

SAMIRA WILEY

EMMY-WINNING ACTOR

b. April 15, 1987

“There’s some little girl out there watching [me] who can think differently about herself.”

Samira Wiley is an Emmy Award-winning actor and activist best known for her roles as Poussey Washington in “Orange Is the New Black” and Moira in “The Handmaid’s Tale.”

Wiley was born and raised in Washington, D.C. She credits her parents for her social conscience and moral compass. As preachers in a Baptist church, they were among the first to perform same-sex marriages, despite losing half their congregation because of it. Her parents were clear about taking a social stand, especially in the seat of federal government. Wiley came out to them when she was about 20.

She is best recognized for her roles in the TV series “Orange Is the New Black” and “The Handmaid’s Tale.”

Wiley was interested in acting as a child. As she neared graduation from her performing arts high school, she auditioned for multiple acting conservatories and was rejected by all of them. After Wiley attended one semester at Temple University, her mother convinced her to give Juilliard another try. She auditioned again and was accepted.

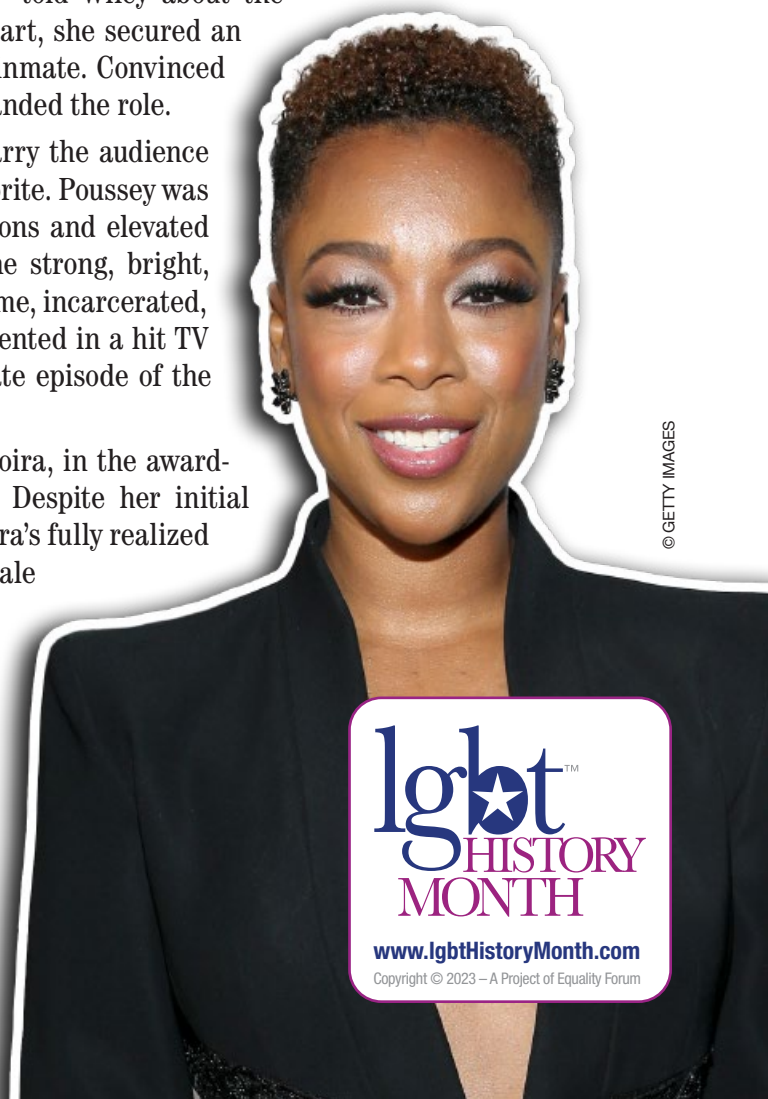
At Juilliard, a friend and writer for a new Netflix series, “Orange Is the New Black,” told Wiley about the project. When Wiley discovered that a classmate had won a part, she secured an audition for the role of Poussey Washington, a lesbian prison inmate. Convinced the character resided in her somewhere, Wiley determinedly landed the role.

Praised for her powerful on-screen presence and ability to carry the audience through the full spectrum of emotions, Wiley became a fan favorite. Poussey was written as a recurring character in the show’s first two seasons and elevated to a main character in season three. Wiley’s portrayal of the strong, bright, sensitive Poussey has inspired countless Black, queer, low-income, incarcerated, or otherwise marginalized women who saw themselves represented in a hit TV series for the first time. The character died in the penultimate episode of the show’s fourth season.

Wiley went on to star as another courageous gay character, Moira, in the award-winning dystopian television series “The Handmaid’s Tale.” Despite her initial concerns about typecasting, Wiley took the role because of Moira’s fully realized character and the importance of strong queer Black female representation. Her widely praised performance earned her an Emmy Award for Best Supporting Actress.

Wiley has followed in her parents’ activist footsteps. The Human Rights Campaign presented her with a Visibility Award in 2015, and she has worked as a spokesperson for GLAAD. Her active social media presence affirms Black, LGBTQ, and gender-nonconforming youth.

In 2017 Wiley married Lauren Morelli, a writer for “Orange Is the New Black.” They have one child.



lgbt[™]
HISTORY
MONTH

www.lgbtHistoryMonth.com
Copyright © 2023 – A Project of Equality Forum