

# HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

## FAIRY TALE AUTHOR

b. April 2, 1805

d. August 4, 1875

**He was the gifted creator of some of the world's most enduring fairytales.**

*“Just living is not enough ... one must have sunshine, freedom, and a little flower.”*

Hans Christian Andersen was a Danish storyteller and novelist, most famous for his timeless fairy tales, including “The Little Mermaid,” “The Snow Queen” and “Thumbelina.”

Andersen was born to a working-class family in Odense, Denmark. His father was a shoemaker, and his mother worked as a washerwoman. Andersen attended a local school, while simultaneously working as a weaver’s apprentice and later as a tailor.

When he was 14, Andersen moved to Copenhagen to pursue an acting career. He was accepted into the Royal Danish Theatre and established a friendship with the theatre’s director, Jonas Collin. Collin raised money to send Andersen to secondary school in Slagelse, Denmark.

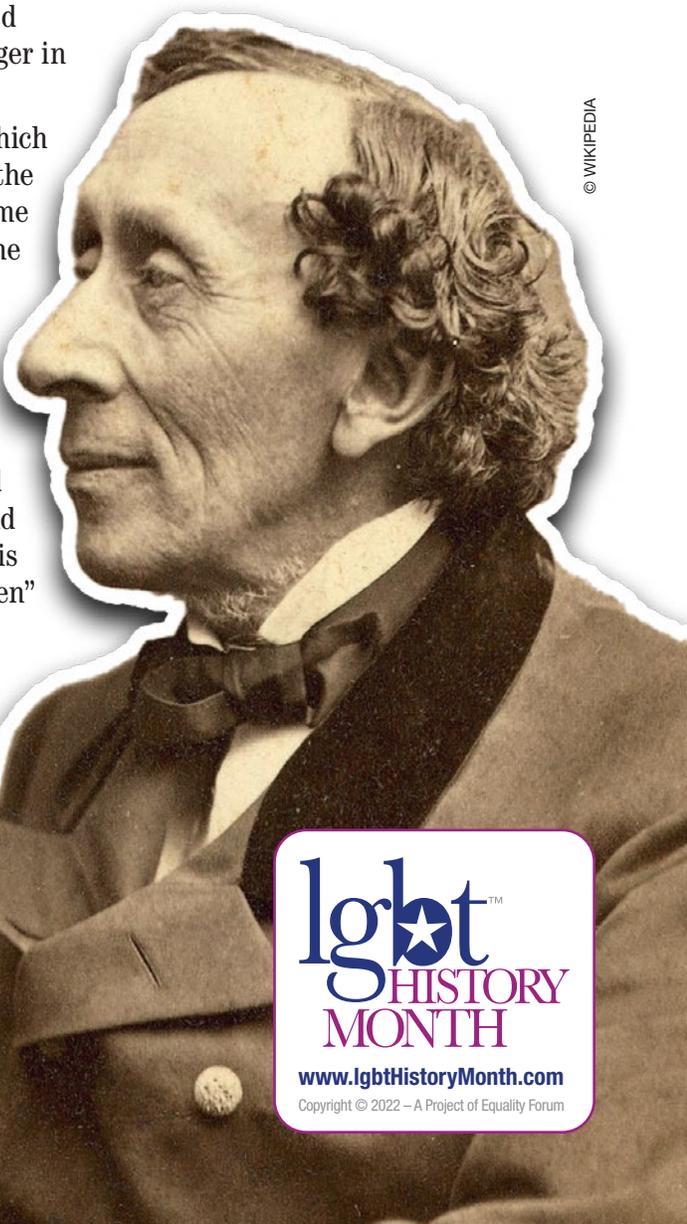
In 1828, after Andersen graduated, he enrolled in the University of Copenhagen, where he began writing novels. In 1829 he published “A Walk from Holmen’s Canal to the East Point of the Island of Amager in the Years 1828 and 1829.” It was his first success as an author.

In May 1835 Andersen wrote “Tales Told for Children: Volume One,” which included many of his now-famous stories such as “The Princess and the Pea” and “The Tinderbox.” Later that year, Andersen published Volume Two, which included “Thumbelina” and “The Naughty Boy.” Despite the success of these volumes, Andersen received criticism for his casual writing style, which delayed the publication of Volume Three until 1837. His third volume included classics like “The Little Mermaid” and “The Emperor’s New Clothes.”

Andersen subsequently wrote plays. He gained notoriety from one of his first, “The Mulatto,” in 1840 — a work that explores and condemns slavery. He traveled to Africa, Asia, Sweden, Spain, and other European countries and wrote several books documenting his time abroad, including “A Poet’s Bazaar” (1842), “Pictures of Sweden” (1851) and “In Spain” (1863).

Although Andersen’s sexuality was never made public, he wrote love letters to both men and women and experienced a few romances with men. From 1861 to 1863, he enjoyed a continuous relationship with the Danish dancer Harold Scharff.

In 1872 Andersen sustained permanent injuries falling out of bed. He developed signs of liver cancer soon thereafter and died of the disease at age 70. He is buried in Assistens Cemetery in Copenhagen.



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# ROBINA ASTI

# TRANSGENDER RIGHTS PLAINTIFF

b. April 7, 1921

d. March 21, 2021

*“After years of deep reflection, I realized that I was not living my true self.”*

**She won the legal right to spousal Social Security benefits for widowed transgender people.**

Robina Asti was a World War II Navy pilot and the oldest working flight instructor on record. As a 92-year-old transgender woman, she won the legal right to receive her late husband's Social Security benefits — a right previously afforded only to cisgender widows and widowers.

Assigned male at birth, Asti was born in New York City. To pursue her interest in electrical engineering, she attended Brooklyn Technology High School. She dropped out at 17 to join the U.S. Navy.

Asti began her military career installing naval aircraft radios. After the war broke out, she became a pilot, flying reconnaissance missions over the Pacific. She was promoted to test pilot, and by the time she was discharged, Asti was a lieutenant commander.

After the war, Asti returned to New York state, where she opened a restaurant in White Plains with three Navy friends. She soon realized the business didn't suit her, and she joined W. Axe, a mutual fund firm, where she rose to vice president.

In 1958 Asti married a woman, Evangeline Diaz-Perez, and they had four children. In 1976, with the support of Evangeline, Asti left her job and began to transition. After Asti's gender confirmation surgery, the couple agreed to split.

Asti went to work as a makeup artist at Bloomingdales. She served as chairperson of the Hudson Valley chapter of the Ninety-Nines, an organization for female pilots, and taught flying lessons. She soon discovered that, as a woman, she was required to undergo an internal exam as part of the annual physical needed to renew her pilot's license. With the Ninety-Nines, she successfully petitioned the government to end the rule.

Asti met an artist, Norwood Patten, and they married in 2004. After Patten died in 2012, Asti applied for his Social Security benefits. Because she was transgender, the government denied her application. With the help of Lambda Legal, Asti successfully challenged the rule in court, winning transgender people nationwide the right to collect their deceased spouse's benefits.

Asti emerged herself in LGBTQ activism after a film about her case, “Flying Solo: A Transgender Widow Fights Discrimination,” was released in 2015. She gave TED Talks and, with her grandson, founded the Cloud Dancers Foundation in 2019 — an advocacy organization for elder trans people.

In 2020, Guinness World Records recognized Asti, at age 99, as the oldest active pilot and the oldest active flight instructor. Out Magazine named her among its 100 LGBTQ+ Individuals of the Year.

Asti died shortly before her 100th birthday. The New York Times published her obituary.

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# RICHARD AVEDON

b. May 15, 1923

d. October 1, 2004

## PREEMINENT PHOTOGRAPHER

**He was a world-famous fashion and portrait photographer.**

*“All photographs are accurate. None of them is the truth.”*

Richard Avedon was a world-famous photographer who specialized in fashion and portraiture. Best known for his images of models and celebrities, his minimalist portraits of unknown people, including a bee-covered beekeeper, are among his most compelling works.

Avedon was born in New York City to Jewish parents who were employed in the apparel industry. At age 12, he joined a camera club, sparking his lifelong passion. With his later-famous friend, James Baldwin, he co-edited his public high school's prominent literary magazine. Avedon was named Poet Laureate of New York City High Schools.

Avedon joined the Merchant Marines in 1942, where he took identification photos. He left after two years to pursue photography professionally. He became a protégé of Alexey Brodovitch, an influential photographer and the top graphic designer for the fashion magazine Harper's Bazaar.

Avedon started freelancing at 22. He began a 20-year working relationship with Harper's Bazaar, taking what were then unconventional, out-of-studio action photos of models. The magazine soon made him its lead photographer. During this period, Avedon also worked for other popular magazines, such as Life and Look, and shot personality-revealing portraits of famous people, including John F. Kennedy and Elizabeth Taylor.

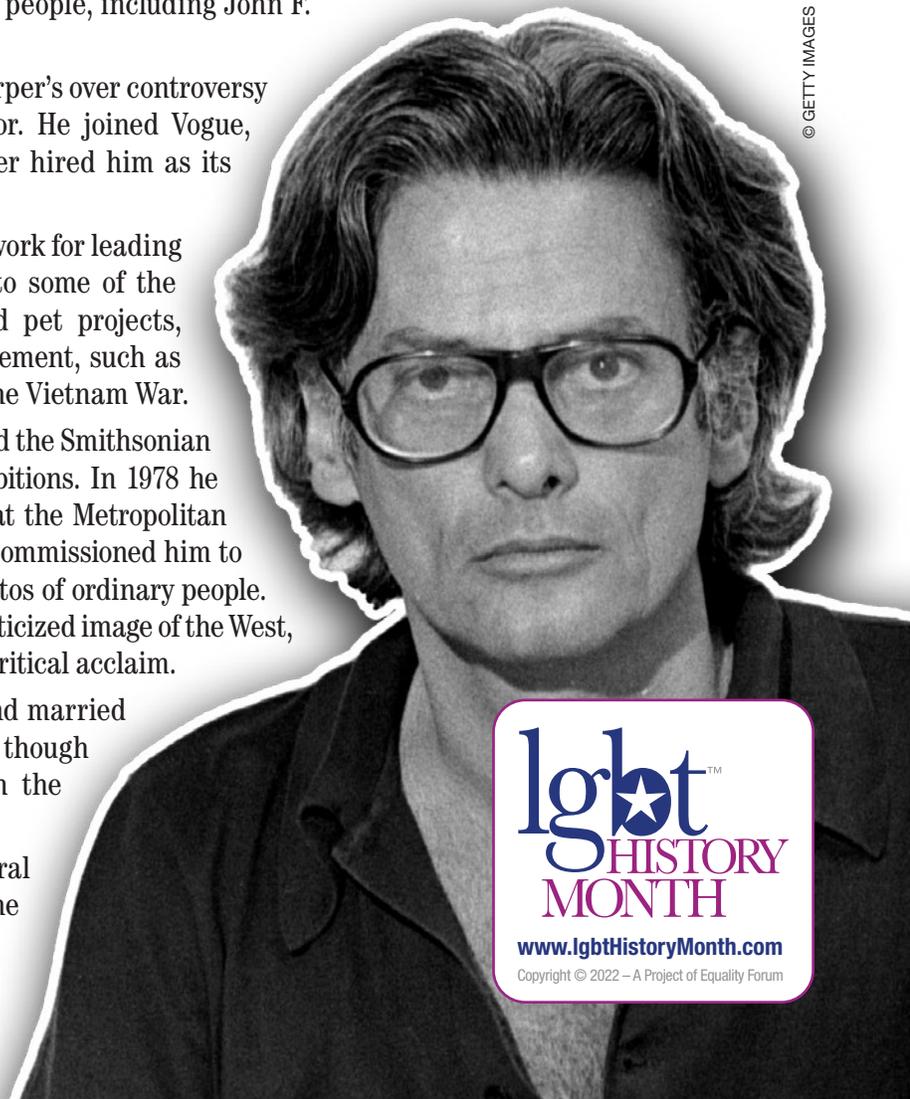
In 1965, when racism was rampant, Avedon quit Harper's over controversy concerning his collaboration with models of color. He joined Vogue, where he worked until 1994, when The New Yorker hired him as its first staff photographer.

Avedon also maintained his own studio, where his work for leading brands such as Revlon and Versace contributed to some of the world's most successful advertising. He explored pet projects, including portraits reflecting the Civil Rights Movement, such as those of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, and the Vietnam War.

During his life, Avedon published 11 photo books, and the Smithsonian and other major museums presented his solo exhibitions. In 1978 he became the first living photographer with a show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1985 the Amon Carter Museum commissioned him to capture the spirit of the American West through photos of ordinary people. His gritty, startling portraits contradicted the romanticized image of the West, igniting intense controversy as well as widespread critical acclaim.

Avedon was out as a bisexual to his close circle and married twice to women. His second marriage lasted, though Avedon reportedly had a decade-long affair with the director Mike Nichols.

Avedon died shortly after suffering a cerebral hemorrhage on assignment for The New Yorker. The New York Times published his obituary.



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# NINIA BAEHR & GENORA DANCEL

## MARRIAGE EQUALITY PIONEERS

*“Maybe I was living in fantasyland, but when you want to marry someone, that’s all you think about.” - Genora Dancel*

Ninia Baehr and Genora Dancel were plaintiffs in the first major marriage equality lawsuit in America. Initiated in Hawaii in 1990, *Baehr v. Lewin (Miike)* launched a 23-year battle for marriage equality in the state and laid the foundation for nationwide legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015.

Genora Dancel was the first female broadcast engineer at Hawaii Public Television. Her boss introduced her to her daughter, Ninia Baehr, who was the co-director of the University of Hawaii Women’s Center. Baehr and Dancel fell in love, and Dancel soon proposed.

As residents of Hawaii, Dancel and Baehr applied for a marriage license, but the state immediately denied it. They resigned themselves to the injustice until Baehr, who was uninsured, developed a serious ear infection. If married, Dancel could have extended her health insurance to her spouse.

Eager to find a solution, Baehr and Dancel sought information about domestic partnerships from the Lesbian and Gay Center of Honolulu, but hit another roadblock. The center’s executive director urged them to join a marriage-equality lawsuit he was organizing.

At a time when same-sex marriage was illegal throughout the world, Dancel feared the publicity might upend their lives. She and Baehr hired a civil rights attorney and bravely moved forward anyway. In December 1990, Baehr, Dancel and two other couples walked into the Department of Health to apply for marriage licenses. They were denied, and the couples sued.

The case made its way through the system to the state’s highest court. In 1993 the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples had the right to marry unless “compelling state interest” could prove otherwise. The case was remanded back to the lower courts. About this time, Baehr and Dancel moved to Baltimore to escape the spotlight and angry backlash.

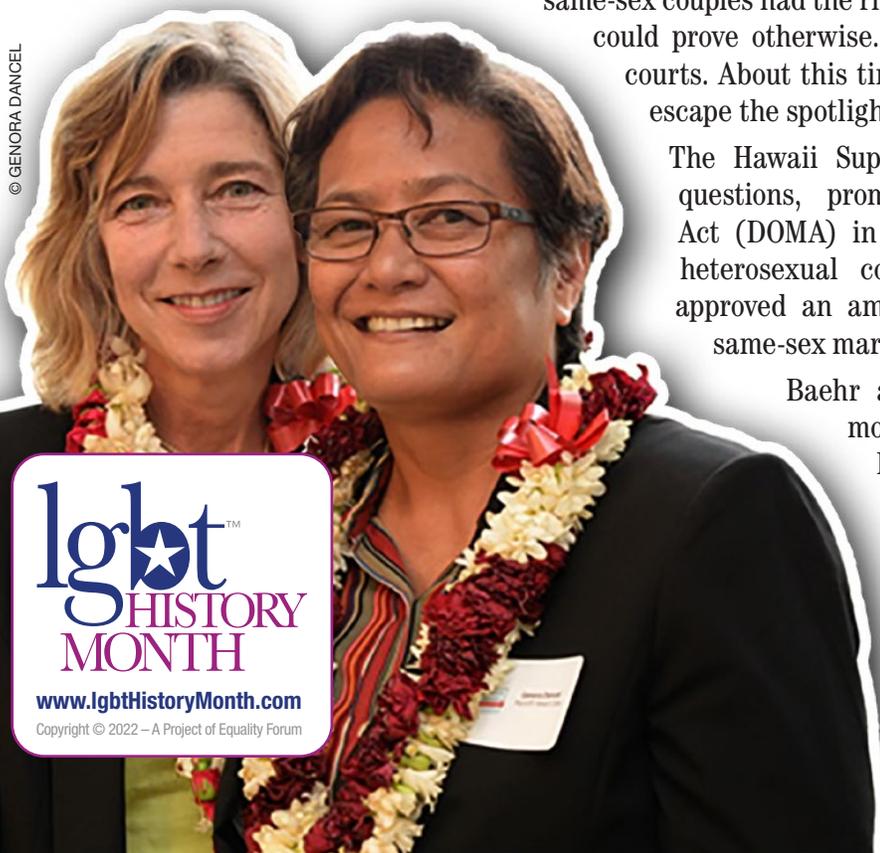
The Hawaii Supreme Court decision opened constitutional questions, prompting the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in 1996, which limited the right to marry to heterosexual couples exclusively. In 1998 Hawaii voters approved an amendment to the state constitution banning same-sex marriage, and the *Baehr* case was dismissed.

Baehr and Dancel split amicably in 1997. Dancel moved back to Hawaii in 2006 and married Kathryn Dennis in 2013, a month after the state eventually legalized same-sex marriage. Baehr married Lori Hiris in Montana in 2014.

Baehr and Dancel remain friends. In 2015 when the Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* legalized same-sex marriage in all 50 states, they celebrated the victory over the phone.

**Their attempt to obtain a marriage license helped spark a nationwide movement to legalize same-sex marriage.**

© GENORA DANCEL



# SUE BIRD

b. October 16, 1980

## WNBA SUPERSTAR

*“Every great team has had to fail at some point in order to be successful.”*

**She is considered one of the greatest women’s professional basketball players.**

Sue Bird is a Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) star and a five-time Olympic gold medalist. Her league records include all-time leader in assists and 12-time WNBA All-Star. Considered one of the greatest female players of all time, she has spent her career with the Seattle Storm.

Bird was born to an Israeli-American family in Syosset, New York. Influenced by an athletic older sister, Bird developed an early aptitude for a variety of sports and started playing Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) basketball in sixth grade.

Bird attended Syosset High School, where she played basketball for her first two years. She then transferred to Christ the King Regional High School in Queens for a chance to play with a more competitive team.

In her first year at Christ the King, the team went undefeated, winning the New York State Championship and the national title. Bird was named New York State Player of the Year and earned the same title from the New York Daily News. The Women’s Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA) named her an All-American.

Prestigious college teams fought to recruit Bird. She chose the University of Connecticut, but tore her ACL in her freshman year. She played the following season, helping the Huskies win the 2000 NCAA Women’s Division I Basketball Tournament. When she graduated from UConn in 2002, Bird took with her the Wade Trophy, the Honda Sports Award and the Naismith College Player of the Year Award.

In the 2002 WNBA draft, Bird was the Seattle Storm’s first pick. In 2004 the Storm won the WNBA Championship. She has helped lead the team to four championship victories. In 2011 she was named one of the top 15 WNBA players of all time.

In 2013 Bird underwent knee surgery that sidelined her for the season. She returned to the game in 2014 and was named the WNBA All-Star of the Year. She re-signed with Seattle in 2016 and was named one of the WNBA’s 20 best players in its 20-year history.

Bird had two more knee surgeries that briefly took her off the court. She played her 19th and final season with the Storm in 2022 — the most ever in the WNBA — before announcing her retirement.

Bird played on the U.S. Olympic women’s basketball team five times, winning five golds, most recently in 2021. At the 2016 games, she met Megan Rapinoe, a U.S. professional soccer player, and the two began dating. Bird came out as lesbian in 2017, when she made their relationship public. The couple announced their engagement in October 2020.



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# VICTOR BLACKWELL

b. September 25, 1981

# CNN NEWS ANCHOR

*“Sometimes it’s not cancellation.  
It’s just plain ol’ accountability.”*

Victor Blackwell is an openly gay award-winning journalist, correspondent and CNN anchor.

Blackwell was born in Baltimore, Maryland. He attended Millford Mill Academy, a public high school, where he was voted senior class president. He got his first taste of broadcasting, making the school’s morning announcements. Blackwell studied broadcast journalism at Howard University and graduated with honors. He interned at WHUT-TV, the university’s public television station.

Blackwell started his journalism career as a writer for the Community Times, a Columbia, Maryland, newspaper. He served as a producer for a Baltimore radio station, a co-producer for public television in Washington, D.C., and worked for Fox affiliates in California and Pennsylvania. He became a reporter and fill-in anchor for WHAG-TV in Hagerstown, Maryland, before moving to Florida, where he worked as a reporter and weekend anchor for WTLV/WJXX in Jacksonville. At WPBF 25 in West Palm Beach, he became the first Black person to serve as the station’s main news anchor.

**He is an Emmy  
Award-winning  
CNN correspondent  
and anchor.**

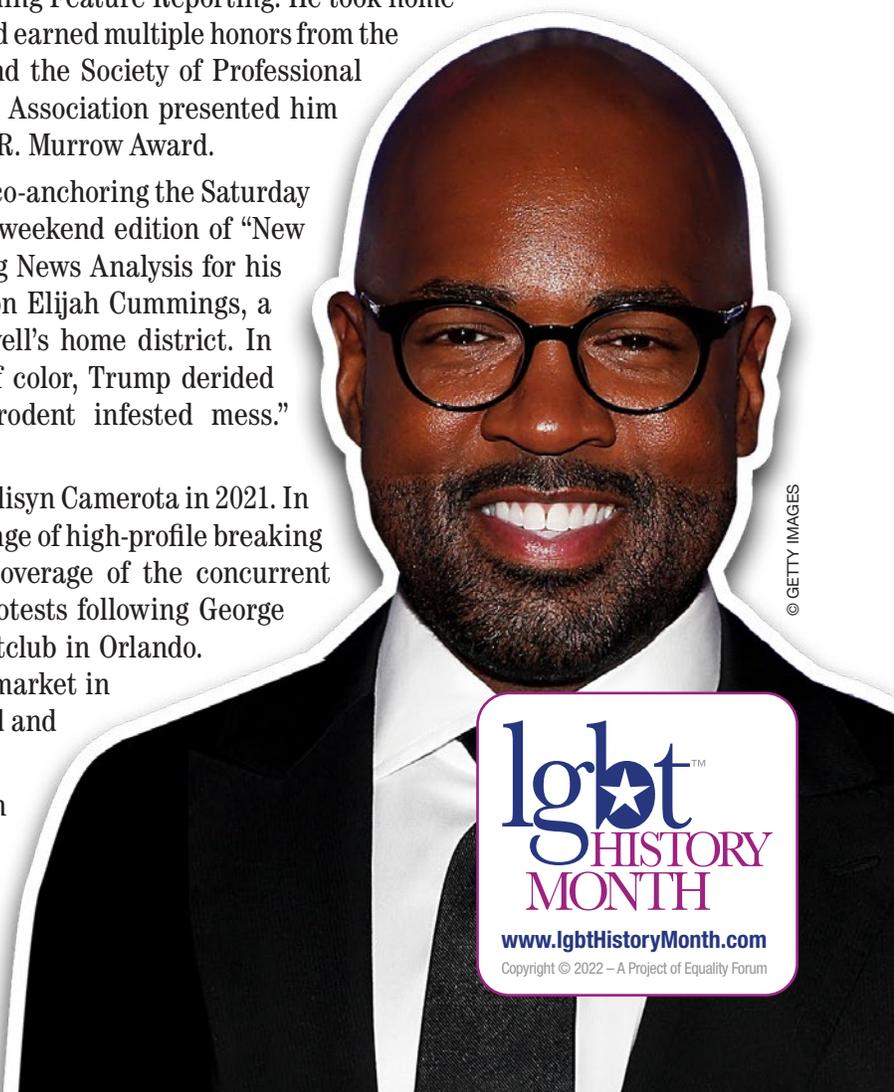
At WPBF, Blackwell was nominated four times for regional Emmy Awards, winning in 2009 for Outstanding Feature Reporting. He took home two Telly Awards and earned multiple honors from the Associated Press and the Society of Professional

Journalists. The Radio and Television Digital News Association presented him with both the Unity Award and the coveted Edward R. Murrow Award.

Blackwell left WPBF in 2012 to join CNN in Atlanta, co-anchoring the Saturday morning edition of “CNN Newsroom” and then the weekend edition of “New Day.” In 2020 he received an Emmy for Outstanding News Analysis for his commentary on President Donald Trump’s attack on Elijah Cummings, a Black Maryland congressman representing Blackwell’s home district. In yet another verbal assault on congress members of color, Trump derided Cummings’s district as a “disgusting, rat and rodent infested mess.” Blackwell called out Trump’s racism.

Blackwell began co-hosting “CNN Newsroom” with Alisyn Camerota in 2021. In his 10 years at the network, he has covered a wide range of high-profile breaking news stories, including CNN’s Emmy-nominated coverage of the concurrent shoots in Dayton, Ohio, and El Paso, Texas; the protests following George Floyd’s murder; and the shooting at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando. In May 2022 he shed tears on air outside the supermarket in Buffalo, New York, where 10 Black people were killed and three wounded in a racist massacre.

Blackwell came out as gay on CNN in 2013. He is an outspoken supporter of the LGBTQ community.



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# MATT BOMER

b. October 11, 1977

## ACTOR

*“Everybody thinks that equality comes from identifying people, and that’s not where equality comes from.”*

**He is an award-winning actor and LGBTQ rights advocate.**

Matt Bomer is an award-winning actor and LGBTQ advocate. Some of his best-known films include “Magic Mike” (2012), “The Normal Heart” (2014) and “The Boys in the Band” (2020).

Bomer was born in Missouri to ultra-conservative parents and raised in Texas. His father played football briefly for the Dallas Cowboys. Bomer played for his high school team.

While still in high school, Bomer made his professional debut in “A Streetcar Named Desire” at the Alley Theater in Houston. He attended Carnegie Mellon University, where he received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2001. At about this time,

he came out in a letter to his parents. They initially rejected him.

Acting became Bomer’s salvation. In 2001 he joined the cast of “Guiding Light,” a soap opera role that earned him a Gold Derby Award for Younger Actor – Daytime Drama.

In 2005 Bomer made his film debut opposite Jodi Foster in “Flightplan,” which opened at No. 1 in the U.S. and Canada. He secured a second movie role in 2006 and continued to work regularly in television. In 2009 he joined the cast of “White Collar,” an opportunity that earned him a 2015 People’s Choice Award for Favorite Cable TV Actor.

In 2011 Bomer starred on Broadway in Dustin Lance Black’s “8,” a reenactment of the landmark trial that overturned California’s Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriage. Bomer publicly came out as gay in 2012. The same year, he starred opposite Channing Tatum in the critical success, “Magic Mike,” a movie dramedy about male strippers. Bomer reprised the role in Magic Mike XXL (2015).

Bomer’s creative choices often comport with his sexuality. He earned a Golden Globe in 2014 for his portrayal of a man dying of AIDS in the film “The Normal Heart,” based on Larry Kramer’s autobiographical play. He starred on Broadway in the 2018 revival of Mart Crowley’s “The Boys in the Band” and also appeared in the film adaptation, which featured the same all-gay cast. He has guest starred in TV episodes of shows such as “The New Normal” and “Will and Grace.”

As of 2021, Bomer has performed in 18 films, 22 television productions and 6 plays. He has earned at least 10 awards and numerous nominations for his acting. In 2012 he was honored with the Steve Chase Humanitarian Award and the GLSEN Inspiration Award for his LGBTQ advocacy.

Bomer is married to Simon Halls, a well-known publicist. They have three children.

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# RAPHAEL BOSTIC

b. 1966

## FEDERAL RESERVE BANK CEO

*“The Reserve Banks are vital contributors to our nation’s economic and financial success.”*

**He is the first openly gay president and CEO in the Federal Reserve System.**

Dr. Raphael Bostic is the 15th president and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank (FRB) of Atlanta. He is the first African American and the first out gay person to lead a regional chain of the FRB. He also serves on the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) of the Federal Reserve System.

Bostic hails from Delran, New Jersey. He graduated in 1984 as the valedictorian of his public high school and earned a combined degree in economics and psychology from Harvard University in 1987. He received his doctorate in economics from Stanford University in 1995.

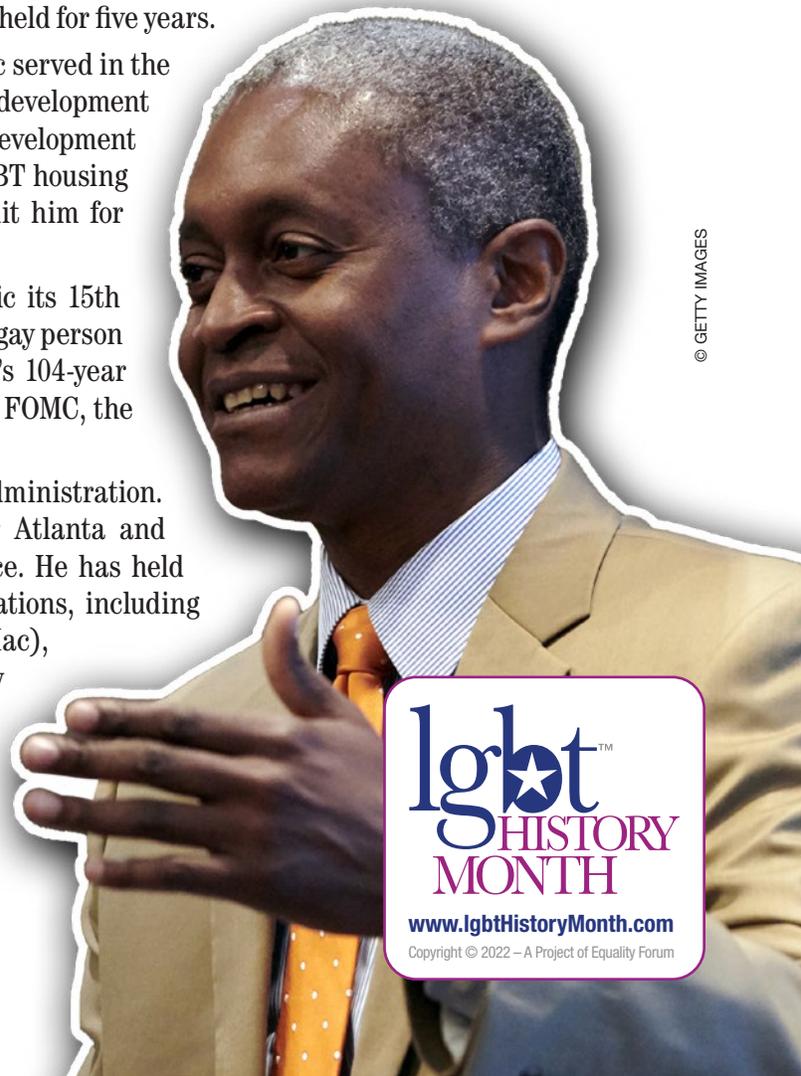
From 1995 to 2001, Bostic served as an economist for the Federal Reserve Board of Governors. He earned a special achievement award for his work on the Community Reinvestment Act.

In 2001 Bostic joined the faculty at the University of Southern California School of Policy, Planning, and Development, where his research spanned a wide variety of housing-related fields, including finance, home ownership and policy. He remained with USC for 16 years, during which time, he held several real-estate program directorships. In 2012 he was named the Judith and John Bedrosian Chair in Governance and the Public Enterprise at the Price School of Public Policy, a position he held for five years.

From 2009 to 2012, during the Obama administration, Bostic served in the Senate-confirmed position as assistant secretary for policy development and research at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). During his tenure, he spearheaded research on LGBT housing challenges and discrimination. LGBTQ organizations credit him for his groundbreaking work.

In 2017 the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta named Bostic its 15th president and CEO. He is the first Black and the first openly gay person to run one of the 12 FRBs in the Federal Reserve System’s 104-year history. He is the fourth Black person ever to serve on Fed’s FOMC, the committee that controls the nation’s interest rates.

Bostic is a fellow of the National Association of Public Administration. He is the 2021-2022 chair of the United Way of Greater Atlanta and the 2022 chair of the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce. He has held esteemed positions on numerous other boards and associations, including the Federal Loan Home Mortgage Corporation (Freddie Mac), the Reinvestment Fund and the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management.



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# JENNIFER FINNEY BOYLAN

b. June 22, 1958

## AUTHOR & TRANSGENDER ACTIVIST

*“The more we feel compelled to keep explaining ourselves, the less like others we become.”*

**She is an author and transgender activist most famous for her best-selling memoir.**

Jennifer Finney Boylan is a transgender author and activist, celebrated for her best-selling memoir, her commentaries in *The New York Times* and her public advocacy.

Born male in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, Boylan attended The Haverford School, a suburban Philadelphia all-boys preparatory school. She graduated in 1976 and received her bachelor's degree from Wesleyan University and her master's degree in English from Johns Hopkins University.

In 1988 Boylan began teaching at Colby College in Maine. She was named Professor of the Year in 2000. Boylan left Colby in 2014 to accept a professorship in English at Barnard College of Columbia University, where she was named the inaugural Anna Quindlen Writer in Residence.

Although Boylan dreamed of being a girl and secretly dressed in women's clothing after college, she did not come out as trans until her 40s. She feared marginalization, losing her family and even losing her life. As a man, Boylan married in 1988, but after 10 years, could no longer continue the façade. Boylan tearfully told her wife, Deirdre, and began to transition. The couple remained married.

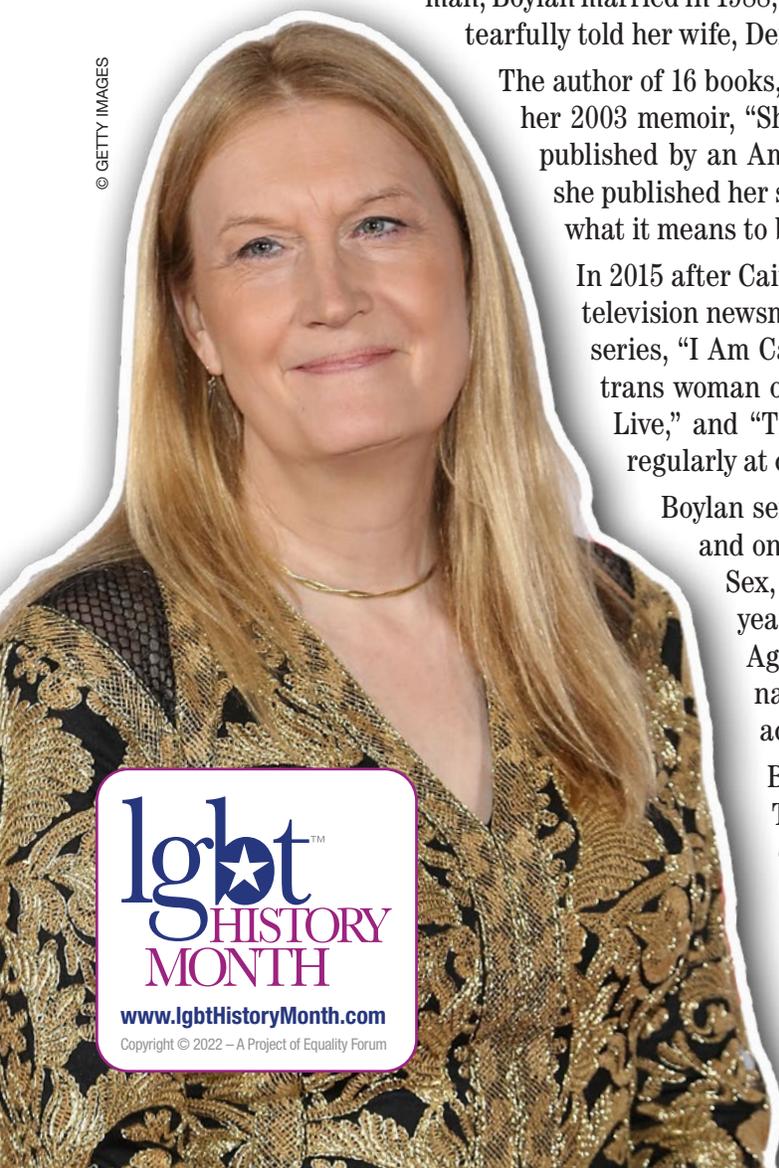
The author of 16 books, including novels and short stories, Boylan is most famous for her 2003 memoir, *“She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders.”* It was the first book published by an American transgender author to become a best seller. In 2020 she published her second memoir, *“Good Boy: My Life in 7 Dogs,”* which explores what it means to be a woman with a boyhood.

In 2015 after Caitlyn Jenner came out as transgender, Boylan appeared on the television newsmagazine *“20/20”* and became a regular on Jenner's reality TV series, *“I Am Cait.”* Boylan has discussed her experiences and activism as a trans woman on programs such as *“The Oprah Winfrey Show,”* *“Larry King Live,”* and *“The Today Show,”* and on National Public Radio. She speaks regularly at colleges and universities, including Harvard and Yale.

Boylan serves on the policy advisory board of Gender Rights Maryland and on the board of trustees of the Kinsey Institute for Research on Sex, Gender, and Reproduction. Previously, she served for seven years on the Board of Directors of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). In 2020 *Queerty* magazine named her one of 50 heroes “leading the nation toward equality, acceptance and dignity for all people.”

Boylan and Deirdre have been married for more than 30 years. They have two children. Boylan's latest novel, *“Mad Honey,”* co-written with the *New York Times* best-selling author Jodi Picoult, was released in October 2022.

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# KATE BROWN

b. June 21, 1960

## GOVERNOR OF OREGON

*“There’s no better place to fight for working families than the governor’s chair.”*

**She is the first openly bisexual governor in the United States.**

Kate Brown is a Democrat and the first openly bisexual governor in the United States. Among other priorities, she fights for children and working families, environmental protections and LGBTQ+ rights.

Brown was born in Torrejón de Ardoz, Spain, where her father was serving in the U.S. Air Force. She grew up in Minnesota. Brown attended the University of Colorado Boulder and graduated in 1981 with a bachelor’s degree in environmental conservation and a certificate in women’s studies. Brown earned her J.D. with a certificate in environmental law in 1985 from Lewis & Clark’s Northwestern School of Law in Portland, Oregon.

After working as an attorney, Brown was elected in 1991 to the Oregon House of Representatives. She served two terms. In 1996 she ran for the state Senate and won. Her colleagues voted her Senate Democratic Leader in 1998.

Brown held her Senate seat for 12 years and, in 2004, became the first woman to serve as Senate majority leader. She relinquished her post to run for Oregon Secretary of State, winning in 2008.

As Secretary of State, Brown passed bills to reduce fraud, initiated online voter registration and provided disabled citizens with increased voting accessibility options, including iPads and tablets. In 2009 the Aspen Institute awarded her a Rodel Fellowship in Public Leadership.

In 2015 Brown assumed the governorship of Oregon after her predecessor, Governor John Kitzhaber, resigned over an ethics investigation. She won a special election in 2016 to serve out the remainder of his term. Oregonians re-elected Governor Brown for a second term in 2018.

As the state’s leader, Governor Brown enhanced discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people; established the state’s Racial Justice Council; passed the Reproductive Health Equity Act to preserve and expand access to abortion and women’s health services; set some of the nation’s most aggressive goals to address climate change; established the Child Welfare Oversight Board; expanded health care to cover all children; and more.

In July 2021 President Joe Biden appointed her chair of the Disaster Response and Emergency Management Group of the President’s Council of Governors.

Brown and her husband, Dan Little, married in 1997. She helped raise his two children.



# NANCY CÁRDENAS

b. May 29, 1934

d. March 22, 1994

## MEXICAN WRITER & ACTIVIST

*“Of course, if we change the future,  
we change the past.”*

**She was the first  
publicly out lesbian in  
Mexico and the founder  
of Mexico's first LGBTQ  
civil rights organization.**

Nancy Cárdenas was the first publicly out lesbian in Mexico. Her activism, poetry and playwriting were instrumental to the country's LGBTQ civil rights movement.

Cárdenas was born in Mexico in the small town of Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila. Her passion for writing, particularly of plays, began early. She earned a Ph.D. from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, where she advanced her left-leaning views. She went on to study theater at Yale University and Polish culture and literature in Łódź, Poland. As a well-educated, politically outspoken young woman, Cárdenas captured attention, particularly from the LGBTQ community abroad.

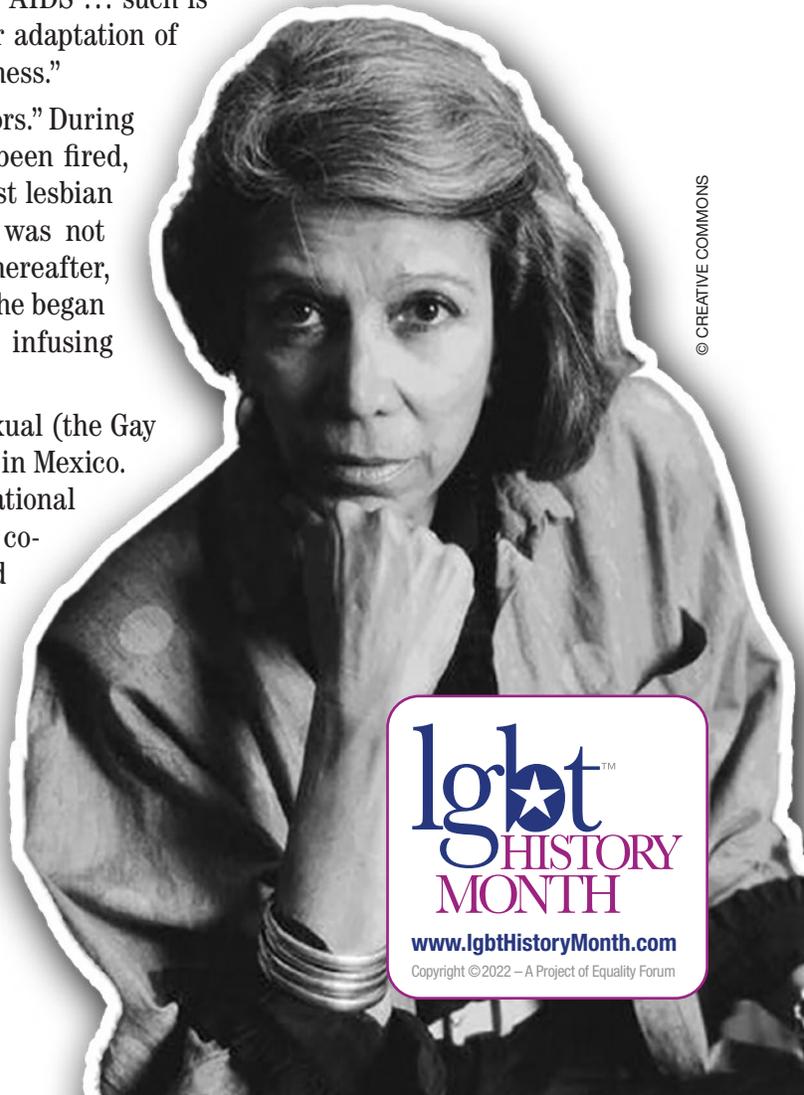
In the 1950s, when Cárdenas was 20, she started a career in entertainment — first as a radio announcer and then as an actor, participating in “Poetry Out Loud,” a program directed by Héctor Mendoza. During this period, she developed a reputation for her activism, including fighting for feminism and protesting police violence.

Cárdenas's writing soon gained recognition. She began working as a journalist, while pursuing her own projects. Her creative work frequently reflected her progressive views and focused on LGBTQ issues, as represented in her play “Sida ... así es la vida” (“AIDS ... such is life”) and in “El pozo de la soledad de Radclyffe Hall,” her adaptation of Radclyffe Hall's 1928 lesbian love story, “The Well of Loneliness.”

In 1973, at age 39, Cárdenas made history on the show “24 Hors.” During an interview about gay rights and an employee who had been fired, she disclosed her own sexual orientation, becoming the first lesbian in Mexico to come out on live television. Although she was not punished or attacked, her ability to find work suffered. Thereafter, she threw herself into fighting for Mexican LGBTQ rights. She began interviewing and collecting stories about LGBTQ people, infusing this material into her projects.

In 1974 Cárdenas founded el Frente de Liberación Homosexual (the Gay Liberation Front), the first LGBTQ civil rights organization in Mexico. As a feminist and sexologist, she lectured, made international television appearances and held conferences. In 1975 she co-authored the Manifesto in Defense of Homosexuals, and in 1978 she led the country's first gay pride march in Las Plazas de las Tres Culturas.

Cárdenas fought for LGBTQ rights until she died of breast cancer in 1994. The Nancy Cárdenas Latin American and Mexican Lesbian Documentation and Historical Archives Center was named in her honor.



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# KITTY CONE

b. April 7, 1944

d. March 21, 2015

## DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVIST

**In 1977 her historic sit-in helped lay the groundwork for passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990.**

*“For the first time, we had concrete federal civil rights protection.”*

Curtis Selden “Kitty” Cone was a disabled lesbian activist who fought successfully to advance inclusivity for Americans with disabilities. She is best known for staging a historic sit-in that helped paved the way for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Cone was born to an affluent family in Champaign, Illinois. Doctors initially misdiagnosed her with cerebral palsy, leading to treatments that worsened her condition. At age 15, she was accurately diagnosed with muscular dystrophy.

Cone attended the Holton-Arms School in Washington, D.C., but the campus was so inaccessible, her cousins had to carry her up the steps. Cone’s family moved to Kentucky when she was in her mid-teens. There, she witnessed the most brutal inequities of racism. Deeply affected, she escaped back to Washington to attend Mount Vernon Seminary, a women’s boarding school.

At Mount Vernon, Cone experienced the sting of discrimination firsthand. The headmistress segregated her from the other girls for various activities. Defying her prohibitions, Cone was expelled. It marked the beginning of her activism.

In 1962 Cone entered the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, confined to a wheelchair. In her sophomore year, she joined in the Civil Rights Movement and organized for the NAACP. She protested the Vietnam War and fought for other causes. In doing so, she came into conflict with the school’s administration who imposed unfair limitations on her and the other disabled students. In the 1960s basic rights for people with disabilities were practically nonexistent.

Cone left Champaign immediately after college, moving around until 1974, when she settled in Oakland, California. She was hired by the Center for Independent Living, a disability rights organization, where she spearheaded substantive changes like the installation of ramps and curb cuts around the city.

In 1977 Cone masterminded the 504 Sit-in, demanding action on the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 prohibited programs receiving federal aid from discriminating against people with disabilities. Though the act had been passed, the law was not implemented. Protesters occupied federal buildings for a historic 28 days. As a result, the regulations were signed and slated for enforcement. The ADA was passed 13 years later.

In 1979 Cone organized the Disabled People’s Civil Rights Day. Until she retired, she worked for organizations such as the World Institute on Disability and the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund.

As publicly out disabled lesbians, Cone and her long-term partner were unable to marry or adopt children in the United States. In 1984 they moved to Mexico where they adopted a son.

Cone died in California of pancreatic cancer.



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# ROBERT CUTLER

b. June 12, 1895

d. May 8, 1974

## NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR

*“No man in the Government, with the possible exception of the President, knows so many of the nation’s strategic secrets.” - The New York Times (1957)*

**A closeted gay man,  
he was the United  
States’ first national  
security advisor.**

A distinguished closeted gay brigadier general, attorney and bank president, Robert Cutler was the United States’ first national security advisor. He served in the position twice under President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Born in Massachusetts, Cutler attended Harvard College. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa and class poet in 1916, intent on teaching English and becoming a writer. He taught at Harvard and Radclyffe and published two novels in his 20s: “Louisburg Square” (1917) and “The Speckled Bird” (1923).

After serving in World War I, Cutler attended Harvard Law School. He graduated first in his class in 1922 and practiced private and corporate law in his home state. In 1940 he was appointed corporation counsel for the mayor of Boston. He resigned in 1942 to join the U.S. Army in World War II.

Cutler served as a colonel and the head occupational analyst of the Army Specialist Corps. In 1944 he became the executive officer of the War Ballot Commission, managing the soldier vote during the presidential election. He received the Distinguished Service Medal and the Legion of Merit. In 1945 the military discharged him as a brigadier general.

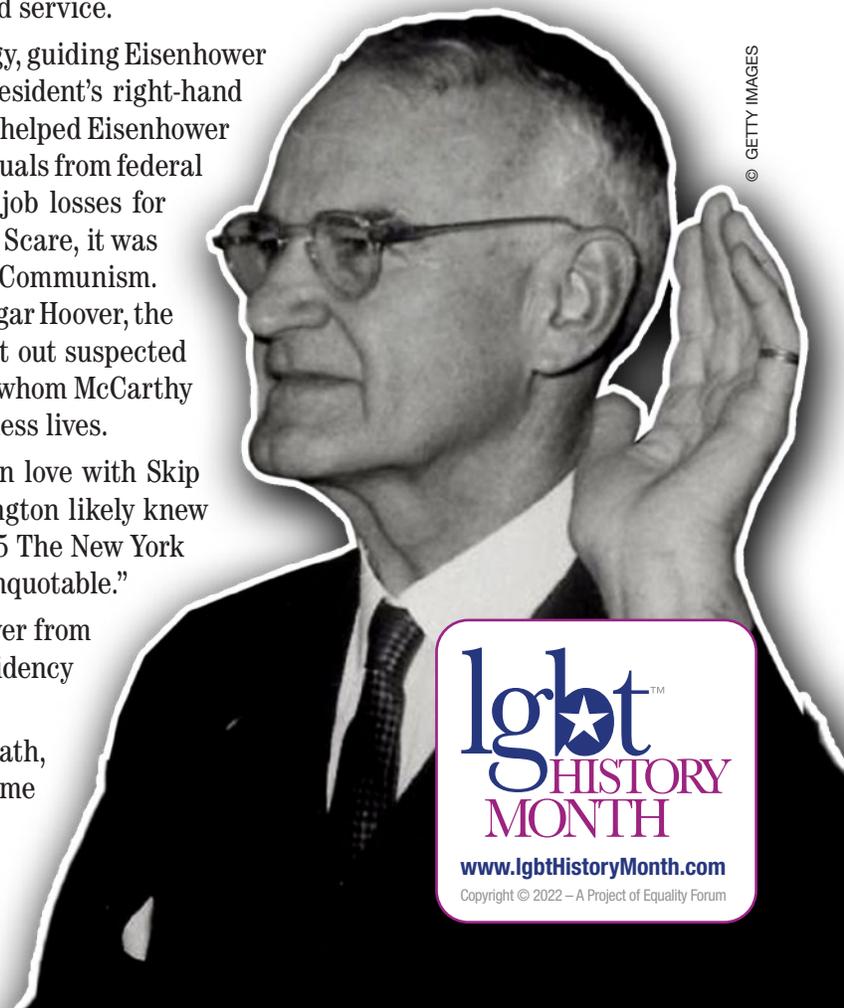
When Eisenhower ran for president in 1952, Cutler served as his campaign secretary. As president, Eisenhower named Cutler the country’s first national security advisor. Cutler held the position until 1955 and received the Medal of Freedom for his distinguished service.

As security advisor, Cutler helped shape Cold War strategy, guiding Eisenhower through nuclear arms escalation. Tragically, as the president’s right-hand man during a treacherously homophobic era, Cutler also helped Eisenhower draft Executive Order 10450. The order banned homosexuals from federal employment, triggering a witch hunt that resulted in job losses for thousands of gays and lesbians. Known as the Lavender Scare, it was fueled by the nation’s intense political paranoia about Communism. Joseph McCarthy, a Republican senator, assisted by J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI director (who was himself closeted), sought to root out suspected Communists and other “subversives,” i.e., homosexuals, whom McCarthy called “sexual perverts.” McCarthyism destroyed countless lives.

Based on his diaries and communication, Cutler was in love with Skip Koons, a gay naval intelligence officer. Some in Washington likely knew about Cutler’s sexuality, but never exposed him. In 1955 The New York Times called Cutler, “Untouchable, Unreachable, and Unquotable.”

Cutler served again as security advisor under Eisenhower from 1955 to 1957 and worked with him at the end of his presidency from 1959 to 1962.

Cutler never married. Eight years before his death, he published his third and final book, a memoir, “No Time for Rest.”



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# ANDRÉ DE SHIELDS

b. January 12, 1946

ACTOR &  
SINGER

*“The top of the mountain is the bottom of the next, so keep climbing.”*

**He is a Broadway legend and the winner of every major award for his craft.**

André De Shields is a queer award-winning actor, singer, and dancer, and an acclaimed choreographer and director. A Broadway legend whose career spans a half century, De Shields has won every major honor and award.

One of 11 children, De Shields was raised in Baltimore, Maryland. He received his high school diploma from Baltimore City College in 1964. De Shields attended Wilmington College, where he began stage acting. He transferred to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, earning a degree in English literature in 1970. Twenty years later, he received his master’s degree in African American studies from New York University.

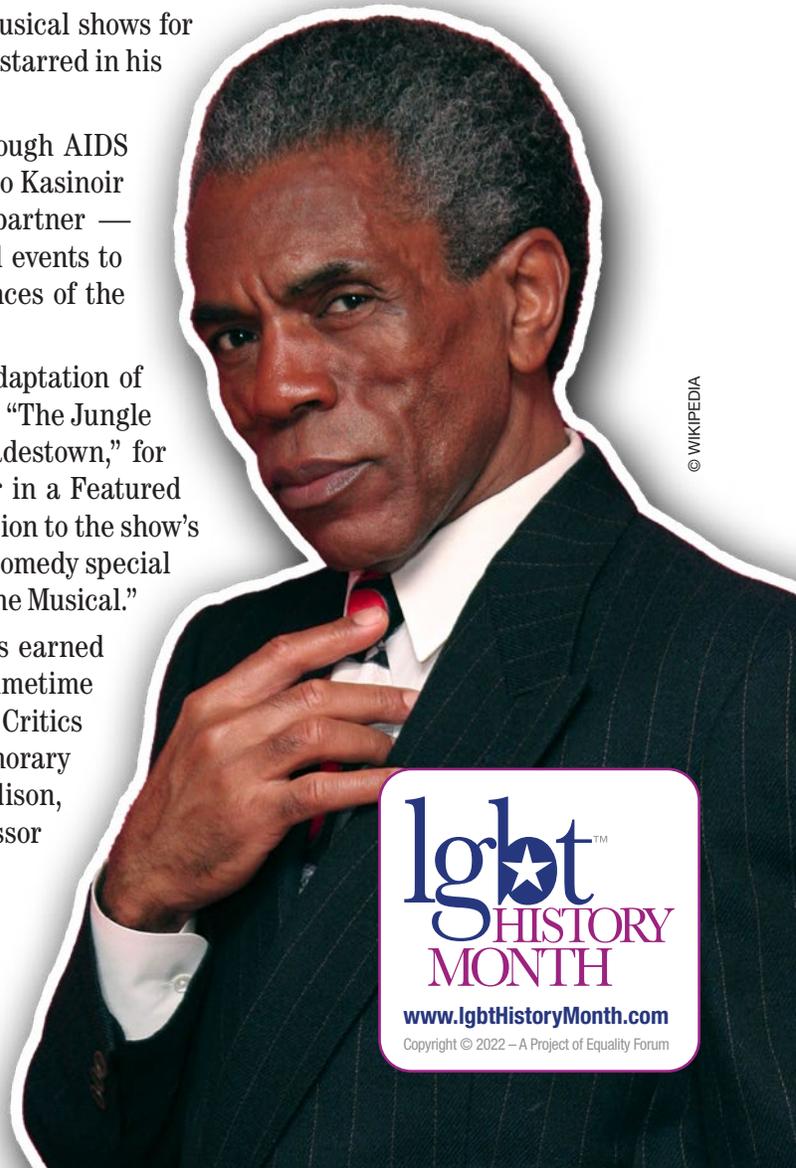
De Shields’s career took off almost immediately. In 1969 he joined the cast of “Hair” in Chicago. He made his Broadway debut in 1973 as Xander in “Warp!” In 1974 he secured the title role in “The Wiz,” which moved to Broadway the following year, winning seven Tony Awards.

In addition to performing, De Shields choreographed two musical shows for Bette Midler. In 1984 he wrote, directed, choreographed and starred in his own musical revue, “André De Shields’ Harlem Nocturne.”

In 1991 De Shields was formally diagnosed with HIV. Although AIDS robbed him of his life partner, mentor and collaborator, Chico Kasinoir — along with countless other loved ones and a second partner — De Shields is a longtime survivor. He participates in annual events to raise money for people living with HIV and reminds audiences of the support he and Kasinoir received when Kasinoir was dying.

De Shields’s many theatrical credits include the musical adaptation of “The Full Monty,” “Ain’t Misbehavin,” “Black Impressionism,” “The Jungle Book,” “The Fortress of Solitude” and the hit musical “Hadestown,” for which he earned both the 2019 Tony Award for Best Actor in a Featured Role in a Musical and a 2020 Grammy Award for his contribution to the show’s album. While cast in “Hadestown,” he also appeared in the comedy special “John Mulaney & the Sack Lunch Bunch” and in “Ratatouille the Musical.”

In addition to his Tony and Grammy Awards, DeShields has earned countless other nominations and honors, including a Primetime Emmy, a National Black Theatre Festival Award, an Outer Critics Circle Award, an Obie and an Audie. He received an honorary doctorate in fine arts from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and has served as an adjunct and distinguished visiting professor at NYU’s Gallatin School of Individualized Study.



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# LEA DELARIA

b. May 23, 1958

## COMEDIAN & ACTOR

**A bawdy comedian and award-winning actor and singer, she proudly flaunts her lesbian identity.**

*“I’m a big butch dyke with a smile on my face.”*

Lea DeLaria is an award-winning actor, a jazz singer and the first openly gay comedian to appear on American television. As an actor, she is most famous for her role as Carrie “Big Boo” Black, a lesbian inmate and main character in the hit Netflix series “Orange is the New Black.”

The daughter of Italian American parents, DeLaria was born in Belleville, Illinois, and attended St. Mary’s Elementary School. Her father was a jazz pianist.

A self-described “butch dyke lesbian,” DeLaria began her show-business career in the early 1980s as a stand-up comedian in San Francisco’s Mission District, telling raunchy jokes about her sexuality and Catholic upbringing. Hers was the first openly lesbian act in Provincetown, Massachusetts. She is credited with the widely known “U-Haul” joke about lesbians’ propensity for moving in together right after meeting.

DeLaria also turned her talents to musical theater. In 1986 she directed “Ten Percent Revue,” a show that combined music and sketches about homosexuality. Many of the performances sold out. She also starred in two musical comedies, “Dos Lesbos” (1988) and “Girl Friday: We’re Funny That Way” (1989).

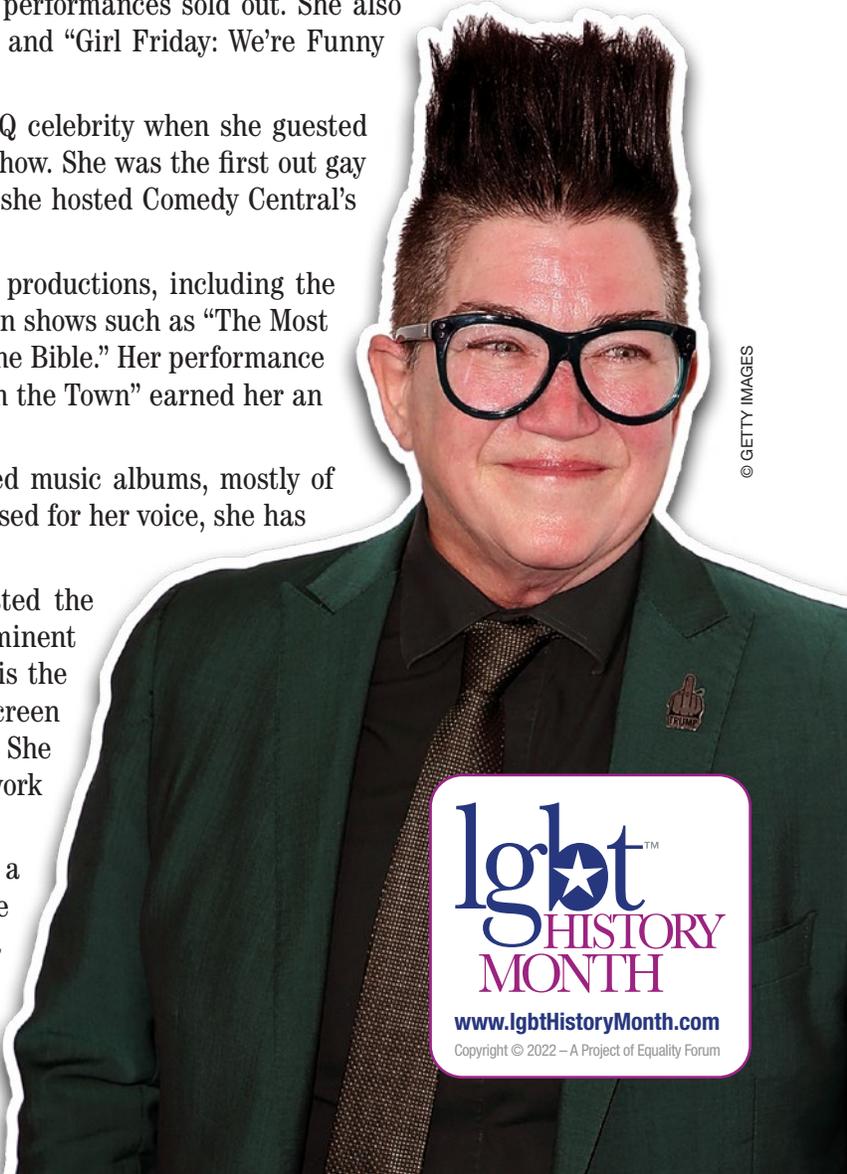
In 1993 DeLaria cemented her reputation as an LGBTQ celebrity when she guested on “The Arsenio Hall Show,” a popular late-night talk show. She was the first out gay comedian to appear on U.S. television. The same year, she hosted Comedy Central’s first all-gay stand-up special, “Out There.”

Throughout the ’90s, DeLaria performed in Broadway productions, including the revival of “The Rocky Horror Show,” and Off Broadway in shows such as “The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told,” billed as “a gay retelling of the Bible.” Her performance in the critically acclaimed Off Broadway production “On the Town” earned her an Obie Award in 1998.

Between comedy and acting, DeLaria has also released music albums, mostly of unique jazz arrangements of popular songs. Widely praised for her voice, she has performed concerts around the world.

DeLaria has guest starred in multiple TV shows, hosted the OBIE Awards and voiced animated characters. Her prominent supporting role in the long-running dramedy “Orange is the New Black,” was created just for her and earned her the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Award for Outstanding Performance. She received the Equality Illinois Freedom Award for her work as an LGBT performer in 2015.

DeLaria was engaged for two years to Chelsea Fairness, a creative director, but the pair separated in 2017. Despite her financial success, DeLaria is said to live simply in a working-class Brooklyn neighborhood.



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# ANNA ELIZABETH DICKINSON

## 19TH CENTURY ORATOR

b. October 28, 1842

d. October 22, 1932

**She was a women's rights advocate, an abolitionist and the first female to speak before Congress.**

*"See to it, women who listen to me ... that no man take your crown."*

Anna Elizabeth Dickinson was an early American orator who advocated for women's rights and the abolition of slavery. During the Civil War, she helped secure key political victories for the North and became the first woman to address Congress.

Dickinson was born to a Quaker family in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her father, an abolitionist, died when she was 2, leaving her mother financially strapped. As a teen, Dickinson supported the family, working as a copyist and a schoolteacher.

At age 13, Dickinson wrote an impassioned anti-slavery essay for the radical abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper, "The Liberator." Garrison was so impressed, he arranged speaking engagements for Dickinson. At the time, women rarely spoke in public, much less about controversial issues. Dickinson became well known throughout the Northeast, denouncing slavery and supporting women's rights. Her fervor and eloquence captivated thousands of paying spectators. More than 5,000 people attended her first lecture in New York City.

When the Civil War began and Northern morale plummeted, the chairman of the New Hampshire State Republican Committee invited Dickinson to deliver the pro-Union message to antiwar audiences. Dickinson's oratory prowess prompted campaign organizers in other states to enlist her help. She stumped for candidates in Connecticut, Maine, Pennsylvania and New York, earning substantial fees. Her ability to galvanize audiences helped secure key victories in the 1863 elections and earned her the moniker the "American Joan of Arc."

In 1864 legislators invited Dickinson to speak before Congress. She became the first woman ever to do so. With President Lincoln, military officers and civilian leaders in attendance, Dickinson received a standing ovation. She was 21 years old.

Immediately after the war, Dickinson became one of the most popular, highly paid speakers in the nation, addressing such issues as reconstruction, temperance, civil rights, and a few sensational topics, like venereal disease. Dickinson and Frederick Douglass shared a podium to advocate for Black men's voting rights.

When the demand for paid lectures diminished in the Panic of 1873, Dickinson turned to writing. She authored novels and plays and enjoyed a stint as an actor. Consistently defying gender norms, she played Hamlet on Broadway and became the second white woman to summit Pike's Peak.

Though many eligible men pursued her, Dickinson never married. Her letters and interviews suggest she had love affairs with women, including Sallie Ackley, who was married.

Dickinson never quite recovered from the postwar loss of her early celebrity. She later fell into poverty and struggled with mental health issues. She died a week before her 90th birthday.



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# MASHA GESSEN

b. January 13, 1967

## RUSSIAN-AMERICAN JOURNALIST

*“To create, and to confront,  
one has to be an outcast.”*

**An outspoken critic  
of Vladimir Putin,  
Masha Gessen has  
written extensively on  
LGBTQ rights.**

Masha Gessen is a Russian-American journalist, an activist and a vocal critic of Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. Gessen identifies as nonbinary and trans. Known as “Russia’s leading LGBT rights activist,” Gessen was the only openly gay public figure in Russia for many years and frequently endured harassment.

Gessen was born in Moscow to Jewish parents. In 1981 the family immigrated to the United States to escape religious persecution.

A dual citizen of Russia and the United States, Gessen returned to Russia as an adult in 1991 to work as a journalist, writing in Russian and English. Gessen served as Moscow bureau chief for the U.S. News & World Report and as editor in chief of the oldest Russian language publication, Vokrug Sveta, a popular-science magazine.

Gessen served for five years on the board of Triangle, the LGBT rights organization based in Moscow. While in Russia, Gessen published several critically acclaimed books, including “Dead Again: The Russian Intelligentsia After Communism” (1997) and “Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin” (2012).

Gessen often reported on issues of political freedom and LGBTQ rights. In a 2008 profile of Putin for Vanity Fair, Gessen noted the country’s slide toward autocracy. Gessen contributed regular commentaries about Russia to The New York Times blog on subjects such as the “gay propaganda” law and the persecution of journalists.

In 2012 Vokrug Sveta fired Gessen after Gessen refused to cover an event featuring Putin hang gliding with Siberian cranes. Gessen viewed Putin’s stunt as an exploitation of environmental concerns for political gain.

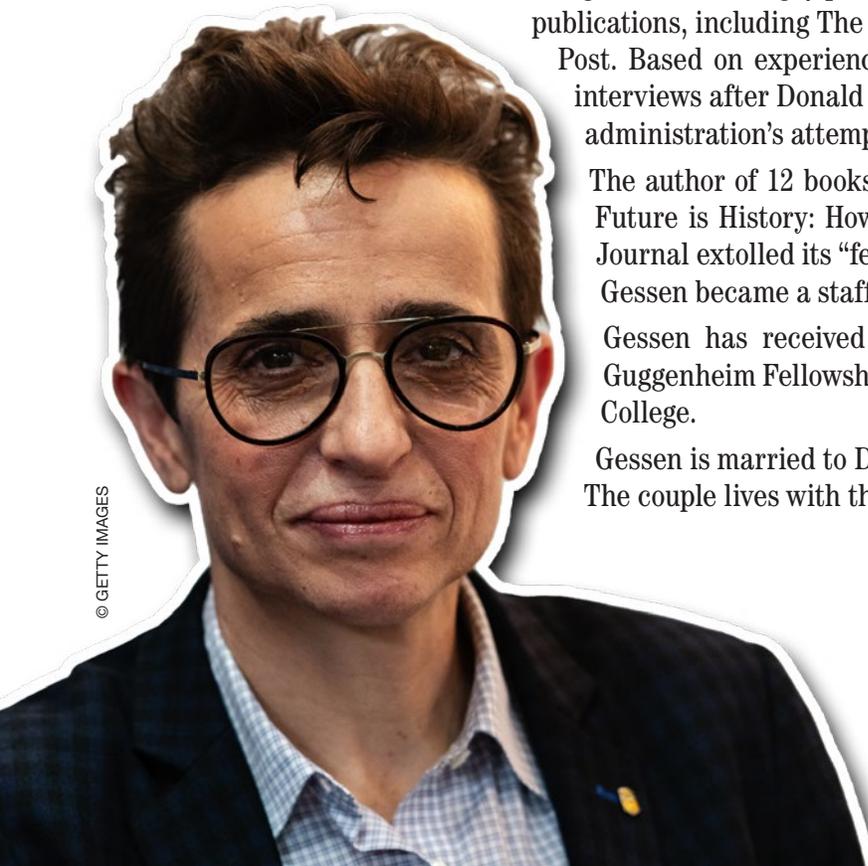
Gessen, who has three children, moved back to the United States in 2013 when Russian authorities were discussing removing children from gay parents. Gessen continued to write in the U.S. for leading publications, including The New Yorker, The New York Times and The Washington Post. Based on experience with the Kremlin, Gessen wrote articles and gave interviews after Donald Trump was elected on how to recognize and resist his administration’s attempts to silence the press and the public.

The author of 12 books, Gessen won the 2017 National Book Award for “The Future is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia.” The Wall Street Journal extolled its “fearless indictment of the most powerful man in Russia.” Gessen became a staff writer for the New Yorker that same year.

Gessen has received numerous honors, including Andrew Carnegie and Guggenheim Fellowships, and is a Distinguished Writer in Residence at Bard College.

Gessen is married to Darya Oreshkina.  
The couple lives with their children in New York.

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# RON GOLD

b. April 22, 1930

d. May 1, 2017

## GAY PIONEER

**He played an important role in the declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness.**

*“Stop it, you’re making me sick!”*

Ron Gold played an important role in the American Psychiatric Association’s (APA’s) declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness. A member of the Gay Activists Alliance and, later, a cofounder of the National Gay Task Force, he fought for positive representation of gays and lesbians in the media.

Gold was born in Brooklyn, New York. When he turned 13, his parents began shuffling him to psychiatrists to address his homosexuality. He eventually developed a heroin addiction. At age 24, he approached a psychiatric hospital for treatment and was turned away. He spent several years at a Kansas clinic, where they helped him get clean, but failed to “cure” his homosexuality. His experiences with conversion therapy fueled his commitment to “eliminate the ‘sickness’ label branded upon gays and lesbians.”

Gold spent his early career as a magazine writer and a reporter for *Variety*, before dedicating himself to activism. In 1970 he created the seminal, later-expanded booklet “20 Questions About Homosexuality,” which, at the time, was one of only two publications that spoke positively about gay identity.

As the media director of the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), Gold played a pivotal role in the pressure campaign to remove homosexuality from the APA’s index of mental disorders. In the fall of 1972 — after a disguised gay psychiatrist, John Fryer, appeared at the APA Annual Meeting in May and provided historic testimony on the issue — Gold and GAA protesters infiltrated a behavioral therapy conference in New York. Railing against the speakers, Gold broke up the meeting. As the conferees disassembled, Gold talked to a psychiatrist there who helped give him a forum for debate at the next APA convention.

At the 1973 APA Annual Meeting in Honolulu, Gold delivered his now-famous “Stop It, You’re Making Me Sick” speech, asserting, “Your profession of psychiatry — dedicated to making sick people well — is the cornerstone of oppression that makes people sick.” The same year, the APA removed homosexuality from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of Mental Disorders.

In 1986 Gold wrote the first media guide for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. He persuaded producers of major television networks to edit episodes of shows that presented negative gay and lesbian stereotypes.

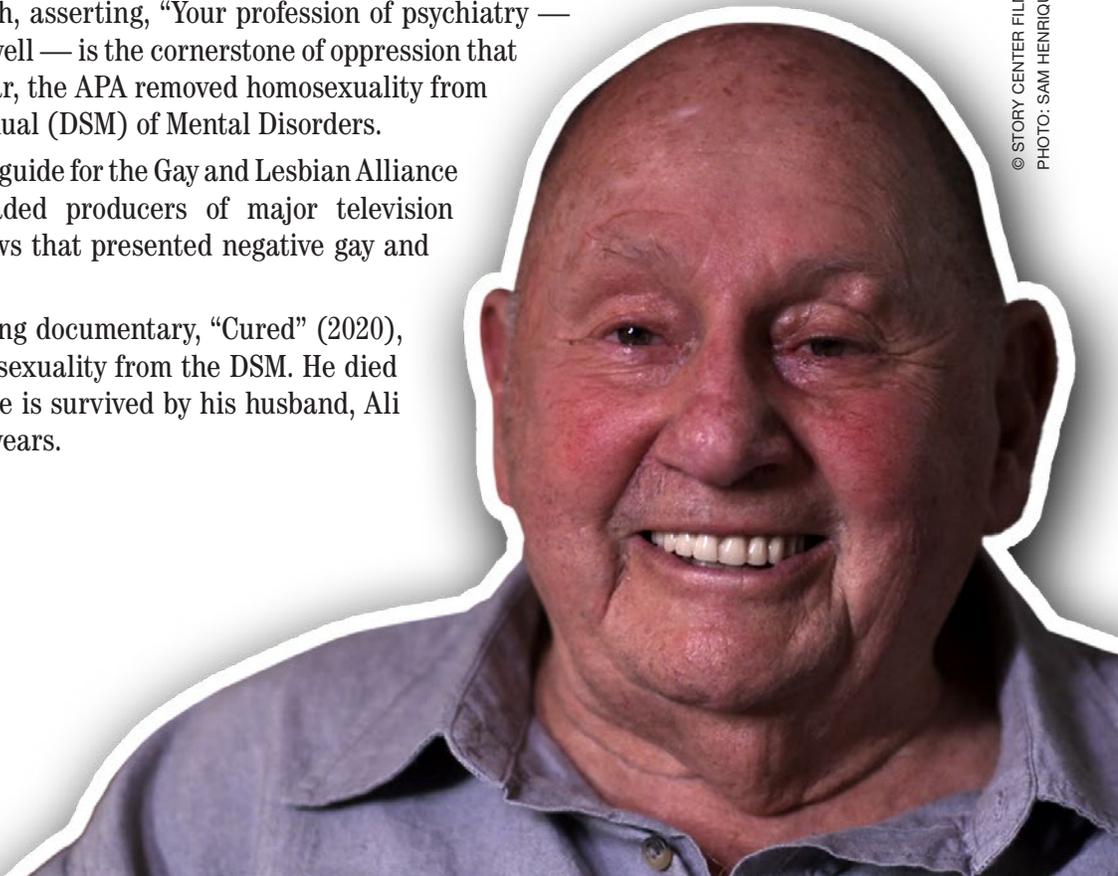
Gold appears in the award-winning documentary, “Cured” (2020), about the crusade to delist homosexuality from the DSM. He died at age 87, shortly after filming. He is survived by his husband, Ali Akbar. They were together for 17 years.

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# RADCLYFFE HALL

b. August 12, 1880

d. October 7, 1943

## ENGLISH AUTHOR

*“Our love may be faithful even unto death and beyond — yet the world will call it unclean.”*

**Her 1928 novel, “The Well of Loneliness,” laid the groundwork for lesbian fiction.**

Radclyffe Hall was a British author best known for “The Well of Loneliness” (1928), one of the most significant novels about lesbian love. Though it was not sexually explicit, its publisher was tried for obscenity.

Marguerite Antonia Radclyffe-Hall was born in Bournemouth, England. Her father was a wealthy philanderer who left when she was a toddler. She despised her mother, who persistently reminded Hall that she had been unwanted and unadoptable.

Hall attended King’s College in London for a year, then studied in Germany. At age 21, she inherited a fortune from her paternal grandfather and began living on her own terms. She spent her young adulthood traveling, writing and pursuing relationships with women. A self-described “congenital invert,” a sexology term of the era for a lesbian born with male traits, Hall took to smoking, swearing and wearing tailored masculine clothing.

At age 26, Hall published her first book of poems. A year later, in 1907, she met the first of her two longtime loves, Mabel Batten, an aristocrat nearly twice Hall’s age. Hall’s second book of poetry, published in 1908, contains her earliest references to homosexuality. During this period, Hall began using the first name John, which she continued for the rest of her life.

Hall and Batten lived together until Batten’s death in 1916, although Hall started an affair with Batten’s cousin, Lady Troubridge, a renowned sculptor, the year before. Hall and Troubridge lived as a “married” couple until Hall’s death 28 years later. The pair developed an interest in the subject of lesbianism and their open defense of it influenced Hall’s subsequent work.

All told, Hall wrote five volumes of poetry and eight novels. Her first novel, “The Forge” (1924), about a heterosexual couple, closely reflected her life with Troubridge. Hall’s 1926 novel, “Adams Breed,” about a disillusioned waiter, won the Prix Fémina and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction.

Published in 1928, Hall’s famous, largely autobiographical lesbian love story, “The Well of Loneliness,” drew instant outrage and interest. The book’s main protagonist is a sexual invert named Stephen. The book was initially banned, and copies were burned. Its publisher was charged under English obscenity laws, and Hall figured prominently in the trial. Ultimately, however, by the time the author died, the novel sold more than a million copies and was translated into 11 languages.

In 1930 Hall received the Gold Medal of the Eichelberger Humane Award. Decades later, she was named 16th on The Pink Paper’s list of 500 lesbian and gay heroes.

Hall died of cancer at age 63. She is buried near Mabel Batten in Highgate Cemetery, London.

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# BELL HOOKS

b. September 25, 1952

d. December 15, 2021

# AUTHOR & FEMINIST

**An influential author and feminist, hooks explored the intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality.**

*“I will not have my life narrowed down. I will not bow down ... to someone else’s ignorance.”*

Bell Hooks was a Black feminist writer and social critic who helped pave the way for the study of intersectionality: how race, gender, class and sexuality form overlapping systems of discrimination. The author of 30 books, hooks is best known for her powerful critiques of patriarchy, sexism and racism.

Hooks, née Gloria Jean Watkins, was born in the small, segregated town of Hopkinsville, Kentucky, the daughter of a maid and a janitor. She attended public school and received a bachelor’s degree in English from Stanford University in 1973. She earned her master’s degree in English from the University of Wisconsin-Madison three years later.

Hooks taught English at the University of Southern California for three years. Around this time, she adopted the pen name bell hooks, after her maternal great-grandmother. She intentionally uncapitalized it to focus attention on her work, rather than herself.

In 1981, while studying for her doctorate in English at the University of California, Santa Cruz, hooks published her influential work “Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism.” She finished her Ph.D. and, for the next decade, taught English and Afro-American Studies at various colleges universities. In 1984 she published “Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center,” a critique of racism in the white feminist community.

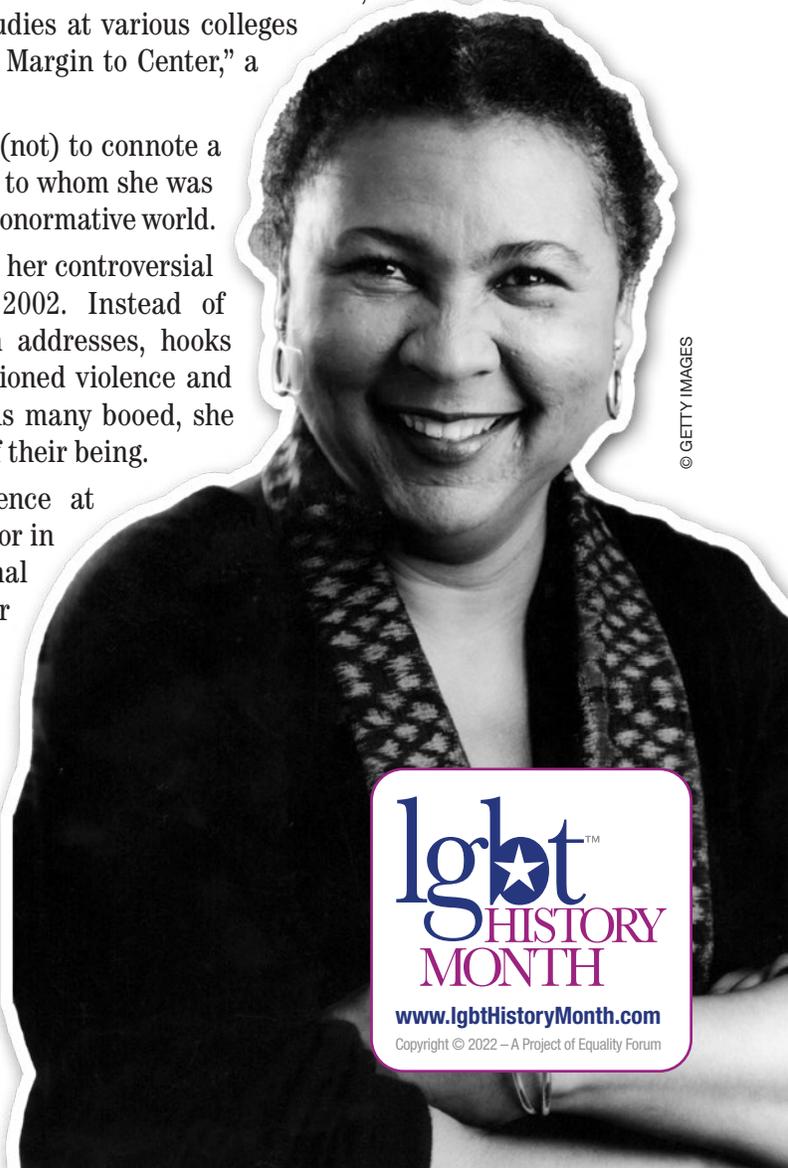
Hooks identified as “queer-pas-gay,” using the French “pas” (not) to connote a more unbound identity. She saw her queerness as less about to whom she was attracted and more about creating space for herself in a heteronormative world.

In addition to her large body of work, hooks is also known for her controversial commencement speech at Southwestern University in 2002. Instead of conforming with the traditional, optimistic spirit of such addresses, hooks used the occasion to condemn prejudice, government-sanctioned violence and oppression, and the pitfalls of capitalism and patriarchy. As many booed, she instructed the students to “realize the essential goodness” of their being.

During the 2000s, hooks served as a scholar in residence at The New School. In 2004 she became a distinguished professor in residence at Berea College, the first integrated co-educational college in the South. Berea established the bell hooks center in 2014.

Throughout her life, hooks received many nominations and awards, most notably The American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation (1991) and the Lila Wallace Reader’s Digest Writer’s Award (1994). The Atlantic Monthly called her “one of our nation’s leading public intellectuals.”

Hooks moved back to her home state in 2008. She was inducted into Kentucky’s Writers Hall of Fame in 2018. She died of kidney failure at age 69.



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# JAZZ JENNINGS

b. October 6, 2000

## TRANSGENDER YOUTH ACTIVIST

*“No matter what your differences are, you have to embrace them and be proud of the way you are.”*

**Her public childhood and lifelong activism provide a model of trans pride for youth worldwide.**

One of the youngest publicly documented transgender children, Jazz Jennings is a television star, a social media personality, an author and a lifelong LGBTQ activist. She made her groundbreaking television debut at the age of 6 and continues to generate global awareness and acceptance of trans youth.

Assigned male at birth, Jennings was raised in South Florida. She was diagnosed with gender dysphoria at age 4 and began her transition at 5. “Ever since I could form coherent thoughts, I knew I was a girl trapped inside a boy’s body,” she says. Her parents supported her unconditionally.

As a child, Jennings attended Camp Aranu’itiq, the first summer camp for transgender youth. She completed her high school education in 2019 and was accepted to Harvard University but deferred her admission.

In 2006 Jennings appeared for the first time on television in an interview with Barbara Walters on “20/20.” She subsequently guested on the “The Rosie Show.” At age 11, Jennings sat down with Oprah Winfrey for the television documentary, “I Am Jazz: A Family in Transition.”

Jennings’s public childhood highlighted the triumphs and challenges of growing up transgender. She and her parents fought for her right to play on the girls’ soccer team, eventually securing a rule change from the U.S. Soccer Federation (USSF) that made it possible for her and other trans athletes to play on the team matching their gender identity. The Jenningses founded the Transkids Purple Rainbow Foundation to help transgender children around the world, and later, Jazz founded Rainbow Purple Tails, a fundraising organization for trans youth.

At age 13, Jennings co-wrote an educational children’s book about trans childhood. The following year, she became a spokesperson for the skincare company Clean & Clear and began modeling. When she turned 15, Jennings was given her own TLC reality television series, “I Am Jazz” (2015-present). The same year, she published a book aimed at adults, “Being Jazz: My Life as a (Transgender) Teen.”

Jennings has been honored by numerous publications and organizations. Among them, TIME magazine named her one of the 25 Most Influential Teens of 2014, the Advocate named her to its list of 40 Under 40, and she became the youngest person ever to appear on OUT magazine’s Out 100 list. In 2017 a collectible Jazz doll was created.

Beyond reality TV, Jennings has voiced multiple cartoon characters, starred in the short film “Denim” and pursued other acting opportunities. She was readmitted to Harvard University in 2022.



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# MONDAIRE JONES

b. May 18, 1987

## FIRST OUT BLACK CONGRESSMAN

*“Growing up poor, Black, and gay, I never imagined someone like me could run for Congress, let alone win.”*

**As the first out Black Congressman, Mondaire Jones uses his platform to champion equality and diversity.**

Mondaire Jones became the country’s first out gay Black congressman on January 3, 2021, at the age of 33. He serves as the U.S. representative of New York’s 17th District, which comprises Westchester and Rockland counties.

Jones grew up in Spring Valley, New York, the son of a single mother who worked multiple jobs and relied on food stamps to support the family. Jones attended public high school, where he restarted the school’s chapter of the NAACP. By age 19, he was serving on the NAACP’s National Board of Directors.

Jones earned his bachelor’s degree from Stanford University in 2009 and came out in 2012. He interned in the U.S. Department of Justice during the Obama administration and received his Juris Doctor from Harvard Law in 2013. He joined the law firm of Davis Polk & Wardwell in West Chester County, New York, and clerked for the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

Jones ran for Congress against the Democratic incumbent in 2020, defeating her and a half dozen other candidates in the primary. He received 42% of the vote and went on to defeat his Republican opponent in the general election. With his win, Jones secured his place in history as the first out gay Black member of Congress, alongside U.S. Representative Ritchie Torres, who identifies as Afro-Latinx.

In his first year in office, Jones sued former President Trump and the Postmaster General, Louis DeJoy, for stymieing the use of mail-in ballots. He voted to impeach Donald Trump and halted the deportation of Paul Pierrilus, the last scheduled deportee under the Trump administration. Pierrilus, who was an undocumented immigrant but raised in America, would have been “returned” to a country in which he never lived.

Among other proposed laws, Jones voted for the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act and the Equality Act, which would strengthen protections against gender-identity and sexual-orientation discrimination. He supports the Green New Deal, Medicare for All, tuition-free public colleges and universities, an end to partisan gerrymandering, automatic voter registration and a host of other progressive initiatives.

Jones cofounded the nonprofit Rising Leaders, Inc., an organization that mentors underprivileged middle schoolers. In addition to the NAACP, he has served on a variety of boards, including Yonkers Partners in Education and the Civil Liberties Union, and he has worked pro bono for The Legal Aid Society.

In 2020 Queerty magazine named him one of its 50 honorees for his work toward equality.

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# STEPHEN LACHS

b. September 1939

## WORLD'S FIRST OUT JUDGE

*“Now, if a gay judge is appointed, people barely bat an eye ... at the time, this was big news.”*

**He made history in 1979 as the world's first openly gay judge.**

Stephen Lachs is an American attorney and LGBTQ activist who became the world's first out judge, serving on the Los Angeles County Superior Court.

Lachs was born in New York and moved with his family to California when he was 16. He attended the University of California, Los Angeles, where he earned his bachelor's degree in 1960 and his law degree in 1963.

After graduation, Lachs worked for the California Department of Insurance. He subsequently worked for the Los Angeles public defender and in general-practice law.

Although Lachs's closest friends knew he was gay, his family and colleagues were unaware. He did not broadly disclose his sexual orientation until his early 30s, when

he was invited to a meeting of law students at the L.A. Gay Community Services Center (now the L.A. LGBT Center). In the early 1970s, coming out could have cost Lachs his career and his apartment, but the experience that night inspired him. The group had never met a gay lawyer. Lachs got involved with the center, and before long, he was serving on its board.

In 1975 Lachs was elected as a commissioner to the Los Angeles County Superior Court.

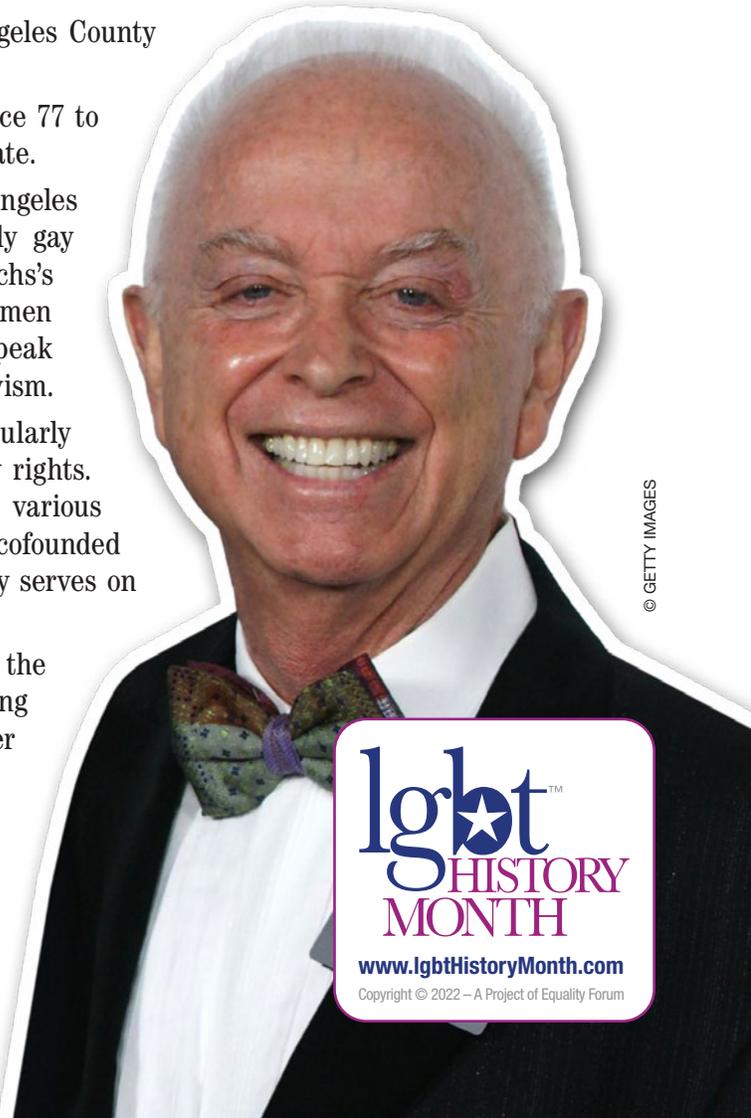
A year later, he and 11 other professional men formed Influence 77 to fight the potential election of a homophobic city council candidate.

In 1979 Governor Jerry Brown appointed Lachs to the Los Angeles County Superior Court, making him the world's first openly gay judge. The publicity surrounding the appointment became Lachs's international outing. He received letters of praise from gay men around the globe. Invitations to appear in the media and to speak at events poured in, and the experience helped cement his activism.

Lachs had always been active in Jewish organizations, particularly in fundraising, and he used those skills in the service of gay rights. He chaired the AIDS Project Los Angeles and worked with various organizations to help stem the epidemic. In the early '90s, he cofounded the International Association of LGBTQ+ Judges. He currently serves on the board of the Desert AIDS Project.

Lachs remained a superior court judge until he retired from the bench in 1999. Thereafter, he practiced law privately, handling all kinds of cases, including two matters involving the singer Michael Jackson.

Lachs lives in California with his husband, Michael Ruvo, whom he met during a speaking engagement. They have been together for 41 years.



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# LAWRENCE OF ARABIA

b. August 16, 1888

d. May 19, 1935

BRITISH  
MILITARY  
OFFICER

*“Truly, for some men nothing is written unless they write it.”*

T. E. Lawrence, “Lawrence of Arabia,” was a British archeologist, Army colonel and intelligence officer famous for helping the Arabs win key victories over the Ottoman Turks during the First World War.

Born in Wales, Lawrence was the second of five illegitimate sons. His unmarried parents and their boys settled in Oxford, England, where Lawrence attended university and graduated with high honors.

**He helped Arab rebels win key victories over the Ottoman Turks during WWI.**

As a student, Lawrence spent the summer of 1909 walking nearly a thousand miles through Syria and Palestine, surveying castles. Though he was robbed and beaten, his passion for Arabian culture only deepened.

Lawrence returned to Syria the following year for an archeological expedition. During this time, he reportedly formed a romantic relationship with an Arab water boy who became his assistant and traveling companion.

When World War I broke out, Lawrence took a map-making job with the government. By 1914 he was serving as a British Army intelligence officer in Cairo, where he developed a handbook on the Turkish Army.

In 1916 the military dispatched Lawrence as a liaison officer and coalition builder to aid Prince Faisal with the Arab Revolt. Lacking formal military training, Lawrence daringly commanded guerilla attacks and sabotaged more than 75 bridges to undermine the Turkish forces. In 1917 he led Arab rebels hundreds of miles to capture the strategic port of Aqaba, contributing to the liberation of Arabia.

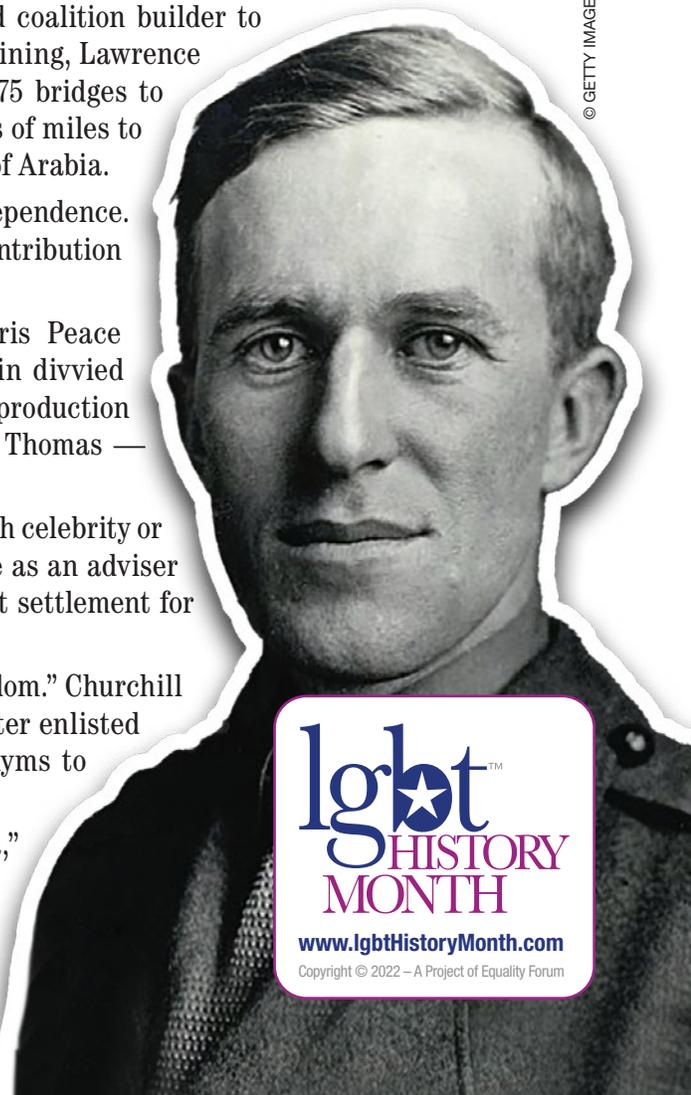
After the war, Lawrence persistently supported Arab independence. Disillusioned by the region’s divisiveness and his own country’s contribution to it, he refused to accept military medals from King George V.

In 1919, wearing Arabian robes, Lawrence traveled to the Paris Peace Conference as Prince Faisal’s translator. When France and Britain divvied up Arabia, Lawrence was devastated. The same year, a multimedia production about his exploits — created by the American Journalist Lowell Thomas — premiered at the Royal Opera House. It made Lawrence a legend.

Bitter over the Paris agreement, Lawrence wanted nothing to do with celebrity or government. Eventually, Winston Churchill convinced him to serve as an adviser to the Middle East Department, where they negotiated a more just settlement for the Arabs in 1921.

In 1926, Lawrence published his war memoir, “Seven Pillars of Wisdom.” Churchill praised it as “one of the greatest books ever written.” Lawrence later enlisted in the Royal Air Force and the Royal Tank Corps under pseudonyms to protect his privacy. He died in a motorcycle accident at age 47.

Based on Lawrence’s book, the epic film, “Lawrence of Arabia,” premiered in 1962. It is regarded as one of the most important works in cinematic history.



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# LANCE LOUD

b. June 26, 1951

d. December 22, 2001

## FIRST OUT REALITY STAR

*“It was a pleasure to be a gay eyesore.”*

**His appearance as a groundbreaking out gay man in the 1973 PBS documentary series about his family made him a celebrity.**

Alanson Russell “Lance” Loud was a television celebrity, a rock singer and a writer. His participation in the groundbreaking 1973 PBS documentary series, “An American Family,” made him the first out gay reality TV star — before the genre had a name and before openly gay men appeared on air.

Loud was born in 1951 and grew up with his four siblings in Santa Barbara, California. As a child, he envisioned himself as an artist and a rebel. At age 13, he wrote a letter to his idol, Andy Warhol. To everyone’s surprise, Warhol wrote back, beginning a lifelong correspondence with Loud. Warhol’s outrageousness influenced Loud’s own persona.

Loud entered the public eye as the eldest child of an upper-middle-class California family whose everyday lives were chronicled, cinema-verité style, in an experimental PBS series, “An American Family.” The 12-part documentary ran from January through March 1973 and drew 10 million viewers.

Now considered the first reality show on U.S. television, “An American Family” garnered harsh criticism and considerable praise for challenging the conventional depiction of “normal” family life. Loud’s parents argued about divorce and Lance came out to them at a time when homosexuality was largely concealed and entirely absent from primetime TV. Reviled by the media, Loud, with his bold conviction to live life on his own terms, captivated audiences. He quickly became an inspiration and a hero to legions of young people — both gay and straight — nationwide.

During the show’s filming, Loud moved to New York City to resurrect a new wave band he founded in Santa Barbara with a female friend. Fronted by Loud, the Mumps cultivated a loyal following, regularly selling out at popular clubs like CBGB and Max’s Kansas City. They were often billed with soon-to-be-famous artists like the Ramones, the Talking Heads and Blondie. In 1980, after failing to find a record label, the Mumps disbanded.

Loud moved back to California and launched a new career as a music and pop-culture writer. Over the next two decades, he contributed to a variety of magazines, including Interview, Details and Vanity Fair. He also wrote a regular column for The Advocate about his life as a gay celebrity.

Loud struggled with drug abuse and died of liver failure at age 50 from hepatitis C and HIV co-infection. Major media outlets, including The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times and PBS published obituaries and tributes. TIME magazine remembered him famously remarking, “Television ate my family.”



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# JAMES MERRILL PULITZER-WINNING POET

b. March 3, 1926

d. February 6, 1995

**His work received every major award for American poetry, including the Pulitzer Prize.**

*“Let the mind be ...  
a landing strip for sacred visitations.”*

James Ingram Merrill was a great 20th-century literary figure. Celebrated for his poetry — including collections like “Divine Comedies” and the three volumes constituting his epic poem, “The Changing Light at Sandover” — his work earned every major American poetry award including the Pulitzer Prize.

The son of Charles E. Merrill, founding partner of Merrill Lynch Investment Group, Merrill enjoyed an exceptionally privileged New York City upbringing. He showed literary promise as a child, writing his first poem at age 8. Merrill’s parents divorced

when he was 13, the impact of which featured in his writing. While attending Amherst College, he was drafted into the U.S. Army and served for eight months at the end of World War II. He graduated from Amherst summa cum laude in 1947.

Merrill’s earliest book, “First Poems,” published in 1951, earned critical acclaim. In 1955 he moved to Stonington, Connecticut, sharing a home with his partner, David Jackson. For two decades, the couple spent part of each year in Athens, Greece, a location that inspired much of Merrill’s work.

A master of polished, formal lyrical poetry, Merrill frequently drew inspiration from his personal life and past experiences. His work garnered praise for its elegance, wit and wordplay.

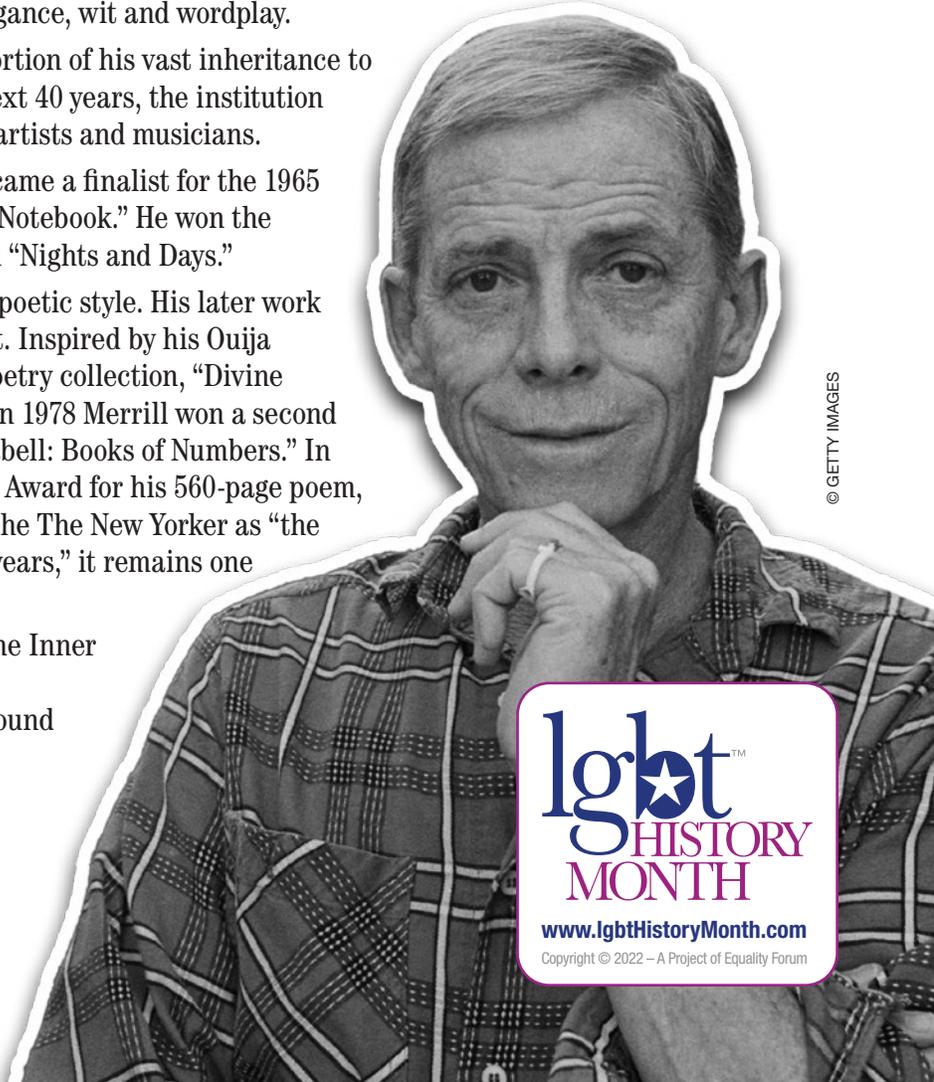
After his father’s death in 1956, Merrill used a portion of his vast inheritance to start the Ingram Merrill Foundation. Over the next 40 years, the institution awarded millions of dollars in grants to writers, artists and musicians.

The author of 19 books and two plays, Merrill became a finalist for the 1965 National Book Award for his novel “The (Diblos) Notebook.” He won the award the following year for his poetry collection “Nights and Days.”

As he matured, Merrill adapted a more informal poetic style. His later work reflected his interest in mysticism and the occult. Inspired by his Ouija board sessions with Jackson, Merrill’s seventh poetry collection, “Divine Comedies,” earned him the 1977 Pulitzer Prize. In 1978 Merrill won a second National Book Award for his poetry volume “Mirabell: Books of Numbers.” In 1982 he received the National Book Critics Circle Award for his 560-page poem, “The Changing Light at Sandover.” Described by the *The New Yorker* as “the most ambitious American poem of the past fifty years,” it remains one of the longest ever published.

Merrill’s late poetry, including his collections “The Inner Room” (1988) and the posthumously released, “A Scattering of Salts” (1995), addressed the profound effect of the AIDS crisis on his life.

Merrill died from complications of AIDS. He and Jackson remained partners for 40 years.



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# RUDOLF NUREYEV

b. March 17, 1938

d. January 6, 1993

## INTERNATIONAL BALLET STAR

**He is regarded as the greatest male ballet dancer of his generation.**

*“You live because you dance, you dance as long as you live.”*

Rudolf Nureyev was a Soviet-born ballet star and choreographer, celebrated for his athleticism and charisma. He is widely regarded as the greatest male ballet dancer of his generation.

Born to a poor Tatar Muslim family, Nureyev was raised in the Soviet Republic of Bashkir. When he was 6, his mother smuggled him and his siblings into a ballet performance. The experience kindled his lifelong passion.

Despite his father's disapproval, Nureyev snuck off to ballet classes. At age 17, he was accepted into the prestigious Vaganova Academy (Kirov Ballet School) in Leningrad, under the legendary tutelage of Aleksandr Pushkin. A defiant nonconformist, Nureyev learned English and refused to join the Communist youth organization.

After graduation, Nureyev joined the USSR's preeminent dance company, the Kirov Ballet (now the Mariinsky). He garnered praise for the complex emotionality of his performances and the customizations he made to his costumes. He quickly became a Soviet sensation.

On the Kirov's first tour in Paris in 1961, Nureyev electrified audiences and critics. Although the Soviet security forces (KGB) closely monitored him, he flouted the rules, mingling with foreigners and frequenting the city's gay clubs. When the dance company gathered at the airport to leave for London, officials told Nureyev he must return to Moscow. He refused, evading the KGB and seeking asylum in the West.

After defecting, Nureyev briefly joined a French ballet company before going independent. In 1962 he went to Copenhagen to study with Erik Bruhn, a soloist for the Royal Danish Ballet, whom he greatly admired. The two became lovers and artistic collaborators. With Bruhn, Nureyev solidified his belief that a male dancer deserved the same expressive range as his female counterpart. Nureyev transformed the role of the male dancer from a “lifter” to the ballerina's equal.

Nureyev performed with dozens of renowned companies, including the Royal Ballet of London, where he first danced with Margot Fonteyn, a ballerina with whom he established a long, successful professional partnership. During his career, he worked with more than 40 choreographers on more than a hundred leading roles, many of which were created specifically for him. He was the first and most famous ballet artist to perform with modern dance companies, including Martha Graham.

In the 1980s Nureyev served as chief choreographer and director of the Paris Opera Ballet, creating distinctive versions of classics such as “Swan Lake.” Although he tested positive for HIV in 1984, he continued to work tirelessly until his death.



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# J. PAUL OETKEN

b. October 1, 1965

## FIRST OUT MALE FEDERAL JUDGE

*“Moderation and judicial modesty are crucial characteristics of a judge.”*

**He is the first openly gay man to serve as a federal judge.**

J. Paul Oetken is the judge for the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. He is the first openly gay man to be confirmed as a federal judge.

Oetken grew up in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. His leadership skills and talent for oration began early. When Oetken was in high school, the National Council on Youth Leadership named him “Youth Leader of the Year.” He also won the school’s mock Democratic presidential convention, playing the role of Senator Alan Cranston.

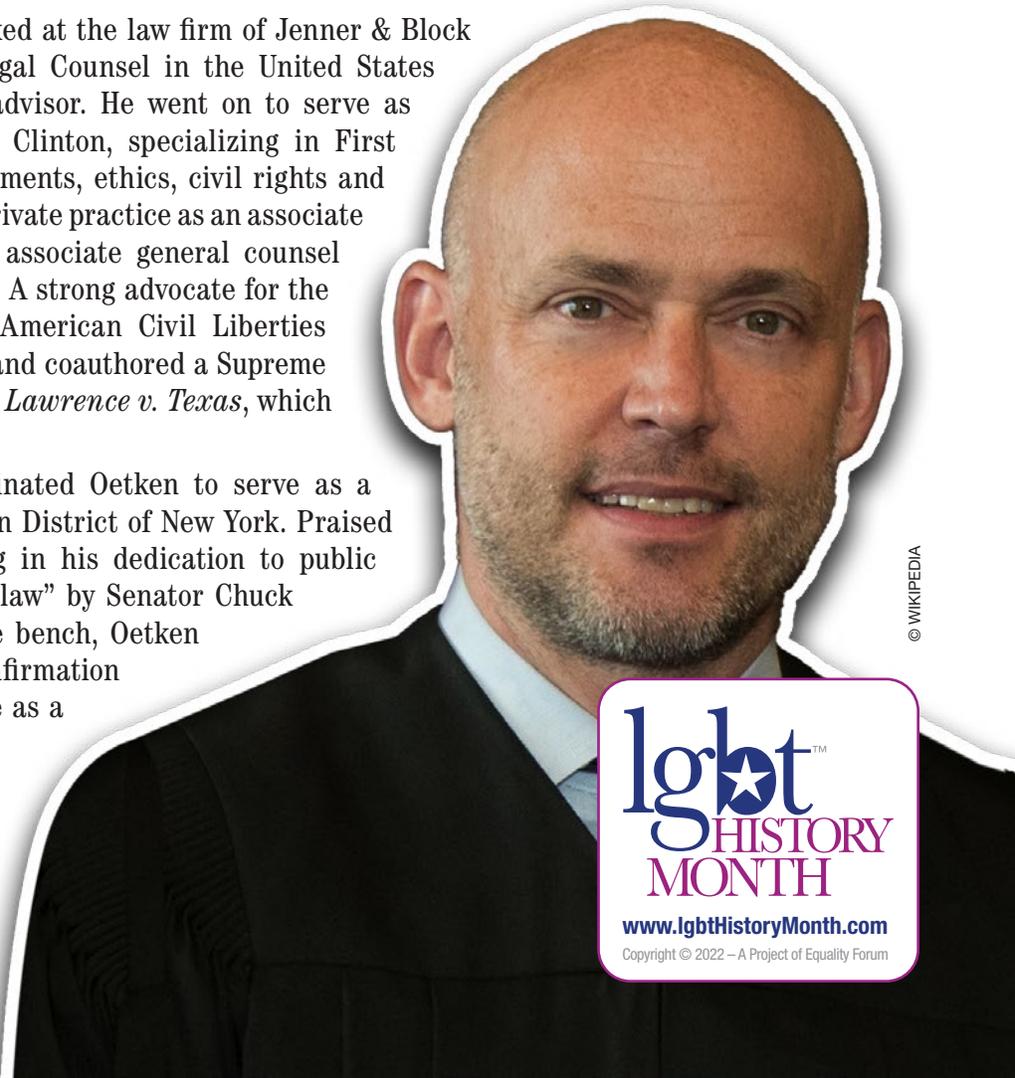
Oetken graduated with distinction from the University of Iowa and earned his law degree from Yale Law School in 1991. At a time when there were few openly gay students, Oetken came out on his résumé as a part of the LGBT Law Students Association at Yale.

After law school, Oetken clerked for three renowned federal judges: Richard Cudahy on the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, Louis Oberdorfer on the District Court for the District of Columbia, and Harry Blackmun on the U.S. Supreme Court. While clerking for Justice Blackmun, Oetken closely watched the confirmation of Deborah Batts, the first openly LGBTQ federal judge. The experience taught him that being openly gay and being a judge were not mutually exclusive. It confirmed his aspiration to one day to join the judiciary.

After his clerkships, Oetken briefly worked at the law firm of Jenner & Block before leaving to join the Office of Legal Counsel in the United States Department of Justice as an attorney-advisor. He went on to serve as an associate counsel to President Bill Clinton, specializing in First Amendment issues, presidential appointments, ethics, civil rights and legal policy. He subsequently worked in private practice as an associate at Debevoise & Plimpton and later as associate general counsel and senior vice president at Cablevision. A strong advocate for the LGBTQ community, he supported the American Civil Liberties Union LGBT Project and Lambda Legal and coauthored a Supreme Court amicus brief in the landmark case *Lawrence v. Texas*, which struck down the state’s sodomy law.

In 2011 President Barack Obama nominated Oetken to serve as a federal judge in the prestigious Southern District of New York. Praised as “brilliant, well rounded, unwavering in his dedication to public service and his commitment to rule of law” by Senator Chuck Schumer, who recommended him to the bench, Oetken was confirmed by a vote of 80-13. The confirmation made him the first out gay man to serve as a federal judge.

Oetken lives with his husband, Makky Pratayot, in Manhattan.



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# AMY SCHNEIDER

b. May 29, 1979

## “JEOPARDY!” CHAMPION

**Her 40-game  
“Jeopardy!” winning  
streak was the second  
longest in history.**

*“The best part for me has been  
being on TV as my true self.”*

Amy Schneider is a “Jeopardy!” champion whose 40-game winning streak was the second longest in the show’s history. The most successful woman contestant ever to compete on “Jeopardy!” and the first transgender person to qualify for the Tournament of Champions, she helped positively influence perceptions of transgender people.

Assigned male at birth, Schneider grew up in Dayton, Ohio, as part of a practicing Catholic family. She didn’t know transgender people existed until she moved to the San Francisco Bay Area, where she recognized her own identity. Then living as a married heterosexual man, Schneider separated from her wife in 2016 and transitioned the following year.

Voted most likely to appear on “Jeopardy!” by her eighth-grade class, Schneider always dreamed of being a contestant. She spent more than a decade auditioning unsuccessfully. She was chosen only after she decided to live openly. “I do think part of the reason I finally did get selected was that ... I was living my true identity,” Schneider said. “Looking back, I realized that I was hiding so much of myself. I was a very closed-off person before that.”

Taking a leave of absence from her job as a software engineer, Schneider began her historic run on “Jeopardy!” in November 2021. Before the show, she decided to speak in her natural register rather than effect a more “feminine voice.” She hoped the decision would help other transgender people feel more comfortable being themselves.

Initially anxious about her open authenticity, Schneider found that her wit, warmth and confidence quickly endeared her to wide audience, including an older, more conservative demographic who were likely seeing an openly transgender person for the first time on national television. She received many positive messages from LGBTQ fans, including one person who said that because of Schneider’s presence, their grandfather for the first time used the correct pronouns for a transgender person.

Seemingly unflappable in her signature pearls — a gift from her girlfriend, Genevieve Davis — Schneider’s combination of accuracy, speed and traditional strategy secured her an undefeated 40-episode run. She ended the competition in January 2022, winning \$1.3 million. That same month, she received a GLAAD Special Recognition Award for her performance on the show. On March 31, 2022, as part of transgender day of visibility, she was invited to the White House. She used the occasion to speak out against recent bills that negatively affect the transgender community.

Schneider and her fiancé have been engaged since early 2022. The couple lives in Oakland, California.



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# AMY WALTER

b. October 19, 1969

# POLITICAL ANALYST

*“I knew I didn’t want to go into pure partisan politics, so covering it and analyzing it was very much up my alley.”*

**She is an expert analyst and a national editor and publisher covering Washington politics.**

Amy Walter is the publisher and editor in chief of “The Cook Political Report with Amy Walter,” a highly respected nonpartisan newsletter that analyzes elections and campaigns. An expert covering Washington politics for more than 25 years, Walter regularly provides analysis on NBC’s “Meet the Press,” CBS’s “Face the Nation,” “Fox News Sunday” with Chris Wallace, “PBS NewsHour” and other national media outlets.

Walter was born in Virginia and graduated summa cum laude with a degree in government from Colby College. She moved to Washington, D.C., and interned for the Women’s Campaign Fund, working successfully to elect females to Congress. When she realized she was more interested in political coverage and analysis than partisan politics, Walter joined “The Cook Political Report,” covering the House of Representatives. As

a senior editor there, she developed a reputation for objective, astute political commentary. Around this time, she married her girlfriend, Kathryn Hamm, even though same-sex marriage was not yet recognized in Virginia.

Walter left the “The Cook Political Report” in 2006 to become editor in chief of National Journal’s “Hotline,” Washington’s premier daily briefing on American politics, and served as an on-air analyst for major media outlets. Known for her authoritative election coverage, she was a member of CNN’s Emmy Award-winning 2006 election-night team. Walter subsequently served as political director of ABC, beginning in 2010, before returning to “The Cook Political Report” in 2013 as editor in chief. She hosted “Politics with Amy Walter” on WNYC public radio’s “The Takeaway” from 2017 to 2021.

Respected for her insights by Democrats and Republicans alike, Walter received the Washington Post’s Crystal Ball Award for her spot-on political forecasting. George magazine named her one of the most powerful people in politics, and Washingtonian magazine named her one of the “Top 50 Journalists.” In 2021 Washingtonian listed Walter among Washington’s most powerful women. In addition to her on-air commentary, she is frequently quoted as an elections expert in The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, The New York Times and other leading publications.

Walter was an inaugural fellow at the Institute of Politics at the University of Chicago and serves on its Board of Advisors. She is an emeritus member of the Board of Trustees at Colby College, where she received an honorary doctorate in 2017.

Walter married her wife again legally in 2013. The couple lives in Washington, D.C., with their son.

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# ALICE WU

b. April 21, 1970

# FILM DIRECTOR

*“I take a character who would never think she’d be a main character ... I make her front and center.”*

**Her film “Saving Face” paved the way for Asian-American and LGBTQ cinema.**

Alice Wu is a director and screenwriter. Her landmark film, “Saving Face” (2004), one of the first mainstream movies centered on Chinese-American and lesbian characters, paved the way for Asian-American and LGBTQ cinema.

Born to Taiwanese immigrant parents, Wu grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area. She studied computer science at MIT and Stanford University. At age 19, she came out to her mother, speaking in Mandarin, the family’s native language. Her mother reacted harshly, vowing never to see her daughter again, before reaching out two years later to reconcile. Wu’s experience coming out and the subject of familial love and traditional expectations inspired the screenplay for “Saving Face.”

After graduation, Wu worked as a software engineer for Microsoft. In her late 20s, after attempting to write a novel about her relationship with her mother, Wu began taking night classes in screenwriting. In three days, she wrote the first draft of “Saving Face,” a romantic comedy about a closeted Asian-American lesbian surgeon who discovers her 48-year-old mother is pregnant out of wedlock. Although Wu started writing purely for self-expression, she realized her screenplay had potential. Her professor suggested Wu try to option it but told her it would likely be produced with straight or white characters. Wu decided her only chance to make the film as intended was to quit her job and try to direct it herself.

Wu left Microsoft and moved to New York City. She gave herself five years to make the movie. As predicted, major studios questioned her vision, wanting to whitewash and “straightwash” the project, but Wu pressed on.

Released in 2005, “Saving Face” received a series of nominations and film festival awards. After the movie’s world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival, Sony Pictures Classics acquired it for distribution. Praised for its wry humor and relatability, the film played worldwide. It has become a queer classic and influenced a generation of Asian-American and LGBTQ actors and directors.

In 2016, after dabbling unsuccessfully in additional projects and leaving the film industry for a time to take care of her sick mother, Wu began outlining the screenplay for what would become “The Half Of It.”

Based loosely on Wu’s teenage friendships, the coming-of-age dramatic comedy also features a queer Asian-American lead. Netflix released “The Half Of It” in 2020. It won Best Narrative Feature at the 2020 Tribeca Film Festival and an Independent Spirit Award for Best Screenplay in 2021.

Shortly after the film’s release, Queerty magazine named Wu to its list of 50 LGBTQ heroes.



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