

18th Annual Black New England Conference: Living Out Loud: The Intersectionality of Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation Black LGBTQ Trailblazers Who Made History

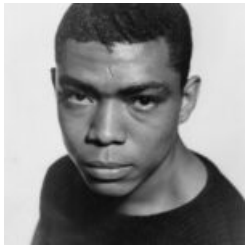


Audre Lorde (born Audrey Geraldine Lorde; February 18, 1934 – November 17, 1992) was an American writer, professor, philosopher, intersectional feminist, poet and civil rights activist. She was a self-described "Black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, mother, warrior, poet" who dedicated her life and talents to confronting different forms of injustice, as she believed there could be "no hierarchy of oppressions" among "those who share the goals of liberation and a workable future for our children." As a poet, she is well known for technical mastery and emotional expression, as well as her poems that express anger and outrage at civil and social injustices she observed throughout her life. As a spoken word artist, her delivery has been called powerful, melodic, and intense by the Poetry Foundation. Her poems and prose largely deal with issues related to civil rights, feminism, lesbianism, illness, disability, and the exploration of Black female identity.



James Arthur Baldwin (né Jones; August 2, 1924 – December 1, 1987) was an American writer and civil rights activist who garnered acclaim for his essays, novels, plays, and poems. His 1953 novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* has been ranked by *TIME* magazine as one of the top 100 English-language novels. His 1955 essay collection *Notes of a Native Son* helped establish his reputation as a voice for human equality. Baldwin was an influential public figure and orator, especially during the civil rights movement in the United States. Baldwin's fiction posed fundamental personal questions and dilemmas

amid complex social and psychological pressures. Themes of masculinity, sexuality, race, and class intertwine to create intricate narratives that influenced both the civil rights movement and the gay liberation movement in mid-twentieth century America. Baldwin's protagonists are often, but not exclusively African American; gay and bisexual men feature prominently in his work (as in his 1956 novel *Giovanni's Room*). His characters typically face internal and external obstacles in their search for self- and social acceptance.



Alvin Ailey Jr. (January 5, 1931 – December 1, 1989) was an American dancer, director, choreographer, and activist who founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT). He created AAADT and its affiliated Alvin Ailey American Dance Center (later Ailey School) as havens for nurturing Black artists and expressing the universality of the African-American experience through dance. Ailey's work fused theater, modern dance, ballet, and jazz with Black vernacular, creating hope-fueled choreography that continues to spread global awareness of Black life in America. Ailey's choreographic masterpiece *Revelations* is recognized as one of the most popular and most performed ballets in the world.



Lorraine Vivian Hansberry (May 19, 1930 – January 12, 1965) was an American playwright and writer. She was the first African-American female author to have a play performed on Broadway. Her best-known work, the play *A Raisin in the Sun*, highlights the lives of Black Americans in Chicago living under racial segregation. The title of the play was taken from the poem "Harlem" by Langston Hughes: "What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?" At the age of 29, she won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award — making her the first African-American dramatist, the fifth woman, and the youngest playwright to do so. Hansberry's family

had struggled against segregation, challenging a restrictive covenant in the 1940 U.S. Supreme Court case *Hansberry v. Lee*. After she moved to New York City, Hansberry worked at the Pan-Africanist newspaper *Freedom*, where she worked with other black intellectuals such as Paul Robeson and W. E. B. Du Bois. Much of her work during this time concerned the African struggles for liberation and their impact on the world. Hansberry also wrote about being a lesbian and the oppression of gay people. She died of pancreatic cancer at the age of 34 during the Broadway run of her play *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* in 1965. Hansberry inspired the Nina Simone song "To Be Young, Gifted and Black", whose title-line came from Hansberry's autobiographical play.



William Dorsey Swann, (March 1860 – c. December 23, 1925) was an American activist. An African-American born into slavery, Swann was the first person in the United States to lead a queer resistance group and the first known person to self-identify as a "queen of drag". As a black gay man, Swann paved the way for future drag queens and gay men of color. His legal efforts sparked a conversation about the LGBTQ+ community and may have even been one of the first instances of LGBTQ+ activism in the United States. There was little support at the time of his activism, and the ideas were not widespread. He helped lay the foundation for future activists such as Marsha P. Johnson and others who fought during the "modern LGBTQ rights movements"



Alain LeRoy Locke (September 13, 1885 – June 9, 1954) was an American writer, philosopher, and educator. Distinguished in 1907 as the first African-American Rhodes Scholar, Locke became known as the philosophical architect—the acknowledged "Dean"—of the Harlem Renaissance. He is frequently included in listings of influential African Americans. On March 19, 1968, the Rev.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. proclaimed: "We're going to let our children know that the only philosophers that lived were not Plato and Aristotle, but W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke came through the universe."

Locke was homosexual and may have encouraged and supported other gay African Americans who were part of the Harlem Renaissance. Given the discriminatory laws against it, he was not fully open about his orientation. He referred to it as a point of "vulnerable/invulnerability", representing an area of both risk and strength.

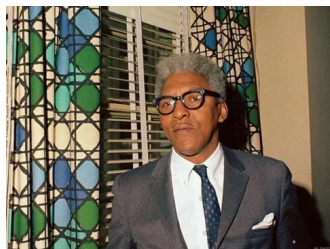


Lucy Hicks Anderson (née Lawson; 1886–1954) was an American socialite, chef, and philanthropist, best known for her time in Oxnard, California, from 1920 to 1946.

Assigned male at birth, she was adamant from an early age that she was a girl. Her parents, based on advice from doctors, supported her decision to live as one. She later established a boarding house in Oxnard, where she became a popular hostess. In 1945, a year after she married her second husband, she was arrested, tried and convicted of perjury, as the government said she had lied about her sex on her marriage license. After her release from prison, she and her husband moved to Los Angeles. The *Handbook of LGBT Elders* calls Anderson "one of the earliest documented cases of an African-American transgender person"



Gladys Bentley (August 12, 1907 – January 18, 1960) was an American blues singer, pianist, and entertainer during the Harlem Renaissance. Her career skyrocketed when she appeared at Harry Hansberry's Clam House, a well-known gay speakeasy in New York in the 1920s, as a black, lesbian, cross-dressing performer. She headlined in the early 1930s at Harlem's Ubangi Club, where she was backed up by a chorus line of drag queens. She dressed in men's clothes (including a signature tail coat and top hat), played piano, and sang her own raunchy lyrics to popular tunes of the day in a deep, growling voice while flirting with women in the audience.



Bayard Rustin (March 17, 1912 – August 24, 1987) was an American political activist, a prominent leader in social movements for civil rights, socialism, nonviolence, and gay rights. Rustin was the principal organizer of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963. Rustin worked in 1941 with A. Philip Randolph on the March on Washington Movement to press for an end to racial discrimination in the military and defense employment. Rustin later organized Freedom Rides, and helped to organize the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to strengthen Martin Luther King Jr.'s leadership; he taught King about non-violence. Rustin worked alongside Ella Baker, a co-director of the Crusade for Citizenship, in 1954; and before the Montgomery bus boycott, he helped organize a group called "In Friendship" to provide material and legal assistance to people threatened with eviction from their tenant farms and homes. Rustin became the head of the AFL–CIO's A. Philip Randolph Institute, which promoted the integration of formerly all-white unions and promoted the unionization of African Americans. During the 1970s

and 1980s, Rustin served on many humanitarian missions, such as aiding refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia.

Rustin was a gay man and, due to criticism over his sexuality, usually advised other civil rights leaders from behind the scenes. During the 1980s, he became a public advocate on behalf of gay causes, speaking at events as an activist and supporter of human rights.

Later in life, while still devoted to securing workers' rights, Rustin joined other union leaders in aligning with ideological neoconservatism, earning posthumous praise from President Ronald Reagan. On November 20, 2013, President Barack Obama posthumously awarded Rustin the Presidential Medal of Freedom.



Marcia P. Johnson(August 24, 1945 – July 6, 1992) was an American gay liberation activist and self-identified drag queen. Known as an outspoken advocate for gay rights, Johnson was one of the prominent figures in the Stonewall uprising of 1969.

Johnson was a founding member of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and co-founded the radical activist group Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), alongside close friend Sylvia Rivera. Popular in New York's gay community, Johnson was also active in the City's art scene, modeling for Andy Warhol and appearing onstage with the drag performance troupe Hot Peaches. Johnson was known as the "mayor of Christopher Street" for being a welcoming presence in the streets of Greenwich Village. Beginning in 1987, Johnson was an AIDS activist with ACT UP.



Marlon Riggs (February 3, 1957 – April 5, 1994) was a Black gay filmmaker, educator, poet, and activist. He produced, wrote, and directed several documentary films, including *Ethnic Notions*, *Tongues Untied*, *Color Adjustment*, and *Black Is...Black Ain't*. His films examine past and present representations of race and sexuality in the United States. The Marlon Riggs Collection is open to the public at Stanford University Libraries. Riggs's documentaries have received much critical acclaim. Riggs received a national Emmy Award in 1987 for *Ethnic Notions*. *Tongues Untied* was awarded the Teddy Award at the Berlin Film Festival. The film received recognition from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association, the New York Documentary Film Festival, the American Film and Video Festival, and the San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival.



Langston Hughes (February 1, 1901 – May 22, 1967) was an American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist from Joplin, Missouri. One of the earliest innovators of the literary art form called jazz poetry, Hughes is best known as a leader of the Harlem Renaissance. He famously wrote about the period that "the Negro was in vogue", which was later paraphrased as "when Harlem was in vogue." Some academics and biographers believe that Hughes was homosexual and included homosexual codes in many of his poems, as did Walt Whitman, who, Hughes said, influenced his poetry. Hughes's story "Blessed Assurance" deals with a father's anger over his son's effeminacy and "queerness". The biographer Aldrich argues that, in order to retain the respect and support of black churches and organizations and avoid exacerbating his precarious financial situation, Hughes remained closeted.



Stormé DeLarverie (c. December 24, 1920 – May 24, 2014) was an American woman known as the butch lesbian whose scuffle with police was, according to DeLarverie and many eyewitnesses, the spark that ignited the Stonewall uprising, spurring the crowd to action.[3] She was born in New Orleans, to an African American mother and a white father. She is remembered as a gay civil rights icon and entertainer, who performed and hosted at the Apollo Theater and Radio City Music Hall. She worked for much of her life as an MC, singer, bouncer, bodyguard, and volunteer street patrol worker, the "guardian of lesbians in the Village". She is known as "the Rosa Parks of the gay community."



William Roscoe Leake (April 12, 1961 – September 2, 2006), better known as Willi Ninja, was an American dancer and choreographer known for his appearance in the documentary film *Paris Is Burning*. Ninja specialized in voguing and was a fixture of ball culture at Harlem's drag balls who took inspiration from sources as far-flung as Fred Astaire and the world of haute couture to develop a style of dance and movement. He caught the attention of *Paris Is Burning* director Jennie Livingston. The film served as a springboard for Ninja. He parlayed his appearance into performances with a number of dance troupes and choreography gigs. In 1989, Ninja starred in the music video for Malcolm McLaren's song "Deep in Vogue", which sampled the then-unfinished movie. Ninja was a member of the LGBT community who died of AIDS complications in 2006.



Miss Major Griffin-Gracy (October 25, 1946), often referred to as Miss Major, is an American author, activist, and community organizer for transgender rights. She has participated in activism and community organizing for a range of causes, and served as the first executive director for the Transgender Gender Variant Intersex Justice Project. Griffin-Gracy has contributed to oral history collections, including *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex*, *The Stonewall Reader*, and *The Stonewall Generation: LGBT Elders on Sex, Activism, and Aging*. Her memoir, *Miss Major Speaks: Conversations with a Black Trans Revolutionary*, was released by Verso Books in 2023.