

ABILLY JONES-HENNIN

b. March 21, 1942

d. January 19, 2024

LGBTQ
ACTIVIST

“I am [an] activist till death do I part. Once it gets in your blood, you may step back, but you can't take it away.”

He was a pioneering LGBTQ+ activist and founder of the first organization for Black gays and lesbians.

ABilly Jones-Hennin was a pioneering LGBTQ+ activist and founder of the first organization for Black gays and lesbians. He helped organize the first national march on Washington for gay and lesbian rights.

Born Lannie Bess in Antigua, he was adopted at the age of 3 by American civil rights activists and raised as Allen Billy Scott Jones in Virginia. Immersed in activism from an early age, he participated in the civil rights movement and the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. He served in the Marines before earning a degree in business and accounting from Virginia State University in 1967 and a master's degree in social work from Howard University in 1990.

After graduating from Virginia State, Jones-Hennin's father encouraged him to marry and raise a family. He married a woman and had three children. They separated seven years later but remained lifelong friends and co-parents. Around this time, Jones-Hennin came out as bisexual.

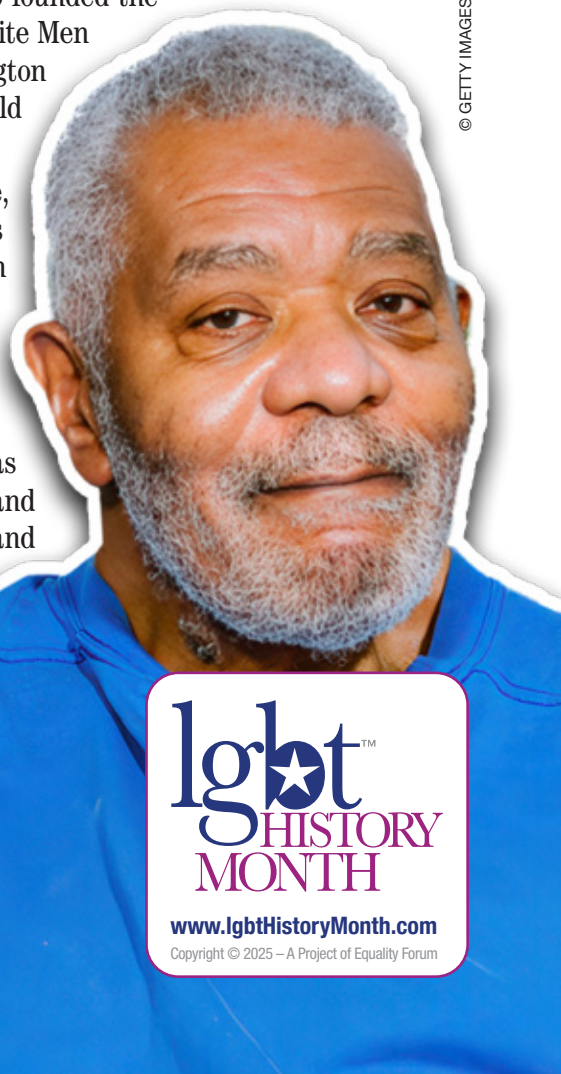
He relocated to the Washington, D.C., area and became actively involved in LGBTQ+ advocacy. Noting the lack of Black representation, he cofounded the D.C. Coalition of Black Gays in 1978 (later renamed the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays)—the first national Black LGBTQ+ advocacy group. He also founded the Gay Married Men's Association and cofounded the D.C. chapter of Black and White Men Together. In 1979, he coordinated logistics for the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights and helped organize the First National Third World Lesbian and Gay Conference at Howard University.

During the 1980s, Jones-Hennin focused on HIV/AIDS education and health care, working with the Whitman-Walker Clinic. He served as director of minority affairs for the National AIDS Network and managed federal and state HIV/AIDS research projects.

In 1985, Jones-Hennin received a one-year prison sentence stemming from drug addiction. He used the experience to advocate for those struggling with substance use disorder. After his release, he returned to Washington, where he led HIV/AIDS prevention efforts at Whitman-Walker Health. He served again as the minority affairs director of the National AIDS Network and held research and advisory roles at Macro International, all while continuing to lead antiracist and other political organizations. When he was diagnosed with spinal stenosis in the 1990s, he included disability rights in his activism.

In 2007, the Rainbow History Project recognized Jones-Hennin as a Community Pioneer. He married his longtime partner, Chris Hennin, in 2014. They raised a blended family with five children between them.

Jones-Hennin died at home in Mexico from complications of Parkinson's disease and spinal stenosis.



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