women, a familiar Chinese entertainment.

Ah Ming's obituary stated that he led all of his countrymen as a drag performer and hinted that he performed before the "crowned head" of China. In his adopted city, with a built-in audience of lonely Chinese men aware of his reputation, plus other queer folks just appreciative of drag, Ah Ming was able to transcend hateful exclusion and flourish in a new land.

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 8

- **Unit 2:** Lesson 4: Coming to America
- **Unit 2:** Lesson 7: Nativism, Assimilation, and Cultural Preservation
- **Unit 2:** Lesson 8: The Chinese Exclusion Act
- **Unit 2:** Lesson 9: Immigration Political Cartoons
- **Unit 2:** Lesson 10: Immigrant Experience Article

Grade 11

- **Unit 3:** Post-Civil War America Industrialization, Urbanization, and the Progressive Movement

Thinking About:

Ah Ming

- How were Chinese immigrants treated during the 19th century? Why? **E/M/H**
- How does the mistreatment of Chinese immigrants connect to a long history of xenophobia in the United States? **M/H**
- Why was San Francisco a city of many unmarried Chinese men in the late 19th century? **M/H**
- How was Ah Ming an example of the concept of intersectionality? **M/H**
- To what extent was Ah Ming able to transcend the rampant discrimination facing Chinese immigrants? **M/H**
- How does Ah Ming's life shed light on the tension between progress and tradition? **H**
- Have Asian actors achieved full equality today? What does your answer reveal about immigration, discrimination, and tolerance in the arts? **M/H**

Additional Resources

Wide Open Town by Nan Alamilla Boyd

[“Citywide Historical Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco”](#)

by Donna J. Graves and Shayne E. Watson

[“#TBT: When Cross-Dressing Was a Crime”](#) by *The Advocate*

[“The Chinese Immigration”](#) by *The Maritime Heritage Project*

Announcement of Ah Ming's Death

The *San Francisco Call* was a newspaper that was popular among the working class people of the city of San Francisco. By the mid-1880s the *Call* was read more than any other daily paper. Ah Ming's obituary presents very little information about his life other than his professional career. A thumbnail of the original obituary is included below along with a transcription.

DEATH OF A CHINESE STAR.
Ah Ming Rings Down the Curtain in Another Sphere.
Ah Ming, the famous Chinese female impersonator, died yesterday at noon.
Ming was perfection in his special line, which was peculiar and a difficult character to assume.
He took off to perfection the coy manners and deportment of the Chinese girl of the period.
As a female impersonator it is said that Ming led all of his countrymen. It is even hinted that he performed before the "crowned head" of China, but whether or not this is merely a fiction gotten up by his managers to "draw" cannot well be ascertained.
Ming went to the Washington-street Theater two years ago under contract. His salary was \$6000 a year. It was afterward cut down somewhat to meet expenses. Ming was a true Bohemian in his way. He "rolled high" and indulged himself in all that goes to make life merry. He could afford to do this on his salary, and it is said that too much salary was the cause of his death.
He had been ill for several weeks prior to his demise.

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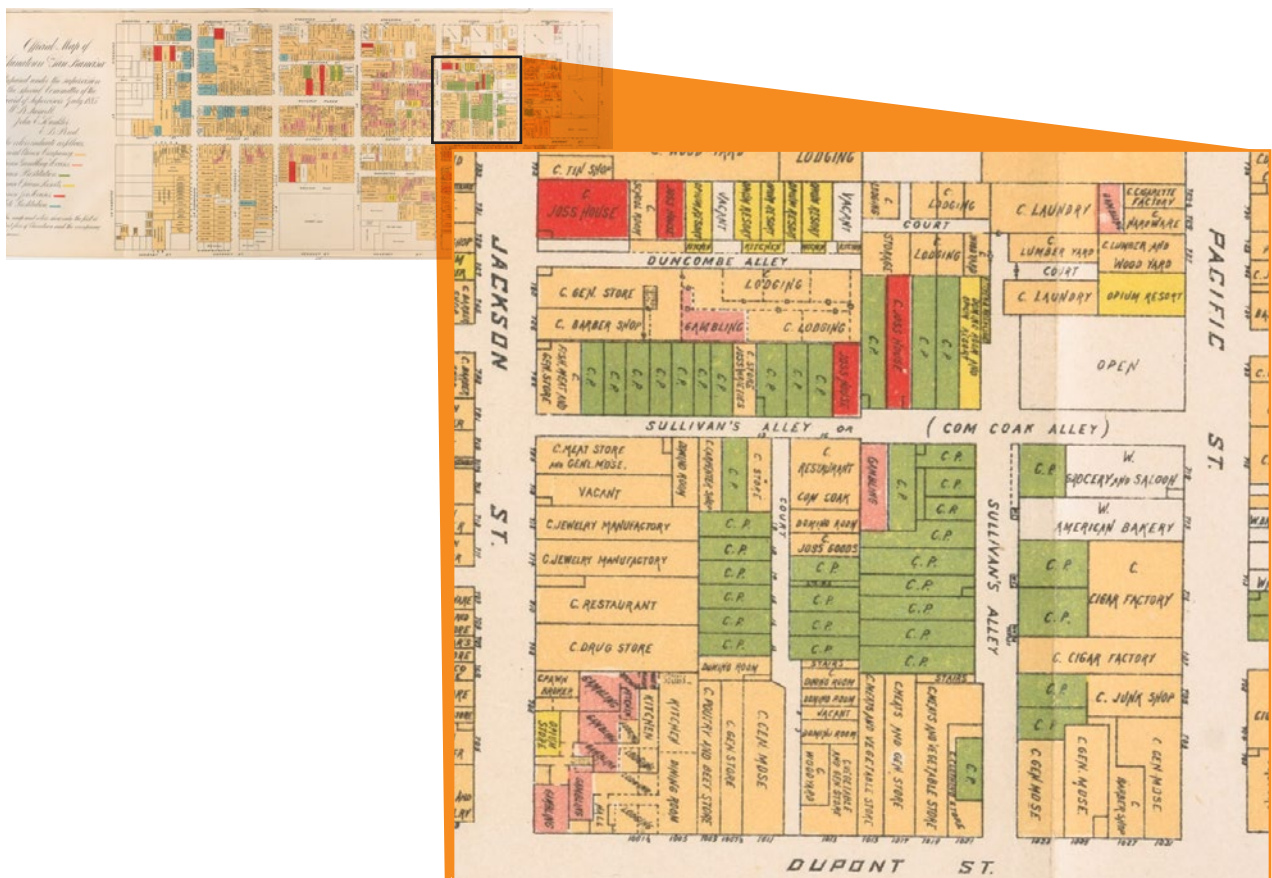
He had been ill for several weeks prior to his demise.

Citation: "[Death of a Chinese Star](#)," *San Francisco Call*, Volume 72, Number 180, November 27, 1892, page 7, California Digital Newspaper Collection, Center for Bibliographic Studies and Research, University of California, Riverside.

- How does the obituary describe Ming's profession? **E/M/H**
- What was the public response to Ming's female impersonation? **M/H**
- What is implied about Ming's cause of death? **M/H**

Official Map of Chinatown in San Francisco, July 1885

This map was published as part of a report written by a Special Committee established by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors on conditions in the Chinese ethnic enclave of the city. The report and accompanying map reflect negative bias against, and present racist stereotypes about Chinese and Chinese American residents of the city. The map shows the names of owners, businesses, labels buildings as “Chinese occupancy,” “Chinese gambling houses,” and “White occupants.” The report was published three years after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that prevented Chinese people from immigrating to the United States. Ah Ming was a resident of San Francisco’s Chinatown and performed in theaters in this area of the city.

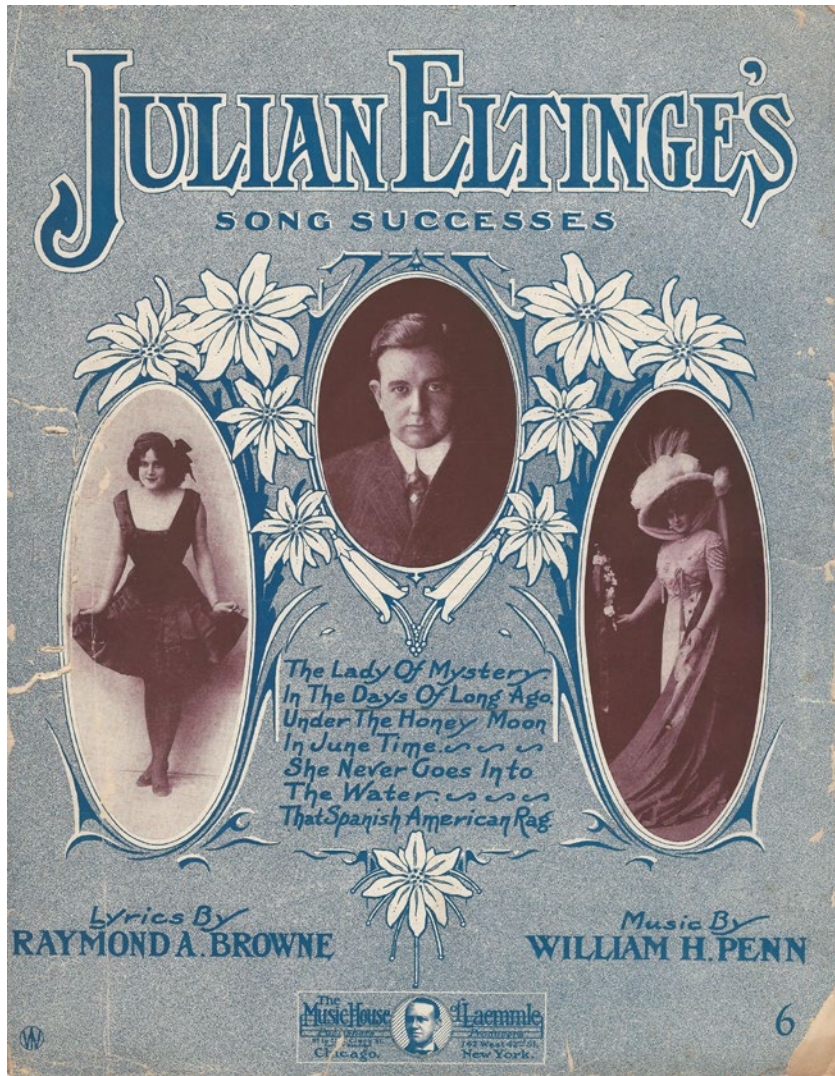


Citation: Willard B. Farwell, *Official map of Chinatown in San Francisco : prepared under the supervision of the special committee of the Board of Supervisors. July 1885*, *The Chinese at Home and Abroad, Together with the Report of the Special Committee of the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco on the Condition of the Chinese Quarter of that City*, (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft & Co.), Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Library, Division of Rare & Manuscript Collections, PJ Mode Collection of Persuasive Cartography, 2015.

- What does the existence of this map tell us about San Francisco in the late 19th century? **E/M/H**
- Why would the San Francisco Board of Supervisors have wanted a map with these details in 1885? **M/H**

Julian Eltinge Sheet Music Cover

Julian Eltinge was a stage and film actor in the early 1900s. Working in the tradition of entertainers such as Ah Ming, Eltinge, who was assigned male sex at birth, performed as a woman. In a stage performance advertised as “Eltinge,” without identifying gender, he would present a series of female roles. Significantly, Eltinge did not parody or present caricatures. Little is known about Julian Eltinge’s sexual identity. Even though Eltinge performed as a woman, off stage his gender expression was heteronormatively masculine.



Citation: “In the Days of Long Ago,” 1910, Julian Eltinge Sheet Music Cover, Music House of Laemmle, Matthew Kiernan/Alamy Stock Photo.

- What evidence about the past is provided by this cover for the sheet music of popular songs performed by Julian Eltinge? **E/M/H**
- In what ways do you think Ah Ming’s experiences were similar to and different from Julian Eltinge? **M/H**



Alain Locke

Curator and Promoter of the Harlem Renaissance

by Daniel Hurewitz

Focus Questions

What factors led to the Harlem Renaissance?

What was the effect of the Harlem Renaissance on American society?

How have African Americans contributed to American culture?

To what extent was the Harlem Renaissance a turning point for African Americans?

Alain Locke (1885–1954) first imagined, and then fashioned, what in the literary world became known as the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s. Locke helped introduce a new generation of African American writers and artists to the rest of the world. He trumpeted Harlem Renaissance writers' work as representing a new spirit that was growing in Harlem in the wake of World War I and the early waves of the Great Migration. Locke devoted his time to getting his cherished writers published as well as finding patrons who would support their art.

Born in Philadelphia in 1885, Locke was raised by his parents to be an intellectual from the start. When he was a young child, his father read Virgil and Homer aloud to him. This early exposure to the classics proved to have the intended effect. Locke certainly lived up to his parents' high

He trumpeted Harlem Renaissance writers' work as representing a new spirit that was growing in Harlem in the wake of World War I and the early waves of the Great Migration. Locke devoted his time to getting his cherished writers published as well as finding patrons who would support their art.

academic expectations. He left their Philadelphia home to study at Harvard University, then the University of Oxford—as the first Black Rhodes Scholar—and then back to Harvard to earn his Ph.D. in philosophy. He joined the faculty at Howard University, the esteemed Black university in Washington, D.C., but he also kept close ties with the vibrant cultural scene expanding rapidly in Harlem.

Political activism and the projects of W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey did not captivate Locke. He found the protest politics of the time to be alienating, too heteronormative and masculine in orientation. Instead, he devoted himself to the cultivation and celebration of a new African American culture and identity which, despite Jim Crow, he insisted was leaping forward. Segregation in New York, he suggested, was throwing together an incredibly rich mixture of African Americans—“the peasant, the student, the business man, the professional man, artist, poet, musician, adventurer and worker, preacher and criminal, exploiter and social outcast”; all were being thrust into the same stew. Locke felt this shared living experience and mixture of people was beneficial. He wrote, “Negro life is seizing upon its first changes for group expression and self-determination.” Harlem,

This 1925 illustration of Alain Locke titles him “The New Negro,” which is also the name of an anthology of Black American writing that Locke edited and published that same year. The artist who made the illustration, Winold Reiss, was a German American immigrant who provided all of the illustrations for the first edition of *The New Negro*.



Winold Reiss, *The New Negro*, 1925, Printed Illustration, sheet 8 11/16 x 5 7/8”, Washington, D.C., National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, NPG.98.129.a.

he insisted, was cultivating a deepening sense of racial consciousness—of “race sympathy and unity”—and forging a powerful new American culture.¹

To display that new consciousness and culture, Locke pulled together some of the finest African American writing of the time and published it in a 1925 anthology whose very title trumpeted change: *The New Negro*. The phrase itself was popularized during the Harlem Renaissance, of which Locke was a major part, and indicated a Black person who was proud, dedicated to the uplift of the Black community, and actively opposed to white supremacy. In *The New Negro*, Locke displayed the lyricism and ingenuity of Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, James Weldon Johnson, and W. E. B. Du Bois; there was artwork as well, including drawings from Aaron Douglas. If the Harlem Renaissance had had a debut exhibition, this would have been it.

What’s more, Locke worked hard to secure financial support for the artists he identified, most extensively through his ties to Charlotte Mason, an extremely wealthy white widow who

¹ Alain Locke, “The New Negro,” in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (1925, repr., New York: Atheneum, 1992), 6–7.

Locke hoped would endow a Harlem Museum of African Art. While that project never fully materialized, Mason provided vital support for Hughes, Hurston, and McKay.

Locke's biographer described him as "a dandy, really, often seen walking with a cane, discreet, of course, but with just enough of a hint of swagger to announce to those curious that he was queer."² Bayard Rustin later said that he admired Locke's discretion. "He never felt it necessary to discuss his gayness," Rustin explained, and as a result, "the most people could say . . . was that they suspected him of being gay." But for many young men, especially the young writers he cultivated, there was little question about Locke's sexuality; he connected with them intimately, sometimes sexually. With poet Countee Cullen, Locke became an occasional lover but more importantly a devoted mentor and confidante, one who encouraged both his writing and his sense of comfort in being gay. Indeed, Locke included Cullen's "Tableau" poem in *The New Negro*, with its image of a Black boy and a white boy "locked arm in arm [as] they cross the way."

Langston Hughes was a much more passionate object of Locke's desire than Cullen, and Locke pursued him both as a writer and a lover. Hughes, perhaps predictably, kept Locke at arm's-length. As Hughes recounted in his memoir, after a year of exchanging letters, Locke obtained his address in Paris and paid a call while on vacation in Europe. After a thrilling two weeks wooing Hughes in Paris, where the refined Locke escorted the "destitute" Hughes through Paris's high-culture art scene, Locke wrote, "I needed one such day and one such night to tell you how much I love you, in which to see soul-deep and be satisfied."³ Hughes responded coolly, however, keeping Locke close, but not too close, "I like you immensely," he wrote, "and certainly we are good 'pals,' aren't we? And we shall work together well and produce beautiful things."⁴ In Jeffrey Stewart's biography of Locke, Tobi Haslett asserted, "Each man was trapped in the other's fantasy: Hughes appeared as the scruffy poet who had fled his studies at Columbia for the pleasures of *la vie bohème*, while Locke was the "little, brown man" with status and degrees."⁵ To Hughes, Locke represented not a romantic partner, but access to the literary movement of which he wanted to be a part.

We can thank Locke for discovering and connecting the world with a talented new crop of writers who would define a generation. However, in his own personal life, Locke's yearning for a deep romantic connection with a male partner proved futile. After spending most of his life searching for a man who would be more than his "pal," he passed away in 1954 without ever finding him. Nonetheless, he gave his heart to his writers and lifted them up. Jeffrey Stewart, Locke's biographer, wrote that because Locke was gay but cautious and discreet, he shared a profound empathy for what these artists discovered hidden away in the larger "Black closet," namely, "a whole range of feelings, loves, triumphs, and epiphanies routinely hidden by the need to keep one's life one-dimensional to fight the racists."⁶ Locke gave them permission to give voice to those feelings, and he found an audience for them, thus enabling the revolution at the heart of the Harlem Renaissance.

2 Jeffrey Stewart, *The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 8.

3 Locke to Hughes, quoted in Stewart, *New Negro*, 440.

4 Hughes to Locke, quoted in Stewart, *New Negro*, 440.

5 Tobi Haslett, "The Man Who Led the Harlem Renaissance—And His Hidden Hungers," *The New Yorker*, 21 May 2018, 89.

6 Stewart, *New Negro*, 877.

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 4

- **Unit 5:** Lesson 8: The Harlem Renaissance

Grade 8

- **Unit 2:** Lesson 19: African Americans' Response to Discrimination

Grade 11

- **Unit 4:** Prosperity and Depression: At Home and Abroad

Thinking About:

Alain Locke

- Based on what you know about the experience of most African Americans in the late 19th century, how was Alain Locke's upbringing different than his peers? **E/M/H**
- Summarize Locke's contributions to the Harlem Renaissance. **M/H**
- How did the Black experience in New York after World War I lead to a cultural and artistic renaissance in Harlem? **M/H**
- Why did Alain Locke not identify with the protest movements happening in Harlem in the 1920s? **M/H**
- Why was Locke so passionate about finding an audience for the Harlem writers? **M/H**
- How did Locke's unrequited quest for a romantic partner help him to better understand and connect with his writers? **H**
- What societal factors made it difficult for Locke to find a male partner in his day? Do any of those same factors still exist today? **M/H**
- Is there a modern-day version of the "Black closet?" **H**
- To what extent do Locke's experiences indicate that the Harlem Renaissance opened doors for marginalized groups beyond the African American community? **H**

Additional Resources

["The Man Who Led the Harlem Renaissance—and His Hidden Hungers"](#) in *The New Yorker*
by Tobi Haslett

The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke by Jeffrey C. Stewart

The Works of Alain Locke edited by Charles Molesworth

Enter the New Negro

In 1925, Locke edited a special edition of the magazine *Survey Graphic*, devoted exclusively to the life of Harlem. He later expanded it into an anthology, *The New Negro*, which became the manifesto of the Harlem Renaissance, or as some critics prefer to call it, the New Negro Movement. In the essay excerpted here, Locke captures the hope and optimism of a people who have discovered “a new vision of opportunity.”

Our greatest rehabilitation may possibly come through such channels, but for the present, more immediate hope rests in the revaluation by white and black alike of the Negro in terms of his artistic endowments and cultural contributions, past and prospective. It must be increasingly recognized that the Negro has already made very substantial contributions, not only in his folk-art, music especially, which has always found appreciation, but in larger, though humbler and less acknowledged ways A second crop of the Negro's gifts promises still more largely. He now becomes a conscious contributor and lays aside the status of a beneficiary and ward for that of a collaborator and participant in American civilization. The great social gain in this is the releasing of our talented group from the arid fields of controversy and debate to the productive fields of creative expression. The especially cultural recognition they win should in turn prove the key to that revaluation of the Negro which must precede or accompany any considerable further betterment of race relationships. But whatever the general effect, the present generation will have added the motives of self-expression and spiritual development to the old and still unfinished task of making material headway and progress. No one who understandingly faces the situation with its substantial accomplishment or views the new scene with its still more abundant promise can be entirely without hope. And certainly, if in our lifetime the Negro should not be able to celebrate his full initiation into American democracy, he can at least, on the warrant of these things, celebrate the attainment of a significant and satisfying new phase of group development, and with it a spiritual Coming of Age.

Citation: Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (Albert and Charles Boni: New York), 15–16.

- According to Locke, what ways have African Americans already contributed to American civilization? **M/H**
- Why do you think Locke believes that all Americans will gain from more African American creative expression? **M/H**
- What is the significance of Locke using a farming analogy to describe what would be known as the Harlem Renaissance? **M/H**
- Does Locke believe that Black people will be able to celebrate his full initiation into American democracy? Based on the time period in which he writes, is his position surprising or not? **H**

Letter from Countee Cullen to Alain Locke

Countee Cullen was one of the most significant literary figures of the Harlem Renaissance. Following the Harlem Renaissance, from 1934 until his death, he was a French and creative writing teacher at Frederick Douglass Junior High School in Harlem. Though his sexuality is a present theme in his poetry, and he wrote poems for his lovers and close gay friends, Cullen's relationships with men were largely unknown to the public. One of those close friends was Alain Locke, a professor at Howard University and a mentor who had a complicated relationship with Cullen. Although Locke also was discreet publicly with his sexuality, he presented his younger confidant, Cullen, with queer-affirming literature. An excerpt of a letter from Cullen to Locke appears below.

*234 W. 131 St.,
New York City
March 3/[19]23*

My dear friend,

I am feeling as miserable at this writing as I can imagine a person feeling. Let me explain—The Monday following our Saturday evening together I secured Carpenter's "Iolaüs" from the library. I read it through at one sitting, and steeped myself in its charming and comprehending atmosphere. It opened up for me Soul windows which had been closed; it threw a noble and evident light on what I had begun to believe, because of what the world believes, ignoble and unnatural. I loved myself in it, and thanked you a thousand times as many delightful examples appeared, for recommending it to me. Tuesday young Loeb was to have come to see me. He did not come. I was keenly disappointed. He wrote no letter. Thursday morning I wrote to him, asking him to attend a concert with me to-morrow (Sunday) afternoon. It is now Saturday night and, although there has been time a-plenty, I have not heard from him. So what I had envisioned as a delightful and stimulating camaraderie is not to be. I believe the cause may be defined as parental, for I feel certain that the attraction was as keenly felt by Loeb as by me. I know you will understand how I feel. But I suppose some of us erotic lads, vide myself, were placed here just to eat our hearts out with longing for unattainable things, especially for that friendship beyond understanding. . . .

Citation: Countee Cullen, "Letter to Alain Locke," 1923, Alain Leroy Locke Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.

-
- What does Cullen mean when he states that the book Locke recommended, "threw a noble and evident light on what I had begun to believe, because of what the world believes, ignoble and unnatural"? **H**
 - What can you ascertain about the relationship between Cullen and Locke from this letter? **M/H**



Portrait of an Era: The Pansy Craze

The 1920s Obsession with Drag and Gay Performance

by Daniel Hurewitz

In the 1930s, in the final years of Prohibition, “pansy” performers became the rage in nightclubs and speakeasies around the country. Pansy performers not only played around with gender; they also often made a show of their non-heterosexual desires. They were celebrities in an era when middle- and upper-class urbanites wanted to be titillated, so they may have been objects of derision as much as delight, but they were woven into the taboo world of Prohibition pleasures.

During the last years of Prohibition and the first years of the Great Depression, American nightclub audiences seemed to go crazy for performers who mocked the straitjacket of traditional gender roles. In particular, men who flaunted their femininity became the biggest stars of this “Pansy Craze,” and were hired as the leading acts and featured hosts of some of the hottest speakeasies across the country.

Men appearing on stage dressed as women had been a staple of the vaudeville circuit since at least the late 1800s. Indeed, a talented “female impersonator” like Julian Eltinge was celebrated as an international star. (See page 76 about Ah Ming.) While impersonator acts sometimes had a tinge of comedy to them, Eltinge was largely admired for how successfully and believably he seemed to capture the aesthetic essence of womanhood.

But the Pansy Craze of the 1930s took an Eltinge show to a new level. **Pansy**, a term that evolved from the French “pensée,” referred to men who spent excessive time thinking—a quality perceived at the time to be decidedly unmasculine—in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In the 1920s, though, it came to denote an effeminate, homosexual man. The term was then adopted as the moniker for a trend in entertainment whose central focus was effeminate, homosexual men. Many of the most beloved of these performers not only challenged the boundaries of “appropriate” gender behavior; they flaunted their non-heterosexuality as well. Urban nightlife in the 1920s, already an underground scene during Prohibition, offered a more liberal atmosphere where these performers and their acts could thrive.

According to historian George Chauncey, this enthusiasm for nonconforming entertainers paralleled the “Negro Vogue” of the same era, when white New Yorkers flocked to Harlem spots like the

Cotton Club to see African American stars such as Josephine Baker. For white urban Americans, venturing to Harlem became a sought-after opportunity to experience the “other”—to sample what they imagined was a more passionate, more authentic, and more sexual culture. And the pansy performers of the 1930s seemed to offer a similar opportunity to dip a toe into a taboo world.¹

Perhaps no performer captures the excitement of the Pansy Craze better than Jean Malin, the Brooklyn-born son of European immigrants who began performing in vaudeville at an early age and won prizes for his drag acts. By the 1920s, he was performing at small downtown clubs, but in the early 1930s, he was hired as the host at Club Abbey, a big Times Square venue. Malin did not perform as a woman, though he adopted a few elements of feminine style. Rather, he made clear that he was also a man attracted to other men. Malin’s recordings of two faux-biographical songs survive, both of which flaunt his femininity and homosexual desires. One was called “I’d Rather be Spanish,” with the lyrics “I’d rather be spanish than mannish.” In the other, entitled “That’s What’s the Matter with Me,” he sang, “My father hoped I’d be a boy, / ‘A girl,’ my mother cried. / And you can see when they got me, / they both were satisfied!”

Audience members did not universally adore Malin. In truth, there were regular reports of men at Malin’s shows heckling him. Malin, though, apparently gave as good as he got, and sassed right back. A reviewer for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* even wondered if the “men who jeered at him were merely plants” (meaning, part of the act), because they were so impressed by Malin’s “flip answers” and “tart retorts.” No doubt, part of the fun of a Malin show was watching this effeminate man spar with the crowd—and win!

Other pansy performers made big names for themselves in the early 1930s, in New York and around the world. LGBT nightlife flourished in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and London. Darryl W. Bullock reported in *The Guardian*, “Paris had a reputation for its laissez-faire attitude, and queer performers were encouraged by the success enjoyed in the city by American performers including bisexual dancer Josephine Baker and gay trapeze artist Barquette. Berlin, too, had been a mecca for LGBT people for decades. . . where ‘patrons, either lesbian, fairy or normal sexed are welcome.’”² Malin moved from New York to Los Angeles where he had his own nightclub and starred in a film before tragically dying in a car accident at the age of 25.

By the 1930s, the same cities where the Pansy Craze thrived began to crack down on gay nightlife and the clubs that were a part of it. The end of Prohibition was a significant factor. Police in New York, reacting to the violence that accompanied mob rivalries, raided and shut down the mafia-owned clubs where pansy shows were most prominent. Performers took refuge in Los Angeles, but stage shows there were also canceled and films were censored to exclude pansy characters. In Europe, Hitler’s rise to power ended cabaret culture in Berlin. Moreover, historian Chauncey argued that the celebration of pansy performers felt less acceptable as the Depression continued to undermine American men’s economic status and self-esteem.³ The ban was not total; San Francisco’s pansy performers continued to be beloved fixtures of that city’s nightlife for many more decades. Banishing pansy acts was ultimately part of a wide-reaching effort to exclude homosexuality from American popular culture; that effort stretched from the 1930s well into the 1950s, and helped erase the memory of a time when pansies were all the rage.

1 George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

2 Darryl W. Bullock, “Pansy Craze: the wild 1930s drag parties that kickstarted gay nightlife” *The Guardian*, September 14, 2017.

3 George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).



Ma Rainey

“Mother of the Blues” and Voice of Jazz Age Women’s Sexuality

by Daniel Hurewitz

Focus Questions

What was life like for African Americans in the United States after Reconstruction ended?

What challenges did women face in post-Reconstruction America?

What was the effect of the Harlem Renaissance on American culture?

Gertrude Pridgett (1886–1939)—renamed “Ma Rainey” by marriage and show business—was born in Georgia in 1886, in the dark days after Reconstruction’s demise. By the time she was 14, she was performing professionally in minstrel shows. While on tour, she heard another woman perform the blues, and she quickly adopted the style as her own. The blues became a powerful and unprecedented vehicle for African American women to share their emotional lives in public, and Rainey emerged as the country’s first major female blues singer. Indeed, she soon earned the nickname “The Mother of the Blues.” While her talents included singing, writing songs, dancing, and performing comedy, the heart of her career relied on her singing the “Classic Blues” in a way that made plain the heartache of African American womanhood and offered up ways to confront that pain with humor, anger, and sorrow.

Rainey married and began performing with her husband, William “Pa” Rainey, in 1904; their touring company, the Rabbit Foot Minstrels, labeled them the “Assassins of the Blues.” Increasingly she and her band became the lead act in an evening’s entertainment that played in tent shows around the South, bringing the “gospel of the blues” as they toured. In the Jim Crow era of the 1910s, her audiences were segregated, Blacks on one side, whites on the other. Rainey would appear after a variety of other acts—dancers and comedians, and other singers—telling racy stories and singing the songs that accompanied them. After separating from “Pa” Rainey in 1916, she toured with her own company, playing tent shows in the country and Black theaters in cities.

Poet Sterling Brown extolled Rainey’s performing charisma, describing the way audiences loved her and her ability to raise the roof and bring down the house. “Ma Rainey was a tremendous figure.

Ma Rainey was not the first woman to sing the blues, but she was America's first major female blues celebrity, earning her the name "The Mother of the Blues." This image was most likely produced by her label, Paramount Records. It appeared on numerous posters, newspaper advertisements, and album covers, helping to make Ma Rainey—and the blues—a household name to white Americans who had little previous exposure to Black American music.



Portrait of Ma Rainey, c. 1923, photograph, Chicago, Illinois, Album/Alamy Stock Photo.

She wouldn't have to sing any words; she would moan, and the audience would moan with her. She had them in the palm of her hand . . . Ma Rainey was the greatest mistress of an audience."

In the 1920s, Rainey began recording her songs with Paramount Records in Chicago, where she settled at the age of 37, and quickly leapt from being a Southern star to a national one. The new record industry, wrote documentarian Robert Philipson, "created the first class of black divas in history." Her songs dwelt on a narrow band of emotion; they were not focused on race discrimination or the sufferings of childhood or family life. Instead, as Sandra Lieb wrote, Rainey's recurrent theme was on women's mistreatment—mostly by men—and their responses to it. Thus, she produced "a black, sensual song cycle about depression," but also "about a woman's anger which is directed both against herself and against others." Indeed, Angela Davis wrote that Rainey sang of defiant women who behaved just as badly as the men in their lives.

By most scholars' accounts, Rainey was attracted to both men and women and had affairs with both. This made her like so many of the divas of her time—Bessie Smith, Alberta Hunter, Ethel Waters, and more—and there were rumors that she and Smith had a relationship for a time. Rainey was arrested in 1925 in Chicago while hosting a party with a group of young women. A neighbor called the police,

complaining about the noise, and the police arrived just as the party took a turn toward more intimate activity. Most of the women ran off, grabbing their clothes, but the police nabbed Rainey and arrested her for having an "indecent" gathering.

Among her 90-plus recorded songs, there were at least two that tipped their hat to the presence of homosexuality in her life and world. Her song "Prove It On Me Blues," written by Rainey, narrates a night out that went wrong. Suddenly, sang Rainey, "I looked up, to my surprise / The gal I was with was gone." Over the course of the song, Rainey vowed to find her gal and "follow everywhere she goes." And she added that she wanted "the whole world to know." At the same time, she resisted being too neatly pigeon-holed in terms of her sexual desires and challenged the public to assess her life: "Cause they say I do it, ain't nobody caught me / Sure got to prove it on me."

Historian Sandra Lieb wrote, “her stance in this song is proud, tough, and swaggering, as she dares the world to find evidence, admitting just enough. . . to entice the gossips. This is a powerful statement of lesbian defiance and self-worth.” The Paramount Records advertisement (on page 90) makes clear that the lesbian message of the song might titillate Rainey’s audience, who thrilled to her emotional daring and self-revelations.

Rainey did not only sing about homosexuality in her own life. In “Sissy Blues,” Rainey sang as a woman broken-hearted yet again by a man’s abandonment, but this time it was because she “woke up and found my man in a sissy’s arms.” Her man has left her for this sissy—perhaps a “fairy” or “pansy” of the time. Eventually, Rainey named the sissy who stole her man away “Miss Kate.” Significantly, Rainey did not sing about seeking revenge nor showing hostility about her rival being a sissy; his presence in her world was neither surprising nor disgusting. Instead, she seems to have accepted the fact that a man can seduce a man, even if he has been loving a woman prior to that.

Of course, Rainey’s songs were not intended to be direct reflections of her own life. Oftentimes she played with different performing personas. Nonetheless, the success of her records dealing with homosexuality point to something bigger than just her story. In the blues world of the 1920s, much as among the poets of the Harlem Renaissance, a song about a lesbian lover or a sissy could be a hit; there was an interest in and enthusiasm for such tales.

Rainey stopped recording in 1928, and by the early 1930s had given up touring. People’s musical tastes changed with the Great Depression and the market for her style of jazz and blues declined. She died in 1939. But for several years, especially in the 1920s, Rainey embodied a revolutionary audacity as a queer Black woman who bravely stepped forward to share her stories in song.

While her talents included singing, writing songs, dancing, and performing comedy, the heart of her career relied on her singing the “Classic Blues” in a way that made plain the heartache of African American womanhood and offered up ways to confront that pain with humor, anger, and sorrow.

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 4

- **Unit 5:** Lesson 8: The Harlem Renaissance

Grade 8

- **Unit 2:** Lesson 19: African Americans’ Response to Discrimination

Grade 11

- **Unit 4:** Prosperity and Depression: At Home and Abroad

Thinking About:

Ma Rainey

- How did Ma Rainey earn the title of “Mother of the Blues”? **M/H**
- How would you describe Ma Rainey’s personality? Provide examples from her profile to support your response. **M/H**
- What might Rainey’s arrest in 1925 reveal about both the laws and the societal norms of the time? **M/H**
- How did Rainey challenge gender and sexuality norms in her music? **M/H**
- To what extent is Ma Rainey an example of an intersectional figure? **H**
- Would you consider Ma Rainey to be a civil rights activist? Why or why not? **H**

Additional Resources

Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday
by Angela Y. Davis

“[Overlooked No More: Ma Rainey, the ‘Mother of the Blues’](#)” in the *New York Times*
by Giovanni Russonello

“[Ma Rainey](#)” by the *Rock & Roll Hall of Fame*

“Prove It On Me Blues” (1928)

Ma Rainey recorded “Prove It On Me Blues” in 1928. The song is notable for the time it was recorded for its positive and self-affirming statement of a woman’s sexual attraction to other women. In the song’s lyrics Rainey, an African American, narrates a willingness to resist both the gender and sexual mores of the period. In her songs, Ma Rainey often presented different characters; however, there is evidence that the character narrating “Prove It On Me Blues” was at least partially autobiographical. According to one biographer, Sandra Lieb, there is evidence that Ma Rainey was bisexual had intimate relationships with both men and women.

Went out last night, had a great big fight.
Everything seemed to be going wrong.
I looked up, to my surprise,
The gal I was with was gone.

Where she went, I don’t know.
I mean to follow everywhere she goes;
Folks said I’m crooked.
I didn’t know where she took it.
I want the whole world to know.

They say I do it: ain’t nobody caught me.
Sure got to prove it on me.

Went out last night with a crowd of my friends.
They must’ve been women, ’cause I don’t like no men.
It’s true I wear a collar and a tie.
Makes the wind blow all the while.

They say I do it: ain’t nobody caught me.
You sure got to prove it on me...

Went out last night with a crowd of my friends.
They must’ve been women, ’cause I don’t like no men.
Wear my clothes just like a fan,
Talk to the gals just like any old man.

They say I do it: ain’t nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it on me.

Citation: Ma Rainey, “Prove It On Me Blues,” SpikeDriver Music (ASCAP).

- Summarize the main idea of Rainey’s lyrics. **M/H**
- What do you learn about Ma Rainey from this particular set of lyrics? **M/H**
- Based on the historical context, why was this song controversial? **M/H**

"Prove It On Me Blues" Advertisement

Paramount Records was an American record label producing records from jazz and blues artists in the 1920s and early 1930s. Much of the music produced by Paramount fell into a genre known as race records. At the time, the recording industry mirrored much of Jim Crow America and race records were marketed to African Americans. This advertisement appeared in a 1928 issue of the Black newspaper the *Chicago Defender*. The larger picture in the advertisement illustrates the story in "Prove It On Me Blues" and the inset picture is of the artist Ma Rainey.

"PROVE IT ON ME BLUES"

by **"Ma" Rainey**

What's all this? Scandal? Maybe so, but you wouldn't have thought it of "Ma" Rainey. But look at that cop watching her! What does it all mean? But "Ma" just sings "Prove It On Me" in this great new Paramount Blues No. 12668, with a bang-up accompaniment by the Tub Jug Washboard Band. Don't fail to get this record from your dealer, or send us the coupon.

[12668—Prove It On Me Blues and Hear Me Talking To You, "Ma" Rainey and the Tub Jug Washboard Band.]

12666—Fascinating Blues and Long Luster Lovin', Blind Lemon Jefferson and His Guitar.
 12664—Some Orchard Blues and Western Union Blues, Ida Cox; Piano, Banjo and Cornet Acc.
 12665—Low Down Mississippi Bottom and Tom Cat Blues, "Mr. Freddie" Spruill; Guitar Acc.
 12666—Ash Tray Blues and No Need of Kneekin' On the Blind, "Papa Charlie" Jackson and His Blues Banjo.
 12668—Saint Louis Man and Kentucky Stomp, Dixie Four.
 12667—Rambler and Rambler, Ben Greenstreet Blues and Detroit Bound Blues, Blind Blake and His Guitar.
 12668—House Rent Stomp and Big Bill Blues, Big Bill and Thotops; Guitar Acc.
 12669—Lestrin Chair Blues and See That My Groves Is Kept Clean, Blind Lemon Jefferson and His Guitar.
 12670—Jimmy Rodgers Blue Yodel and Way Out On The Mountain, Louis Warfield; Guitar Acc.

Favorite Spirituals

12669—Side On, King Jews and Our Father, Norfolk Jubilee Quartette.
 12668—His Eye Is On The Sparrow and I Wouldn't Mind Dying If Dying Was All, Norfolk Jubilee Quartette.

SEND NO MONEY! If your dealer is out of the records you want, send us the coupon below. Pay postman 75 cents for each record, plus small C. O. D. fee when he delivers records. We pay postage on shipments of two or more records.

Electrically Recorded!
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 New York, N. Y.

Send me the records checked (✓) below 75 cents each.

<input type="checkbox"/> 12668	<input type="checkbox"/> 12669	<input type="checkbox"/> 12670
<input type="checkbox"/> 12666	<input type="checkbox"/> 12664	<input type="checkbox"/> 12667
<input type="checkbox"/> 12665	<input type="checkbox"/> 12666	<input type="checkbox"/> 12668

Paramount
 The Popular Race Record

Name.....
 Address.....
 City..... State.....

Citation: Paramount Records, "Prove It On Me Blues," Advertisement, 1928, *Chicago Defender*.

“Prove It On Me Blues” Advertisement *continued*:

- What is surprising about this advertisement? Why is it surprising? **M/H**
- What is this an advertisement for? How do you know? **M/H**
- What is being depicted in the image? Why is it being depicted? How does the text add to your understanding of the image? **M/H**
- Considering the lyrics, why do you think that the record company chose this imagery for the advertisement? **M/H**
- The record, “Prove It On Me Blues” was produced by Paramount. What is meant by the line “The popular race record” to describe Paramount? **M/H**
- How are issues of race, gender, and sexuality brought together in this advertisement? **M/H**
- Why is there an inset picture inside the larger picture of the three women? What is the purpose of these juxtaposed images? In what ways is this a commentary on queer or gender-fluid performative culture? **M/H**
- Why do you think the record company chose to advertise Ma Rainey’s song in this manner? **M/H**

Ma Rainey with Her Band

Over the course of her decades-long career as a musician, Ma Rainey was the leader of many bands, including the “Rabbit Foot Minstrels” and “Rainey and Rainey, Assassins of the Blues.” In 1924, the year this photo was taken, Rainey recorded for the first time with Louis Armstrong, one of the top jazz musicians of the day. Although she only recorded her first album in 1923, by 1928, she had recorded over 100.



Citation: *Ma Rainey and Her Band*, c. 1924, photograph, Chicago, Illinois, Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy Stock Photo.

- Why do you think this photograph was created? **E/M/H**
- Do you think this is a candid photograph or staged for the photographer? How might knowing the purpose of the photo affect your interpretation? **M/H**
- Is this a reliable primary source to help one understand Ma Rainey's influence on popular culture in the United States during the 1920s? Why or why not? **E/M/H**

“Ma Rainey” by Sterling Brown, 1932

Sterling Brown was a poet of the Harlem Renaissance and a professor at Howard University, whose work was greatly influenced by Black American music of the period, from blues, to jazz, to spirituals. In this poem dedicated to Ma Rainey, he captures ways of speaking, metaphors, place names, and experiences that would have been familiar to Rainey’s Black audiences, particularly those from the Southeast, like Ma Rainey herself. “Ma Rainey” was included in Brown’s first book, published in 1932 and titled *Southern Road*, but his next book of poetry, *The Last Ride of Wild Bill*, would not be published until 1975.

I

When Ma Rainey
Comes to town,
Folks from anyplace
Miles aroun’,
From Cape Girardeau,
Poplar Bluff,
Flocks in to hear
Ma do her stuff;

Comes flivverin’ in,
Or ridin’ mules,
Or packed in trains,
Picknickin’ fools...
That’s what it’s like,
Fo’ miles on down,
To the New Orleans delta
An’ mobile town,
When Ma hits
Anywheres aroun’.

II

Dey comes to hear Ma Rainey from de little river settlements
From blackbottom cornrows and from lumber camps;
Dey stumble in de hall, jes’ a-laughin’ an’ a-cacklin’,
Cheerin’ lak roarin’ water, lak wind in river swamps.

An’ some jokers keeps dey laughs a-goin’ in de crowded aisles,
An’ some folks sits dere waitin’ wid dey aches an’ miseries,
Till Ma comes out before dem, a-smilin’ gold-toofed smiles,
An’ Long Boy ripples minors on de black an’ yellow keys.

“Ma Rainey” by Sterling Brown, 1932 *continued*:

III

O Ma Rainey,
Sing yo’ song;
Now you’s back
Whah you belong,
Git way inside us,
Keep us strong...
O Ma Rainey,
Li’l an low;
Sing us ’bout de hard luck
Roun’ our do’;
Sing us ’bout de lonesome road
We mus’ go...

IV

I talked to a fellow, an’ the fellow say,
“She jes’ catch hold of us, somekindaway.
She sang Backwater Blues one day:
*‘It rained fo’ days an’ de skies was dark as night,
Trouble taken place in de lowlands at night.
Thundered an’ lightened an’ the storm begin to roll
Thousan’s of people ain’t got no place to go.
Den I went an’ stood upon some high ol’ lonesome hill,
An’ looked down on the place where I used to live.’*
An’ den de folks, dey natchally bowed dey heads an’ cried
Bowed dey heavy heads, shet dey moufs up tight an’ cried
An’ Ma lef’ de stage, an’ followed some de folks outside.”
Dere wasn’t much more de fellow say:
She jes’ gits hold of us dataway.

Citation: Sterling Brown, “Ma Rainey,” *The Collected Poems of Sterling A. Brown*, ed. Michael S. Harper, (New York: Harper Colophon, 1980); Copyright © 1980 by Sterling A. Brown. Reprinted by permission of Jacqueline M. Combs.

-
- According to the poet Sterling Brown, how did people respond when Ma Rainey came to perform? **E/M/H**
 - At the end of the poem, Brown describes audience members as acting like they were in a church when Ma Rainey sang Backwater Blues. Why do you think the poet compared Rainey’s performance to going to church? **M/H**
 - Does this poem provide reliable evidence about Rainey’s influence on Black American music? Why or why not? **M/H**



Pauli Murray

Black Civil Rights Activist, Lawyer, and Priest Who Challenged the Constraints of Identity

by the Museum of the City of New York

Focus Questions

What role did women and LGBTQ+ activists play in shaping the Civil Rights movement?

How did the fight to end racial discrimination inform the feminist movement?

How have activists used the United States Constitution to protect the rights of women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ people?

How has our understanding of gender identity changed in the last century?

NOTE: In her writing toward the end of her life, Pauli Murray self identified using female pronouns. With this historical context in mind, we use the pronouns she, her, and hers when referring to Pauli Murray.

Pauli Murray (1910–1985) was a lawyer, a civil rights activist, a leading member of the feminist movement, a labor organizer, a poet, and a priest. She helped to develop the legal theories that were used to end Jim Crow segregation in the South and fought for the recognition of the double oppression that Black women faced, both in American society and within the civil rights and feminist movements. Well before the term intersectionality was coined in 1989, Murray identified how members of minority groups experienced overlapping and reinforcing discrimination. She refused, she wrote, “to be fragmented into Negro at one time, woman at another, or worker at another.”

Murray was born in Baltimore to a family of teachers who named her Anna Pauline Murray. After the death of her mother in 1914 and the hospitalization of her father, who suffered from mental illness, she moved south to Durham, North Carolina, to live with her aunt and namesake, Pauline Fitzgerald Dame, who soon became her surrogate mother. Even as a young child, Murray pushed against boundaries meant to contain her: she refused to feel ashamed of her mixed-race background, she would walk rather than take segregated transportation, and she gave up movies instead of sitting in a segregated theater. And while she kept this struggle private for most of her life, Murray also

Well before the term intersectionality was coined in 1989, Murray identified how members of minority groups experienced overlapping and reinforcing discrimination. She refused, she wrote, “to be fragmented into Negro at one time, woman at another, or worker at another.”

rejected the strict separation of male and female identity that existed for most of the 20th century. As a child, she felt more like a boy than a girl; her aunt actually called her a “little boy-girl,” and by 15 she was calling herself “Paul.”¹

Murray excelled in school, graduating at age 15, but refused to attend a segregated college. Instead, she moved to New York and enrolled at Hunter College (where she became “Pauli”). While living in the city, she joined the labor movement, marching in picket lines and working as a union organizer, and wrote much of the poetry she would later publish.

In 1939, Murray decided to apply to graduate school and submitted an application to the University of North Carolina, which did not allow Black students to enroll. The rejection letter she received prompted her to reach out to the NAACP in hopes of bringing a lawsuit; while the organization turned down her case against the university, they represented her two years later

when she and a friend were arrested for refusing to sit on a broken seat in the back of a segregated bus in Richmond, Virginia. Though Murray lost her case, these two experiences drove her to apply to law school, hoping to gain the skills needed to fight racial discrimination. She enrolled at Howard University, one of only two women in her class, and quickly found herself confronting the sexism of her male classmates and professors.

Murray’s experiences at Howard led her to coin the term “Jane Crow” to describe the prejudice she faced as a Black woman. Graduating at the top of her class, Murray wrote a senior paper that attacked the system of racial segregation, arguing that Jim Crow laws were unconstitutional and a violation of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. While her peers at Howard thought her ideas were too radical to be successful, civil rights attorney and future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall used Murray’s paper as he and the NAACP prepared their winning argument in the case that overturned school segregation, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

Throughout these years, Murray wrestled with her gender identity. Murray was attracted to women, but did not feel that terms like “homosexual” or “lesbian” accurately described her. Instead, she felt strongly that she was more male than female; “one of nature’s experiments,” she wrote, “a girl who should have been a boy.” That description also helped her make sense of her desires, which she did not like to characterize as lesbian. Instead, she regarded her “very natural falling in love with the female sex” as a manifestation of her inner maleness. She experimented with the language she used to identify herself, using terms like “boy-girl,” “imp,” “pixie,” and “queer.”²

1 Rosalind Rosenberg, *Jane Crow: The Life of Pauli Murray* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1-3, 39.

2 Kathryn Shultz, “[The Many Lives of Pauli Murray](#),” *New Yorker*, April 10, 2017

Despite her ambivalence about identifying as a woman, Murray worked aggressively to fight for women's equality. She applied her arguments against racial discrimination to oppose laws that discriminated against women. If the Constitution forbade discrimination on the basis of race, she argued, why was discrimination against women on the basis of sex any different? Murray helped to argue a legal case, *White v. Crook* (1966), that overturned laws preventing women from serving on juries. That same year, she joined Betty Friedan and others to co-found NOW, the **National Organization for Women**, aimed at mobilizing women to protest gender discrimination. In 1971, Ruth Bader Ginsburg—an attorney for the ACLU who would become the second woman to join the Supreme Court—acknowledged the importance of Murray's work when she added Murray's name to a brief submitted to the Supreme Court in a case where Ginsburg successfully argued that gender discrimination violated the Fourteenth Amendment.

After becoming a tenured professor at Brandeis University, where she taught classes on law, African American studies, and women's studies, Murray began an entirely new career; she left academia to become a priest. Murray was ordained in 1977 as the first Black women priest in the Episcopal Church. For the remainder of her life, she worked in a parish in Washington, D.C., writing sermons and theology that focused on the struggles of Black and poor women.

Even with all her successes, her gender identity remained a puzzle for Murray. "Maybe two got fused into one with parts of each sex," she mused at one point, "male head and brain (?), female-ish body, mixed emotional characteristics." Into her forties, Murray unsuccessfully sought to be treated with male hormones and adopted masculine clothing and nicknames. Pauli Murray struggled throughout her life to find a gender identity that spoke to her sense of self, her desires, and her experiences.

Murray died in 1985 at age 74. "If anyone should ask a Negro woman in America what has been her greatest achievement," Murray wrote in 1970, "her honest answer would be, 'I survived!'"

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 8

- **Unit 6:** Lesson 3: Key Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement
- **Unit 6:** Lesson 8: Feminist Movement
- **Unit 6:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 21: Modern Civil Rights (LGBTQ movement)

Grade 11

- **Unit 4:** Prosperity and Depression: At Home and Abroad

Thinking About:

Pauli Murray

- How did Pauli Murray’s childhood in Durham, North Carolina, shape her career as an activist? **E/M/H**
- Why might Pauli Murray have thought training as a lawyer would be the best way to fight racial segregation? **M/H**
- What role did the law and the court system play in Murray’s own life? **M/H**
- The Fourteenth Amendment states that all citizens of the United States have equal protection under the law. How did the idea of “separate but equal” violate the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution? **E/M/H**
- How would you define the term “Jane Crow”? How is it different from “Jim Crow”? **M/H**
- How does including stories like those of Pauli Murray change our understanding of activist movements in the 20th century, including the Civil Rights, feminist, and Gay Liberation movements? **M/H**
- How did historically constructed definitions of gender and sexuality create difficulties for Pauli Murray to comfortably assert her identity? In what ways can her multiple career paths be seen as resistance against heteronormative structures? **H**
- Why do you think that Pauli Murray in her 60s decided to become an ordained priest in the Episcopal Church? **M/H**

Additional Resources

Dark Testament and Other Poems by Pauli Murray

Song in a Weary Throat: Memoir of an American Pilgrim by Pauli Murray

Jane Crow: The Life of Pauli Murray by Rosalind Rosenberg

“[The Many Lives of Pauli Murray](#)” in *The New Yorker* by Kathryn Schulz

“[The Pauli Murray Project](#)” by the *Duke Human Rights Center at the Franklin Humanities Institute*

Excerpt from an interview with Pauli Murray

In 1976, Pauli Murray was interviewed as part of the Southern Oral History Program at UNC-Chapel Hill. This excerpt covers her initial experience of gender discrimination in law school at Howard University, a historically Black institution.

Pauli Murray: O.K., so at the law school, two things happened immediately. I became aware of sex prejudice.

Genna Rae McNeil: That was something that I was going to ask you about.

Murray: I became aware of it in my freshman year at law school. It came upon me as a terrible shock. I had not grown up in family where limitations were placed upon women. My whole family tradition had been self-sufficient women. My grandfather, patriarch though he was, believed in his daughters being self-sufficient and independent and so it just simply was not part of my family tradition to expect any limitations upon what a woman could and could not do. I had never thought of myself in terms of a woman. I had thought of myself in preparing to be a civil rights lawyer for this cause. I had not been in school, I guess for two or three days, and Professor Robert Ming, said . . . I can't tell whether he was kidding or being sarcastic or what, but he said, "We don't know why women come to law school anyway, but since you're here . . ." However you take it, one has to respond, you can't just say that this is really kidding. Then the second thing, was that there was a notice on the bulletin board very shortly, maybe two or three weeks after school began which said, "All male members of the first year class are invited to Dean So-and-So's for smoker." There were only two females in the entire school, one of which was myself. I am so stunned. I couldn't imagine. "What is all this?" So, I raised the question. I was told that they wanted to look over the members of the first year class for the legal fraternity. "Well, if it is legal fraternity, why I am not eligible?" "Oh, well, why don't you women go and form a legal sorority." So, what I'm really saying is that removing the racial factor, Howard University being school where the racial factor was not the problem, immediately the sex factor was isolated and stood there in all of its . . .

Excerpt from an interview with Pauli Murray *continued*:

G.M.: And the professor who was involved in making a suggestion of a female legal society was not one of the white professors at the law school?

Murray: There were no white professors.

G.M.: At that point, there were no white professors, in the twenties and thirties?

Murray: No, there were none at that point [in the 1940s]. So, my whole experience at law school was an experience of learning really for the first time what, in a way, a crude kind of sexism can be, an unvarnished one. . . .

G.M.: In fact, so much a part of custom that one is not supposed to question it, which is why it can be crude.

Murray: Yes. And so, this is the beginning of my conscious feminism, which began at Howard University back in the 1940s.

Citation: Pauli Murray, [Oral History Interview with Pauli Murray](#), interview by Genna Rae McNeil, February 13, 1976, Interview G-0044, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, UNC-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Published by *Documenting the American South*, May 3, 2013.

- How did Pauli Murray first become aware of what she calls “sex prejudice?” **E/M/H**
- How might Murray have felt as only one of two women in Howard University’s first-year law class? **E/M/H**
- What does Murray mean when she states that only after removing the “racial factor” could she see the gender discrimination she faced? How would you define the “racial factor” in your own words? **E/M/H**
- What might Murray mean by the phrase “conscious feminism”? How might you define the difference between conscious and unconscious feminism? **H**
- Why up until this point might Murray have “never thought of [herself] in terms of a woman?” **M/H**

Dark Testament

Originally written in 1943, “Dark Testament” is among Murray’s most famous poems. She published it, along with other work, in a collection entitled *Dark Testament and other poems* in 1970.

Poem – Verse 8

“Dark Testament”

Hope is a crushed stalk
Between clenched fingers.

Hope is a bird’s wing
Broken by a stone.

Hope is a word in a tuneless ditty—
A word whispered with the wind,
A dream of forty acres and a mule,
A cabin of one’s own and a moment to rest,
A name and place for one’s children
And children’s children at last. . .

Hope is a song in a weary throat.

Give me a song of hope
And a world where I can sing it.
Give me a song of faith
And a people to believe in it.
Give me a song of kindness
And a country where I can live it.
Give me a song of hope and love
And a brown girl’s heart to hear it.

Citation: Pauli Murray, *Dark Testament and other poems*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018); “Dark Testament” copyright by the Pauli Murray Foundation; Used by permission of Liveright Publishing Corporation.

- What words, phrases, and images jump out at you as you read this poem? How would you describe the mood of this poem? **M/H**
- How would you describe the speaker of this poem? What lines and images give you a sense of the speaker’s identity? **M/H**
- How does the speaker of this poem understand the concept of hope? **M/H**
- The word “testament” has several meanings. A testament can refer to someone’s will, the document that expresses someone’s wishes after death. A testament can also be a belief, or evidence or proof of something. How should we understand the title of this poem, “Dark Testament”? **M/H**
- What elements of her own life might Pauli Murray have drawn upon when writing this poem? **H**
- Does this poem give you any new insight into Pauli Murray’s work as an activist? How so? **M/H**

Pauli Murray at UNC

In this photograph, likely taken in the 1970s after she was ordained by the Episcopal Church, Pauli Murray is pictured at work in her office. She wears a clerical collar and a crucifix on a necklace.



Citation: [Pauli Murray \(1910–1985\)](#), Portrait Collection, North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Carolina Digital Library and Archives, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, P2-M983-P327.

- Describe briefly what you see in this portrait. What elements of the photograph stand out most sharply to you? **E/M/H**
- After becoming a published poet and a tenured law professor at Brandeis University, Murray became the first African American woman to be ordained as a priest in the Episcopal Church in 1977. How might Murray's religious identity have informed her work as an activist for gender and racial equality? **H**

Opinion of US Supreme Court Case

Reed v. Reed, 1971

Reed v. Reed involved a dispute between two separated parents in Idaho. In 1967, Sally and Cecil Reed's son died without a will. While both parents applied to manage their son's estate, the law stated that in such cases, "males must be preferred over females." Sally Reed sued, arguing that Idaho's law violated her rights under the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees equal protection under the law. She won; it was the first time the Supreme Court had ever found a law that differentiated between men and women to be unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment—an argument that Pauli Murray had previously advanced.

Having examined the record and considered the briefs and oral arguments of the parties, we have concluded that the arbitrary preference established in favor of males by . . . the Idaho Code cannot stand in the face of the Fourteenth Amendment's command that no State deny the equal protection of the laws to any person within its jurisdiction.

Idaho does not, of course, deny letters of administration to women altogether. Indeed. . . , a woman whose spouse dies intestate has a preference over a son, father, brother, or any other male relative of the decedent. Moreover, we can judicially notice that, in this country, presumably due to the greater longevity of women, a large proportion of estates, both intestate and under wills of decedents, are administered by surviving widows.

[The code] is restricted in its operation to those situations where competing applications for letters of administration have been filed by both male and female members of the same entitlement class. . . . In such situations, [the Idaho Code] provides that different treatment be accorded to the applicants on the basis of their sex; it thus establishes a classification subject to scrutiny under the Equal Protection Clause.

In applying that clause, this Court has consistently recognized that the Fourteenth Amendment does not deny to States the power to treat different classes of persons in different ways. . . . The Equal Protection Clause of that amendment does, however, deny to States the power to legislate that different treatment be accorded to persons placed by a statute into different classes on the basis of criteria wholly unrelated to the objective of that statute. A classification "must be reasonable, not arbitrary, and must rest upon some ground of difference having a fair and substantial relation to the object of the legislation, so that all persons similarly circumstanced shall be treated alike." . . . The question presented by this

Opinion of US Supreme Court Case Reed v. Reed, 1971 *continued*:

case, then, is whether a difference in the sex of competing applicants for letters of administration bears a rational relationship to a state objective that is sought to be advanced by the [Idaho Code]. . .

In upholding the latter section, the Idaho Supreme Court concluded that its objective was to eliminate one area of controversy when two or more persons, equally entitled under [the Idaho Code], seek letters of administration, and thereby present the probate court “with the issue of which one should be named.” The court also concluded that, where such persons are not of the same sex, the elimination of females from consideration “is neither an illogical nor arbitrary method devised by the legislature to resolve an issue that would otherwise require a hearing as to the relative merits. . . of the two or more petitioning relatives.” . . .

Clearly the objective of reducing the workload on probate courts by eliminating one class of contests is not without some legitimacy. The crucial question, however, is whether [the Idaho Code] advances that objective in a manner consistent with the command of the Equal Protection Clause. We hold that it does not. To give a mandatory preference to members of either sex over members of the other, merely to accomplish the elimination of hearings on the merits, is to make the very kind of arbitrary legislative choice forbidden by the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment; and whatever may be said as to the positive values of avoiding intrafamily controversy, the choice in this context may not lawfully be mandated solely on the basis of sex. . . .

By providing dissimilar treatment for men and women who are thus similarly situated, the challenged section [of the Idaho Code] violates the Equal Protection Clause. . . .

The judgment of the Idaho Supreme Court is reversed, and the case remanded for further proceedings not inconsistent with this opinion.

Citation: *Reed v. Reed*, 404 U.S. 71 (1971).

- The first full paragraph of this document gives the Supreme Court’s decision in the case of *Reed v. Reed*. In your own words, what is the court saying? **M/H**
- While lawyers had previously used the Fourteenth Amendment to overturn racially discriminatory laws, Pauli Murray thought the same argument could be used to argue against gender discrimination. What argument might she have made? **M/H**
- Ruth Bader Ginsberg and Melvin Wulf, both lawyers for the ACLU, wrote the brief for Sally Reed’s case, but named Pauli Murray and Dorothy Kenyon as co-authors. Why might they have done that? **H**
- How might Pauli Murray have felt seeing her name on this brief before the Supreme Court? **H**



Bayard Rustin

MLK's Secret Lieutenant and Mentor

by Daniel Hurewitz

Focus Questions

How and why did the civil rights movement evolve after World War II?

Why did civil rights leaders initially use nonviolence to achieve economic, political, and social equality?

What were the key turning points in the post-World War II civil rights movement?

What are the challenges of an intersectional approach to achieving equality?

The beloved photos of the 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech are forever etched into our historical memory. In them, we tend to remember one man standing at the Lincoln Memorial: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. If you take a closer look at these iconic images, though, you see that Dr. King delivered his history-making address flanked by a cohort of lesser-known men. Among them stands **Bayard Rustin** (1912–1987), a gay African American. Without Rustin, the seminal speech in civil rights history would never have even happened. In fact, without Rustin, it is unlikely that King’s leadership of the Black civil rights movement would have been as successful—or as nonviolent—as it was.

Had Bayard Rustin not been gay, there is little question he would have been one of the most celebrated leaders in the 20th century fight for African American equality and Black civil rights. Born in 1912 outside of Philadelphia, Rustin was raised by his grandparents. His grandmother’s moral perspective, shaped in part by her own Quaker faith, profoundly influenced him. Before graduating from high school, where he was celebrated as a talented singer, writer, athlete, and scholar, he was also arrested for daring to sit in the Whites-only section of the local movie theater. Rustin struggled to finish college, twice dropping out, and by 1937 he was living in New York, singing backup to the folk singer Josh White and performing in a musical featuring Paul Robeson.

There in New York, Rustin made two important friendships. One was with socialist leader A. Philip Randolph, head of the sleeping-car porters union and a visionary who understood the potential power of organized African American protest. Randolph also introduced Rustin to A.J. Muste, who

Rustin proffered a strategy and method that King steadily absorbed, and he explained the possibilities of strategic civil disobedience in lengthy nightly discussions.

had recently taken control of a pacifist antiwar group, the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). Muste hired Rustin to be a youth organizer, and he became Muste's "hands and feet and eyes," traveling the country, recruiting for a movement to resist the war.¹ Drawing on his singing voice and eloquence, Rustin was an inspiring orator. Rustin and James Farmer, another FOR activist, also convinced Muste to expand FOR's mission and establish a part of the group to focus on racial discrimination; this became the organization CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality. As the work began in earnest, however, Rustin was convicted as a draft evader and sent for more than two years to federal prison, from the spring of 1944 to the summer of 1946.

Following his release, he again began organizing with CORE and FOR, continuing the idea of challenging racism through nonviolence in the South. In the spring of 1947, they launched a series of "freedom rides" across the south to draw attention to segregated interstate travel. For his efforts, Rustin served 30 days on a chain gang. While on a speaking tour in Southern California in the spring of 1953, the policing of gay men and women that had accelerated during the Cold War caught up with Rustin. He was found having sex in a car with two other men outside his hotel, arrested, and sentenced to 60 days in jail. In the past, Rustin's imprisonments had been celebrated; he had written an essay about serving on the chain gang in North Carolina and his two-year stint as a war resister had served as fodder in the FOR publicity. But with this arrest, Muste came down hard on Rustin, denouncing him privately for engaging in such a casual kind of intimacy. But worse than that, Muste decided to publicize Rustin's arrest within the movement; he sent out a letter describing the incident and the arrest and making clear that he thought Rustin should never have a leadership position again. The membership largely followed Muste's lead, Rustin later recalled, describing how, "some of these nonviolent Christians, despite their love and affection for humanity, were not really able to express very much affection to me."²

In 1956, however, Randolph rescued Rustin from the sidelines, thus launching the second great arc of his life in the civil rights movement. A bus boycott had begun in Montgomery, Alabama, and a young reverend had been drafted to lead it. The only problem, Randolph told Rustin, this young promising leader had no experience organizing people, let alone strategically confronting the deep racism that surrounded them. Randolph dispatched Rustin to Montgomery, where Rustin began to mentor what became the next generation of leaders—specifically Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Mentor," though, understates the role Rustin played in helping King build the civil rights movement. When Rustin arrived in Montgomery, White anger was on the rise and so was King's sense of

1 Bayard Rustin, "Black and Gay in the Civil Rights Movement," in *Time on Two Crosses: Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*, eds. Devon Carbado and Donald Weise (San Francisco: Cleis, 2003), 284.

2 Devon Carbado and Donald Weise, "Introduction," *Time on Two Crosses: Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*, eds. Carbado and Weise (San Francisco: Cleis, 2003), xvi.

threat and danger. King was already storing guns at home. Instead, Rustin proffered a strategy and method that King steadily absorbed, and he explained the possibilities of strategic civil disobedience in lengthy nightly discussions. He helped King see how protestors' refusal to meet violence with violence, and their willingness to be arrested, turned them from powerless victims to powerful revealers of an unjust system. In fact, when city commissioners indicted the boycott leaders, including King, Rustin convinced them to turn themselves in, voluntarily, before being arrested. Suddenly, a moment of seeming weakness became a moment of defiance and liberation for the boycott.

Importantly, Rustin's first visit to Montgomery was kept short. His own personal history was seen as a threat to King's efforts and he was encouraged to leave within a week of arriving. This became the recurring dynamic between Rustin and King: Rustin took on crucial work for the movement, but always behind the scenes. From the background, Rustin provided crucial support to keep up the momentum of the movement. For instance, he kept national press attention on Montgomery, even though he himself was in New York, and he also organized a massive New York fundraiser for the boycott that featured Adam Clayton Powell and Eleanor Roosevelt. In addition, he helped construct the organization that became King's major vehicle—the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, or SCLC.

Rustin was key to King's leadership in the movement, yet the Reverend did not always have Rustin's back. In the summer of 1960, when Randolph wanted a large march to descend on the Democratic Party Convention, the Party asked Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. to intercede. Powell's strategy was to challenge King, threatening that unless he stopped the march, he would announce to the press that he and Rustin were having an affair. Already dogged by rumors about his own infidelities, King did not stand up to Powell. Instead, King allowed Rustin to resign, letting his mentor disappear into the shadows, once again.

Regardless of this treatment, Rustin's commitment to the fight for civil rights never wavered. He began organizing what became a turning point in civil rights history, the famous March on Washington, the site of King's powerful speech. That 1963 march was the fulfillment of what Randolph proposed in 1941—a mass mobilization of African American power. Rustin brought that promise to reality: he organized the bus routes and the schedule, the food and the port-a-potties. Had Rustin not constructed the event, not produced it, no one would have been there to hear King speak. Rustin was not named the director of the march, though he did all the work to make it happen; the leaders of the various civil rights organizations balked at letting him do so. Bowing to homophobia inside the movement, Randolph was named the head. Nevertheless, in an attempt to disparage the entire march, Senator Strom Thurmond read Rustin's California arrest record into the Congressional Record.

The 1963 March on Washington is often heralded as representing a new brand of American protest. With more than 250,000 people in attendance and millions more watching on television, the march brought the demands of the civil rights movement to a larger national audience. Rustin later said that the march was “the most exciting project I've ever worked on.”

Rustin only began to speak out publicly about being gay in the 1980s. He emerged as a vocal advocate for establishing gay rights as the new locus of the fight for expanding American democracy. As he told a group of gay men in 1986, in the 1960s, if you wanted to know “whether a person was truly for democracy, you asked a simple question, ‘What about blacks?’ . . . If you want to know

whether today people believe in democracy... the question to ask is, 'What about people who are gay?' Because that is now the litmus paper by which this democracy is to be judged."³

Rustin died in the summer of 1987 and in 2013 President Barack Obama honored him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. On February 4, 2020, California Governor Gavin Newsom issued a posthumous pardon for Rustin's 1953 conviction for having consensual sex with men in California. Gay people at the time were often targeted with discriminatory "morals charges," which were life-ruining for many people and often, as in Rustin's case, led to their being forced to register as sex offenders. At the same time as he pardoned Bayard Rustin, Governor Newsom announced a clemency initiative seeking to clear the records of other people who faced similar discriminatory charges in the past.

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 8

- **Unit 6:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 7: Act of Terror: Bombing in Birmingham
- **Unit 6:** Lesson 3: Key Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement
- **Unit 6:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 21: Modern Civil Rights (LGBTQ movement)

Grade 11

- **Unit 4:** Prosperity and Depression: At Home and Abroad
- **Unit 6:** Social and Economic Change: Domestic Issues

³ Bayard Rustin, "Talk to Black and White Men Together: Philadelphia Chapter, March 1, 1986, in *Time on Two Crosses: Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*, eds. Devon Carbado and Donald Weise (San Francisco: Cleis, 2003), 275.

Thinking About:

Bayard Rustin

- How did the response to Rustin’s homosexuality affect his treatment in the historical narrative? **M/H**
- What was Rustin’s most important achievement during the civil rights movement? Support your opinion with facts and details. **M/H**
- How would you summarize Bayard Rustin’s role in the civil rights movement? Develop your response with evidence from his profile. **M/H**
- Why do you think Rustin continued to fight for civil rights even though he was often mistreated and marginalized by his peers? Is there any evidence to support your opinion? **M/H**
- Why was Rustin’s 1953 arrest treated differently by civil rights leaders than his previous arrests? **M/H**
- What did the public shaming of Rustin by his civil rights peers reveal about ongoing tensions between certain religious doctrines and practices and the fight for equality? **H**
- What does Rustin’s story reveal about the challenges of an intersectional approach to achieving civil rights? **H**
- How did Rustin suggest the definition of democracy changed during his lifetime? **M/H**

Additional Resources

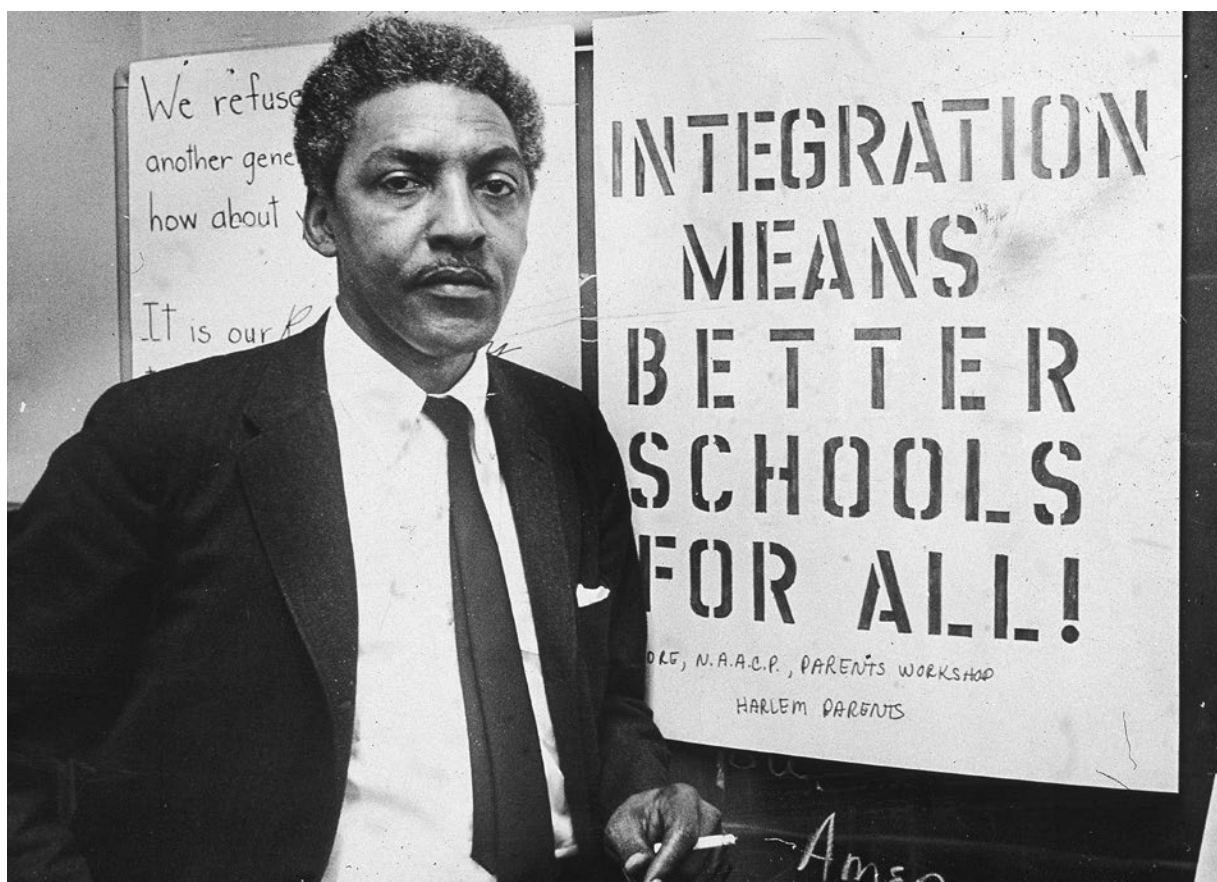
Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin by Bennett Singer and Nancy D. Kates

“[Honoring an Unsung LGBTQ Hero: Bayard Rustin](#)” by *Family Equality Council*

“[In Newly Found Audio, A Forgotten Civil Rights Leader Says Coming Out ‘Was an Absolute Necessity’](#)” by Michel Martin and Emma Bowman

The Citywide Committee for Integrated Schools

Bayard Rustin was one of the leaders of the Civil Rights movement, and a close confidant of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. Rustin organized local communities around the country on a wide variety of issues, from police brutality, to anti-Black housing policies, to employment and the living wage. This photo was taken in February of 1964, one day before Rustin helped to coordinate over 450,000 students walking out of New York City schools to protest segregation in education. It was the largest one-day civil rights protest in United States history.



Citation: Patrick A. Burns, *American civil rights activist Bayard Rustin (1912–1987), spokesman for the Citywide Committee for Integration, at the organization’s headquarters at Silcam Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn, New York City, February 2, 1964*, New York Times Co., Getty Images, 3248947.

- What is the meaning of the poster next to Bayard Rustin? **E**
- Why is it important that Bayard Rustin worked on organizing local communities around the country? **M/H**
- Was the February 1964 protest against school segregation in New York City effective? How do you know? **M/H**

Lecturer Jailed on Morals Charge

In 1953, Bayard Rustin was arrested in Pasadena, California for consensual sexual activity with another man. In the press, this was euphemistically called a “morals charge,” but readers in the 1950s would have been able to read between the lines and understand that Rustin’s “crime” was simply his sexuality. Ten years later, noted segregationist Senator Strom Thurmond would rail against Rustin’s sexuality on the floor of the Senate, in an effort to undermine the March on Washington that Rustin had helped organize with Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

[From the *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 22, 1953]

LECTURER JAILED ON MORALS CHARGE

Bayard Rustin, 40-year-old nationally known Negro lecturer, was jailed on a morals charge in Pasadena early yesterday a few hours after he had spoken on the subject of world peace before the American Association Of University Women at the Pasadena Athletic Club.

Rustin, who was registered at the Green Hotel is scheduled to address the Pasadena chapter of the American Friends Society on world conditions this evening at the Pasadena First Methodist Church.

He was released on \$500 bail pending a plea at 2 p.m. today before Municipal Judge Burton Noble in Pasadena.

When arrested by Pasadena police, Rustin had \$427 in cash on his person—which he said included the proceeds from his previous night’s speech. He was taken into custody when officers spotted him parked in his automobile at Raymond Avenue at Green Street, Pasadena, in company with Marvin W. Long, 23, of Monterey Park, and Louie Buono, 23, of Rosemead.

All three men were booked on suspicion of lewd vagrancy.

Lecturer Jailed on Morals Charge *continued*:

[From the *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 23, 1953]

LECTURER SENTENCED TO JAIL ON MORALS CHARGE

Pasadena Municipal Judge Burton Noble yesterday sentenced Bayard Rustin, 40-year old Negro lecturer, to 60 days in the county jail on a morals charge.

Rustin's attorney, Charles Holloper, failed in an appeal to free his client on the promise that he would leave this State and return to his home in New York.

Rustin pleaded guilty to the charge. He had been arrested by Pasadena police early Thursday in company with two men in an automobile parked near the Green Hotel.

The other men, Marvin W. Long, 23, of Monterey Park and Louie Buono, 23, of Rosemead, were given similar sentences.

A delegation of three members of the American Friends Society appeared in court, but did not testify in Rustin's behalf.

Rustin had been scheduled to address the latter group at the Pasadena First Methodist Church yesterday. Shortly before his arrest, Rustin spoke on world peace before the American Society of University Women at the Pasadena Athletic Club.

Citation: *Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 88th Congress*, First Session, Volume 109, Part 11, United States Government Printing Office, Washington 1963, 148837.

- How might people who disagreed with Rustin's advocacy have used the charges detailed in these articles against him? **M/H**
- In February of 2020 Governor Gavin Newsom of California posthumously pardoned Bayard Rustin on these charges. What does that tell us about California in 1953 versus California today? **M/H**

Excerpt from Montgomery Diary

Bayard Rustin spent most of his adult life as an advocate for social justice. While it is easy to see how his incredible skills as a speaker and writer helped make that work possible, the day-in and day-out work of organizing in the community is often invisible. In this excerpt from Rustin's 1956 diary, we can see how carefully he tracked every aspect of the work that made the Montgomery Bus Boycott successful.

Bayard Rustin, "Excerpt from Montgomery Diary"

February 24, 1956

42,000 Negroes have not ridden the busses since December 5. On December 6, the police began to harass, intimidate, and arrest Negro taxi drivers who were helping get these people to work. It thus became necessary for the Negro leaders to find an alternative—the car pool.

They set up 23 dispatch centers where people gather to wait for free transportation. This morning Rufus Lewis, director of the pool, invited me to attend the meeting of the drivers. On the way, he explained that there are three methods in addition to the car pool, for moving the Negro population:

- 1) Hitch-hiking.
- 2) The transportation of servants by white housewives.
- 3) Walking.

Later he introduced me to two men, one of whom has walked 7 miles and the other 14 miles, every day since December 5.

"The success of the car pool is at the heart of the movement," Lewis said at the meeting.

"It must not be stopped." I wondered what the response of the drivers would be, since 28 of them had just been arrested on charges of conspiring to destroy the bus company. One by one, they pledged that, if necessary, they would be arrested again and again.

Citation: Bayard Rustin, "[Montgomery Diary](#)," in Stewart Burns, ed., *Daybreak of Freedom: The Montgomery Bus Boycott* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 166–167. American Social History Project, Center for Media and Learning (City University of New York), <http://herb.ashp.cuny.edu>.

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- What can we learn about the organization associated with large scale social justice movements from this document? **E/M/H**
 - According to this document, what steps were police taking to interfere with the bus boycott? **M/H**
 - What can we learn about Bayard Rustin and his importance to the civil rights movement from this document? **E/M/H**

Bayard Rustin in Interview with Robert Penn Warren (1964)

A Pulitzer Prize–winning novelist and poet, Robert Penn Warren interviewed civil rights leaders and grassroots activists, including Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Bayard Rustin, in order to write his 1965 book, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* What follows is an excerpt from an interview transcript between Warren and Rustin. They discuss the violent response among whites to the nonviolent civil rights protests against segregation laws in Birmingham, Alabama.

RPW: The nature of pressure to a social movement in times of pressure, Birmingham was a violent situation. If it hadn't been violent no civil rights bill, given the context. What do you say about the use of violence?

BR: Oh. Who used the violence, is the question. By and large Negroes did not resort to violence in Birmingham. Violence was directed toward them. Dr. Martin Luther King's insistence and the people by and large, with a few little scattered incidents that didn't amount to much, remained nonviolent, and it was not only that violence was used against the Negro, it was that the Negro by and large absorbed that violence. But even after three children—or four—were murdered, they did not take to the streets and raise hell. They said we're still going to be nonviolent. This deeply touched the hearts of the American people. I would say that wherever social change is involved, some violence is inevitable, usually on the part of those who have rather than those who have not. To the degree that the have-nots can remain nonviolent, they therefore reduce the inevitable violence to its irreducible minimum. To the degree that they retaliate with violence, to that degree do they bring more violence into the situation and thus multiply it. But Gandhi used to say, go to—be courageous and accept in a great movement death as you would accept your pillow at night, but do not resort to violence yourself. And I think that this is true. There will be injury. The purpose of our movement is to reduce that injury to the least possible.

Citation: Bayard Rustin, Interview by Robert Penn Warren, [transcription of audio from interview](#), 1964, tape 2, University of Kentucky and Yale University libraries, *Robert Penn Warren's Who Speaks for the Negro? An Archival Collection*, Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, Vanderbilt University.

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- Summarize Rustin's discussion about the violence that transpired at the Birmingham protest. **M/H**
 - What does Rustin mean that the "Negro by and large absorbed that violence"? **M/H**
 - What does Rustin say about Dr. Martin Luther King's position about the use of violence? **M/H**
 - Do you agree with Rustin that whenever social change is involved, a degree of violence is inevitable? What historical examples support your position? **H**
 - Based on your knowledge about the civil rights movement, do you think that nonviolence was the best approach in achieving their goals? **M/H**



Christine Jorgensen

America's First Transgender Celebrity

by the New-York Historical Society

Focus Questions

What were the key turning points for the United States during the mid-to-late 20th century?

Is there one America or many?

NOTE: Out of respect for the subject of this profile, we use the pronouns “she/her/hers” and her name—Christine—throughout the reading.

Christine Jorgensen (1926–1989) was born on May 30, 1926, in the Bronx, New York. She was assigned the male sex at birth and named George William Jorgensen, Junior. As long as she could remember, however, Jorgensen felt like a girl. She wanted to wear girl’s clothes and play with girl’s toys. As a teenager, she developed crushes on boys and struggled to understand her own feelings. After she graduated from Christopher Columbus High School in the Bronx in 1945, Jorgensen was drafted by the United States Army. She served for a year as a military clerical worker. After receiving an honorable discharge, she pursued a career in photography. In her free time, she read about medical procedures intended to help people who felt their sexual or gender identity did not align with society’s expectations.

In 1950, Jorgensen traveled to Denmark for a series of surgeries and hormone treatments that transformed her body into that of a woman. She abandoned the name George and chose the name Christine in honor of her surgeon Dr. Christian Hamburger. Jorgensen intended for her transition to remain private. However, a relative or friend contacted the press. On December 1, 1952, the *New York Daily News* published photographs of Jorgensen before and after her transition with the headline “Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty: Operations Transform Bronx Youth.” Within days, Christine Jorgensen was a national and international celebrity. When she returned to the United States in 1953, she consented with members of the press to make her arrival a public spectacle. Hundreds of reporters greeted her at Idlewild Airport (today’s John F. Kennedy International Airport). She required a police escort to keep the crowds under control. Jorgensen gave an interview at the airport. She thanked the press for the warm welcome, but said it was “too much.”

When America first became aware of Christine Jorgensen's transition in 1950, she was celebrated as a miracle of modern science. But very quickly, interest in her life took on a salacious and transphobic air, as can be seen in the quotes on this poster from the 1970 dramatized biopic. Years later, Jorgensen tried (unsuccessfully) to get a restraining order to stop the distribution and exploitation of the film as a "B-movie."



United Artists Corporation, *The Christine Jorgensen Story*,
United States Poster Art, 1970,
Everett Collection, Inc./Alamy Stock Photo.

Although she often encountered offensive questions and rude jokes, Jorgensen embraced the attention. She saw it as an opportunity to control the narrative about her life and advocate for acceptance of all transgender people. Jorgensen was not the first transgender person in American history, but she was the most publicly recognized at the time, and one of the first to complete a physical transition with both surgery and hormones. Articles and media coverage about Jorgensen were both positive and negative. She was often described as someone with a condition or illness, and many reporters questioned whether she was a "real" man or a "real" woman. Jorgensen often emphasized that no one had to be 100% male or 100% female. It was acceptable and normal to be a little of both, and she had always felt more woman than man. As a pioneer of the transgender community, she often fought for understanding and empathy.

Jorgensen used her fame to start a career performing in nightclubs. Her act included a Wonder Woman costume and the song "I Enjoy Being a Girl." She traveled the world and gave interviews on college campuses and television talk shows. She saw herself as an activist and educator, even in the face of frequent discrimination.

Jorgensen took pride and pleasure in displaying her femininity. She often posed for photographs in fur coats, glamorous jewelry, and makeup.

Some historians believe that her willingness

to play a traditional female role made it easier for her to be accepted. Others argue that Christine Jorgensen forced Americans to question what it meant to be a woman because she was a transgender woman embracing traditional female roles.

Christine's life, however, was not always glamorous. In 1959, she and her fiancé, Howard J. Knox, applied for a marriage license in New York City. The City denied their request—twice: first because Knox's divorce from his prior marriage was not established, and then again because Jorgensen's birth certificate listed her as a male. She and Knox never married; in fact, they parted company not long after the marriage license fiasco, and at age 40, Jorgensen declared herself "just another old maid."

In 1967, Jorgensen published her autobiography, *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography*, which sold nearly 450,000 copies. Within a few years, it was even made into film, *The Christine Jorgensen Story*.

Jorgensen wrote that she fought hard for a successful transition in the 1950s because it was her best opportunity for personal freedom. Although most people emphasized her outward change, she was most grateful for the inward one. To her, the most important transformation was the one from a shy, lonely, and depressed person who questioned her identity to a happy, confident person who was truly herself.

She gave an interview towards the end of her life in which she explained that being transgender is about identity, “What people still don’t understand is that the important thing is identity. You don’t do [gender reassignment procedures] primarily for sexual reasons, you do it because of who you are.”

“What people still don’t understand is that the important thing is identity. You don’t do [gender reassignment procedures] primarily for sexual reasons, you do it because of who you are.”

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 8

- **Unit 6:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 21: Modern Civil Rights (LGBTQ movement)

Grade 11

- **Unit 6:** Social and Economic Change: Domestic Issues

Thinking About:

Christine Jorgensen

- Why do you think Jorgensen chose to embrace the spotlight? How did that choice inform the rest of her life? **M/H**
- Even when attempting to present Jorgensen in a positive light, the press often described her as a person who overcame an illness or condition. Why is this a problematic characterization of Jorgensen and other transgender people like her? **M/H**
- Why was Jorgensen's choice to adopt traditionally feminine fashions that reflected traditional stereotypes of the era significant? How might it have been an act of rebellion? How might it have been an act of assimilation? **M/H**
- During Jorgensen's lifetime, the press often used the pronouns he/his to describe Jorgensen. What does this tell us about how the public viewed her and other transgender men and women at that time? **M/H**
- Why did Jorgensen never marry her fiancé? What does this tell us about the rights of transgender people in the middle of the 20th century? **M/H**
- Christine Jorgensen was not the first transgender woman in American history. Why is her story an important and memorable one? **M/H**
- Many historians point out that Jorgensen was white and that transgender women of color in this era did not receive the same level of attention or positive publicity. Why do you think this is true? **H**
- What did Jorgensen mean when she said, "You don't do it [undergo gender reassignment surgery] for sexual reasons, you do it because of who you are"? **M/H**

Additional Resources

["Christine Jorgensen Childhood Residence"](#) by NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project

["1951: Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty"](#) by Mashable

"Transforming Sex: Christine Jorgensen in the Postwar U.S." by Joanne Meyerowitz

How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States by Joanne Meyerowitz

Christine Jorgensen arriving at Idlewild Airport

When Christine Jorgensen arrived at Idlewild Airport (now JFK) in 1953 after her transition, she was greeted by over 300 reporters, photographers, and video cameras. While there were many people who were known for existing outside of traditional gender boundaries, Jorgensen is considered the first transgender person to be famous for her gender affirming surgery and transition.



Citation: Tom Gallagher, *Christine Jorgensen arriving at Idlewild Airport*, February 12, 1953, New York Daily News Archive, Contributor, Getty Images, 97258122.

-
- Why do you think Jorgensen agreed to publicize her homecoming? **E/M/H**
 - Why was Christine Jorgensen's identity of interest to reporters in 1953? **E/M/H**

Christine Jorgensen ‘Off Limits’ for GI’s

Around World War II, the United States military began an aggressive campaign to keep LGBTQ+ people out of the armed forces, which included everything from delivering homophobic lectures at basic training, to distributing lists of gay bars to be avoided, to hounding LGBTQ+ members out of the service. Hence, they refused to allow America’s most famous transgender person to perform for the troops, as *Variety* magazine pointed out in this article. A thumbnail of the original article is included below along with a transcription.

**CHRISTINE JORGENSEN
‘OFF LIMITS’ FOR GI’S**
Frankfurt, Sept. 21.
Even though she used to be a GI herself, Christine Jorgensen was banned for her scheduled presentation to the troops here. The ex-GI turned showgirl, via that famed Danish operation, was pacted to make personal appearances at enlisted men’s and non-commissioned officers’ clubs in Germany between Sept. 18 and Oct. 3.
But the Third Armored Division’s top commander reportedly decided that her appearance was “not in the best interests of the division,” and cancelled her dates for the Third Armored’s soldier clubs. As a result, Miss Jorgensen turned down the entire tour.
Variety 09/22/65

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Variety 09/22/65

Citation: “[Christine Jorgensen ‘Off Limits’ For GI’s](#),” *Variety*, September 22, 1965, *Digital Transgender Archive*, JD Doyle Archives, Christine Jorgensen Collection, 3484zh230.

- What does the army’s refusal to allow Jorgensen to perform tell you about the culture of the armed services at the time? **M/H**
- Why do you think Jorgensen canceled her entire tour after this decision? What does this tell you about her character? **M/H**

N.Y. Couple Joyous Son Now Daughter

When Christine Jorgensen transitioned in 1952, there was no public consensus on what it meant to be transgender, and America as a whole was unsure how to feel about the idea of transitioning. Although this article uses male pronouns for Jorgensen, in a way that would be considered transphobic today, it also shows her parents' love and acceptance, and allows Jorgensen the space to explain her transition in her own terms.

NEW YORK—A New York carpenter and his wife said today they were delighted at the news they had become parents of a new girl, blonde, attractive and 26.

George W. Jorgensen, an employe [sic] of the New York City Board of Education, and his wife told reporters all their plans were for the homecoming of their new daughter, Christine—who until recently had been George, Jr. a former soldier.

They revealed their son had been transformed through a series of six surgical operations in Denmark into an attractive, normal woman. Jorgensen said he and his wife, Florence, received a letter [sic] from their son—who had changed his name to Christine—describing the change and relating how the transformation took place at Copenhagen's Richs Hospital.

MAY RETURN SOON

Asked if Christine planned to return to America, Mrs. Jorgensen said:

"I hope so, soon."

"Our plans," she added, "are only to wait for Chris to come home.

"We think it's wonderful for Chris. We think she couldn't be as beautiful as the pictures show. We couldn't be happier and we are proud of her."

The Jorgensens said their son had all of his past Army records officially changed to Christine Jorgensen. There was no immediate confirmation in Copenhagen, but an official in Washington said he recalled such a request for a name change.

Jorgensen said Christine was drafted into the Army in 1944 and served two years at Fort Dix before receiving his honorable discharge. He said Christine is now employed as a color photographer in Denmark.

THOUGHT HE WAS WORKING

The sex transformation is extremely rare when used to change a female into a male, and still more unusual when used to change a male into a female.

N.Y. Couple Joyous Son Now Daughter *continued*:

Jorgensen said that as a young man, his son was “all masculine,” if somewhat more quiet and reserved than the usual youth of his age.

He said that his son sailed to Denmark in May, 1950, ostensibly to make a set of travelogue pictures.

During the time that his son was undergoing treatment, Jorgensen said, the family thought he was doing a special photographic work for the hospital where the transformation took place. Even after the disclosure, he continued, the family waited until now to make the news known—because they wanted to discuss it with friends and did not want it to smack of sensationalism.

The first inkling of sex-reversal, Jorgensen said, was the letter brought back by his son’s great aunt after a trip to Denmark.

The letter, signed “Christine” and accompanied by several photographs of the attractive blonde, apologized for not letting the family “in on it.”

“NATURE MADE MISTAKE”

The letter said in part:

“Nature made a mistake which I have had corrected and I am your daughter.

“We humans are perhaps the greatest chemical reaction in the world, and therefore it is not strange that we are subject to many physical ailments. Among the greatest working parts of our bodies are the glands. . . unimportant looking glands, yet our whole body is governed by them.”

The letter then went on to tell of “imbalance in the glandular system” which “puts the body under a strain” in an effort to adjust it. “This strain,” it said, “although not usually fatal, has a great effect on our well-being both physically and mentally.

“I, along with millions of other people, had such a system imbalance. I use the past tense ‘had’ because the condition has been cleared.”

The long letter paid high tribute to Dr. Hamburger, giving no initials or first name, calling him “a great man and a brilliant scientist.”

Citation: “[N.Y. Couple Joyous Son Now Daughter](#),” *Boston American*, December 1, 1952, *Digital Commonwealth*, Massachusetts Collections Online, Worcester, MA.

- What is the significance of Jorgensen’s parents’ reaction to her transition? **M/H**
- What is the tone of this article? Is it what you would expect from a newspaper in 1953? **E/M/H**



Portrait of an Era: The Lavender Scare

The 1950s Purge of LGBTQ+ People from the United States Government and Public Culture

by the National Archives and Records Administration

The Red Scare, the congressional witch-hunt against Communists during the early years of the Cold War, is a well-known chapter of American history. A second scare of the same era has been much slower to make its way into public consciousness.

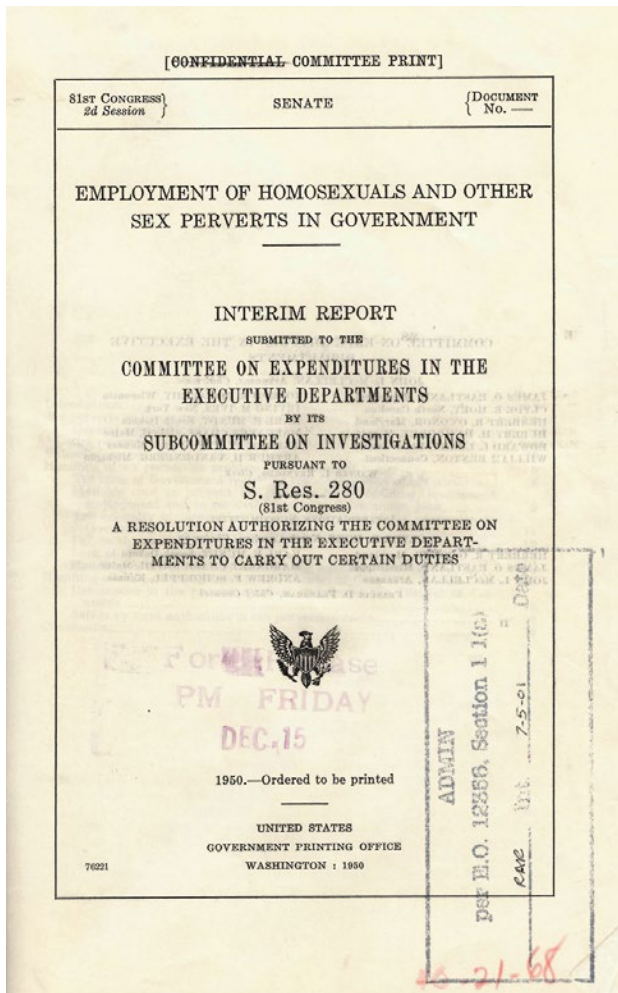
Beginning in the late 1940s and continuing through the 1960s, thousands of gay employees were fired or forced to resign from the federal workforce because of their sexuality. Dubbed the **Lavender Scare**, this wave of repression was also bound up with anti-Communism and fueled by the power of congressional investigation.¹

In the late 1940s, as the United States and the Soviet Union were locked in the Cold War, the House Un-American Activities Committee began investigating suspected communists. A few years later, on February 9, 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy waved a piece of paper in the air as he told a gathered crowd at the Ohio County Women's Republican Club that he had a list of 205 subversives—communists—working in the State Department. A second Red Scare descended upon the country, and any individual whose beliefs or lifestyle contradicted the carefully curated idea of American values was suspect. As Judith Adkins wrote in the National Archives' *Prologue Magazine*, "On February 20, McCarthy spoke at length on the Senate floor, offering more specifics about some of these individuals, this time characterizing them more broadly as 'unsafe risks.' Just over a week later, Deputy Undersecretary of State John Peurifoy, testifying before a subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, revealed that the State Department had ousted 91 homosexual employees as security risks. Communists, then, were not the only target." In an era known as the Lavender Scare, individuals suspected of having LGBTQ+ identities were considered threats to national security as well.

¹ Judith Adkins, "[These People Are Frightened to Death: Congressional Investigations and the Lavender Scare](#)," The United States National Archives and Records Administration, *Prologue Magazine*, Summer 2016, Vol. 48, No. 2.

After an initial investigation by Senator Kenneth Wherry, a Republican, and Senator J. Lister Hill, a Democrat, the Investigations Subcommittee of the Senate’s Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments conducted a second investigation. Led by Senator Clyde Hoey and known as the Hoey Committee, they questioned all branches of the military plus fifty-three civilian departments and agencies, gathered data from law enforcement and judicial authorities, and sought out expert psychiatric experts “to ascertain whether homosexuals could be detected through psychiatric examination, whether and how they could be cured, whether they lacked the emotional stability necessary for government service, whether they tended to seduce younger men and women, and whether it would be helpful to have psychiatrists on personnel boards charged with identifying homosexuals.”

The Hoey Committee of the Senate released the report pictured below, concluding that homosexuals were unsuitable for employment in the Federal Government and constituted security risks in positions of public trust.



(Records of the United States Senate, RG 46)
National Archives and Records Administration.

On December 15, 1950, the Hoey Committee released a report entitled “Employment of Homosexuals and other Sex perverts in Government.” It concluded: “There is no place in the United States Government for persons who. . . bring disrepute to the Federal service by infamous or scandalous personal conduct. . . . It is in the opinion of this subcommittee that those who engage in acts of homosexuality and other perverted activities are unsuitable for employment in the Federal Government. This conclusion is based upon the fact that persons who indulge in such degraded activity are committing not only illegal and immoral acts, but they also constitute security risks in positions of public trust.” As Adkins wrote, the report “selectively used evidence that the committee had gathered, largely ignoring, for example, the complexities raised by medical authorities. The report also dismissed the hesitations, qualifying statements, and more tolerant attitudes voiced by a minority of agency officials.” The federal government began firing gay employees or forcing them to resign because of their sexuality in the late 1940s. This report legitimized those thoughts and practices.

The Hoey committee report was widely promulgated and highly influential. It shaped government agency security manuals for years to come. It was sent abroad to U.S. embassies and to foreign intelligence agencies. The report carried the authority of Congress and so was

taken as official proof that gay people did indeed threaten national security. The U.S. government and even foreign governments repeatedly quoted it to justify discrimination.

Most significantly, the 1950 congressional investigations and the Hoey Committee's final report helped institutionalize discrimination by laying the groundwork for President Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1953 Executive Order #10450, "Security Requirements for Government Employment." Stating "the interests of the national security require that all persons privileged to be employed in the departments and agencies of the Government, shall be reliable, trustworthy, of good conduct and character, and of complete and unswerving loyalty to the United States. . . ," Eisenhower decreed that an individual could be prohibited from federal employment based on "Any criminal, infamous, dishonest, immoral, or notoriously disgraceful conduct, habitual use of intoxicants to excess, drug addiction, sexual perversion. . ."

With the stroke of a pen, the president effectively banned gay men and lesbians from all jobs in the United States government—the country's largest employer.

Even the private sector was no haven. Because Eisenhower's order stipulated that "consultants" to government agencies could be investigated for adherence to these security requirements, contractors and other employers, especially in metropolitan Washington, followed the government's lead and adopted discriminatory hiring and firing practices as well.

Congressional investigation, and the institutionalized exclusion that followed, created a sizable ripple effect. Historians estimate that somewhere between 5,000 and tens of thousands of gay workers lost their jobs during the Lavender Scare. Some faced continued unemployment or underemployment, exclusion from their professions, financial strain or even ruin, and considerable emotional distress.

The Lavender Scare, and the discrimination and ostracism that it condoned, in many ways laid the groundwork for the homophile movement of the 1950s and gay rights movement of the 1960s as the LGBTQ+ population began, quietly at first and with increasing loudness, to question their oppression in a nation claiming to represent freedom.



Frank Kameny

The Lavender Scare Victim Who Became One of the Nation’s Leading Activists for LGBTQ+ Equality

by the Museum of the City of New York

Focus Questions

What were the key turning points for the United States during the mid-to-late 20th century?

Is there one America or many?

How did the strategies of the gay liberation movement change in the years before and after the Stonewall uprising?

When **Frank Kameny** (1925–2011), a veteran of World War II and an astronomer for the United States Army Map Service, was fired from his position in 1957 during the latter part of the Lavender Scare for “sexual perversion,” he appealed his dismissal, becoming the first individual in American history to sue the federal government for its discrimination against LGBTQ+ people. Kameny went on to become one of the earliest public advocates for gay rights—he led pickets, organized marches, and then became the first openly gay person to run for Congress in 1971, coining the slogan that would become a rallying cry for the gay liberation movement: “Gay is good!”

Kameny’s youth was shaped by his love of science; by the age of six he had decided to become an astronomer. While enrolled at Queens College, Kameny was drafted into the U.S. Army, and he fought in World War II before returning home, finishing his degree, and earning a doctorate from Harvard University. In 1957, Kameny was hired by the U.S. Army Map Service. After just five months, he was fired. His dismissal came after the Army learned that Kameny had been arrested two years earlier in San Francisco and charged with lewd conduct. When his superiors asked Kameny if he was gay, he responded that it was no one’s business but his own. He was fired on the grounds of “sexual perversion,” coded language at the time for homosexuality.

Kameny was one of thousands of LGBTQ+ federal employees who lost their jobs in the era of the Lavender Scare, targeted by President Eisenhower’s 1953 executive order that declared that “sexual

perversion” was grounds for revoking employees’ security clearances. In the midst of the Cold War, proponents of the policy argued that LGBTQ+ Americans were vulnerable to blackmail because shame forced them to keep their sex lives a secret; therefore, they could not be trusted with classified information. Kameny’s decision to fight this discrimination was not only the first civil rights challenge to an anti-homosexuality law, but it also defied the underlying logic of the order itself: Kameny saw nothing wrong or shameful about his sexual orientation.

Kameny’s appeal was unsuccessful. In 1961, the Supreme Court refused to hear his petition, but it prompted his turn to full-time activism. He co-founded the Washington, D.C., chapter of the **Mattachine Society**, one of the earliest gay rights organizations in the country, and embarked on a public campaign for LGBTQ+ equality. Kameny’s willingness to visibly confront and denounce homophobia helped to spark a newly radical stance among LGBTQ+ activists. Beginning in 1965, he led pickets of government buildings—including the White House and the Pentagon—as well as a march each July 4th outside of Independence Hall in Philadelphia called the **Annual Reminder**, which continued until 1969 and the Stonewall uprising of June 28 in New York City. In 1970, Kameny and other Annual Reminder organizers commemorated the first anniversary of Stonewall with the Christopher Street Liberation Day March, the foundation of today’s New York City Pride Parade.

Drawing upon his scientific training, Kameny brought new scrutiny to the role the American Psychiatric Association (APA) played in perpetuating the belief that homosexuality was a sickness and unnatural. “What you had was moral, cultural, theological and sociological value judgments,” said Kameny, “camouflaged in the language of science without any of the substance of science.” In 1964, Kameny and fellow activists released a statement denouncing the classification of homosexuality as an illness; instead, they called it an orientation, no different than heterosexuality. Kameny also organized panels at APA conferences—in 1972, he, lesbian activist Barbara Gittings, and gay psychiatrist Dr. John Fryer (who appeared in disguise) spoke on a panel entitled “Psychiatry: Friend or Foe to the Homosexual?; A Dialogue.” Their

In 1970, New York City held its first pride parade—then called the “Christopher Street Liberation Day March”—in honor of the one-year anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising. Activist Frank Kameny had been involved in some of the earliest gay rights organizing in the country, via an organization called the Mattachine Society. Although the organization did not last long after Stonewall, in this picture, Frank Kameny marches with the Washington, D.C. chapter.



Kay Tobin, [Frank Kameny \(center\) and Mattachine Society of Washington members marching \[in the first Christopher Street Liberation Day March\]](#), New York City, 1970, © Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Kameny’s willingness to visibly confront and denounce homophobia helped to spark a newly radical stance among LGBTQ+ activists.

panel was widely credited for spurring the APA to remove homosexuality from its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1973.

Kameny lived long enough to see the federal government begin to reverse its history of discrimination against LGBTQ+ Americans. In 2009, Kameny finally received an apology for his 1957 firing—the initial injustice that sparked his activism. John Berry, Director of the United States Office of Personnel Management which oversees all federal civilian employees, apologized for the discriminatory policy that had forced Kameny from his job and noted that Kameny’s refusal to accept his treatment had made it possible for Berry, 50 years later, to serve his government as an openly gay man. In 2010, he attended the ceremony where President Barack Obama repealed the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy of the United States Armed Forces, allowing gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals to serve openly in the military.

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 8

- **Unit 6:** Lesson 8: Feminist Movement
- **Unit 6:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 21: Modern Civil Rights (LGBTQ movement)

Grade 11

- **Unit 6:** Social and Economic Change: Domestic Issues

Thinking About:

Frank Kameny

- How did early LGBTQ+ activists bring greater visibility to the movement for gay liberation? **M/H**
- How might Frank Kameny's experience of serving his country in the military have shaped his activism? **M/H**
- Why did supporters of President Eisenhower's 1953 executive order believe that LGBTQ+ people should not be granted security clearances? **M/H**
- Why might Kameny and his fellow activists have picked July 4th and Independence Hall in Philadelphia as the day and site for their Annual Reminder marches? **M/H**
- How might Frank Kameny's training and career as a scientist have influenced his decision to focus on reforming the medical field's views on homosexuality? **M/H**
- What role has the federal government played in both obstructing and advancing the movement for LGBTQ+ rights? **M/H**
- How did the American psychiatric profession influence LGBTQ+ activism in the 1960s and 70s? Why was it so important for LGBTQ+ activists to change the American Psychiatric Society's manual of mental disorders? **H**
- How did Kameny's activism during the 1960s compare with other 1960s activist groups? How did it compare with gay activism after Stonewall? **H**
- Why did Kameny receive an official apology in 2009 from Director John Berry of the Office of Personnel Management for his firing over 50 years earlier? Why was this apology particularly symbolically significant? **M/H**

Additional Resources

Conduct Unbecoming: Lesbians and Gays in the US Military from Vietnam to the Persian Gulf War by Randy Shilts

Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A. by Jonathan Ned Katz

Gay is Good: The Life and Letters of Gay Rights Pioneer Franklin Kameny edited by Michael G. Long

Generation on Fire: Voices of Protest from the 1960s by Jeff Kasseloff

"How It All Started" by Frank Kameny

"[The Kameny Papers](#)" by kamenypapers.org

"[The Long War Against a Gay 'Cure'](#)" by James Kirchick

New Security Plan Issued; Thousands Face Re-Inquiry

In this front-page article, of which an excerpt appears below, the New York Times covered the announcement of Executive Order 10450 by President Eisenhower. This order changed how federal employees received security clearances, which granted them permission to look at secret or sensitive information necessary for their jobs. While previously an employee might be considered a security risk because of their political beliefs, Executive Order 10450 allowed the federal government to evaluate someone's character and behavior when granting security clearances. As a result, over 5,000 federal employees who were suspected of being gay were fired. This era is often referred to as the "Lavender Scare," during which LGBTQ+ federal employees lived in fear of being outed, fired, and considered disloyal to the United States.

New Security Plan Issued; Thousands Face Re-Inquiry

Eisenhower Program Discards Truman Idea of Loyalty Distinction—Review Boards Dropped—McCarthy Is Enthusiastic

by Anthony Leviero

Special to *The New York Times*

WASHINGTON, April 27—The Eisenhower Administration today announced a new, stricter security program for Federal employes [sic], discarding the dual Truman system that had made a distinction between loyalty and security.

The new program will go into effect May 27 with the aim of assuring that all employes of the Executive Branch of the Government are "reliable, trustworthy, of good conduct and character, and of complete and unswerving loyalty to the United States."

President Eisenhower stated this aim in the preamble of a five-page Executive Order that will subject all present and future employes to a character scrutiny based on seven specified stands of conduct.

The outright traitor and a tipsy Federal employe, talking about his work in a bar, alike are subject to dismissal under the new program. The tipsy employe might receive a chance in another, less sensitive Federal job. Essentially, the Truman system did the same thing but the traitor would be branded disloyal and the loose-talking drinker would be labeled a security risk.

New Security Plan Issued; Thousands Face Re-Inquiry *continued*:

Under the new system no provision is made for a distinction between disloyalty and borderline or misconduct cases, unless department heads, who will have the final adjudication authority, indicate it.

The new program will require a new investigation of many thousands of employees previously investigated, as well as many more thousands who have had no security check. The Truman system had started as a loyalty program, requiring a finding of disloyalty as a cause for dismissal. . . .

Seven numbered criteria for security were established by the President, but actually the total was twelve, because the first point had five subdivisions. All five subdivisions of Point No. 1 dealt with problems of behavior involving trustworthiness, misrepresentations, criminal and immoral acts, including drug addiction and sexual perversion, insanity or neurological disorder, and susceptibility to coercion.

The other six points dealt directly with loyalty, including acts of sabotage, espionage and treason; association with saboteurs, spies, traitors, seditionists, anarchists or revolutionists; advocacy of force to overthrow the Government; membership in any organization that was totalitarian, Fascist, Communist or subversive; intentional, unauthorized disclosure of information relating to national security; performing one's work in a manner that would serve the interests of another Government in preference to United States interests. . . .

Citation: Anthony Leviero, "New Security Plan Issued; Thousands Face Re-Inquiry," *New York Times*, April 28, 1953, 1, 20. From *The New York Times*. © 1953 The New York Times Company. All rights reserved. Used under license.

- How did Executive Order 10450 change the way security clearances were granted? **M/H**
- What does it mean to call someone a "security risk"? How might that impact their ability to work? **M/H**
- The article notes that there are seven criteria for establishing someone's security clearance. What might the federal government mean by "sexual perversion," one of the first metrics for being denied a clearance? **M/H**
- As the article explains, under this new system the federal government no longer distinguished between employees who were disloyal and those who were security risks because of their character or behavior. How might this new classification target vulnerable people, such as LGBTQ+ Americans? **M/H**
- Is it ever fair to evaluate someone's personal character in matters of national security? Under what conditions would this be acceptable, and what qualities would support investigating or firing a government employee charged with top-level security concerns? **M/H**

Letter from Frank Kameny to John F. Kennedy

After being fired from the Army in 1957, Frank Kameny appealed his dismissal in the federal courts. In 1961, the Supreme Court declined to hear his case. In response, Kameny wrote to President John F. Kennedy on May 15, 1961, asking the president to act as a “court of last appeal,” and informing him of the discrimination that LGBTQ+ Americans faced. An excerpt of this letter is below.

2435 18th Street, N. W.
Washington 9, D. C.
May 15, 1961

President John F. Kennedy
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

Dear President Kennedy,

I write to you for two reasons: (1) To ask that you act as a “court of last appeal” in a matter in which I believe that you can properly act as such; and (2) perhaps much more important, to bring to your attention, and to ask for your constructive action on, a situation involving at least 15,000,000 Americans, and in which a “New Frontier” approach is very badly needed. These people are our nation’s homosexuals—a minority group in no way different, as such, from the Negroes, the Jews, the Catholics, and other minority groups.

May I take the liberty of requesting that, because of the importance of this question to such a large number of citizens, this letter, and the enclosed material, despite their length, be read and replied to by you personally, rather than merely by one of your aides. . . .

In World War II, I willingly fought the Germans, with bullets, in order to preserve and secure my rights, freedoms, and liberties, and those of my fellow citizens. In 1961, it has, ironically, become necessary for me to fight my own government, with words, in order to achieve some of the very same rights, freedoms, and liberties for which I placed my life in jeopardy in 1945. This letter is part of that fight. . . .

The homosexuals in this country are increasingly less willing to tolerate the abuse, repression, and discrimination directed at them, both officially and unofficially, and they are beginning to stand up for their rights and freedoms as citizens no less deserving than other citizens of those rights and freedoms. They are no longer willing to accept their present status as second-class citizens and as second-class human beings; they are neither. . . .

The winds of change are blowing. A wise and foresighted government will start NOW to take constructive action on this question.

Your administration has taken a firm and admirable stand, and has taken an active interest in the maintenance of the civil liberties of minority groups, and in the elimination of discrimination against them. Yet the federal government is the prime offender in depriving the homosexual of his civil and other liberties, and in actively discriminating against him. May I suggest that the homosexual is as deserving of his government’s protection and assistance in these areas as is the Negro, and needs that protection at least as much—actually much more. The abuses, by constituted authority, of the person, property, and liberties of American homosexuals are

Letter from Frank Kameny to John F. Kennedy *continued*:

shocking and appalling, and yet not only is not a finger raised by the government to assist these people, but the government acts in active, virulent conspiracy to foster and perpetuate these abuses. . . .

You have said: “Ask not what can your country do for you, but what can you do for your country.” I know what I can best do for my country, but my country’s government, for no sane reason, will not let me do it. I wish to be of service to my country and to my government; I am capable of being of such service; I need only to be allowed to be so. Thus far, my government has stubbornly and irrationally refused to allow me to be so, and has done its best to make it impossible for me ever to be so. This is equally true, actually or potentially, of millions of homosexuals in this country—well over 10% of our adult population. Not only the society in which they live, but the government under which they live, have steadfastly and stubbornly refused to allow them to serve and to contribute. . . .

Yours is an administration which has openly disavowed blind conformity. Here is an unconventional group with the courage to be so. Give them the support they deserve as citizens seeking the pursuit of happiness guaranteed them by the Declaration of Independence. . . .

I shall be more than merely pleased to have the privilege of discussing this matter with you by letter, by telephone, or directly, entirely at your convenience. . . .

Thank you for your consideration of the matters presented here. I look forward to your reply.

Most sincerely yours,
Franklin E. Kameny

Citation: Franklin E. Kameny, “[Letter from Frank Kameny to John F. Kennedy](#),” May 15, 1961, Papers of John F. Kennedy, Presidential Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, JFKWHCNF-1418-002-p0002.

- What did Frank Kameny ask of President Kennedy in this letter? **M/H**
- How does Kameny describe LGBTQ+ Americans in this letter? **M/H**
- What arguments does Kameny use in this letter to argue against the discrimination he and other LGBTQ+ Americans were facing from the federal government? **M/H**
- Kameny compares the treatment LGBTQ+ individuals received from the federal government to that of African Americans. How does Kameny characterize the discrimination both groups faced? How might you challenge Kameny’s statement about the relationship between the federal government and African Americans? **M/H**
- Kameny was fired from his government position in 1957. In what ways does this letter potentially reflect his experience during the Lavender Scare? **M/H**
- Kameny and members of the Mattachine Society of Washington, D.C., sent several letters to President Kennedy in the early 1960s. The letters informed the president of the discrimination LGBTQ+ people experienced and asked for the federal government to change its policies. What do you think Kameny and his fellow activists hoped to accomplish by writing President Kennedy? **M/H**
- The 1960s are often referred to as a turbulent decade in United States history. From Kameny’s profile and accompanying documents, what evidence supports that characterization? **M/H**

Panel on Homosexuality at the 1972 American Psychiatric Association's Annual Meeting

Along with fellow activist Barbara Gittings, Frank Kameny worked to overturn the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder. In 1972, Gittings, Kameny, and psychiatrist Dr. John Fryer appeared on a panel at the APA Annual Meeting entitled "Psychiatry: Friend or Foe to the Homosexual?; A Dialogue." Dr. Fryer, who was gay, wore a mask and spoke through a microphone to distort his voice, as he worried that appearing publicly on the panel could harm his career. One year after the panel, the APA removed homosexuality from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM III) which cataloged the nature and symptoms of mental illnesses as psychiatrists understood them. Kameny described the APA's decision as the moment "we were cured en masse by the psychiatrists."



Citation: Kay Tobin, [Barbara Gittings, Frank Kameny, and John Fryer in disguise as 'Dr. H. Anonymous,'](#) 1972, © Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Panel on Homosexuality at the 1972 American Psychiatric Association’s Annual Meeting
continued:

- Describe the scene in the photograph. What do you notice about the individuals? Where are they? How might audience members have reacted to this scene? **H**
- Why did Dr. John Fryer, a gay psychiatrist, wear a mask and disguise his voice when appearing on this panel to discuss his perspective? **H**
- Why might Kameny and Gittings have called this panel “Psychiatry: Friend or Foe to the Homosexual?; A Dialogue”? How did they see the role of psychiatrists in treating LGBTQ+ patients? **H**
- Why might the perspective of these three individuals—two LGBTQ+ activists and one gay psychiatrist—have had such an impact on the APA and its position on homosexuality? **H**
- Why might LGBTQ+ activists like Kameny and Gittings have considered the psychiatric profession and its stance on homosexuality to be such an important target for advocates to confront? **H**
- In Gitting’s profile, which immediately follows this, there is an interview in which she discusses how she and Kameny’s approaches to this panel differed. In what ways did these two activists disagree? How did their disagreements reflect difficulties about activism? **H**
- Why was it such a significant moment in history when the APA removed homosexuality from the DSM III? How can this event be viewed as a cause of future victories for the civil rights of LGBTQ+ people? **H**



Barbara Gittings

LGBTQ+ Activist Who Convinced Psychologists and Librarians to Change Their Views

by the Museum of the City of New York

Focus Questions

What were the key turning points for the United States during the mid-to-late 20th century?

Is there one America or many?

How did the strategies of the gay liberation movement change in the years before and after the Stonewall uprising?

Barbara Gittings (1932–2007) was a key member of the early LGBTQ+ rights movement in the United States. At a time when gay organizations—then called homophile organizations—were often wary of public attention, Gittings pushed for a radical approach to gay and lesbian rights activism that demanded not only an end to discrimination against gay and lesbian Americans, but insisted on refuting societal stereotypes that condemned homosexuality as unnatural. Rather than attempting to fit into mainstream norms governing sexuality and gender, Gittings demanded that society accept her for who she was. “Homosexuality,” she declared, “is not at all something dreadful—it’s good, it’s right, it’s natural, it’s moral!”

Gittings recognized she was attracted to women during her teenage years, though, at the time, she did not yet have language to describe her feelings. She first encountered the term “homosexual” during her senior year of high school, when she submitted an application to join the National Honor Society. A teacher took Gittings aside to inform her that her application had been rejected, based upon what her teacher described as Gittings’ apparent “homosexual inclinations.”

After graduating high school, Gittings enrolled at Northwestern University in 1949 and quickly found herself the target of rumors that she and a close friend were **lesbians**, women who are only romantically, sexually, and/or emotionally attracted to other women. Gittings’s attempt to understand the term prompted her to visit a psychiatrist, who “diagnosed” her as a lesbian and offered sessions intended to change her sexual orientation. Instead, Gittings turned to local libraries in Chicago, hunting for any information about her sexuality. The information she encountered presented

homosexuality as a perversion or illness, which was the fairly typical “scientific” view in the mid-20th century. Gittings felt convinced that these authors had little insight into her own experience, but she found few sources that presented anything approaching a positive view of gay or lesbian people.

Determined to track down useful information, Gittings ignored her college classes in favor of studying human sexuality; by the end of her freshman year she had dropped out of college and returned home. Back in her parents’ house, Gittings began to read novels that presented lesbians as fully realized individuals. She left home again at the age of eighteen, determined to find or create a community that would accept her as she was.

Six years later, in 1956, she had discovered the women who comprised the **Daughters of Bilitis** (DOB), the first lesbian organization in the United States, begun only a year earlier in San Francisco. In 1958, Gittings launched the DOB’s New York chapter and by 1963 was editor of the organization’s magazine, *The Ladder*. Under Gittings’s editorship, *The Ladder* became a more overtly political publication, covering legal cases and public demonstrations, and adding a subtitle to the magazine’s cover, “A Lesbian Review,” that made its focus unmistakable; she even began publishing photos of women who openly proclaimed their homosexuality. Through her work running the New York DOB chapter, Gittings met her partner, photojournalist Kay Tobin Lahusen. The two women would remain together for the rest of Gittings’s life.

In addition to her work editing *The Ladder*, Gittings also participated in some of the first public gay rights demonstrations in the country. Alongside her friend and fellow activist Frank Kameny—who had lost his position in the United States Army due to his homosexuality—Gittings marched in picket lines in front of the White House and the State Department in the 1960s. She and fellow demonstrators hoped to draw attention to the federal government’s policy of discriminating against homosexual employees, but the public action was also designed to bring visibility to the growing gay liberation movement, and to show that LGBTQ+ Americans could be found in all American institutions.

Gittings also joined Kameny in fighting to change the American Psychiatric Association (APA) designation of homosexuality as a mental illness. They were successful in 1973, when the organization officially removed homosexuality from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.

As a lifelong book-lover eager to see books circulating that offered accurate and positive information about homosexuality, Gittings focused her activist energy on the American Library Association (ALA) as well. In 1970, Gittings joined a group of gay librarians who

She and fellow demonstrators hoped to draw attention to the federal government’s policy of discriminating against homosexual employees, but the public action was also designed to bring visibility to the growing gay liberation movement, and to show that LGBTQ+ Americans could be found in all American institutions.

had organized within the ALA; together, they pushed for greater recognition within the profession for gay librarians and championed the inclusion of LGBTQ+-positive works within the nation's libraries. In 2002, the ALA's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table—the same organization Gittings had helped run in the 1970s —named one of their annual prizes the Stonewall Book Award-Barbara Gittings Literature Award in her honor.

Gittings never stopped her work as an advocate for LGBTQ+ rights and acceptance. She considered her visibility to be a crucial element of her activism—particularly for lesbians who were often marginalized in both the early gay liberation and women's liberation movements. Prior to her death in 2007, as she and her partner Kay moved into an assisted-living facility, Gittings performed one of her last public actions: the two women came out as a couple in the facility's newsletter.

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 8

- **Unit 6:** Lesson 8: Feminist Movement
- **Unit 6:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 21: Modern Civil Rights (LGBTQ movement)

Grade 11

- **Unit 6:** Social and Economic Change: Domestic Issues

Thinking About:

Barbara Gittings

- How did early LGBTQ+ activists shape the gay liberation movement in the years prior to the Stonewall uprising? **M/H**
- How did LGBTQ+ people access information about sexual orientation and gender identity in the first half of the 20th century? **M/H**
- Why did some early activists focus on the visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals in mainstream society? **M/H**
- Why might Gittings have felt “invisible” after attempting to research homosexuality in libraries during her time at college? **M/H**
- How did Barbara Gittings’s teenage experiences shape her approach to LGBTQ+ activism? **M/H**
- Why might Gittings have joined her fellow gay and lesbian activists on picket lines protesting federal discrimination in Washington, D.C., despite never having worked for the government? **M/H**
- Why did Gittings believe that access to positive LGBTQ+ information—whether in library collections or when talking to doctors and mental-health professionals—was such an important issue for gay and lesbian activists? **M/H**
- Why was it so important for activists like Gittings and Frank Kameny to remove homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Society’s manual of mental disorders? **M/H**
- How might including stories like that of Barbara Gittings’s change our understanding of both the gay liberation movement and the feminist movement? **M/H**

Additional Resources

Barbara Gittings: Gay Pioneer by Tracy Baim

“Barbara Gittings: Independent Spirit” by Kay Tobin Lahusen

Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement by Marcia Gallo

Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A. by Jonathan Ned Katz

The Gay Crusaders by Kay Tobin and Randy Wicker

[“Interview Jonathan Katz conducted with Barbara Gittings”](#) by *outhistory.org*

[“The Mattachine Society of New York and the Daughters of Bilitis”](#) by *The New York Public Library*

Excerpt from an Interview with Barbara Gittings

In this 1974 interview with historian Jonathan Ned Katz, Gittings spoke about the process of realizing her sexual orientation, and about the founding and early activities of the **Daughters of Bilitis**, the first lesbian organization in the United States.

Jonathan Katz: ...It seems to me that one of the main impetuses behind the Gay movement is Gay people's desire to meet other Gays, to break out of our isolation.

Barbara Gittings: Now, of course, it's easy for us to look back and say how silly we were to deny that. But it wasn't silly at the time. We had some heavy discussions over the possibilities of criticism deriving from any suggestion that we were acting as places for social meetings. While we did have social events, we always called them fund-raisers. Nowadays, with hindsight, we sometimes get a little bit arrogant, because we look back and say, "Oh, how could people have been so silly?" It wasn't silly in the context of the time.

I remember one letter from a parent—she had gotten hold of a mailing her daughter had received, and she wrote a vile letter of condemnation with the word pervert spelled "prevert." Well, by that time, we were feeling a little bit more graceful about ourselves and were able to laugh over the word "prevert." Still, there, was reason to think we could get into more trouble than we could cope with. That kind of feeling carried over for a very long time. When DOB [Daughters of Bilitis] had its third national convention in '64 in New York City; Donald Webster Cory was one of the speakers. . . In his speech he chided us for not saying openly that it was a legitimate purpose of our organizations to provide a social place. After all, he said, under what better auspices can homosexuals meet each other? He was prophetic on that issue of socializing. Because only a few years later everyone was saying: "Well, of course, what better place for Gay people to meet each other but in places sponsored and run by Gay people?"

J.K.: You people seem to have been very concerned with what the straight society thought of you.

B.G.: Oh, very much so. Appearance and behavior were very important. We needed the acceptance of society, we thought. So we geared ourselves to getting it. There was an incident at an early Daughters of Bilitis national convention (in Los Angeles, I think), where a woman who had been living pretty much as a transvestite most of her life was persuaded, for the purposes of attending that convention, to don

Excerpt from an Interview with Barbara Gittings *continued*:

female garb, to deck herself out in as “feminine” a manner as she could, given that female clothes were totally alien to her. Everybody rejoiced over this as though some great victory had been accomplished—the “feminizing” of this woman. Today we would be horrified at anyone who thought this kind of evangelism had a legitimate purpose. Yet at the time, I remember, I joined in the rejoicing. At the same time there was some kind of mental reservation in me; I felt there was something grotesque about this woman’s trying to look “normal” for the purposes of appearances at this convention. The resulting appearance simply wasn’t that persuasive—and what was it really for, since we were essentially among ourselves? ...During the first years of New York DOB’s existence there was another debate about a woman who lived as a transvestite, who was accepted even at her place of work as a woman who chose to live and dress as a young man. But in DOB there was discussion over her appearance, whether it was acceptable. It was a controversy that probably wouldn’t even arise today, or would arise in a different form.

Citation: Barbara Gittings, “[Barbara Gittings: Founding New York Daughters of Bilitis, 1958](#),” Interview by Jonathan Ned Katz, Philadelphia, July 19, 1974; First published in Katz’s *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York: Avon Books, 1976), Reprinted on [outhistory.org](#) with permission of Katz.

- Why might Barbara Gittings and other gay activists have thought it was important to gain “the acceptance of society”? What might have driven Gittings and others to change their minds? **M/H**
- Why might the Daughters of Bilitis have worried it was “silly” to have meetings that were just about socializing with one another? **M/H**
- As Gittings notes, gay activists later changed their minds and defended the importance of social groups and events. Why might activists have changed their minds and considered it crucial to provide social spaces for LGBTQ+ people? **M/H**
- Could operating a social space, like a gay bar, or hosting a dance for LGBTQ+ people be considered a political action? Why or why not? **H**
- In this interview, Gittings uses the term “transvestite” to describe the gender performance of two different members of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB). Today, transvestite is a term that is considered derogatory by many, and is not commonly accepted to describe someone who wears clothes usually associated with a gender other than the one which they were assigned at birth. Why might members of the DOB worry about the perceptions of the appearance of a member? In this interview, how does Gittings express that her feelings have changed about the DOB’s discussion about the gender expression of the group’s membership? **H**

Barbara Gittings and Isabel Miller kissing at the “Hug a Homosexual” booth, ALA, 1971

Gittings was a longtime library advocate who pushed for greater inclusion of gay and lesbian books within American library collections and for workplace protections for LGBTQ+ librarians. At the 1971 ALA Annual Conference, Gittings and author Alma Routsong set up a “Hug a Homosexual” booth to showcase gay love publicly. At the time, Routsong wrote lesbian novels under a pen name, Isabel Miller; she would later come out in her work and use her birth name when publishing.



Citation: Kay Tobin, [Barbara Gittings and Isabel Miller kissing at the 'Hug a Homosexual' booth](#), ALA, 1971, © Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Barbara Gittings and Isabel Miller kissing at the “Hug a Homosexual” booth, ALA, 1971
continued:

- Why did Gittings and her allies at the American Library Association (ALA) think it was important to showcase love and public affection between two women? **M/H**
- How do you think onlookers might have responded to the “Hug a Homosexual” booth at the ALA conference? **M/H**
- The woman Barbara Gittings is kissing is Alma Routsong, who wrote novels featuring lesbian characters, but did so using a pen name, Isabel Miller. Why would Routsong have chosen to use a pen name when publishing her novels? What might have motivated her to change her mind, as she did later on in her career? **M/H**

Barbara Gittings in Picket Line

Throughout 1965, gay rights activists staged a series of pickets in front of government buildings in Washington, D.C. This picture shows Barbara Gittings participating in the third protest, held on October 23, 1965, in front of the White House. The target of that year's Washington, D.C., demonstrations was the federal government's official policy of discriminating against gay employees.



Citation: Kay Tobin, [Barbara Gittings in picket line](#), 1965, © Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

- What argument are protestors making about federal discrimination against gay employees? Are there other arguments not pictured that they might have utilized? **M/H**
- During the summer of 1965, gay and lesbian activists staged a series of pickets protesting federal employment discrimination in front of landmarks like the White House, the State Department, and the Pentagon. Why do you think they picked these locations for their actions? **E/M/H**
- During these protests, activists made a point of wearing formal clothing; men wore suits and ties and women wore dresses. Why might activists have chosen to dress in this manner? Why did they hope their clothing would communicate? **E/M/H**

Interview by Eric Marcus with Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin Lahusen

In an era when few people were willing to vocally support LGBTQ+ rights, Barbara Gittings and her partner Kay Tobin Lahusen were unusually public in their advocacy and their personal lives. In this transcript from an interview conducted December 18, 1989, Gittings discusses the difficulty of finding a psychiatrist in 1972 who would talk publicly about being gay. In the end, “Dr. Anonymous” participated in the panel while wearing a mask, even as Gittings herself sits next to him fully exposed. The interview has been edited for length and clarity, indicated by the bracketed ellipsis.

Eric: I want to show you a photograph, which you’re probably familiar with.

Kay: Is this the picture?

Barbara: Oh, this is Dr. Anonymous at the American Psychiatric Association.

Kay: I took that picture. [. . .]

Barbara: Well, at the left is myself, Barbara Gittings. Next to me is Franklin Kameny. And we were the two non-psychiatrist gay panelists.

Eric: What was this event that you were speaking at?

Barbara: This was the American Psychiatric Association’s annual conference.

Eric: Which was in May of 1972.

Kay: I was shooting for *Gay* newspaper at the time. That appeared in there.

Barbara: Frank and I... The story behind this is that Frank and I had been asked to be on a panel at the 1972 conference and Kay said [. . .], “Look, you have psychiatrists who are not gay on the panel. And you have gays who are not psychiatrists on the panel. But what you’re lacking on the panel is gay psychiatrists. Those who are both.” [. . .] And I made a number of calls to some of the people I had made some contacts with and nobody yet was quite willing to be that public.

Eric: Why? What would have happened if someone who was that public?

Barbara: They feared damage to their careers. But finally I talked with this one man who said, “Well, I will do it provided I am allowed to wear a wig and a mask and use a distort microphone.” And that’s what he did. And he came on the... He was billed in the program as “Dr. H. Anonymous.” That was the way he wanted to be billed. And he was going to talk about what it was like to have to live in the closet because of career constraints as a gay psychiatrist.

It went off marvelously! The house was packed. Dr. H. Anonymous came in through the back.

Interview by Eric Marcus with Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin Lahusen *continued*:

Kay: Frank Kameny was [raving] against it. He didn't want anyone in a mask. He wanted it to be up front.

Barbara: I know, but it went off so well that he had to admit afterwards that it was a great gamble. It was a great [gamble]. Look at the smile on his face. After all it went off so well.

Eric: What were the other two...

Barbara: "Psychiatry, Friend or Foe to Homosexuals, A Dialogue" was the title.

Eric: The title of the, uh, panel.

Barbara: The title of the panel that had Frank and me and Dr. H. Anonymous and Dr. Marmor.

From 1967 when I made my first public lecture to a straight audience, and I had to deal constantly with people's conviction that we were sick simply because they had heard some psychiatrist say so or they had heard a report of the infamous Bieber study, that badly flawed study [. . .]. That was the one that promoted the idea that gay men become gay because of the absent, distant father, and the all-encompassing mother. And you know, that idea is, you've heard about that, at least...

Eric: I used to get that all the time.

Barbara: That's still around. Well, that came strictly out of the Bieber study. It was a really bad piece of work and yet, it had such impact and such control over our destinies. [. . .]

Kay: [Psychoanalysts] abdicated totally. They didn't say we were immoral. They said we were sick.

Eric: Oh, and now they say we're immoral.

Kay: Right. Now we're immoral.

Barbara: But at least that's arguable. Whereas the problem with the sickness label is that that's supposedly is scientific and not subject to dispute.

Eric: And so those were some of the things you went after in your work.

Barbara: Yes. The sickness issue was paramount.

Citation: Barbara Gittings and Kay Lahusen, [Transcript of interview with Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin Lahusen](#), interview by Eric Marcus, December 18, 1989, West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, *Making Gay History*. Find the Making Gay History podcast on all major podcast platforms and at www.makinggayhistory.com.

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- Why did Dr. Anonymous wear a mask to participate in the panel being discussed? **E/M**
 - Why might Frank Kameny have been opposed to anyone participating in the panel wearing a mask or hiding their identity? **M/H**
 - According to Barbara and Kay what role did faulty science play in discrimination against gay people? **M/H**



Audre Lorde

African American Poet and Essayist Who Demanded Intersectional Politics That Respected Difference

by Bonnie Smith

Focus Questions

How have issues of race, gender, and sexuality shaped American identity?

What were the main reforms that activists aimed to achieve in the 1960s and thereafter?

What methods did reformers employ to achieve a better society?

How did 20th century reform movements intersect with and/or contradict each other?

Are we a nation of haves and have nots?

Has the United States lived up to the promise and potential of its history and status?

Audre Lorde (1934–1992), legendary poet and activist—or, as she noted, “a Black, lesbian, feminist, mother, warrior poet,”—was born in New York in 1934 to hard-working immigrant parents from the Caribbean. Lorde attended Catholic school and was the first Black student at Hunter High School, a school for gifted girls. She later graduated from Hunter College and earned a Masters of Library Science from Columbia University. Lorde’s parents attempted to shield her from some aspects of American intolerance. In her memoir, *Zami*, Lorde wrote, “racism was a new and crushing reality that my parents had to deal with every day of their lives once they came to this country. They handled it as a private woe. My mother and father believed that they could best protect their children from the realities of race in America and the fact of American racism by never giving them name much less discussing their nature.”¹

Despite her parents’ efforts, racism was pervasive in American society. In 1947, during the summer after she finished eighth grade, Lorde’s family traveled to Washington, D.C. Lorde’s sister, who graduated from high school the same year, was previously disinvited from her senior class trip to

1 Audre Lorde, *Zami, a New Spelling of My Name: A Biomythography* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1982) 69.

Audre Lorde's life and work have been an inspiration to generations of queer black women who came after her. She is the author of 18 books of prose and poetry. This photograph was taken as part of Robert Giard's series *Particular Voices: Portraits of Gay and Lesbian Writers*.



Robert Giard, [Audre Lorde, Staten Island, NY](#), 1987, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection, The New York Public Library. © Estate of Robert Giard.

Washington, D.C. because she was Black. Traveling by train, Lorde wanted to eat in the dining cars she had read so much about; her mother's excuses about the price and preparation of the food attempted to cover up the fact that Blacks were prohibited from the dining car. In the nation's capital, meanwhile, the family was told to leave an ice cream parlor because of their race, arousing Lorde's "fury."² Her memoir further describes the unfolding of race, gender, and lesbianism into her young adult years.

After gaining her degree in library science, she served as a New York City public school librarian beginning in 1961. In 1962 she married a gay white man, Edwin Rollins, with whom she had two children.

According to one of her biographers, Alexis De Veaux, Lorde did not often speak of her ex-husband or marriage as she believed some might use it to question her role as a lesbian icon. In 1968 Lorde took a position as poet-in-

residence at Tougaloo College, where she met and fell in love with Frances Clayton. That relationship led to the end of her marriage in 1970. Clayton and Lorde's relationship lasted for nearly two decades; the women raised Lorde's children together.

Lorde's mother instilled in her a passion for words and stories, and she began writing poetry as a teenager. While at Tougaloo Lorde published her first poetry collection, *The First Cities*, in 1968. She remembered coming to poetry at a young age: "I used to speak in poetry. I would read poems, and I would memorize them. People would say, well what do you think, Audre. What happened to you yesterday? And I would recite a poem and somewhere in that poem would be a line or a feeling I would be sharing."³ Lorde published subsequent collections throughout the 1970s, each reflecting her identity, activism, radicalism, politics, and sexuality at the time of publication. She publicly announced her sexuality with a reading of "Love Poem" in 1973; she previously cut the poem from her third collection, fearing negative reactions from the Black literary circle of which she sought to be a part. In *Between Our Selves* (1976), Lorde embraced African spirituality after returning from her travels there. Her time abroad throughout her career influenced her ideas about the ways in which people are similar and different, the way they face oppression, and their ability to work together.

Lorde's early intellectual and social life occurred mostly among whites; soon leaders of the vibrant Black literary publishing world embraced and promoted her talent. At the time, writers like Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, and LeRoi Jones flourished. As Lorde gravitated to Black publishers, she also participated in the Combahee River Collective and other Black lesbian feminist

2 Audre Lorde, *Zami, a New Spelling of My Name: A Biomythography* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1982) 70.

3 Audre Lorde in *Black Women Writers (1950–1980) A Critical Evaluation*, Mari Evans ed. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984) 261–268.

activism. She traveled the world and gathered up new symbols, myths, and intimacies with diverse women, experiencing strength from the “erotic.”

In 1977, Lorde gave an insightful and moving speech, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action.” It yielded a lesbian motto—“Your silence will not protect you.”⁴ She additionally highlighted the racism in the women’s movement, castigating white women for coasting on their privilege and making Black women in the movement invisible. She attended the 1979 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights; she “used her theory of difference to establish the fight for gay rights as part of the greater fight against all oppressive forces that affect those who embody difference. [She] quickly became the best known out-of-the-closet Black radical lesbian feminist.”⁵

After her diagnosis, Lorde, who devoted her life and career to examining, pondering, analyzing, embracing, and writing about intersectional identities, made surviving cancer a part of hers.

In her essay, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” published in *Sister Outsider* in 1984, Lorde asserted, “If white American feminist theory need not deal with the differences between us, and the resulting difference in our oppressions, then how do you deal with the fact that the women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor women and women of color?”⁶ Lorde traveled the world and was constantly in demand for speaking engagements. Her schedule of poetry readings was exhausting but she also needed to gain funds to support her children. She was increasingly in demand for the wisdom audiences gleaned from her speeches and that readers found in her prose writing.

In 1978, doctors diagnosed Lorde with breast cancer and removed her right breast. After her diagnosis, Lorde, who devoted her life and career to examining, pondering, analyzing, embracing, and writing about intersectional identities, made surviving cancer a part of hers. She endured an array of emotions as a result of her struggle with the disease and felt compelled in *The Cancer Journals* (1980) to spell out the plight of the Black woman with cancer and use her experience as an example of women’s empowerment. Following from that came Lorde’s memoir *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name: A Biomythography* (1982). In it, Lorde unforgettably presents scenes from her childhood and young adulthood during which she developed the strength to survive the emotional and physical pain of cancer. Lorde received a second diagnosis of liver cancer in the 1980s. Her relationship with Frances Clayton ended in the late 1980s. She spent the remainder of her life living with the Black activist Dr. Gloria Joseph in St. Croix.

4 Quoted in Alexis De Veaux, *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004) 193.

5 Dionn McDonald, “[Big Lives: Profiles of LGBT African Americans](#),” *OutHistory.org*

6 McDonald, “[Big Lives: Profiles of LGBT African Americans](#)”

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 8

- **Unit 6:** Lesson 8: Feminist Movement
- **Unit 6:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 21: Modern Civil Rights (LGBTQ movement)

Grade 11

- **Unit 6:** Social and Economic Change: Domestic Issues

Thinking About:

Audre Lorde

- What caused Audre Lorde to become an activist? Why did these factors cause her activism? **M/H**
- How does Audre Lorde’s poetry help us understand the times in which she lived? **H**
- How did Lorde use her artistic expression as a tool of her activism? **M/H**
- What identities shaped Audre Lorde’s life? **H**
- What insights and achievements make Audre Lorde such an important voice in the United States? What does Lorde’s motto: “Your silence will not protect you,” mean? **H**
- How did the feminist and civil rights movements intersect? Why was there conflict between them? How does Lorde’s participation in both highlight her intersectionality? **H**
- How did Lorde’s identity evolve over time? How did her life experiences contribute to her own intersectional identity? **H**

Additional Resources

“Excerpts from Silence... Broken: Audre Lorde’s Indelible Imprint on My Life” by Aishah Shahidah Simmons

Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde

Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde by Alexis de Veaux

Zami, a New Spelling of My Name: A Biomythography by Audre Lorde

Zami, a New Spelling of My Name: A Biomythography

In 1982 Audre Lorde published an autobiography titled *Zami, a New Spelling of My Name: A Biomythography*. In the book, Lorde indicates that “Zami” is “a Carriacou name for women who work together as friends and lovers.” Lorde’s mother immigrated from the Caribbean island, Carriacou. Much of the book relates Lorde’s relationships (familial, platonic, and sexual) with other women, dealing with themes of lesbianism, racism, and the intersectional nature of Lorde’s identity. In the autobiography, Lorde celebrates the Zami in her life that have influenced her development and intellectual engagement with the world, from Lorde’s best friend as a teenager, whose suicide left Lorde feeling powerless, to the women who helped her become an influential public intellectual and leading Black lesbian feminist.

It was not that I didn’t have friends, and good ones. There was a loose group of young lesbians, white except for Flee and I, who hung out together, apart from whatever piece of the straight world we each had a separate place in. We not only believed in the reality of sisterhood, that word which was to be so abused two decades later, but we also tried to put it into practice, with varying results. We all cared for and about each other, sometimes with more or less understanding, regardless of who was entangled with whom at any given time, and there was always a place to sleep and something to eat and a listening ear for anyone who wandered into the crew. And there was always somebody calling you on the telephone, to interrupt the fantasies of suicide. That is as good a working definition of friend as most.

However imperfectly, we tried to build a community of sorts where we could, at the very least, survive within a world we correctly perceived to be hostile to us; we talked endlessly about how best to create that mutual support which twenty years later was being discussed in the women’s movement as a brand new concept. Lesbians were probably the only Black and white women in New York City in the fifties who were making any real attempt to communicate with each other; we learned lessons from each other, the values of which were not lessened by what we did not learn.

Citation: Audre Lorde, *Zami, a New Spelling of My Name: A Biomythography*. (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1982), 179.

- Sisterhood is an important concept in this passage of *Zami*. How does Lorde suggest that sisterhood is practiced by the group of lesbians with whom she was friends? **M/H**
- Why do you think that Black and white lesbian women in New York City made attempts to “communicate” across segregated communities? **H**
- What do you think is the purpose of this excerpt? How reliable is the evidence from this passage to explain the relationships of lesbian women in 1950s America? **H**

Suffer the Children

This poem by Audre Lorde addresses civil rights atrocities in the United States. It refers to the September 15, 1963, bombing of a Baptist church in Birmingham, Alabama, in which four African American girls died and fourteen others were injured. Ku Klux Klan members set off the bomb.

SUFFER THE CHILDREN

Birmingham, 1963

Pity for him who suffers from his waste.
Water that flows from the earth
For lack of roots to hold it
And children who are murdered
Before their lives begin.
Who pays his crops to the sun
When his field is parched by drought
Will mourn the lost water, waiting another rain.
But who shall dis-inter these girls
To love the women they were to become
Or read the legends written beneath their skin?

Those who loved them remember their child's laughter.
But he whose hate has robbed him
Of their good
Will come to weep night above their graves.

The years roll out and rain shall come again.
But if sunset be tied to dawn
With the cries of new-born girls
A man will thirst for sleep in his southern night
Seeking his peace where no peace is
And mourn these children given to the dust.

Citation: Audre Lorde "Suffer the Children." Copyright © 1968 by Audre Lorde, from *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

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- In what ways is the poem "Suffer the Children" an indictment of racism in America? **M/H**
 - How many kinds of loss does Lorde see in the deaths of the four girls? **M/H**
 - What kind of special meaning does Lorde attach to the fact that these victims are young? **M/H**

The Black Unicorn

This poem appeared in 1978 after Lorde had made two trips to West Africa. In it, Lorde appropriates the dreamlike unicorn in medieval tapestries and paintings (later revived in 19th century romantic art) and converts it into a far different figure.

The black unicorn is greedy.
The black unicorn is impatient.
The black unicorn was mistaken
for a shadow or symbol
and taken
through a cold country
where mist painted mockeries
of my fury.
It is not on her lap where the horn rests
but deep in her moonpit
growing.
The black unicorn is restless
the black unicorn is unrelenting
the black unicorn is not
free.

Citation: Audre Lorde, "The Black Unicorn." Copyright © 1978 by Audre Lorde, from *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde by Audre Lorde*. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

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- What does it mean that the unicorn is black? **M/H**
 - What adjectives does Lorde use to describe the black unicorn? How do you interpret those adjectives? **M/H**
 - What historical circumstances may have led to the creation of this poem? How might the historical context surrounding the creation of this poem better help in its interpretation? **M/H**
 - What is Lorde's "fury?" **M/H**
 - What is the overall message in the poem? **M/H**
 - What are the connections between the poems "Suffer the Children" and "The Black Unicorn?" In what ways can both poems be considered agitprop? **M/H**



Craig Rodwell

Launching Gay Liberation from the Country's First LGBTQ+ Bookstore

by Daniel Hurewitz

Focus Questions

How was the 1960s decade a time period of cultural and societal transformation in America?

How were other marginalized groups in the United States influenced by the civil rights movement?

Why has New York City often been a location of protest and activism?

To what extent is the United States a fully inclusive society?

In the 1960s and the 1970s, **Craig Rodwell** (1940–1992), along with a cohort of eager young people, challenged the way LGBTQ+ folks were treated in the United States. Through their activism, they shed light on their exclusion from New York City's public spaces as well as American society as a whole.

Born in Chicago in 1940, Rodwell moved to New York in the summer of 1958 at the age of 18, eager to become a gay activist. He had already been arrested as a teenager for a gay encounter. The Mattachine Society of New York, the dominant **homophile** or gay rights organization of the time, told him that he should wait until he was 21 before joining. He began editing their newspaper, but within a few years Rodwell graduated to organizing a picket in front of the military recruitment office in lower Manhattan to protest the ban on lesbian and gay soldiers. In 1965, he chartered a bus and joined with other protestors picketing at the White House. Rodwell also joined what became an annual protest in front of Independence Hall in Philadelphia to challenge the exclusion of gays and lesbians from government jobs. By 1966, he continued his activism as one of a handful of gay men who held a "Sip-In" at Julius' bar in the West Village. State laws on the books since the 1930s banned bars from serving alcohol to gay men and women. As a result, LGBTQ+ people had been forced for decades

to go to separate, illegal bars, often controlled by organized crime.¹ The Sip-In challenged that exclusion.

A year later, Rodwell stepped even further into a leadership role among the New York community, opening the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop in the West Village, a stone's throw from Washington Square Park. The bookstore was the first in the nation to be devoted to gay and lesbian literary publications. It was greeted with a mixture of horror and delight. Given the homophobic climate of the day, the violent reaction was predictable. On a few occasions, Rodwell's bookshop had its windows smashed, and "Kill Fags" was scrawled on its walls. Meanwhile, Rodwell received a steady stream of hate mail. Despite the vitriol he received, the bookstore was also a delight to its many patrons. In fact, Rodwell ran the shop as a community center as much as a business. The store probably only had 25 or so titles—as well as some buttons—for sale in the early days. In many ways it operated as New York's first LGBTQ+ community center, with a "Gay Is Good" sign in the window, serving coffee on weekends, and offering discounts to activists. Rodwell organized a gay youth group out of the store and in 1968; he began publishing a newsletter entitled *Hymnal*.

The newsletter included reviews and details about local bars, but it also aimed to motivate the "people to join and support the work of the movement." As Rodwell wrote in one piece, "We will make no pretense of speaking to the heterosexual, in trying to persuade him to 'accept' homosexuals. *Hymnal* is solely concerned with what the gay person thinks of himself. The community has the economic, political, and social potential to shape its own future. This potential only needs to be encouraged and channeled."²

As Rodwell and the bookstore became better known, people from around the world wrote to him. Teens penned letters asking for advice, entrepreneurs inquired about how they could emulate the shop, patrons suggested books he should carry, and even soldiers overseas in Vietnam sent him mail with the simple hope of making contact with another gay person. A testament to his dedication to community building, Rodwell responded to many of his correspondents with advice, support, and encouragement.

LGBTQ+ activist Craig Rodwell was only twenty-seven years old when he opened the first gay bookstore in America, New York City's Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop, in 1967. In 1973, the shop moved to Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, where it remained until 2009, when it closed in the aftermath of the financial crash. This photo was taken by pioneering lesbian photojournalist, Kay Tobin Lahusen.



Kay Tobin, [Craig Rodwell behind the counter of the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop](#), c. 1973–1974, © Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

1 The laws that the Sip In challenged also laid the groundwork for the Stonewall Riots three years later. They created a need among the LGBTQ+ for these illegal bars; police knew these bars existed and were paid "hush money" so they would allow them to stay open. This unethical practice—of police officers financially benefiting from discriminatory laws—was in part what angered LGBTQ communities and fueled some of the anger the night of the Stonewall riots. (Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015).

2 Craig Rodwell, "Hymnal Makes a Bow," *New York Hymnal*, Feb. 1968, in [Craig Rodwell Papers](#), Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

Rodwell was adamant about reclaiming access to public space for gay people—for the right to be visible in the general public. The Sip-In was an example of this, as was opening a gay bookstore. Rodwell was a vocal critic of the way in which the criminalization of gay life had allowed organized crime to dominate the gay economy, with mobsters running gay bars and movie houses rather than gay people themselves. “For too long,” he wrote in an article about the mafia control, “we have passively accepted the situation; but as our individual and group feelings of pride in our lifestyle and solidarity with our people grow, we find a new determination to assert control over our own lives. . . [W]hen an historically downtrodden people begin to like themselves, they begin to get mad at institutions and groups which exploit and use them.”³

On a Friday night in June 1969, Rodwell came home from a dinner party and stopped by his bookstore. That was when he discovered that a police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a few blocks away, had erupted into street violence. The

Stonewall Inn was run by a mafia group and was raided regularly by the police. The next day, Rodwell wrote and began distributing a leaflet which demanded, “GET THE MAFIA AND THE COPS OUT OF GAY BARS!” That night, the crowds outside the Stonewall Inn were even larger, and the violence more dramatic: a breakthrough seemed to be happening.

Over the course of the following year, Rodwell became more involved in this new aggressive gay activism, known as gay liberation, though he never naturally fit into its most outspoken groups like the Gay Liberation Front. But Rodwell’s apartment on Bleecker Street became the headquarters for planning a march to commemorate the days of the Stonewall Riots. That march took place in June 1970; it was called the Christopher Street Liberation Day March, and the brave participants marched in a single lane of 6th Avenue, from the West Village to a “Gay-In” in Central Park. Every June since then, New Yorkers—as well as millions of people around the world—have heeded Rodwell’s call and marched to commemorate the Stonewall Riots.

By 1973, Rodwell had moved the shop to Christopher Street, within a block of the Stonewall, further cementing the importance of the street and the neighborhood to New York’s expanding LGBTQ+ community. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Rodwell continued to fight for causes that engaged him—challenging the ubiquitous racism and ageism in the gay community, resisting the over-commercialism of gay life, fighting the labeling of gay literature as “obscene” and the steady denigration of gay people in the local press, and working to end homophobic violence.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Rodwell continued to fight for causes that engaged him—challenging the ubiquitous racism and ageism in the gay community, resisting the over-commercialism of gay life, fighting the labeling of gay literature as “obscene” and the steady denigration of gay people in the local press, and working to end homophobic violence.

3 Craig Rodwell, “The Syndicate,” manuscript, in [Craig Rodwell Papers](#), Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

Rodwell died in June 1992, at the age of 52. Late in his life, historian Martin Duberman profiled Rodwell and a handful of other participants in a book about the Stonewall Riots. A Canadian young man, after reading Duberman's book and participating in his first Gay Pride Parade in Toronto, wrote Rodwell in gratitude. "To proclaim my satisfaction to the world that day of who I was, without fear of police or public, makes my position in gay history quite fortunate. Reading the book *Stonewall* has made me realize that a major reason for this is the incredible bravery and determination of those few people like yourself."⁴

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 8

- **Unit 6:** Lesson 8: Feminist Movement
- **Unit 6:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 21: Modern Civil Rights (LGBTQ movement)

Grade 11

- **Unit 6:** Social and Economic Change: Domestic Issues

⁴ J.D. to Craig Rodwell, in [Craig Rodwell Papers](#), Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

Thinking About:

Craig Rodwell

- Why did Craig Rodwell move to New York City when he turned eighteen years old? **M/H**
- Describe the ways in which Rodwell protested the LGBTQ+ community's mistreatment before opening his bookstore. **M/H**
- What was the purpose of the "Sip-In" at the Julius bar? Why did the mafia control bars for the LGBTQ+ community? Why did the organizers of this civic protest include "-in" in its name? **M/H**
- Why was Rodwell's bookshop such an important space for the LGBTQ+ community? **M**
- Why did reclaiming public space play such an important role in achieving rights for the LGBTQ+ community? **M/H**
- What sparked the Stonewall Riots? **M/H**
- Describe the purpose of the Christopher Street Liberation Day March. How did this event connect to Rodwell's fight to reclaim public spaces for the LGBTQ+ community? **M/H**
- How does Rodwell's life exemplify the importance of building solidarity and community? **H**
- Why is community important, particularly for marginalized groups? What are some other examples in history where community building helped groups facing discrimination gain power? **H**

Additional Resources

["Craig Rodwell Papers"](#) by The New York Public Library

["Remembering Craig Rodwell"](#) by Village Alliance

Sip-In

In 1966, Rodwell and a handful of gay men held a “Sip-In” at Julius’ bar in the West Village. State laws had been on the books since the 1930s that banned bars from serving alcohol to gay men and women. As a result, LGBTQ+ people had been forced for decades to go to separate, illegal bars, often controlled by organized crime. The Sip-In was a challenge to that exclusion. In the photograph below, the bartender in Julius’s Bar refuses to serve John Timmins, Dick Leitsch, Craig Rodwell, and Randy Wicker, members of the Mattachine Society.

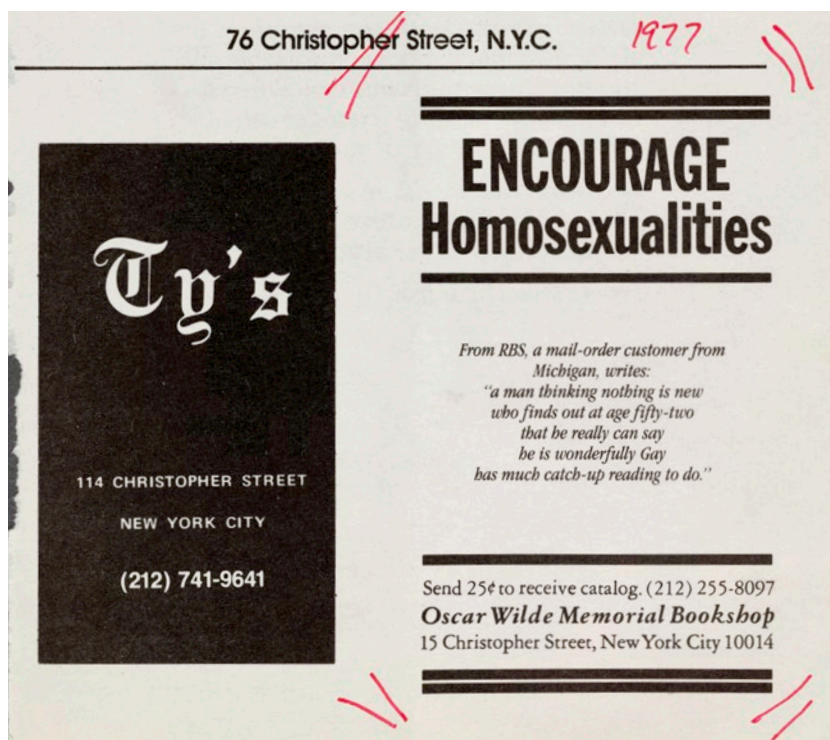


Citation: Fred W. McDarrah, *Mattachine Society ‘Sip-In’*, April 21, 1966, Contributor/Getty Images, 83644488, © Estate of Fred W. McDarrah.

- Describe what you see happening in this photograph. **M/H**
- What was the purpose of the Sip-In? To what extent was it successful? **M/H**
- Does the Sip-In remind you of other moments of civil disobedience in American history? Explain. **M/H**

Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop Advertisement

This clipping from 1977 appeared on a page with ads for other businesses on Christopher Street, including Ty's, a gay bar. The advertisements suggest the vast and public gay world that had, by this point, developed along Christopher Street in Greenwich Village. Craig Rodwell's Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop was a cornerstone of this community, but it also served LGBTQ+ people around the country, as this limerick from a patron in Michigan makes clear.



Citation: "[Clipping including advertisement for Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop catalog](#)," 1977, © Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

- What is the purpose of the headline for the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop advertisement? **M/H**
- Who was Oscar Wilde? What might be the significance of Rodwell naming the bookstore after him? **H**
- Why might the creation of a bookstore devoted to gay and lesbian literary publications be important in the mid 1970's in New York City? **H**
- Why might this advertisement for a bookstore be included in a newspaper with bars and other meeting spaces? **H**
- Why was it significant that people could receive a catalog and not just visit the physical space of the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop? How might that option help empower the global LGBTQ+ community? How might this option expand the community Rodwell aimed to build? **M/H**

Leaflet Handed Out During First March Marking the Stonewall Riots

This flyer was handed out at the 1970 “Christopher Street Liberation Day March,” which was planned as an anniversary celebration for the Stonewall Uprising and would become New York City’s annual pride parade. The authors of this flyer, including Craig Rodwell, hoped to ensure that the day would be a celebration of LGBTQ+ people, rather than a series of conflicts between the community and homophobic onlookers.

WELCOME

Welcome to the first anniversary celebration of the Gay Liberation movement. We are united today to affirm our pride, our lifestyle and our commitment to each other. Despite political and social differences we may have, we are united on this common ground: For the first time in history we are together as The Homosexual Community. This is the commitment that draws us together; let us not forget it through this, our day.

Placing this commitment above all else, let nothing stand in our way. We are Gay and proud. No-one can convince us otherwise. Degrading remarks by hecklers or observers are not important enough to interfere with our goal and don’t deserve a reaction.

The Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee has worked closely with the New York City Police Dept. and we have received their full cooperation to insure an orderly and successful march. Trained marshals are marked with orange CSLD armbands; they are members of the Gay Community and are here to serve the people by providing important information such as medical and legal aid, parade routes, and the location of rest areas. Feel free to ask them any and all questions; they are here to help you in every way possible.

Everyone of us is important. We are showing our strength and love for each other by coming here today. We are all participants in the most important Gay event in history.

the Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee

Citation: [Craig Rodwell papers](#), © Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

- What was the goal of this First March Marking the Stonewall Riots? **E/M/H**
- How did members of the gay community prepare to support one another during the march? **E/M/H**
- The year 2020 would mark the 50th anniversary of this First March Marking the Stonewall Riots. How has the annual New York City Pride Parade grown and changed since the original event?
E/M/H



Sylvia Rivera

Fighting Discrimination from Inside the Gay Liberation Movement

by Sage Milo

Focus Questions

How did individuals and groups take action to bring about change?

How have issues of gender, race, and sexuality shaped American identity?

Why has New York City often been a location of protest and activism?

To what extent is the United States a fully inclusive society?

NOTE: It is important to note that Sylvia Rivera used a range of pronouns, as well as, at times, resisted the use of some pronouns and identifiers throughout her life. In an essay published in 2002, *Queens in Exile, The Forgotten Ones*, Rivera states, “I’m tired of living with labels. I just want to be who I am.” However, following the practice of the people who were closest to her when she was alive, as well as the organization the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, who carry on the legacy of her work, we use the pronouns “she/her/hers” and her name—Sylvia—throughout the reading.

It is also important to understand that at different stages, but especially when she first left home and when she started STAR, Rivera supported herself and others through sex work. This is indicative of the difficult economic situation she found herself in and employment discrimination that many queer and gender nonconforming people face. Because Rivera was a minor when she left home and could not consent to the sex work she engaged in, it is better understood as rape and exploitation. We have not included this information in the narrative that follows, leaving it to teachers to decide whether or not to discuss this with their students.

Be aware that some of the documents following this profile use explicit language and references to rape and other acts of violence which may be traumatizing for some readers.

Sylvia Rivera (1951–2002) was born in the Bronx and was assigned male at birth, as the son of a Puerto Rican father and a Venezuelan mother. When Rivera was three years old, her stepfather threatened to kill her and her mother, and shortly after that, Rivera’s mother died by suicide, leaving Rivera to be raised by her grandmother. From an early age, Rivera refused to conform to gender norms and roles; she wore makeup to school in fourth grade, and despite being punished for it, she would dress up in her grandmother’s clothes. She also insisted that she wanted to be a hairstylist, not a mechanic, which was her grandmother’s plan. When she was nearing her eleventh birthday, Rivera left home, and began living on her own on the streets of New York.

Rivera always said that she was one of the people who led the Stonewall riots, which broke out in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, when the police raided the Stonewall Inn bar in Greenwich Village with plans to shut it down. At the time, police regularly raided LGBTQ+ bars—often to obtain a payoff from the owner—but individual arrests, and other forms of police harassment of LGBTQ+ people were common. As Rivera put it in an interview, “This is what we learned to live with at that time. We had to live with it. We had to live with it until that day.” As part of the raid, the customers were mostly kicked out and sent home. But according to Rivera’s account, instead of slinking off in the darkness, the ejected patrons gathered across the street from the Stonewall that night. Their collective sentiment, she said, was “Why do we have to keep on constantly putting up with this?”¹ People began throwing coins (symbolizing payoff money) at the police, then bricks and paving stones; someone even threw a burning torch into the bar. Eventually, the riot police were called in, and they fought with the remaining patrons and others in the streets of the Village for several hours. Central in the fighting were Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson—her comrade in arms—and other transgender women, drag queens, and street kids. The Stonewall riots are commonly identified as marking a key turning point in the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement in the United States, inspiring an explosion of gay liberation activism around the country.

After Stonewall, Rivera joined the **Gay Activists Alliance**, an organization founded in 1969 to attain civil and social rights for LGBT people. She also participated in the sit-in in Weinstein Hall at New York University, organized after the university closed its buildings to gay events until ministers and psychiatrists decided whether homosexuality was morally acceptable. Although Rivera was protesting with members of gay organizations like the Gay Liberation Front, she notes, “My brothers and sisters from the gay community themselves were not very, very supportive.” Indeed, like other early gay rights organizations, the GAA and the GLF advocated for “gay people,” implying a broad

Although she was only nineteen when this photo was taken in 1970, Sylvia Rivera had already spent nearly a decade living on the streets, and advocating for the rights of transgender people of color (though she probably would not have used that language at the time). Around the time this photo was taken, Rivera founded Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, an organization that addressed the needs of working-class and homeless transgender people (mostly people of color) who were being ignored by the growing lesbian and gay movement.



Kay Tobin, *Sylvia Rivera in front of fountain*, 1970,
© Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

¹ Eric Marcus, [Interview with Sylvia Rivera](#), Part 1, Tarrytown, New York, December 9, 1989.

“I was a radical, a revolutionist. I am still a revolutionist. . . I am glad I was in the Stonewall riot. I remember when someone threw a Molotov cocktail, I thought, ‘My god, the revolution is here. The revolution is finally here!’”

coalition, but in practice many of these groups were dominated by white cisgender men. Rivera was vocal in her criticism of the gay rights movement and its mistreatment of transgender people (especially transgender women), people of color, and sex workers. One of the more public examples of this is her speech at the 1973 Gay Pride Rally at Washington Square Park, where she criticized the crowd for their disregard for the rights of those community members who did not “belong to a white middle class white club.” Much of Rivera’s speech was met with booing.²

The marginalization and often hostility that transgender people, drag queens, and homeless LGBTQ+ people faced within the gay rights movement led Rivera, along with Marsha P. Johnson and several others, to establish

STAR, the **Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries**. As Rivera put it, “My brothers and sisters kept on using us and we wanted to be by ourselves.”³ Rivera and Johnson established the STAR house in a dilapidated building on Second Street as a safe house for homeless LGBTQ+ youth. After her years of work and sacrifice for various LGBTQ+ causes, STAR received almost no support from the larger gay movement. Rivera had envisioned community members teaching each other, benefiting everyone, but sadly this never came to pass. Even so, STAR was the first organization in the United States led by transgender women of color, and it expanded to other cities before collapsing in the mid-1970s.⁴

Sylvia Rivera lived much of her remaining years in poverty and marginalization. She was homeless part of the time, and struggled with addiction. She often felt ostracized by the LGBTQ+ community, discriminated against for her race, class, and gender expression. In an interview in 1989, she said, “I’d like to do a lot more for the movement, but the movement just doesn’t want to deal with me.”⁵ Nonetheless, in 1994 she was honored at the march marking the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, and became active in the LGBTQ+ movement again. Sylvia attempted to restart STAR in 2001, but on February 19, 2002, at the age of 50, she died of liver cancer.

Rivera’s legacy will be recognized and honored with a monument in Greenwich Village, along with other activists including Marsha P. Johnson. The proposal is to have the installation within the Ruth E. Wittenberg Triangle, a short walk from The Stonewall Inn. This monument will be one of the world’s first that includes transgender people. New York City plans to have the monument completed by 2021.⁶

2 Sylvia Rivera, [Y’all Better Quiet Down](#), New York City, 1973.

3 Eric Marcus, [Interview with Sylvia Rivera](#), Part 2, Tarrytown, New York, December 9, 1989.

4 [Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries found STAR House](#), The Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP).

5 Marcus, [Interview with Sylvia Rivera](#), Part 2, Tarrytown, New York, December 9, 1989.

6 Julia Jacobs, [“Two Transgender Activists Are Getting a Monument in New York,”](#) *The New York Times*, May 29, 2019.

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 8

- **Unit 6:** Lesson 8: Feminist Movement
- **Unit 6:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 16: Hispanic Civil Rights Movement
- **Unit 6:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 21: Modern Civil Rights (LGBTQ movement)

Grade 11

- **Unit 6:** Social and Economic Change: Domestic Issues
- **Unit 7:** The United States and Globalization

Thinking About:

Sylvia Rivera

- Why is the exceptional nature of the circumstances that Sylvia Rivera had to face during her “childhood” important for us to know about? How might her activism and advocacy for others have been influenced by the circumstances she faced as a young person?
M/H
- Do you think experiences of LGBTQ+ young people are different now than they were for Rivera growing up? Why or why not? **M/H**
- Why do you think the gay community refused to help with STAR in the 1970s? How does this demonstrate division within the LGBTQ+ community? **H**
- In what ways was Rivera marginalized throughout her lifetime? How do you think this affected her? **M/H**
- Like many of the profiles featured, Rivera’s demonstrates some of the challenges of an intersectional approach to progress. Describe some of these struggles of intersectionality for Rivera and other activists. **H**

Additional Resources

[“Our Armies are Rising and we are Getting Stronger”](#) by Sylvia Rivera

[“Season 3 Episode 1: Sylvia Rivera—Part 2”](#) by Eric Marcus

Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson at a Rally

Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson (left, under the umbrella) were both best friends and comrades in arms in the early LGBTQ+ rights movement. Together, they could be found at the forefront of many of New York City's earliest queer protests. Inside the movement, they were often the lone voices calling out for transgender equality, the rights of queer people of color, and the needs of the homeless, poor, and dispossessed.

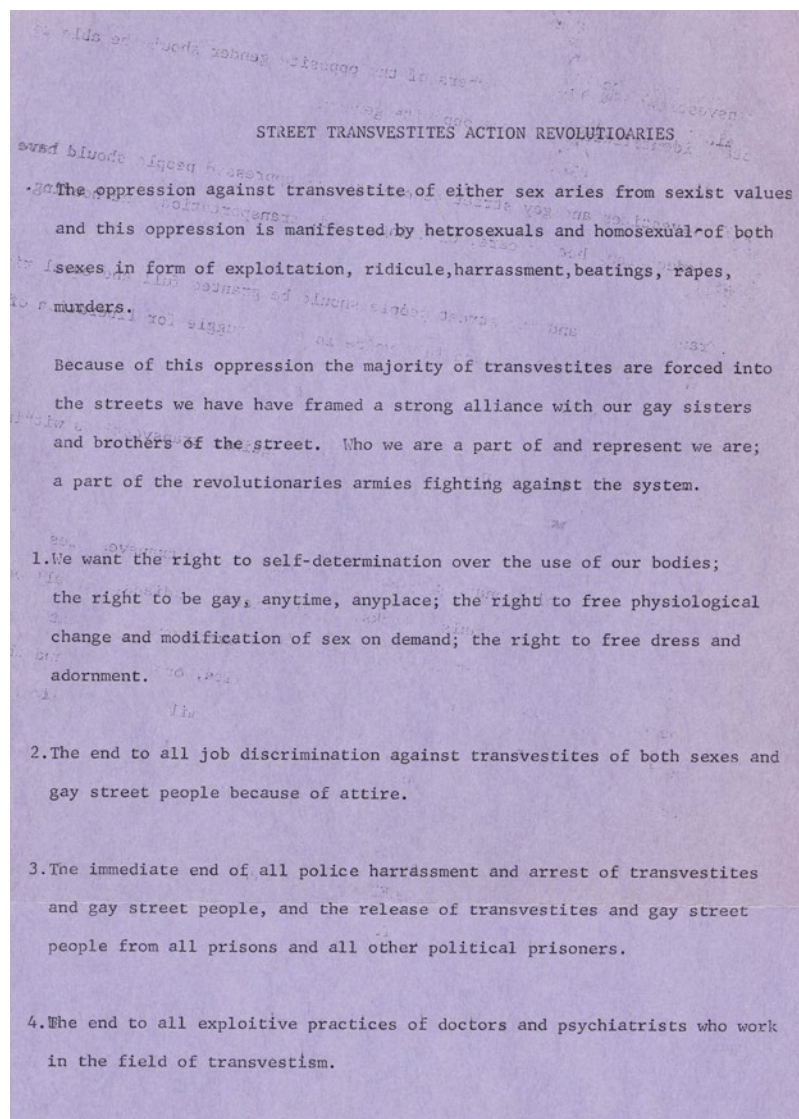


Citation: Diana Davies, [Gay rights activists at City Hall rally for gay rights: Sylvia Ray Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson, Barbara Deming, and Kady Vandeurs](#), 1973, © Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

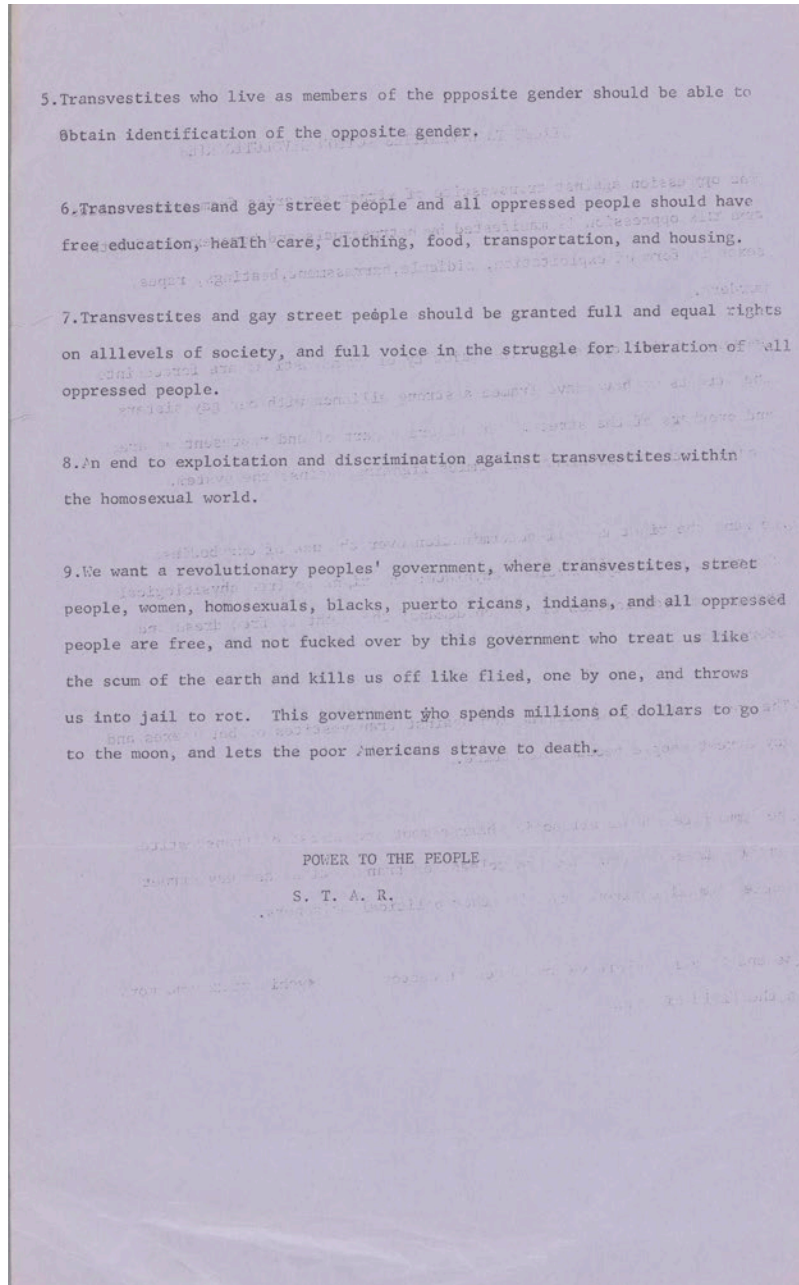
- What do you observe in this picture? What are some inferences that you can draw about this picture based on your observations? What evidence might you look for to corroborate those inferences to develop an evidence based interpretation? **M/H**
- What do you think this protest was about? Why do you think that? **M/H**

Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries

The members of the LGBTQ+ community who more openly defied gender norms—people who today might use words like transgender or genderqueer—may have referred to themselves in the past as transsexual, butch, queen or with other terms that are unfamiliar to us today. As such throughout the LGBTQ+ movement in this period, the needs of transgender people were often relegated to an afterthought, and gender non-conforming people were vilified by some lesbian, gay, and bisexual people who saw them as perpetuating homophobic and/or misogynistic stereotypes that they believed set the movement back. In 1970, Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson founded Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) as a gender non-conforming and transgender street activist organization. STAR was a radical political collective that also provided housing and support to homeless LGBTQ+ youth and sex workers in Lower Manhattan. Soon after being founded, the members of STAR presented a 9 point plan of action. The plan, called a manifesto by some, was influenced by other radical platforms such as the Black Panther Party 10-Point Program and the 13-Point Program of the Young Lords.



Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries *continued*:



Citation: Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, [Manifesto](#), c. 1970, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

- What were the goals of the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries as stated in their 9-points? **H**
- Who do you think STAR's intended audience was for the 9-points? Why do you think that? **H**
- It is believed that this document presenting STAR's 9-points was created after Stonewall, how might that event have influenced the creation of the 9-points? **H**

“Y’all Better Quiet Down” Speech, 1973

In her activism, Sylvia Rivera did not avoid confronting inequality within the larger LGBTQ+ community. On Sunday, June 24, 1973, the Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee organized and held the New York Gay Pride March and Gala in Washington Square Park in New York City. Rivera, who was not on the original program, took the stage at the gala amidst a chorus of ‘boos.’ According to some, the response was because the crowd wanted only entertainment, not political speeches. Others believe the booing was directed at Rivera because she was seen as an interloper for the day’s events. Another political speech delivered that day by Jean O’Leary was critical of Rivera. The crowd met O’Leary, a lesbian feminist, with a mix of boos and cheers when she eventually was allowed to speak by the organizers. In her speech, O’Leary stated that she had been waiting all week to get approved to read the Lesbian Feminist Liberation (LFL) letter exposing sexist biases in the movement and denouncing self-identified drag queens. O’Leary later regretted the transphobia of her speech stating, “Looking back, I find this so embarrassing because my views have changed so much since then.” Sylvia Rivera’s speech not only called the movement out on its transphobia, but also exposed its white, middle-class biases.

Y’all better quiet down. I been tryin’ to get up here all day, for your gay brothers and your gay sisters in jail! They’re writin’ me every motherfuckin’ week. And ask for your help. And you all don’t do a god damned thing for them. Have you ever been beaten up and raped in jail? Now think about it. They been beaten up and raped after they had to spend much of their money in jail to get their silicone and try to get their sex change. The women have tried to fight for their sex changes or to become women of the women’s liberation. And they write ‘STAR’ not the women’s group. They do not write women, they do not write men, they write ‘STAR,’ because we’re trying to do something for them. I have been to jail. I have been raped, and beaten, many times, by men, heterosexual men, that do not belong in the homosexual shelter. But, do you do anything for them? No. Y’all tell me to go and hide my tail between my legs. I will not no longer put up with this shit. I have been beaten. I have had my nose broken. I have been thrown in jail. I have lost my job. I have lost my apartment for gay liberation, and you all treat me this way? What the fuck’s wrong with you all? Think about that. I do not believe in revolution, but you all do. I believe in the Gay Power. I believe in us getting our rights, or else I would not be out there fighting for our rights. That’s all I wanted to say to your people. If you all want to know about the people that are in jail, and do not forget Bambi L’Amour, and Dora Marks, Kenny Metzner, and other gay people are in jail, come and see the people at STAR HOUSE on 12th Street, on 640 East 12th Street between B and C, Apartment 14. The people that are trying to do something for all of us and not men and women that belong to a white middle class, white club! And that’s what’s wrong with all of you. Revolution Now! Gimme’ a G! Gimme’ an A! Gimme’ a Y! Gimme’ a P! Gimme’ an O! Gimme’ a W! Gimme’ an E! Gimme’ an R! GAY POWER! Louder! GAY POWER!

Citation: [Sylvia Rivera Speech](#), 1973 Gay Pride Rally, Washington Square Park, NYC USA. Transcription courtesy of Lesbians Organized for Video Experience (L.O.V.E.) Collective, and LoveTapesCollective ([on Vimeo](#)), and with Special Thanks to Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn, NY USA.

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- Why is it significant that Rivera did not sanitize her language when delivering this speech? **H**
 - How does Rivera address intersectionality in this speech? **H**
 - Rivera uses her personal experiences with violence to illustrate how the experience of some queer people differs from the experiences of many people in the crowd. Why do you think this was a tactic that she chose? **H**
 - How might these experiences have influenced the type of activism that Rivera engaged in? **H**



Portrait of an Era: Politics and Liberation

The Turn of the 21st Century—A Painful but Dramatic Shift towards Greater Acceptance

by Sage Milo

This final portrait aims to convey the incredible shift in late 20th and early 21st-century culture, as the political and cultural efforts of LGBTQ+ activists rewrote the lingering narrative of the Lavender Scare. In the space of a few decades, the AIDS epidemic finally received governmental attention, LGBTQ+ partners were able to register civil unions and then equal marriages, and lesbians and gay men were allowed to serve openly in the military. While some activists viewed these developments as limited and still exclusionary, many saw these years as a watershed, marking a new era in LGBTQ+ American living.

The end of the 20th century marked the beginning of a new era in LGBTQ+ rights history. During the 1980s, gay men became the leading victims of an HIV/AIDS epidemic. Lesbian couples like Sharon Kowalksi and Karen Thomson regularly saw their relationships dismissed by the courts; and in 1986, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of state laws criminalizing gay sex in *Bowers v. Hardwick*. But in the 1990s, the nation began a dramatic, if uneven, shift toward an expanding tolerance and even acceptance of LGBTQ+ folks.

Some historians have argued that the AIDS epidemic helped transform LGBTQ+ people in the public imagination from “amoral perverts” to humans with dignity.¹ Certainly, as thousands of young gay men fell ill in the country’s urban centers, many returned home to be cared for by their families and communities of origin. As they came out, gay people became known in an unprecedented way.

¹ George Chauncey, *Why Marriage: The History Shaping Today’s Debate Over Gay Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 2004). Chauncey discusses the widespread impact of the AIDS epidemic on the LGBTQ community and its status, as well as other issues influencing the struggle for marriage rights, in this book.

AIDS and other events made LGBTQ+ people aware of how vulnerable they were without legal recognition of their relationships. Hospitals often denied gay men visiting privileges when their partners were sick, and if they died, they might find themselves evicted from the apartment they had shared. (See Miguel Braschi's fight over this issue on page 177.) Lesbians who would lose custody of their children to their ex-husbands discovered that legalized same-sex marriages could protect their families. And so, in multiple states during the 1990s, lesbian and gay couples began to press for marriage equality.

The 1990s also saw gay men and women arrive on major television shows. First, Ellen Degeneres came out on her sitcom *Ellen* (and kissed Laura Dern) in 1996, and then starting in 1998 Will Truman and Jack McFarland began appearing weekly in American living rooms on *Will & Grace*. These were brief visits—only 30 minutes—and humorous, often featuring stereotypical behavior or characteristics: you could get to know gay folks, but also laugh at them and with them. These actors all faced backlash; Ellen appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine* and the *Oprah Winfrey Show* to defend her reasons for coming out.

Recognizing the LGBTQ+ population and actually implementing change to its benefit did not always align in politics as well. In 1992 Bill Clinton's presidential campaign reached out to LGBTQ+ voters. He promised them unprecedented attention, pledging that he would appoint an "AIDS Czar" to direct federal efforts to address the epidemic, and that he would immediately repeal the ban on queer folks serving in the military. Once in office, however, Clinton met stiff resistance from the congressional bloc known as the Moral Majority. Conservatives in Congress forced a replacement policy called "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," that tried to make the military more hospitable for closeted men and women, but actually increased LGBTQ+ discharges. LGBTQ+ identity was now written into federal policy as hidden, and active military were expected to keep it that way. Additionally, Congress passed the "Defense of Marriage Act"—that Clinton signed—to block the federal government from recognizing same-sex marriages and give individual states permission to ignore them as well.

Even with these setbacks, the tide continued to shift. In 2000, the Vermont legislature changed their laws so that gay and lesbian couples could form "civil unions"—receiving all the benefits and protections of marriage, just not the name. And then, quite dramatically, a case from Texas came before the Supreme Court, involving two men who had been arrested for having sex at home. Although in the 1980s the court upheld laws criminalizing gay sex, in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003) the court reversed itself, stating that the Constitution gives LGBTQ+ people "the right to choose to enter upon relationships in the confines of their homes and their own private lives and still retain their dignity as free persons."

Six months later, the Massachusetts Supreme Court determined that their state constitution required same-sex couples be accorded full marriage rights. Soon Connecticut followed their example, as did New Jersey, and then other states. Many states passed laws with the opposite intention—banning same-sex marriages—but the states that legalized same-sex marriage grew steadily in number. In 2011, the Obama administration repealed the ban on LGBTQ+ folks serving in the military, and then in 2013 and 2015, in a pair of decisions, the Supreme Court declared that excluding same-sex couples from the right to marry violated the Constitution. As Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote of same-sex couples in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, "Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization's oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right."

And in these same years, LGBTQ+ folks became even more vividly represented in American popular culture, whether on TV shows like *Modern Family*, *Orange Is the New Black*, or *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Actors, popular musicians, and athletes began coming out in larger numbers. The visibility of LGBTQ+ individuals increased dramatically.

On June 15, 2020 the United States Supreme Court ruled in an unexpected decision that gay and transgender workers were protected from workplace discrimination by the 1964 Civil Rights Act. This decision, along with other legal precedent and shifts in public visibility and acceptance throughout the late 20th and early 21st centuries, have expanded the rights of LGBTQ+ Americans; however, queer people, and in particular women, the transgender community, and people of color, still routinely face rampant sexism, discrimination, and violence. In many states LGBTQ+ people can still be denied housing or services, they cannot adopt children, and the Trump Administration rolled back protections for transgender patients facing discrimination in healthcare, as well as transgender students and soldiers.



Miguel Braschi

Fighting for Same-Sex Couples to Be Recognized as Families

by the Museum of the City of New York

Focus Questions

How did individuals and groups take action to bring about change?

How have issues of gender, race, and sexuality shaped American identity?

To what extent is the United States a fully inclusive society?

How have Americans used the legal system to fight for equality?

Why have civil rights activists often focused on combating housing discrimination?

When **Miguel Braschi** (1956–1990) lost his partner of ten years, Leslie Blanchard, to HIV/AIDS in September 1986, he was forced to deal not only with his grief, but with a looming crisis—possible eviction from the apartment the two men had shared and called home. Braschi and Blanchard had lived together in Blanchard’s rent-controlled apartment on East 54th Street in Manhattan; upon Blanchard’s death, their landlord Stanley Stahl sent a series of letters threatening to evict Braschi from the apartment. Braschi responded with a legal challenge, declaring that, as Blanchard’s surviving partner, he had a right to remain in the apartment they had shared. His case not only advanced the fight for LGBTQ+ New Yorkers confronting housing discrimination, but also prompted New York State to acknowledge what gay activists had argued for decades: that same-sex couples were families, entitled to the same legal protection and recognition as heterosexual couples.

Miguel Braschi was born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico. A skilled athlete, he received a full scholarship to play tennis at Ohio State University. When he and Blanchard met in December 1975 in Puerto Rico, Braschi was visiting family during his school vacation. Despite differences in age and culture, the two men quickly fell in love. Braschi introduced Blanchard to his parents, who were supportive of their relationship. By the end of his junior year of college, Braschi permanently relocated to New York City, moving into Blanchard’s one-bedroom apartment and joining him in running the hair salon that Blanchard had founded. To celebrate their first anniversary, the two men

The decision was a landmark victory for LGBTQ+ activists and set forth an important legal concept with potentially persuasive legal authority on a national scale—the term “family” was not reserved for blood relatives or married partners, but for any committed and loving couple.

exchanged bracelets they had purchased for each other—they would wear the bracelets throughout their years together, and when Blanchard died, Braschi wore his partner’s bracelet next to his own.

In May of 1986, a 52-year-old Blanchard—who thought he had come down with a bad flu—learned that he had HIV/AIDS. Like thousands of infected gay men in New York City in the 1980s, Blanchard faced a terrible prognosis; there was not yet any treatment available and the mortality rate for patients was very high. Blanchard wrote his will, leaving the majority of his estate to Braschi; the document referred to Braschi as “his friend,” one of the few socially acceptable terms available at the time to describe their long-term, committed same-sex relationship. Blanchard died that fall, and Braschi returned alone to their apartment.

Within months, his landlord threatened him with eviction. While Braschi’s name did not appear on the lease to the apartment, the two men had paid rent together and cohabited for years. Under New York State law, surviving spouses of a rent-controlled tenant were allowed to remain in their apartments. In fact, the law forbids landlords from evicting any family members living in the original tenant’s rent-controlled apartment. Braschi’s landlord, Stahl, argued that the two men—unmarried and unrelated—were not legally family, and so Braschi had no right to remain in Blanchard’s apartment.

Braschi’s situation was far from unique. Because the law offered no recognition of same-sex relationships, individuals with sick or dying partners often found themselves shut out of their care. Hospitals that enforced “family only” rules for visitation would not let them come in. The law authorized birth families—parents and siblings—to instead make decisions about the type of care being given or the funeral arrangements. And unless they were specified in a will, they rarely were able to retain their partner’s belongings.

This lack of recognition added to the social crisis the AIDS epidemic was creating—a big part of which involved housing. Particularly as young gay men became sick, they often lost their jobs and quickly depleted their own financial resources. Out of money, many were forced to return to living with their parents. Those who chose not to—or were no longer welcomed by their families—often spiraled into homelessness. Thus Braschi’s plight mirrored that of many gay men confronting the AIDS epidemic.

Faced with possible eviction, Braschi filed a lawsuit with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and lawyer William Rubenstein, a noted gay legal activist. Together they argued that same-sex couples deserved the same benefits and protections granted to heterosexual couples

and family members, particularly since they were legally prohibited from marrying (as would remain the case in New York State until 2011). The definition of “family,” Rubenstein argued, should include not only LGBTQ+ New Yorkers, but all people in committed relationships, regardless of a marriage license, blood ties, or adoption papers. In 1989, the New York State Court of Appeals agreed, declaring in the case of *Braschi v. Stahl Associates Company* that same-sex couples were family, just the same as heterosexual couples. The decision was a landmark victory for LGBTQ+ activists and set forth an important legal concept with potentially persuasive legal authority on a national scale—the term “family” was not reserved for blood relatives or married partners, but for any committed and loving couple. Though Braschi died of AIDS shortly after the case was decided, his fight laid the groundwork for future decades of LGBTQ+ activism in favor of marriage equality, housing and workplace protections, and legal recognition of same-sex relationships.

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 8

- **Unit 6:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 16: Hispanic Civil Rights Movement
- **Unit 6:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 21: Modern Civil Rights (LGBTQ movement)

Grade 11

- **Unit 6:** Social and Economic Change: Domestic Issues
- **Unit 7:** The United States and Globalization

Thinking About:

Miguel Braschi

- What is the argument lawyer William Rubenstein made in favor of Braschi's right to remain in the apartment? **M/H**
- Was Miguel Braschi a civil rights activist? Why or why not? **M/H**
- Why might LGBTQ+ activists have considered this case—that applied only to a New York State housing law—a landmark decision? **M/H**
- How might the context of the 1980s AIDS crisis in New York have shaped the judges' decision? **H**
- Has the definition of “family” changed at all in the decades since the case of *Braschi v. Stahl Associates Company*? How so? **M/H**
- Why were the standard rights and protections given to most marriages and families denied to LGBTQ+ couples and families for much of the 20th century? **M/H**

Additional Resources

Beyond Straight and Gay Marriage: Valuing All Families Under the Law by Nancy D. Polikoff

From the Closet to the Courtroom: Five LGBT Rights Lawsuits That Have Changed Our Nation
by Carlos A. Ball

[“The Prop 8 Ruling, My Moms, and History”](#) by Cecilia Perry

Excerpt from the Opinion of the Court, *Braschi v. Stahl Associates Company*, 1989

This is an excerpt from Judge Vito Titone’s decision; he ruled in Braschi’s favor, agreeing that Braschi and Blanchard, although not legally married, were family.

We conclude that the term family, as used in [the rent-control regulations], should not be rigidly restricted to those people who have formalized their relationship by obtaining, for instance, a marriage certificate or an adoption order. The intended protection against sudden eviction should not rest on fictitious legal distinctions or genetic history, but instead should find its foundation in the reality of family life. In the context of eviction, a more realistic, and certainly equally valid, view of a family includes two adult lifetime partners whose relationship is long term and characterized by an emotional and financial commitment and interdependence.

This view comports both with our society’s traditional concept of “family” and with the expectations of individuals who live in such nuclear units (see, also, *829 Seventh Ave. Co. v. Reider*, 67 N.Y.2d 930, 931–932 [interpreting (the regulation’s) additional “living with” requirement to mean living with the named tenant “in a family unit, which in turn connotes an arrangement, whatever its duration, bearing some indicia of permanence or continuity” (emphasis supplied)]). In fact, Webster’s Dictionary defines “family” first as “a group of people united by certain convictions or common affiliation” (see, Ballantine’s Law Dictionary [“family” defined as “(p)rimarily, the collective body of persons who live in one house and under one head or management”]). Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that, in using the term “family,” the Legislature intended to extend protection to those who reside in households having all of the normal familial characteristics. Appellant Braschi should therefore be afforded the opportunity to prove that he and Blanchard had such a household.

This definition of “family” is consistent with both of the competing purposes of the rent-control laws: the protection of individuals from sudden dislocation and the gradual transition to a free market system. Family members, whether or not related by blood, or law who have always treated the apartment as their family home will be protected against the hardship of eviction following the death of the named tenant, thereby furthering the Legislature’s goals of preventing dislocation and preserving family units which might otherwise be broken apart upon eviction. . .

Citation: Judge Vito Titone writing for the court, *Braschi v. Stahl Associates Company*, New York Court of Appeals, 543 N.E.2d 49 (July 6, 1989).

- What is the reasoning behind Judge Vito Titone’s decision? **M/H**
- How does Judge Titone define “family”? What evidence does he use to support his definition? **M/H**
- Judge Titone argues that a family includes “two adult lifetime partners whose relationship is long term and characterized by an emotional and financial commitment and interdependence.” What evidence would you cite to challenge or expand Judge Titone’s definition of family? **M/H**

Excerpt of an Affidavit Submitted by Miguel Braschi, *Braschi v. Stahl Associates Company*, 1989

In this document submitted to the court, Miguel Braschi lays out his argument for why he and partner Leslie Blanchard constituted a family.

MIGUEL BRASCHI, being sworn, deposes and says:

1. I am the plaintiff in this action, and I have lived as a resident and tenant of Apartment 7-L, 405 East 54th Street, New York, New York (the “apartment”) for more than ten and a half (10-1/2) years and for the first ten (10) years I shared the apartment with Leslie Blanchard, the tenant of record.

2. I submit this affidavit in support of my own motion seeking a preliminary injunction until such time as this Court shall declare that I am the equivalent of a surviving spouse of Leslie Blanchard, or a de facto family member of his, who was living with him in the apartment at the time of his death, and that I am thereby entitled to the rent control protections of section 56 (d) of the New York City Rent and Eviction Regulations.

Gay Life Partner Relationship

3. Leslie and I met on December 27 or 28, 1975 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. At the time, I was attending The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio as a junior on a full tennis scholarship, and had returned to San Juan, where I was born and raised, for Christmas vacation. Leslie and I began a relationship and, upon returning to the mainland in January 1976, we spent each and every weekend together either in the apartment or at Yellow Iris Farm in Newton, New Jersey (which was principally owned by Leslie) until May 1976. At the end of the school year, in May 1976, I came to New York and had planned to live with Leslie in the apartment for that summer. In fact, however, I did not leave New York at the end of the summer, but stayed to be with Leslie. I decided not to return to Ohio State, and to stay in New York to commit to a life with Leslie based upon mutual love, trust, dependence and responsibility. Realizing how important we were to each other, Leslie and I decided that we wanted to share our lives together.

Excerpt of an Affidavit Submitted by Miguel Braschi, *Braschi v. Stahl Associates Company*, 1989 *continued*:

4. As a result of this mutual decision to commit ourselves to a permanent relationship of love and responsibility, Leslie had asked me, at the end of that summer of 1976, to stay permanently in the apartment. I have lived continuously in the apartment since that time.

5. In our ten years together, from late summer 1976 until Leslie's death on September 14, 1986, Leslie and I lived as life partners. We committed ourselves to each other and took responsibility for each other. Our relationship was like that of spouses. Like spouses, we began our partnership with expectations of sexual fidelity. During our ten-year relationship I did not date or live with anyone else, and I believe that Leslie was also faithful to me.

6. As soon as I moved in, Leslie and I began to create a home in the apartment. The apartment became the center of our lives. It was the place we shared our love and commitment to each other. Like any married couple, Leslie and I shared household responsibilities.

Citation: Affidavit of Miguel Braschi dated January 27, 1987, *Braschi v. Stahl Associates Company*, New York Court of Appeals, 543 N.E.2d 49 (July 6, 1989).

- How does Miguel Braschi describe his relationship to Leslie Blanchard? Why do you think he includes some of the details he does about their relationship? **M/H**
- How does Braschi describe the apartment that he and Blanchard shared? What makes the apartment a home in his eyes? **M/H**
- Braschi repeatedly uses the words “commitment” and “responsibility” to describe his relationship to Braschi. Why might he have chosen those words? **M/H**
- In addition to his own statement, Braschi also asked friends of his and Blanchard to submit statements to the court describing their partnership. Why might Braschi have had friends testify about his relationship with Blanchard? **M/H**

ACT UP's "Day of Desperation," January 23, 1991

AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), formed in March 1987, is a direct-action advocacy group focused on improving the lives of people with AIDS and bringing an end to the global AIDS pandemic. On January 23, 1991, ACT UP declared a "Day of Desperation" in New York City, a multi-faceted protest intent on showing how every day for people living with AIDS is fraught with desperation. The protests occurred for 24 hours, targeting PBS and CBS evening news broadcasts, Wall Street firms, and city, state, and federal offices. This image is from one of the demonstrations in New York City protesting the lack of housing and services for HIV patients.



Citation: Lee Snider, ACT UP *Day of Desperation*, January 23, 1991, Courtesy of the Estate of Lee Snider.

- Describe what you see in Lee Snider's photograph. Who is engaging in this action? What are they doing? Where are they? Why do you think they are protesting in this location? **M/H**
- In the background of the photograph, the activists pictured are carrying coffins. Why might they have chosen to carry these objects? What might they symbolize? **M/H**
- What is the meaning of "housing?" What is the meaning of "shelter?" What do you think the meaning of this banner was? How does the meaning or message of the banner relate to the HIV/AIDS crisis? How does the message of this banner relate to Miguel Braschi's life and activism? **M/H**
- The group ACT UP, which stands for AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, organized these protests and marches known as the "Day of Desperation." What do you think activists intended to communicate by choosing the name "ACT UP"? What did they mean by "unleashing power"? What do you think the purpose of naming these protests and marches "Day of Desperation?" **H**

Affidavit by Paula Ettelbrick, *Braschi v. Stahl Associates Company*, 1989

Below is an excerpt from an affidavit, a written statement confirmed by oath or affirmation, for use as evidence in court. Paula Ettelbrick, then-legal director of Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, submitted the affidavit to the New York Court of Appeals. Lambda is a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people and everyone living with HIV through impact litigation, education, and public policy work. While Miguel Braschi's attorney, William Rubenstein, did not mention the ongoing AIDS crisis in the argument he made before the court, he did recruit LGBTQ+ organizations to submit briefs to the judges that included information about the AIDS epidemic in New York City and its impact on patients, survivors, and caretakers like Miguel Braschi.

8. Another group, which is overwhelmingly composed of people who are gay and/or poor, is especially at peril: survivors of those who have died from complications related to AIDS. At a time when gay men, black and Hispanic women, and poor people, especially in New York City, are those most ravaged by AIDS, the current decision [to evict Miguel Braschi] would inevitably result in the eviction of large numbers of life partners and loved ones from their homes after the tenants of record die. These surviving partners face displacement, often homelessness, at a time when they themselves may be ill and particularly vulnerable to discrimination and hostility from neighbors, coworkers, and blood relatives. New York City's objective, as recently stated, is "to protect the housing resources of PWAs (People with AIDS) by providing rent support and protection against housing discrimination and to make it possible for people to remain in (or return to) their homes." (NYC Interagency Task Force on AIDS, New York City Strategic Plan For AIDS 2, 4-5 (1988)). Further, because the bulk of deaths due to complications from AIDS have been of young people, those between the ages of 25 and 45, landlords have obtained quite a windfall in decontrolled apartments released because thousands have died prematurely.

9. The loss of one's home and vulnerability to landlord harassment is as frightening and destabilizing to unmarried cohabitants, whether they are gay or non-gay, as it is to married ones. For the purposes of housing, a surviving gay life partner in a several year cohabitating relationship needs the same degree of protection as a widow or widower with a marriage certificate.

10. These social realities underscore the urgent need for either this Court or the Court of Appeals to take decisive action to halt the trend among landlords seeking to evict surviving family members of record tenants who die. The rent control law was enacted to prevent severe hardship to those who have lived in a family relationship with the deceased tenant. Gay and lesbian couples are no less deserving of this protection than their married counterparts.

Citation: Affirmation of Paula Ettelbrick, *Braschi v. Stahl Associates Company*, New York Court of Appeals, 543 N.E.2d 49 (July 6, 1989).

Affidavit by Paula Ettelbrick, *Braschi v. Stahl Associates Company*, 1989 continued:

- What is the main argument Paula Ettelbrick makes in this affidavit in support of Miguel Braschi's right to stay in his apartment? **M/H**
- What populations is Ettelbrick most concerned with protecting in her argument? **M/H**
- Why might Ettelbrick have wanted to draw a comparison between gay and straight couples facing potential eviction in point number 9? **M/H**
- In point number 10, Ettelbrick mentions "social realities [that] underscore the urgent need" for the court to halt evictions like the one that Braschi faced. To what "social realities" might she be referring? **H**
- Rather than include the context of the AIDS crisis in his own argument, Braschi's lawyer William Rubenstein recruited allies like Paula Ettelbrick to submit supporting statements that discussed the growing numbers of homeless AIDS survivors in New York. Why might he have chosen this particular approach? **H**



Martin Wong

Artist of The Multi-Racial World of New York’s Lower East Side

by the Museum of the City of New York

Focus Questions

How did individuals and groups take action to bring about change?

How have issues of gender, race, and sexuality shaped American identity?

To what extent is the United States a fully inclusive society?

Martin Wong (1946–1999) was a Chinese American painter, ceramicist, art collector, and patron to other artists. His work explored racial, ethnic, and queer identities and often brought together widely disparate influences: sign language and astrology, firefighters and cowboys, San Francisco’s Chinatown and New York’s Lower East Side. Though raised in California, Wong is deeply associated with New York City; his paintings often depict the tenements and Latinx and Black communities he lived among, while his collecting focused on New York City graffiti artists, whose art became both a part of the landscape and the cultural iconography of the city Wong loved.

Wong was born in Portland, Oregon, and raised in San Francisco’s Chinatown by a family with a history of involvement in Chinese civil rights activism. Wong began painting as a young child; his artistic career was nourished in part by his mother, who made a point of collecting and saving much of his early work. After graduating from the ceramics program at Humboldt State University in 1970, Wong split his time between Eureka, California, and San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, the birthplace of 1960s counterculture. In addition to producing ceramics and painting, Wong explored new artistic media, including illustration and performance art. He was a member of a San Francisco gay performance art troupe, the Angels of Light, and made a living in part by selling portrait drawings at local art fairs—Wong’s speed and success as a street portraitist inspired his self-given nickname, the “Human Instamatic.”

In 1978, Wong moved to New York City and into the Mercer Hotel at the South Street Seaport, hoping to make a name for himself within the city’s competitive arts scene. Within a few years, he found a home on the Lower East Side, among members of New York’s Puerto Rican community.

Martin Wong was both an artist and a patron to other artists, particularly New York City graffiti artists who were unrecognized by the art world in the 1980s. In this photograph by Peter Bellamy, taken in 1985, Martin Wong is pictured in his bedroom, wearing a cowboy shirt and hat—a look that became his signature style.



Peter Bellamy, *Martin Wong in 1985*,
Courtesy of the Estate of Martin Wong and P•P•O•W, New York,
© Peter Bellamy.

Wong's new neighborhood was characterized by both its working-class residents and its artists; the art gallery ABC No Rio and the Nuyorican Poets Café served as forums and social spaces for the young, often Black and Latinx artists who drew upon their Spanish-speaking heritage by dubbing the neighborhood Loisaida. Within this community, Wong met his longtime collaborator and sometimes romantic partner, the poet and playwright Miguel Piñero. Many of Wong's paintings depict Piñero and feature verses of his poetry.

Wong's paintings from the 1980s drew upon the built environment surrounding him and the people he lived and worked among, and explored themes of queer sexuality, spirituality, identity, and language. His art often featured firefighters who shared same-sex desire—*Big Heat* (1988), for example, shows firefighters in full gear kissing against the backdrop of a building engulfed in flames. A series of prison paintings, meanwhile, includes *The Annunciation According to Mikey Piñero (Cupcake and Paco)* (1984), which depicts two male prisoners meeting. Wong created intricately painted brickwork—inspired by the tenements of the city and the colors and techniques of ceramics—and hands that would spell out messages in American Sign

Language. These paintings, part of a series he called *Paintings for the Hearing Impaired*, attracted the first critical interest in his work. In 1990, as part of a Public Art Fund residency at the Department of Transportation, Wong created a series of aluminum sculptures, *Traffic Signs for the Hearing Impaired*, that directed drivers' attention to public schools, right-of-way directions, and traffic warnings; in 1992 he received a special arts award from Mayor David Dinkins for his commitment to creating inclusive art for all New Yorkers.

Though Wong's queerness was a part of his identity, it was not always a part of his art. Similar to fellow graffiti artist Keith Haring, Wong identified as queer without it always being the predominant theme in his work. Wong's interests and skills were diverse, and he made art that was diverse in its subject matter and milieu.

During his time on the Lower East Side, Wong worked at Pearl Paint, an art supply store in Chinatown. It was while working at Pearl that Wong met many of the graffiti artists whose drawings, paintings, and black books he acquired for his personal collection. According to his friend, graffiti artist Chris "Daze" Ellis, Wong thought of himself "as a little bit of an outsider being Chinese and

being gay,” and therefore identified with graffiti artists who, at that time, were outsiders as well.¹ In the summer of 1989, just as city officials declared the New York City subway free of all graffiti, Wong and his friend Peter Broda opened their Museum of American Graffiti on Bond Street in the East Village, devoted to showcasing graffiti as an important American art form.

Though the museum was short-lived, Wong continued to add to his collection, eventually donating it to the Museum of the City of New York in 1994. That same year, Wong was diagnosed with AIDS; he subsequently returned to San Francisco, where he continued to paint. He died at age 53, on August 12, 1999, at home with his mother, Florence Wong Fie. In her son’s honor, Fie created the Martin Wong Foundation, which grants scholarships to students for undergraduate and graduate studies in painting and ceramics.

Wong’s paintings from the 1980s drew upon the built environment surrounding him and the people he lived and worked among, and explored themes of queer sexuality, spirituality, identity, and language.

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 8

- **Unit 6:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 21: Modern Civil Rights (LGBTQ movement)

Grade 11

- **Unit 6:** Social and Economic Change: Domestic Issues
- **Unit 7:** The United States and Globalization

¹ Vrag Hartanian, “[Graffiti Legend Daze Explains the Importance of Martin Wong’s Graffiti Collection](#),” *Hyperallergic*, October 29, 2013.

Thinking About:

Martin Wong

- How was Martin Wong’s art influenced by his environment? **M/H**
- What is this author’s point about identity, and Wong’s use of identity in his work? How did his artwork challenge societal assumptions? **M/H**
- How might Wong’s time living in many different kinds of communities—from San Francisco’s Chinatown and countercultural Haight-Ashbury neighborhood to New York City’s Puerto Rican neighborhoods—have influenced his art? **M/H**
- Why might it have been important to Wong to depict same-sex love in his artwork? What might it mean that it was not central to his work? **H**
- Why might LGBTQ+ artists like Wong, his frequent collaborator Miguel Piñero, and graffiti artist Keith Haring have chosen to live and work on the Lower East Side and East Village? **M/H**
- Why might it have been important to Martin Wong that his collection of graffiti paintings, drawings, and black books end up in a museum collection? **M/H**

Additional Resources

City as Canvas: New York City Graffiti from the Martin Wong Collection edited by Sean Corcoran and Carlo McCormick

“[City Scenes: A Martin Wong Retrospective](#)” by Peter Schjeldahl

“[The Estate of Martin Wong](#)” by the P.P.O.W. Gallery

“[Martin Wong, an Urban Visionary With a Hungry Eye](#)” by Holland Cotter

Martin Wong: Human Instamatic edited by Antonio Sergio Bessa

“[Martin Wong Is Dead at 53; A Painter of Poetic Realism](#)” by Roberta Smith

Sweet Oblivion: The Urban Landscape of Martin Wong by Martin Wong and Marcia Tucker

“[Wong, Martin \(1946–1990\)](#)” by Richard G. Mann

Big Heat

Wong's paintings from the 1980s drew upon the built environment surrounding him and the people he lived and worked among, and explored themes of queer sexuality, spirituality, identity, and language. His art often featured firefighters who shared same-sex desire—*Big Heat* (1988), for example, shows firefighters in full gear kissing against the backdrop of a tenement building that appears to be in disrepair.



Citation: Martin Wong, *Big Heat*, 1986, acrylic on linen, 60 1/8 × 48 1/8in., Digital Image © Whitney Museum of American Art/Licensed by Scala/Art Resource, NY. Courtesy of the Estate of Martin Wong and P•P•O•W, New York.

- Describe what you notice about Wong's painting. Where are we in New York City? What kind of landscape is Wong depicting? **E/M/H**
- Is there a particular mood or tone to this painting? How would you describe the emotions it elicits? **E/M/H**

Attorney Street (Handball Court with Autobiographical Poem by Piñero)

In this painting, Martin Wong uses a variety of languages and codes as he depicts a common sight from his Lower East Side neighborhood: a handball court tagged by graffiti artists. The inspiration for this painting came from Wong's friend and collaborator Miguel Piñero, who asked Wong to document a graffiti tag—an often-transient kind of art—by artist Little Ivan. In addition to Little Ivan's graffiti, Wong also includes poetry by Piñero rendered in both written English and in American Sign Language in this painting.



Citation: Martin Wong (1946-1999) © Copyright. *Attorney Street (Handball Court with Autobiographical Poem by Piñero)*, 1982–1984, Oil on canvas, H. 35-1/2, W. 48 inches (90.2 x 121.9 cm.), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Edith C. Blum Fund, 1984 (1984.110). Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY.

Attorney Street (Handball Court with Autobiographical Poem by Piñero) *continued*:

- Describe what you notice about Wong’s painting. Where are we in New York City? What kind of landscape is Wong depicting? **E/M/H**
- Is there a particular mood or tone to this painting? How would you describe the emotions it elicits? **E/M/H**
- How many different kinds of languages can you identify in this painting? Why might Wong have used so many different languages to communicate the same poem? **E/M/H**
- Wong often called his paintings that featured sign language “Art for the Hearing Impaired.” Paintings, as a visual medium, are usually already accessible for viewers who may not be able to hear. If Wong already knows that hard-of-hearing viewers can see and understand his artwork, why else might he have included American Sign Language in this painting? **E/M/H**
- Why might Wong have created art that centered on issues of accessibility, identity, and language? **E/M/H**
- Read the poetry at the top of the painting. How do this poem and the painting connect? Why do you think Wong chose to include this poem in his artwork? **M/H**

The Death of Graffiti

This 1982 painting, titled *The Death of Graffiti* by artist Sandra Fabara, who calls herself “Lady Pink,” is part of Martin Wong’s collection of graffiti art, held by the Museum of the City of New York. In it, a nude woman stands atop a pile of spray paint cans, pointing at a subway train that passes by. One car has been painted by graffiti artists, including Lady Pink, who has tagged it with her name. One car is whitewashed.



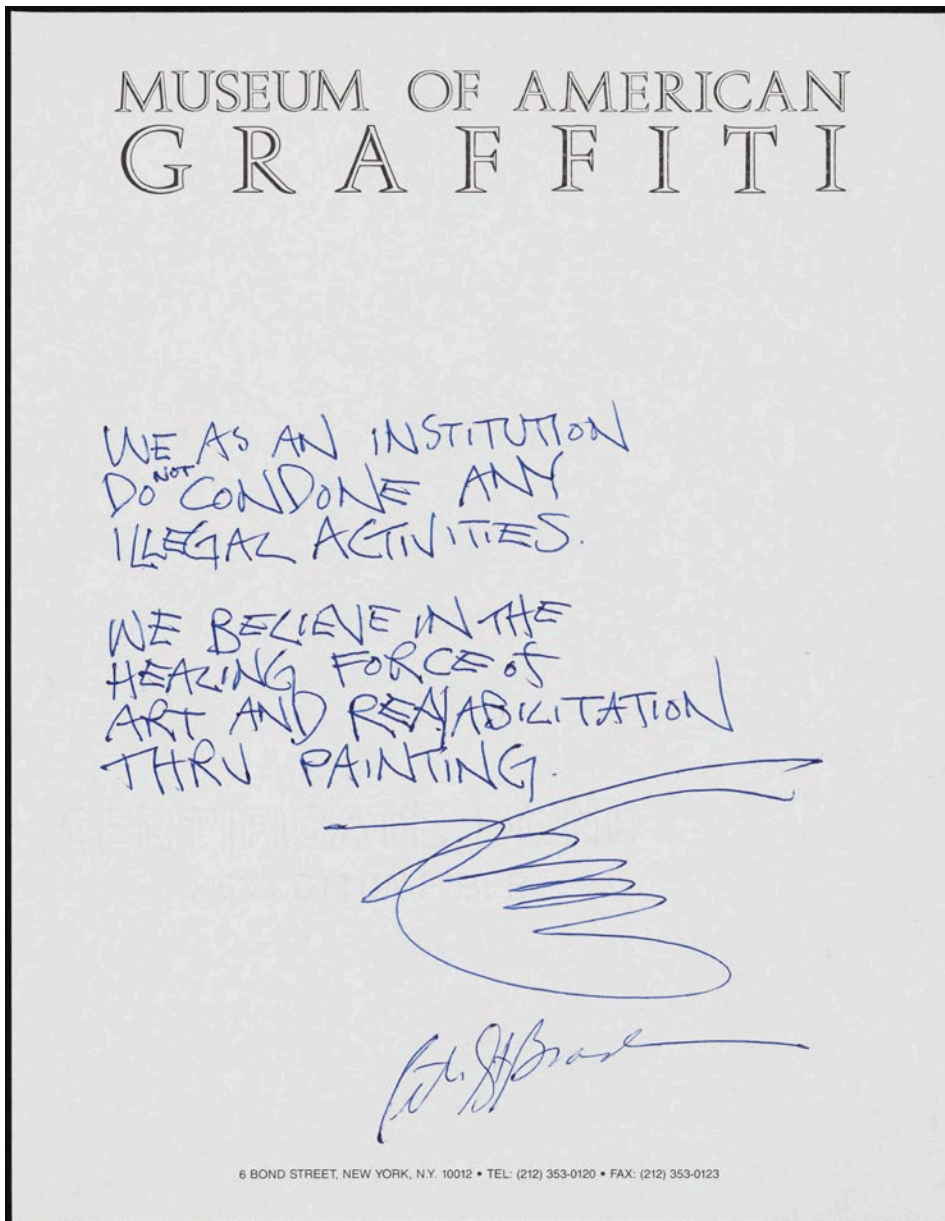
Citation: Lady Pink, *The Death of Graffiti*, 1982, Martin Wong Graffiti Collection, Museum of the City of New York, 94.114.96.

The Death of Graffiti *continued*:

- Describe what you see in this painting, *The Death of Graffiti* by Lady Pink. What kinds of objects are depicted in this painting? What is the setting of the painting? What leads you to your conclusion about the setting of the painting? **H**
- Does Lady Pink reference or allude to any other works of art in this painting? If so, what works? Why might she do that? **M/H**
- Where in this painting can we see graffiti? Why might some spaces be graffiti free? **M/H**
- Why does the artist, Lady Pink, include one subway car with graffiti and one whitewashed subway car in her painting? **M/H**
- Why might Lady Pink have included her own tag, “PINK,” in this painting? **M/H**
- How might we interpret the title of this painting, *The Death of Graffiti*? What is Lady Pink telling us about the way different people might feel about graffiti as an art form? How do you think Lady Pink feels about graffiti? **H**
- Why do you think Martin Wong collected this painting? Why might he have wanted to add it to his Museum of American Graffiti? **M/H**
- How does Wong’s artwork, and the art he collected, challenge societal and artistic norms? Why might LGBTQ+ artists, as well as other minority artists in particular, use their art in subversive ways? **H**
- What evidence does this painting provide us about New York City in 1982? **M/H**

Message on Museum of American Graffiti Letterhead

This paper features the letterhead of the Museum of American Graffiti and a statement by its two co-founders, Martin Wong and Peter Broda. The museum, which opened in 1989, showcased works that Martin had collected. While New York City officials at the time often denounced graffiti as vandalism, Wong believed it was an important American art form worthy of recognition. Though his Museum of American Graffiti closed after only six months, Wong continued to collect the work of graffiti artists for the remainder of his life.



Citation: Martin Wong and Peter Broda, [Message on Museum of American Graffiti letterhead.], c. 1989, Martin Wong Graffiti Collection, Museum of the City of New York, 94.114.316.13.

Message on Museum of American Graffiti Letterhead *continued*:

- What does the message—written in Wong’s handwriting—say? What do you notice about the way Wong has written his statement? **M/H**
- What might Wong and Broda mean by their statement, “We believe in the healing force of art and rehabilitation thru painting”? How might making art be a healing practice? **M/H**
- In the same year that the Museum of American Graffiti opened, New York City officials announced that the subway was free of graffiti, which they considered to be vandalism. How do you think those officials would have responded to Wong and Broda’s statement? How do you think Wong and Broda would have responded to people who did not consider graffiti to be art? **M/H**



Edie Windsor

The Widow Who Tipped the Scale for Marriage Equality

by Bonnie J. Morris

Focus Questions

How did individuals and groups take action to bring about change?

How have issues of gender, race, and sexuality shaped American identity?

To what extent is the United States a fully inclusive society?

How have Americans used the legal system to fight for equality?

How has LGBTQ+ activism shaped life in the United States?

Imagine many years of a loyal and loving partnership, then devoting yourself to your wife during her final years of illness, only to find, after her death, that you cannot inherit “her” money without paying the government a huge sum which other widows and widowers are not charged. This injustice led activist Edith Windsor to become a hero in the LGBTQ+ community for insisting that her marriage was equal to that of any heterosexual couple.

“Edie” Windsor (1929–2017) was born Edith Schlain to Russian Jewish immigrants in 1929 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She rose from a tough Depression-era girlhood to have an outstanding career as a woman mathematician; a rarity in the 1950s, when few women were welcome in the fields of science and technology. But Windsor excelled in her job at IBM, helping to develop early computer programming, and by 1968 had attained the impressive title of Senior Systems Programmer, the highest-level technical position at IBM. As a Jewish woman and a lesbian, Edie was “different” in three ways that American culture did not favor in her day. Yet she found ways to survive and to thrive.

Like many closeted gay women in the 1960s, Windsor first married a male friend, Saul Windsor, and attempted to live a mainstream heterosexual lifestyle, although she had already fallen in love with other women. Her traditional marriage did not last even one year, yet Windsor elected to keep her married name for the rest of her life. This was not an unusual choice for many professional women

emerging from heterosexual marriages as closeted lesbians in the late 1960s and '70s. Her ex-husband's surname provided a cover of sorts, especially as she continued on to security work with the Atomic Energy Commission.

By this time in her life, Windsor began to build a relationship with a woman, Thea Spyer, and soon they considered themselves engaged to be married. At the time, a marriage to another woman would not be legally sanctioned by any state in the United States. At work, Windsor dared to list Spyer as her beneficiary on insurance forms, but this was rejected by her employers.

For over forty years, Windsor and Spyer lived and loved together, traveled and hosted parties, and joined the growing LGBTQ+ movement that included marches and social justice groups. As soon as it became possible to register as "domestic partners" in New York in 1993, they filed for recognition of their relationship. Sadly, Spyer's health had begun declining years before and Windsor had retired in order to care for her. By 2007, knowing that Spyer might not have long to live, the two women decided to get married in Canada, which had recently legalized same-sex marriages. Within a year and a half of their union, Spyer passed away.

Windsor was legally a wife, and now a widow, in the eyes of Canadian law but not yet in American law. Therefore, in order to inherit Spyer's estate, Windsor was expected to pay the United States \$363,053 in federal estate taxes, as though her wife were a stranger and not an intimate family member. This tax was not required of a woman if her husband had died and she had inherited his remaining wealth or property. "Exemption for surviving spouses" was not granted to married gay and lesbian people in 2009 because of a complex law called DOMA, or the Defense of Marriage Act. DOMA, signed into law in 1996 by President Bill Clinton, declared that the federal government would only recognize marriages between a man and a woman. Marriages between two men or women, even if accepted by the couple's home state or another country, would be given no recognition by the United States government when determining benefits or taxes.

While grieving the loss of her life partner, Edie Windsor went to court and challenged DOMA for treating same-sex couples unfairly even when they had obtained a legal marriage. In 2012, a judge ruled that DOMA was unconstitutional and that Windsor should get her estate tax money refunded. Her case went all the way to the Supreme Court, and in June 2013 the Court agreed 5–4 that DOMA was unconstitutional. This meant that the federal government now had to recognize same-sex marriages performed in the states or countries where they were legal, and provide the same benefits to those couples that were given to opposite-sex couples—whether they be Social Security benefits, or the right to sponsor a spouse for a green card.

Edie Windsor did not set out to become the face of same-sex marriage, she simply wanted her relationship with her wife, Thea, to be treated the same as any other legal couple. The resulting legal case, *United States v. Windsor*, took three years to be decided, and made it all the way to the Supreme Court, where Windsor won in 2013, setting a landmark precedent for LGBTQ+ civil rights.



Chip Somodevilla, *Edith Windsor* (C), 83, is mobbed by journalists and supporters as she leaves the Supreme Court, Washington, D.C., March 27, 2013, Getty Images, 164726417.

Windsor's case was an enormous victory for LGBTQ+ rights and a clear move towards legalizing marriage equality throughout the nation, which became a reality in 2015. Thousands gathered to celebrate on the Supreme Court steps that day, and Edie Windsor became a national hero to the LGBTQ+ community for her insistence on justice—and recognition of a committed relationship. That summer of 2013, she was honored as the Grand Marshal of New York City's Pride March.

*“When our marriage appeared in the *New York Times* we heard from literally hundreds of people, all congratulating us and sending love because we were married. It’s a magic word. For anybody who doesn’t understand why we want it, and why we need it, it is magic.”*

Passport to Social Studies Curriculum Connections

Grade 8

- **Unit 6:** Lesson 8: Feminist Movement
- **Unit 6:** Day-by-Day Planner, Day 21: Modern Civil Rights (LGBTQ movement)

Grade 11

- **Unit 6:** Social and Economic Change: Domestic Issues
- **Unit 7:** The United States and Globalization

Thinking About:

Edie Windsor

- How did Edie Windsor try to “pass” as straight (meaning, heterosexual)? Why do you think Windsor attempted to pass? **M/H**
- In what ways did Edie Windsor’s personal and professional lives conflict? Consider decisions Windsor had to make, as well as the role of the IBM company. **H**
- What was the Supreme Court’s decision in *Windsor v. United States*? What are the implications of this decision for the LGBTQ+ community? **M/H**

Additional Resources

[“Edith Windsor Statement on Supreme Court Steps – Full Text”](#) by *The Guardian*

[“Edith Windsor, Whose Same-Sex Marriage Fight Led to Landmark Ruling, Dies at 88”](#)
by Robert McFadden

[“The Perfect Wife: How Edith Windsor Fell in Love, Got Married, and Won a Landmark Case for Gay Marriage”](#) by Ariel Levy

Excerpts of Justice Kennedy’s Opinion

In 2013, the Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling that found that the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)—which limited the legal institution of marriage to opposite-sex couples—was unconstitutional, finally throwing open the door to same-sex marriage for couples across America. The ruling won by only a single vote, and Justice Anthony M. Kennedy wrote this withering opinion for the majority, saying that DOMA’s “principal purpose is to impose inequality.”

[June 26, 2013]

Justice Kennedy delivered the opinion of the Court.

DOMA’s unusual deviation from the usual tradition of recognizing and accepting state definitions of marriage here operates to deprive same-sex couples of the benefits and responsibilities that come with the federal recognition of their marriages. This is strong evidence of a law having the purpose and effect of disapproval of that class. The avowed purpose and practical effect of the law here in question are to impose a disadvantage, a separate status, and so a stigma upon all who enter into same-sex marriages made lawful by the unquestioned authority of the States. . . .

DOMA writes inequality into the entire United States Code. The particular case at hand concerns the estate tax, but DOMA is more than a simple determination of what should or should not be allowed as an estate tax refund. Among the over 1,000 statutes and numerous federal regulations that DOMA controls are laws pertaining to Social Security, housing, taxes, criminal sanctions, copyright, and veterans’ benefits.

DOMA’s principal effect is to identify a subset of state-sanctioned marriages and make them unequal. The principal purpose is to impose inequality, not for other reasons like governmental efficiency. . . .

DOMA instructs all federal officials, and indeed all persons with whom same-sex couples interact, including their own children, that their marriage is less worthy than the marriages of others. The federal statute is invalid, for no legitimate purpose overcomes the purpose and effect to disparage and to injure those whom the State, by its marriage laws, sought to protect in personhood and dignity. By seeking to displace this protection and treating those persons as living in marriages less respected than others, the federal statute is in violation of the Fifth Amendment. This opinion and its holding are confined to those lawful marriages.

The judgment of the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit is affirmed.

It is so ordered.

Citation: *United States v. Windsor*, 570 U.S. 744 (2013).

- Justice Kennedy writes that, “DOMA writes inequality into the entire United States Code.” What does this mean? **M/H**
- What is the reason Justice Kennedy gives for DOMA being invalid? **H**
- Citing language from Justice Kennedy’s opinion, what were the implications for the LGBTQ+ community and the United States of this decision? **M/H**

The decision was a landmark victory for LGBTQ+ activists and set forth an important legal concept with potentially persuasive legal authority on a national scale—the term “family” was not reserved for blood relatives or married partners, but for any committed and loving couple.

She and fellow demonstrators hoped to draw attention to the federal government’s policy of discriminating against homosexual employees, but the public action was also designed to bring visibility to the growing gay liberation movement, and to show that LGBTQ+ Americans could be found in all institutions.

After her diagnosis, Lorde, who devoted her life and career to examining, pondering, analyzing, embracing, and writing about intersectional issues, made surviving a part of hers.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, she continued to fight for causes dear to her heart—challenging the sexism and ageism in the workplace, resisting the medicalization of gay life, and the shelving of gay literature. She was a steady presence in the lives of gay people in the community, and working to end homophobic violence.

“I am radical, a revolutionist. I am still a radical. . . I am glad I was in the Stonewall. I remember when someone threw a Molotov cocktail, I thought, ‘My god, the revolution is here. The revolution is finally here!’”

Using Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Approaches

Effective teaching that truly meets the needs of students requires that educators are responsive to the diverse makeup of their classrooms by engaging students in ways that are meaningful and relevant to multiple forms of diversity (e.g., race, social class, gender, language, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, ability).¹ As students find meaning in their learning, they better understand the content and are able to connect it to their daily lives. In order for students to connect to and make meaning, they must use their full cognitive resources, which are best stimulated through culturally responsive-sustaining education (CR-SE).

Culturally responsive-sustaining education includes learning within the context of culture. Our culture informs the way we learn and process information. Culturally responsive approaches honor students' diversity while recognizing and planning for students' cultural learning styles. An example of this is understanding that many students come from oral cultural traditions. This means that primary ways of knowledge transfer and meaning-making are oral and active. This is a common cultural tradition that cuts across racial groups and uses the brain's memory systems for turning information into useable knowledge. At the heart of CR-SE is the recognition that culture is central to learning, processing, and applying information. Teachers must use "educational strategies that leverage the various aspects of students' identities, including the rich cultural, racial, historical, linguistic characteristics of students."² Teachers should plan lessons that reflect ways of communicating and learning that are familiar to the students, lessons that serve as mirrors to reflect the greatness of who our students are, and those that serve as windows into the rich cultures of their peers. Teaching that acknowledges, responds to, and plans learning experiences for cultural perspectives and deep learning offers full, equitable access to education for students from all cultures.³

Often, the curricular decisions made to accomplish the goal of being culturally responsive result in the use of resources and add-ons that meet a multicultural or social justice objective in a superficial way. While many of these instructional resources have the potential to be valuable, they can only be truly effective when presented in a space where students can develop comprehension and build understanding in an authentic, culturally appropriate

1 New York City Department of Education. (July 31, 2019). *Proposed Policy of Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education in Schools*.

2 New York City Department of Education, "[Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education](#)" (New York: 2019).

3 The Education Alliance, "[Teaching Diverse Learners: Culturally Responsive Teaching](#)," Brown University.

manner. It is a common misconception that culturally responsive teaching involves tying a lesson's content to students' racial or cultural background or is the same as multicultural or social justice education. Although the groups can overlap, they are not interchangeable; each one approaches diversity from a completely different angle. When a teacher can recognize that students' meaning-making is directly connected to their culture, and can use that knowledge to promote effective information processing and relationship building, then a teacher is being culturally responsive.⁴

Consciously improving student learning by creating a culturally responsive-sustaining classroom requires a variety of pedagogical choices, and curricular content is an important one. In her book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Geneva Gay writes, "content about the histories, heritages, contributions, perspectives, and experiences of different ethnic groups and individuals, taught in diverse ways, is essential to culturally responsive teaching."⁵ The *Hidden Voices* project provides teachers with access to resources and strategies that unveil the connection of different individuals and cultural groups to the historical content that has been traditionally taught in schools. It is essential that the inclusion of these hidden voices in the classroom be authentic.

Each of the *Hidden Voices* profiles includes correlations to the *Passport to Social Studies* curriculum, pointing out where in the NYCDOE Scope & Sequence each person's story fits. The lives of the people that make up the *Hidden Voices* project are not peripheral to our shared history, they ARE our shared history. Teachers should center these stories in the appropriate historical context and use them to enrich and enliven their practice. This project provides New York City's students with more opportunities to connect to social studies content, as their brains are constantly searching for personal connections in order to make meaning of what they are being taught, and it gives New York City's teachers more resources from which to develop culturally responsive classrooms.⁶

While curricular content is essential for successful culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy, it cannot stand alone. The *Hidden Voices* project is one resource of many that can make up a teacher's culturally responsive-sustaining toolbox; but the manner in which these hidden voices are utilized in the classroom, and the choices teachers make as students react to and process the stories of these figures, will be what truly creates a nurturing and safe space for learning. Teachers should acknowledge that for much of our nation's history there has been an accepted dominant narrative that has excluded the contributions of many Americans, and that this has perpetuated heteronormative, binary practices that continue to permeate our society and our students' lives. As students learn about the variety of ways in which voices

4 Zaretta Lynn Hammond, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*, (Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin, 2015).

5 Geneva Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010).

6 Yvette Jackson, *Unlocking Student Potential: How do I identify and activate student strengths?* (Alexandria, VA.: ASCD, 2015).

have been silenced in history, teachers should allow for class discussion and provide space for students to process the new content they are learning.

Culturally responsive-sustaining education seeks to prepare students to be independent learners by optimizing engagement and allowing them the opportunity to process complex information in a safe space with high expectations. Teachers should plan to vary their teaching approaches to accommodate the diverse learners in their classrooms. Using discussion protocols, thinking maps, and encouraging accountable talk where students can discuss differences between individuals are a few of the ways teachers can support students in processing content while teaching with this resource. It should be noted, however, that the activities and the content used in a classroom are a means to an end; it is through the purposeful and meaningful connections to students' cultures, and through deliberate relationship building, that a teacher truly engages in culturally responsive-sustaining practice.

Extension Activities

“Be You!” Campaign and Diversity Initiative

Build bridges and open up dialogue to encourage everyone to embrace their differences. Students create an inspirational and educational campaign to encourage students to love who they are and to be accepting of others. Inspirational and influential figures from all cultures and the LGBTQ+ community can be recognized through profile posters hung in the school community and on buttons to wear. These posters and buttons can inspire everyone and make them realize that you can make a difference no matter who you are and where you come from. Students can also create “Be you!” buttons to point out something about their lives, interests, passions, and talents that they are proud of, and highlight a positive contribution they make to the community. Posters and buttons show how we all count, matter, and contribute to society.

Create An Event

In order to build community support, encourage students to create a Pride/LGBTQ+ Allies and Awareness event for their school. Students set up an information booth, or fair with activities, that promotes awareness of LGBTQ+ students and issues. Allow students to design activities that are both informative and fun. For example, rainbow art activities or LGBTQ+ trivia tables can be engaging and enjoyable.

Data Stories

Create an infographic that illustrates current facts and statistical information on the status of LGBTQ+ people. Students can choose to focus on the United States or worldwide as they research current laws, rights, and/or bans that affect LGBTQ+ people in their daily lives, as well as any other relevant data that reflects the status of LGBTQ+ people within their societies. Students choose which data to display and create a visual interpretation of that data.

Design a Poster

Information is power. Encourage students to design an informational poster that includes LGBTQ+ student rights and resources. Include essential information and protections that students are legally entitled to and contact information for additional resources. Make sure to include LGBTQ+ symbols, bright colors, and bold fonts so that your poster is eye-catching and useful. Obtain permission from your school’s administration and display the posters where permissible.

Hall of Fame

Working in pairs or small groups, students research local groups or organizations that focus on or are affiliated with LGBTQ+ issues. Students should also research local historical or contemporary figures that are connected to or were participants in the LGBTQ+ community. Based on their findings, students draft a written nomination, submitting the name of a key local figure or organization that deserves recognition in an LGBTQ+ Hall of Fame. Students describe why this person or organization is worthy of such recognition and cite specific details that illustrate their significance or importance to the progress of LGBTQ+ issues. The school community votes for a winner and creates a hall of fame award template to fill out and display the winning nomination.

Social Media: Bringing the Present into History

NOTE: In this extension activity, students should not create real accounts for their individuals.

Students create a mock-up social media-style post or profile from a significant event/accomplishment/moment in the life of an important LGBTQ+ figure they have learned about.

- Create a template with space for the profile picture, username, and bio.
- Select the LGBTQ+ figure for which you will be “posting.”
- Think of a fitting username.
- Find or create a profile picture for your important person.
- Create a caption or description appropriate to your social media-style post or profile. Think about what is happening, where it is happening, why it is important, and what the person would say about this event or moment.
- Be sure to have at least one hashtag to synthesize the event and person.

Letter to an Adult

Due to the ever-changing nature of a democratic republic, each generation of Americans experiences life differently. Acting as a representative of their generation, students draft an open letter to adults that explains what has changed about LGBTQ+ issues since the adults were young. The letter should describe how it might be different for the younger generation and explain why. Outline why those differences might be important and offer advice to the older generation on how to navigate these changes.

Profile “One Pager”

A one pager is a “one-page” artistic representation of what students have learned about a person (or book or event). It contains images, sketches, quotations, facts, etc. It is not a linear presentation of information but rather is a creative mosaic, in any format, as the images, sketches, quotes, informational sentences, and symbols combine to teach about this important person and/or event.

- Create a sketch of the person, including details of the setting or location where they made their historical impact.
- Create visual symbols and sketches that represent the person.
- Find at least two quotations from the person that represent who they are and what they accomplished.
- Add their accomplishments through words and pictures.
- Include sentences and sketches about the person’s work and accomplishments that show why they are important to our history.
- Use their creativity!

Textbook Hunt

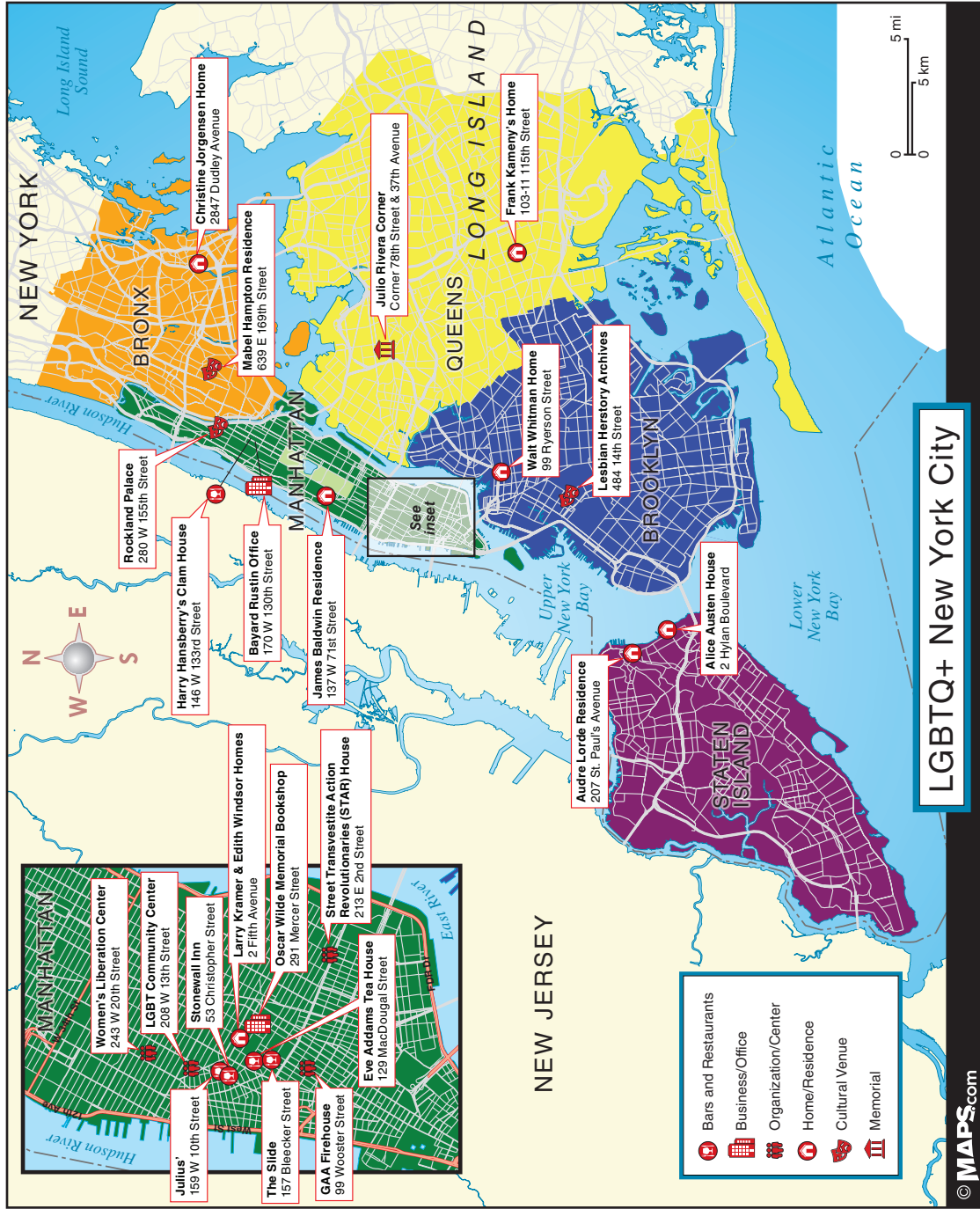
In small groups, assign students a chapter from the textbook used in their social studies classes. Have students scan the chapter for key figures or events that would have involved or affected LGBTQ+ people. Ask students to review the chapter for any mention of or reference to specific LGBTQ+ people or events. Students should then identify an entry point in their assigned chapter where LGBTQ+ information could be included and write a brief description that could be submitted to the textbook publisher to help better reflect LGBTQ+ history.

Word Art

Students create a list of terms which many people in the LGBTQ+ community use to self-identify, including pronouns, as well as terms that are key to understanding LGBTQ+ issues. Give students the option to create a digital word cloud, acrostic poem, or shape poem using the terms from their list. Encourage students to add additional artistic elements to their final pieces.

Out of the Classroom: Finding Historic LGBTQ+ New York City Sites

by Daniel Hurewitz



The Bronx

Christine Jorgensen Home:

2847 Dudley Avenue



Christine Jorgensen, the world’s first celebrity transgender person, grew up here in Throggs Neck in the 1920s and 30s, before serving in the military in World War II and then setting off for Denmark in 1951 for a series of gender affirming procedures. By 1952, Jorgensen was making headlines in the *New York Daily News*—“Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty”—and when she returned to New York the following spring, she was such a frequent subject of news articles that she may well have been the most famous person in the world. Very soon thereafter, she launched a career as a cabaret singer and performer.

Mabel Hampton Residence:

639 E 169th Street



Mabel Hampton was an African American singer and dancer during the Jazz Age, who performed in Coney Island and Harlem. During much of the 1920s and 30s, she socialized with the likes of Ethel Waters and Gladys Bentley and hosted vibrant lesbian parties. She settled down in the early 1930s with Lillian Foster, with whom she remained partners for 46 years. Later in life, Hampton became friends with Joan Nestle, who co-founded the Lesbian Herstory Archives in 1974, and to whom Hampton began offering the thrilling treasures of her memories and artifacts of early 20th century lesbian life.

Brooklyn

Lesbian Herstory Archives:

484 14th Street



Founded on the Upper West Side of Manhattan in the mid-1970s, the Lesbian Herstory Archives started as part of a new kind of gay liberation activism, one that supported queer teachers and students, and strove to have queer content offered in schools and universities. Out of concern that so much of lesbian life was easily forgotten, a group of women devoted themselves to convincing lesbians to be proud of their heritage, and to join them in collecting their stories and artifacts. The archives moved to Park Slope when space demanded it, but they remain quite consciously part of a community—not isolated in an academic setting—cared for by volunteers and open to all who wish to explore it. Caretakers are committed to the belief that knowing one’s herstory can ground their sense of identity.

Walt Whitman Residence:

99 Ryerson Street



One of this country’s great poets, Walt Whitman celebrated a vision of 19th century America as a place where people of all backgrounds shared a universal spirit and connection. Sprinkled throughout his writing, including his masterpiece *Leaves of Grass*—the first edition of which was published while Whitman lived here—are flashes of same-sex affection and romance, such as the “two simple men I saw today on the pier / in the midst of the crowd, parting the parting of dear friends, / The one to remain hung on the other’s neck and / passionately kissed him, / While the one to depart tightly pressed the one / to remain in his arms.”

Manhattan

Bayard Rustin’s Office:

170 W 130th Street



Out of this office in the summer of 1963, Bayard Rustin organized the landmark March on Washington that raised the national profile of both Martin Luther King Jr. and the larger Black civil rights movement. Devoted to applying the strategies of nonviolence to fight racism, Rustin mentored King on how to build a social justice movement around nonviolence. Because of his homosexuality—and his arrest for sexual activity—Rustin remained a kind of secret lieutenant to King, kept at times in the shadows. However, his genius for organizing was vividly on display in the summer of 1963, when he delivered the largest-ever march in the nation’s capital.

Eve Addams Tea House:

129 MacDougal Street



Around 1925, Eve Kotchever set up a speakeasy and tearoom here, offering poetry readings, discussions, and shows. At the time, this block of MacDougal was also home to the Provincetown Players and Heterodoxy, a women’s club whose membership included a large number of lesbian couples, and so Kotchever was in good company. She even included a sign in her shop that said, “Men are admitted but not welcome.” By 1926, however, the shop was raided and she arrested for writing a collection of stories called *Lesbian Love*. She was deported to Poland the following year.

GAA Firehouse:

99 Wooster Street



In the early 1970s, this old firehouse was transformed by the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) into the city's first-ever gay community center, hosting dances, movie nights, and queer theater. GAA emerged not long after the Stonewall Riots as the leaders in the fight for LGBTQ+ rights. They confronted city council members, magazine publishers, and straight bar owners with sit-ins and kiss-ins and zaps, all designed to garner greater civil equality for LGBTQ+ folks. Increasingly criticized for being too white, too male, and too cisgendered in focus, GAA nonetheless helped turn the anger expressed at Stonewall into a new wave of activism.

Harry Hansberry's Clam House:

146 W 133rd Street



This block of Harlem was, in the 1920s and 30s, dense with nightlife, including this speakeasy where Gladys Bentley, an African American singer and piano player, held sway. Langston Hughes wrote how Bentley was “an amazing exhibition of musical energy,” though it was her off-color singing that drew the crowds. As one critic wrote, “if ever there was a gal who could take a popular ditty and put her own naughty version to it, La Bentley could do it.” Bentley garnered publicity not only for her singing, but her very public lesbian identity, even marrying another woman—a white singer—in a New Jersey civil ceremony.

James Baldwin's Residence:

137 W 71st Street



A great American writer, Baldwin grew up in Harlem in the 1920s and 30s. Although he lived in France for much of his adult life, he became one of the leading spokespeople for the civil rights movement, vividly describing the experiences of Black Americans. He wrote about queer life as well in celebrated novels like *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country*, though his gay identity also kept him on the sidelines in key political moments, like the 1963 March on Washington.

Julius':

159 W. 10th Street



This bar is one of the longest running of any kind in New York, even operating as a speakeasy during Prohibition. In the middle of the 20th century, it increasingly became a gathering spot for gay men. And in 1966, Craig Rodwell gathered here with other Mattachine Society activists in a “Sip-In”—a successful challenge to state laws that prohibited serving liquor to gay men and women.

Larry Kramer & Edith Windsor Homes:

2 Fifth Avenue



This building was long the home of both Larry Kramer and Edith Windsor. Kramer, who began his career as a writer, penning screenplays and novels, became an indefatigable activist in the face of the AIDS epidemic. He helped launch the social service organization Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC) in 1981, and ACT UP, the more radical political action group, in 1987. Edie Windsor’s political profile grew in the 2010s, as the fight for equality shifted to same-sex marriage and the federal government refused to recognize her Canadian marriage to her spouse, Thea Spyer, with whom she lived in the United States since the mid-1970s. Windsor’s legal battle became the 2013 Supreme Court case that helped establish marriage equality.

LGBT Community Center:

208 W 13th Street



Open since the spring of 1984, this building gives physical expression to the idea that LGBT folks, as different as they are from each other, nonetheless form a community. A range of groups have met here: from SAGE, the group for queer elders, to ACT UP, which formed here in 1987 after a speech from Larry Kramer challenging the government’s indifference to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. There is a library inside, an archive of historical materials, and even a mural from graffiti artist Keith Haring.

Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop:

291 Mercer Street



Craig Rodwell opened Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop here in 1967, making it the first LGBTQ+ bookstore in the country. Despite bomb threats and broken windows, Rodwell not only helped promote LGBTQ+ writing here, but used the

shop as a gathering place for young activists and community members. He became one of the central organizers of the 1970 Christopher Street Liberation Day March, commemorating the Stonewall Riots and eventually becoming the annual Pride Parade.

Rockland Palace:

280 W 155th Street



The Rockland Palace was a dynamic music and dance club where Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, and Ethel Waters all performed. The Rockland also served as the annual host of the Hamilton Lodge masquerade ball that, by the 1920s and 30s, became a fabulous drag celebration and the largest queer gathering in the city. People across the East Coast flocked by the hundreds to this “grand jamboree of dancing, love making, display, rivalry, drinking and advertisement.” In 1937, 8,000 people attended, as much to ogle each other as to see the outrageous drag competition that formed the heart of the evening.

Stonewall Inn:

53 Christopher Street



When the police, in typical fashion, raided this Mafia-run gay bar late on Friday night, June 27, 1969, the patrons—a mix of diverse races and genders—refused to disperse. Instead, they stood outside, first heckling the police and then attacking them with coins, bricks, and a parking meter. A night of rioting ensued, only to be repeated again over the next several nights, as a new wave of LGBTQ+ political activism took flight.

Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) House:

213 E 2nd Street



Launched by Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson in 1970, STAR aimed to unite and support transgender youth, especially those living on the streets. While very active in the protests organized by other gay liberation groups, Rivera complained that few gay liberationists saw the issues of transgender and other gender nonconforming people—or the people themselves—as part of their community concerns, and did little to support them. According to Johnson, STAR House was a four-room apartment with no electricity and “a floating bunch of 15 to 25 queens,” but for a year or so, they gave each other the support and security they could not find elsewhere.

The Slide:

157 Bleecker Street



In the late 1800s, Bleecker Street was both celebrated and scorned as “the headquarters of Bohemianism,” where “there is no ‘society’ ... to worry your life with its claims and laws. You are a law unto yourself.” In that lawless world, the Slide operated as the kind of saloon where the waiters wore rouge and sang racy songs in falsetto voices, and men might meet other men for sexual encounters. The men involved did not necessarily identify as homosexual—there was not a shared understanding of sexual orientation at the time—but nonetheless, the Slide was among the earliest versions of a New York City gay bar.

Women’s Liberation Center:

243 W 20th Street



Even as lesbians worked with gay men in the homophile organizations of the 1950s, 1960s, and the gay liberation groups of the 1970s, they consistently felt that they were treated as second-class activists whose issues and needs were less important than the men’s were. Much as lesbians formed their own organization, the Daughters of Bilitis, in 1955 to work alongside the Mattachine Society, in 1973, many of the women from the Gay Activists Alliance set up their own group here as Lesbian Feminist Liberation, soon adding an outreach arm called the Lesbian Switchboard. As founder Jean O’Leary explained, “We realized that gay politics will never cut deep enough to eliminate the sexism in a totally sexist society and that for us to be freed as gay people would still leave us oppressed as women.”

Queens

Frank Kameny’s Home:

103–11 115th Street



Born in 1925, Frank Kameny grew up here before heading off to fight in World War II, earn a doctorate in astronomy from Harvard, and secure a job in Washington, D.C., working for the federal government. When the government learned that he had been arrested for a same-sex encounter in San Francisco, however, they fired him as part of the 1950s Lavender Scare. Undaunted, Kameny helped to organize a growing series of protests against governmental discrimination, including pickets of the White House. This laid the foundation for gay liberation politics and embrace of his idea that “Gay Is Good!”

Julio Rivera Corner:

Corner 78th Street & 37th Avenue



Julio Rivera was a 29-year-old bartender who was lured into the schoolyard on this corner and then beaten to death in July 1990 by a gang of young men who said they wanted to “reclaim” their neighborhood. Within six weeks, Rivera’s friends and family were joined by hundreds of LGBTQ+ New Yorkers in a massive candlelight vigil that marked the first show of LGBTQ+ activism in Queens. Rivera’s murder trial also brought increasing attention to homophobic violence and was considered the first gay “hate crime” case in the state of New York.

Staten Island

Alice Austen House:

2 Hylan Boulevard



Born in 1866 and abandoned by her father, Alice Austen grew up on her grandparents’ estate, Clear Comfort. Given a camera when she was 10, Austen became an avid lifelong photographer whose work includes photographs of herself and female friends in male drag, wearing suits and mustaches. When she was in her 30s, Austen fell in love with Gertrude Tate, and they became life partners, living together at Clear Comfort into the 1940s.

Audre Lorde Residence:

207 St. Paul’s Avenue



Born in the 1930s and raised in Harlem, Lorde was a poet and essayist who spoke powerfully about her intersectional identities—she was a lesbian, a mother, an African American, and a woman. While she wrote that early on, she and other Black lesbians saw themselves as “exotic sister outsiders who might gain little by banding together,” increasingly she became a voice for a broader sisterhood that celebrated difference and found strength in it. “It is not our differences that divide us,” she said. “It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.” She lived here with her partner and two children for much of the 1970s and 80s.

Glossary of LGBTQ+ Terms¹

People have engaged in same-sex intimacy and different gender expressions throughout human history. In the United States, as elsewhere, the significance attached to that behavior has changed over time. As a result, the terms used to describe or label the people engaging in those activities have also changed—and continue to do so.

The terms we use today—as well as the ones in some of the primary documents in this volume—contain some of that history. Terms like invert, or homosexual, which emerged from the literature of sexology and psychology, still bear some of the pathologizing meanings embedded in them. A term like queer, which used to be a commonly brandished slur, now also carries within it a more recent political history of empowerment. When such words, and others, show up in a historical text, we might need to unpack them for students and discuss what might at first seem offensive.

The list given here is not all-encompassing; it is designed to provide some of the terms LGBTQ+ folks use to describe their identities, lives, and larger communities. Certainly, as in other areas of social history, in the field of LGBTQ+ history, we need to recognize that when we use these terms, we might well be trying to apply contemporary terminology to refer to people and events from a time when different words—or none at all—described their lives. Yet, as the LGBTQ activist and scholar Dr. Jeffry Iovannone reminds us, “Issues of language are not silly or incidental. The act of naming or labeling oneself can serve as a powerful and validating experience. Language gives visibility and can help to shift social perspectives on historically stigmatized groups. Language does not merely describe our reality, but can actively create it for the better.”²

Ally: An ally is typically a person who does not see themselves as part of an LGBTQ+ community, but who works in their personal and professional life to end the marginalization and oppression of LGBTQ+ people by respecting, supporting, and advocating for the LGBTQ+ community.

¹ Definitions adapted from: [More Than a Phase](#), Pöbel, 2006; [For a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation](#), American Psychological Association, 2008; [Answers to Your Questions About Transgender Individuals and Gender Identity](#), American Psychological Association, 2020; [An Ally's Guide to Terminology](#), GLAAD & Movement Advancement Project, 2012; [Media Reference Guide—Transgender](#), GLAAD.

² Jeffry J. Iovannone, “[A Brief History of the LGBTQ Initialism](#),” Medium, June 9, 2018.

Bisexual: A bisexual person experiences romantic, sexual, and/or emotional attraction to more than one gender. The term bisexual can also sometimes be an umbrella term that includes people who see gender and sex as more than binary categories.

Cisgender: A cisgender person is someone whose gender identity matches with the sex they were assigned at birth (e.g., someone who was assigned female at birth and identifies as a woman). The word cisgender can also be shortened to “cis.”

Gay: A person who is romantically, sexually, and/or emotionally attracted to the same gender as which they identify. This term has historically been used to describe men who are attracted to other men. During the 1970s and 1980s, and at times today, the word gay—as in the “gay community”—was used to refer generally to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

Gender Dominant western society generally defines gender as a binary system—men and women, that are bound to a person’s physical sex characteristics—but many cultures define gender as more fluid and existing along a continuum. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, expressions, and identities of people—and influences how people perceive themselves and each other.

Gender Expression (Gender Presentation): Gender expression refers to how a person displays their sense of their own gender, whether through clothing choices, make-up, mannerisms, or other social behaviors.

Gender Fluid: Individuals who are gender fluid have a fluctuating or unfixed gender identity, and may have a mix of genders.

Gender Identity: A person’s gender identity refers to their internal sense of their gender, whether male, female, fluid, both, neither, or another gender. A person’s gender identity is distinct from the sex that was assigned to them at birth. The sex that is assigned to a person at birth is usually either ‘male’ or ‘female’ and is based upon a binary perception of that person’s external anatomy.

Gender Nonconforming: Refers to people who do not follow prevailing cultural and social ideas or stereotypes about how they should look or act based on the female or male sex they were assigned at birth. Although sometimes used interchangeably with “transgender,” “gender non-conforming” has come to be a broader umbrella term for people creating their own gender expression.

Heteronormativity: This refers to cultural and societal promotion and celebration of heterosexuality as natural, preferred, and superior to other sexualities.

Homophobia: This term refers to disdain, prejudice, and discrimination against lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. Homophobia more generally can also be expressed as a dislike of any expression of same-sex attraction and love, even by someone not gay-identified.

Intersectionality: The term intersectionality uses the metaphor of an intersection—the meeting place where roads come together—to describe how multiple identities are experienced simultaneously and cannot be disentangled. Black women, for example, stand at the juncture of race (blackness) and gender (women), and do not have identities that can be added together or divided apart. Intersectionality has become a shorthand for thinking about privilege and oppression, and unpacking the power relations in different social positions.

Intersex: Refers to people who are born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not seem to fit within the typical expectations of male or female bodies. The differences in their bodies might show up as visible in their external anatomy; as only apparent in their internal reproductive anatomy; or as only present in their genes. In the past, such people might have been labeled as “hermaphrodites,” a term that implied they were both male and female, and one that is mostly no longer used.

Lesbian: A lesbian woman is one who is romantically, sexually, and/or emotionally attracted to women.

LGBTQ+:

This abbreviation, used throughout this resource, is shorthand, or an umbrella term, intended to encompass all of the people with marginalized gender identities and sexual orientations. LGBTQ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and/or Questioning. The + at the end indicates other types of gender and sexual minorities. This acronym does not claim to be correct or complete; instead it represents the evolving history of a coalition of people who have increasingly come to see themselves as part of a shared, if diverse, community.

Queer:

Refers to people of marginalized gender identities and sexual orientations who are not exclusively heterosexual and/or cisgender. The term queer reemerged in the 1990s as an umbrella term championed by activists to describe individuals who did not identify with the straight world, whether because of gender, sexuality, or other reasons. Much of their activism came out of the fight against widespread indifference to the AIDS epidemic, and the embracement of the word queer was, in part, an effort to describe the broad coalition of individuals who were joining the fight. But the adoption of a word that had previously been deemed an insult also represented an effort to push back at the homophobic attitudes that had allowed the epidemic to rage, and so the term also implied a more radical, militant, or confrontational approach to identity issues. Nonetheless, queer has come to be used interchangeably with LGBTQ+, but some members of the LGBTQ+ community eschew it, because of its history as a derogatory term.

**Sexual Orientation,
Sexual Identity,
or Sexuality:**

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual are all terms of sexual orientation, sexual identity, or sexuality. A person's sexual orientation typically refers to their pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or multiple sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, and their feeling of connection to a culture and community of other folks who share those attractions. Not everyone who feels same-sex attractions or even engages in same-sex intimacy identifies as LGBTQ+ or sees themselves as part of that community.

Transgender:

Transgender can describe a range of identities that transgress socially defined gender norms. A transgender person is someone whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender is often shortened to trans.

Transphobia:

Similar to homophobia, this term also refers to disdain, prejudice, and discrimination against transgender people. Transphobia can appear as hostility toward any behavior that transgresses norms of gender, gender identity, or gender expression.

Going Beyond This Book

While uncovering the hidden voices and stories included in this resource, we must also acknowledge that there are countless other hidden voices that students and teachers can work to reveal. What other stories are waiting to be discovered?

Who else has had an impact on New York City and the United States? Who has faced adversity and made a difference? Is their story well-known? What can we learn from bringing it to the surface? How can we get our students engaged in this work? How do historians find these people?

There is no single correct way to engage in this work. Students and teachers can use different approaches to look for the hidden voices around us.

- **Look at Local History:** An exploration of events in a community can provide opportunities to learn about people who helped shape local history. Research at the local libraries, museums, and municipal archives can serve as an entry point to uncovering events and people that might not be well-known in the present day. Local historians and librarians are valuable resources. Each borough has a county historian who can help lead to the discovery of hidden voices. A list of New York State historians can be found at: <http://www.apnys.org/historian-lookup/>.
- **Multiple Perspectives:** Sometimes we can uncover information by considering which version of a time period or an event we have come to accept as historical fact. The best way to begin analyzing this information is by asking questions: Who is telling the story? How do we get all aspects of the story? Whose voices are missing? Students should attempt to find as many different perspectives as possible to help tell a narrative about an event or period of history. The most widely available accounts are not likely the only ones available, but finding others might be challenging. Other perspectives can be found by researching periodicals, municipal records, and cultural institutions.
- **Focus on Hidden Events:** Often, looking at lesser-known events in local history can surface opportunities for discovering additional hidden voices. For instance, ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) was founded in New York City in 1987. The group's tactics rejuvenated lesbian and gay activism. Who were the people behind these events? Who else was involved? Looking for the answers to these questions can unearth hidden voices.
- **Oral Histories:** Oral history is the oldest form of historical record keeping, predating the written word. Accessing oral history has become easier as technology provides ample digitally recorded stories. There are many online and archived oral histories that can provide a variety of perspectives from people who witnessed events and lived through periods of history. Oral history collections often include the stories of everyday people who were present at extraordinary events.

Thinking about Historical Significance

There is so much about the past that is forgotten. Often students are presented with narratives of the past with limited or one-sided perspectives. Students are taught to associate history with symbolically famous or important individuals and events. More often than not, these individuals and events were designated as being significant by the ruling elite of a particular time and place. This limited view of history has led students to the clichéd, but incorrect, understanding that “history is written by the victors.” This view implies that there is only one history of the past and that history is just a retelling of accepted facts. History, however, is so much more. History is actually based on interpretation of past events, which leads to a richer and more complex understanding for students. Foremost in reevaluating the past is the discussion of historical significance. The *Hidden Voices* project challenges teachers and students to include lesser-known, yet equally important, voices, and actors to an ever-evolving historical narrative. Ultimately, the *Hidden Voices* project inspires students to advance their own understanding and ask their own questions about what people and events are worth remembering and why.

Understanding historical significance involves gathering and selecting evidence to sift through the past to choose what voices are heard and what facts are presented. The *Historical Thinking Project* writes, “There is much too much history to remember all of it. So how do we make choices about what is worth remembering? Significant events include those that resulted in great change over long periods of time for large numbers of people. World War II passes the test for historical significance in this sense. But what could be significant about the life of a worker or [enslaved person]? What about my own ancestors, who are clearly significant to me, but not necessarily to others? Significance depends upon one’s perspective and purpose. A historical person or event can acquire significance if we, the historians, can link it to larger trends and stories that reveal something important for us today.”¹ Teaching students to make a case for historical significance means teaching them to apply social studies practices and think like historians to truly “do” history. The *Hidden Voices* project provides students myriad opportunities to establish the significance of LGBTQ+ figures, thereby centering the histories that the traditional narrative has ignored or pushed to the periphery.

Scholars in history education have identified five major criteria for determining historical significance. However, it is important to recognize that not all criteria need to be satisfied for

¹ [“Historical Significance.”](#) *Historical Thinking Project*, Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness.

significance to be established, nor is there a specific number of criteria to be met. Rather, assessing historical significance is an argument that someone can present to make a case for including a particular person, group, or event within a historical narrative. In teaching this practice to students, consider whether, after weighing all of the criteria, the event, person, or group should be considered significant. Of course, the most important element is the student's ability to ground their argument in strongly chosen evidence. The following criteria are adapted from *The Historical Thinking Project* and *Thinking Historically*,² by Stéphane Lévesque:

- **Importance (Historical Empathy):** One measure of significance is to understand the significance of an event or occurrence to those living at the time. Were people aware of the importance or impact of an event, person, or group? Try to avoid **presentism** (seeing the past through the lenses and values of the present) and instead try to empathize with the people in the past to more clearly assess importance to them.
- **Profundity:** Profundity measures how deeply people were affected. It does not consider differences in perspectives because some people may view an event more positively while others may view the event negatively. A particular event could have been important to many people with differing perspectives about it.
- **Quantity:** Quantity considers the number of people affected. However, an event is not necessarily significant simply because large numbers were affected. An event affecting fewer people can still be consequential.
- **Durability:** The impact of past events on subsequent events and the present is the measure of how durable an event is. Does it still matter over time? However, significance is not dependent on the duration of an event. A short-lived historical moment can have great significance.
- **Relevance:** Relevance examines the significance of an event to the present, but different groups debate it. Some worry that it is a presentist approach and focuses too much on current events, but others find great value in how study of the past “can be useful to. . . understanding. . . current affairs and potentially illuminating for the future.”

By providing students the tools to establish historical significance, students can be empowered to present a history that is both more inclusive and representative of the communities in which they live. The skills embedded in establishing historical significance will help students to better address historical inequities and engage in acts of historical recovery.

2 Stéphane Lévesque, *Thinking Historically: Educating Students for the Twenty-First Century*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

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Both women experienced challenges and relied on each other for emotional support. In their letters, they expressed to each other their hopes and dreams openly.

When our marriage appeared in the New York Times we heard from literally hundreds of people, all congratulating us and sending love because we were married.

Wong's paintings from the 1980s drew upon the environment surrounding him and the people lived and worked and explored the queer sexuality, spirituality, and language.

It's a magic word. For anybody who doesn't understand why we want it, and why we need it, it is magic.

