

JACKIE “MOMS” MABLEY

b. March 19, 1894

d. May 23, 1975

COMEDIAN

“The good old days. I was there. Where was they?”

She was the first comedian to incorporate lesbian stand-up routines into her act.

Born Loretta Mary Aiken, Jackie “Moms” Mabley was one of the first, most successful women to work in comedy. Mabley appeared on popular television variety shows like “The Ed Sullivan Show” and “The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour.” A veteran of the African-American vaudeville tradition known as the Chitlin’ Circuit, the comedian overcame a tragic childhood (her parents were killed and she was raped) to become one of the raunchiest, most beloved comedians of her generation.

Known for wearing androgynous clothing, and later her signature housedress and floppy hat, she was the first comedian to incorporate lesbian stand-up routines into her act. She recorded more than 20 comedy albums and appeared in several films, TV shows and in clubs around the country. At one point, Mabley was the highest-paid comedian of

the time, earning more than \$10,000 a week at the famed Apollo Theater in Harlem. She regularly tackled controversial material often deemed too edgy for many mainstream audiences. She helped break down color and gender barriers for the next generation of comedians.

When Mabley was 75 years old, she became the oldest living person ever to have a Top 40 hit in the United States with her cover of “Abraham, Martin and John.”

Mabley was the mother of six children, two of whom she gave up for adoption when she was still a teenager. She is the subject of the Emmy-nominated HBO documentary “Whoopi Goldberg Presents Moms Mabley,” which explores her life, comedy and sexuality.



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