

History is Gay
Episode 34. Queers in the Civil Rights Movement

Introduction

Leigh: Hello and welcome to *History is Gay*. A podcast that examines the underappreciated and overlooked queer ladies, gents, and gentle enbies that have always been there in the unexplored corners of history. Because history has never been as straight as you think.

♪ [Intro music plays]♪

Hello, everyone. Welcome to 2021. Welcome to February. Sorry, there hasn't been an episode in a while, but I don't know if you know this, there's a pandemic going on, and yours truly just got diagnosed with ADHD. So that makes a lot of sense, and things are fun and hard, but also really wonderful, cause we get to make new friends from the internet constantly. So if you haven't guessed, I'm Leigh. Hello, your intrepid host who has been soloing it for a little while, and today I have a wonderful guest who you last heard on the show for our gospel-filled episode about Sister Rosetta Tharp. I have brought back Aubree Calvin to talk today. Hi, Aubree.

Aubree: Hi, Leigh, how are you?

Leigh: I'm doing well. How about you? How are you doing?

Aubree: Well, I am doing okay from one ADHD person to another. [both laugh] I am making it work.

Leigh: There you go. That's, I mean, that's really all we can ask for in this world, right? Just making it work. How have you been doing since- since we last talked? You have officially launched your podcast with your co-host India. That is Southern Queeries. How is that going?

Aubree: It is going well. So yeah, our show is all about everyday life in the South, if you're LGBTQ, kind of taking things away from the East and West

coast, and so far it's been doing well in 2020. We were mainly doing weekly episodes. And for 2021 we've kind of switched things up, and we are doing every other week, and we're focusing on a series on Southern weddings, if you will.

Leigh: That's awesome.

Aubree: Yeah.

Leigh: Well, I mean, and you know, we're going to be getting into springtime soon, which is like the perfect, like, wedding time, which is great. So if you are a queer person who has a fun story about queer weddings, you should reach out to Aubree and India, right?

Aubree: Yes. We want to hear your stories about what is it like trying to plan a wedding when you are away from that cis heterosexual wedding industrial complex that gets crammed on our throat so much.

Leigh: [laughs] Well, I'm really happy to have you here again. We've been talking about doing another episode together for a while, and so today we decided to dive into a whole smattering of people because neither of us can decide or commit to any particular one thing. [laughter] So for this episode, we are going to be talking about some queer folks in the African-American Civil Rights movement. And we will also be doing another episode together in the future on one particular figure that we really want to dive into. In terms of content warnings for this episode, we're going to be talking about homophobia, racism, some mentions of police brutality.

Aubree: There's mentions of violence and beatings.

Leigh: Yes. So we will put time codes in our show notes as usual. So if there are specific things you want to avoid in the conversation, you can skip past those parts. This will be a people focused episode. So we will go into a brief bio of each of our folks, and we'll talk about why do we think they're gay and we'll, as usual, end of the podcast with How Gay were They? Our personal ranking about how likely it is that they weren't straight. In terms of new

business and announcements, right now we actually are going to be launching a listener survey.

So you can actually go to historyisgaypodcast.com/survey to take our first ever audience/listener

Survey. We want to hear from you about what you think about the show, what you think we could be doing better, what you really like about it, and that will help us kind of go forth and continue our work. It's been a while since we started this show, and I'd really love to hear what you all have to say about it.

And feedback is always really wonderful and welcome. So please fill that out, and you will also, if you fill it out and put your email in at the end of the survey, you will be entered into a lotto to get a free piece of *History is Gay* merch of your choice. So if that's not motivation for you, I don't know what it is. I love you all. So.

Aubree: Fill it out, but be kind though, because you know Leigh put so much work into this, [laughs] so- be kind.

Leigh: Be kind, but feel free to be candid.

Aubree: Yes, candid but kind.

Leigh: I want to know what works for the show and what doesn't, because how else can you learn and grow? So Aubree, are you ready to get started and dive into our main topic, "Queers in the Civil Rights Movement?"

Aubree: Yes, let's do it.

Main Topic: Queers in the Civil Rights Movement

Leigh: Alright. Cool. Let's have you start us off with some kind of historic context of the time period that we are going to be mainly focused in.

Aubree: Okay, and I think that's the hardest part, because when looking at the Civil Rights Movement, it can be very difficult to pinpoint an exact start or end time. Historical scholars can draw a line from the pre-Civil War abolitionist era, all the way to the passage of the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments, to efforts to end segregation in the '50s and '60s. Other scholars would say that the movement is still ongoing, focusing on issues related to housing discrimination, police brutality, the wealth gap, disparities in the criminal justice system.

And obviously we can't focus on that entire history. So we want to center our focus on the 20th century efforts of the 1940s, '50s and '60s. And so I just wanted to start out with a brief timeline of events that will help us understand the time period our featured activists are operating in. And one thing the timeline shows is that Black rights groups were frequently divided on the best strategy to achieve their goals.

So if you begin in the 1930s, and really continuing into the 1940s, the NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, largely focused on lawsuits to challenge segregation and discrimination-based policies. The NAACP has long been considered more of a moderate organization, not necessarily a radical one, and their leadership during that time period discouraged public displays of civil disobedience, believing ultimately that it would hurt their cause. In 1941, A. Philip Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, which is more commonly known as the Pullman Porters, organized the first National March on Washington movement.

And this was to push President Roosevelt to integrate the Armed Forces during World War II. One of the organizers of the NAWM was a young pacifist Bayard Ruston. And although the march itself was canceled, it did serve as the blueprint for the more famous 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. And the NAWM also worked with the Congress for Racial Equality, also called "CORE" to begin public actions and rallies against segregation.

Leigh: And while the NAACP continued their legal challenges into the 1950s, they also started to become more involved in nonviolent protests. This

decade saw a shift towards greater public actions to gain media visibility and pressure lawmakers and businesses to make concrete changes. Civil rights groups of this time period were mainly led by religious leaders who would use churches as bases of operation. They emphasized specifically respectability in presence, actions, non-violence, and a commitment to show that Black folks were just as American and “*clean-cut*” quote unquote as Whites.

In addition to the NAACP, there were groups like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which was Martin Luther King's main organization, and precursors to the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, which you'll hear us refer to as "SNCC" [pronounced “snick”] that were formed. These organizations tended to shun any type of counter-cultural ideas like homosexuality and violence. It was very caught up in a lot of respectability politics to drive home a very specific message.

The '60s, in turn, marked a shift in much of the Civil Rights Movement, though the Supreme Court had ordered an end to segregated schools in 1954, the '60s saw that most of society was still divided, and Black activists began to resort to more culturally self-reliant philosophies. This is where you get the Black Panther Party for Self-defense, and the iconic phrase “Black is Beautiful” was birthed, started by Stokely Carmichael, and there was a greater emphasis on the concepts of Black power and self-determination.

The '60s vanguard was less religiously focused and organized, but the emphasis on Black nationalism and masculine leadership left little room for a collaboration between the Civil Rights Movement and the emerging Gay Rights Movement. Few Black activists were willing to work openly with gay activists, and despite Bayard Rustin's key role in planning the 1963 March on Washington, he was still pushed to the back, denied much of the credit. He mainly organized from behind the scenes.

Aubree: And I think one thing that we want to emphasize with the Civil Rights Movement, especially related to African-Americans, is that there is so much emphasis on these famous people, like Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, and they absolutely were phenomenal people, and they were so

valuable. But I think that in creating all that focus, we tend to forget that most of the day-to-day activism in most of the on-the-grounds organizing was done by regular average people who never got famous, rarely got attention, and a lot of this activism was focused on a specific state or specific region. And so that's kind of where we're taking the focus is away from the bigger names more towards those local activists.

And many of the activists in the Civil Rights Movement were also LGBTQ, and what we

see is that their work in the Civil Rights Movement inspired later work in the Gay Rights Movement or the Queer Rights Movement, and there was always a tension between the Black rights groups and this question of whether they would accept or support or advocate for the inclusion of the homosexual rights groups.

Leigh: Yeah, and so as the kind of American Gay Rights Movement or Queer Rights Movement started to emerge, they used the Civil Rights Movement as inspiration for tactics and messaging. Tactics that were utilizing gay liberation efforts that specifically looked to the Civil Rights Movement for inspiration included things like lawsuits, marches, and demonstrations, picketing, and focus on small group or regional organizing. The '60s marked a significant divergence from previous homophile movement focus on psychologists and medical field responses to homosexuality, and more into an activist equal rights perspective.

This was largely due to younger folks coming into the movement like Ernestine Eckstein who we'll talk about, and her basically coming in from her experiences in the Civil Rights Movement going, 'hey, here's what the Black community did, we really need to focus our efforts along these lines.' We have Frank Kameny in the Queer Rights Movement, so he was one of the homophile leaders, created the slogan "Gay is Good," which was adapted from or inspired by Stokely Carmichael's "Black is Beautiful." And there's a historian who's written a lot on this Kevin Mumford who has a really great quote that we wanted to bring up in an interview from *VICE* where he says:

"My sense is that the originating generation of gay and lesbian historians in the late sixties and early seventies were, themselves, very

influenced by civil rights activism. They certainly were inspired by that, but they wrote a history of the homophile movement, of the Mattachine Society, of the ECHO Conference, without thinking about its relationship to the Civil Rights Movement.

Now, I think, another generation of scholars has to go back, and if they're going to write the story—and I think they are— just look for the connections, and the ways in which the tactics of the Civil Rights Movement, the ideals, influenced everybody, especially gay and lesbian activism identity.”

It's also really important to note that as we get later on in the '60s and the '70s, gay rights turning points like the Stonewall uprising were directly influenced by Black responses to police brutality and disenfranchisement. So from 1963 to 1968, each summer in the U.S. saw massive amounts of unrest in cities, most of it race-related and tensions had skyrocketed following the murders of Martin Luther King and Medgar Evers. And the historian Michael Bronski notes that, quote,

"Stonewall could not have happened the way it did without the recent history of several years of those other urban uprisings.”

So, two main focuses here were the summer of 1967, which was two years before Stonewall, which was known as the “Long Hot Summer.” It was a time when more than a hundred poor, primarily Black neighborhoods across the U.S. erupted in uprisings sparked from White police violence towards Black men. And they came to a head in two specific incidents back-to-back in Detroit and Newark during July of that summer.

Content warning: police brutality/violence mention

In Newark, two White police officers had beaten a Black cab driver over a traffic violation, which prompted riots that lasted six days. And two weeks later in Detroit, police raided a Black bar in the Virginia Park neighborhood, sparking five more days of riots with 43 deaths and more than a thousand injured, mostly Black men at the hands of police.

Aubree: Can I enter- interject something there? I think one thing we want to think about is that the lesser known, but just a significant Compton Cafeteria Riot, took place in 1966 in August. So that was right during this time of summer of unrest. So we have- the two can be interspersed a bit.

Leigh: Yeah, totally. Mumphurd notes that the folks involved in Stonewall and similar uprisings like Compton's Cafeteria and the Black Cat Tavern, which happened in L.A., had been keenly aware and directly influenced by these several Black led protests and rebellions against police brutality. He has a quote:

"Yeah, because they say so. They go on record saying, 'Look what's happening over in Newark. We're not going to take it any more than they do in Newark.' Just 20 minutes outside of Manhattan, these huge, explosive riots two years before had made a difference in the area. It became a full-blown tactic to make your point, to make change, precisely because of African-American rioting..."

The thing I always point out is, in the race riots, you have multiples of 10 getting murdered. And the death toll in the Stonewall riots, I think is still zero. But even then it doesn't really do justice to how they are different. But I do think one directly [correction definitely] influenced the other."

Aubree: I think one thing we need to look at when we're comparing the Civil Rights Movement and the Gay Rights Movement is that there are a lot of similarities and differences between the two. We don't want to make the mistake of saying that it's a one-to-one relationship that Civil Rights is exactly the same thing as queer or gay rights, which is exactly the same thing as the Chicano Movement or the Women's Rights Movements. All these movements are different, but there were some similarities and differences between these two specifically that we wanted to highlight.

Leigh: Mhmm.

Aubree: So first a couple of differences. One of the big differences between the Civil Rights Movement and the Gay Rights Movement is that skin color is for the most part an immutable characteristic, which means that unless you are of a light enough skin tone where you can pass or hide Black heritage. You can't hide being Black. I mean, that's the one thing that doesn't matter how I change, I'm always going to be Black.

Whereas if you are gay or lesbian, that was something that you could hide at the time if you chose to. Another difference we have to acknowledge is its relationship to American history. The history of Black people in this country is based on a lack of power. The power dynamics have been skewed from the very beginning, from forced enslavement, to the denial of equal rights, to laws specifically put in place denying our citizenship. That's a big difference.

And then a couple- another difference is the different forms of oppression. And I don't want to get into this game of playing who was more oppressed. But the entire power structure in the entire governmental structure of the United States is designed on this idea of oppressing Black people in a way that the entire power structure was not necessarily designed to oppress gays and lesbians. And of course, you have to look at the scale of brutality we're dealing with here. As Leigh was saying with the riots, I mean, we're talking about during these race riots so many Black people would be murdered, you know.

My family comes from Tulsa, and I learned about the Tulsa race massacre from the 1920s where, you know, my family had land. We had wealth, and all of that was taken away from us, and so many people have been killed. And that's a level of brutality that you just don't see in the Gay Rights Movement, not to say that there wasn't oppression, but the level of millions of people being killed is a bit different.

Leigh: And it's nowhere near as institutionalized and built into the fabric of-

Aubree: Everything?

Leigh: Every- every facet of society. Yeah.

Aubree: Absolutely. I mean, but there are some similarities too. I mean, if you look at the history of policing in America, the police forces and the formation of the institution of the police has been used to oppress really anybody that stepped outside of the cultural norm, whether that is someone who is a racial or ethnic minority or someone who is a gender or sexual orientation minority. Police oppression has been there for both of them. A religion has been used as a source of oppression for queer people and for Black people alike. And this still remains a very religious country, and a lot of that religion was codified in the law.

And then one of the- a couple of other similarities, most people involved in both movements, whether you are solely involved in the Gay Rights Movement or involved in a Civil Rights movement or involved in both. Most of the hundreds of thousands of people will never be famous. These are just day-to-day people who had to live regular life. And then another similarity, I think is the idea that the government really did try hard to discredit both movements through methods of infiltration, through intimidation, through smear campaigns and false information.

The United States government went through a lot of effort to discredit both the Black Power movement, the Civil Rights Movement and the Gay Rights Movement. So there are some interesting similarities and some interesting differences between the two.

Leigh: Yeah, so with that wonderful introduction and our- our very the briefest of timelines, we want to go into our biotime, who were they?

Who were they? Bio Time

And one of the things we really want to emphasize is that today we wanted to take a look at a few of the lesser known Black members of the Civil Rights Movement who were queer. Some of the more prominent people were only going to mention briefly here because their lives were so expensive and accomplished. We want to dedicate full episodes to them in the future.

When we were trying to figure out who we were going to talk about in this- in this episode, our lists changed multiple times because it was really hard to

say, 'okay, here's who we can include in this, here's who really needs a full two hours to their story.'

So keep your ears out for episodes on James Baldwin, Paulie Murray, Angela Davis and others. We previously covered Bayard Rustin, perhaps one of the most well known LGBTQ figures connected to the Civil Rights Movement. So you can check out Episode 22 for his story and as I said before, these lists will always be partial. Thousands of people were active in their local communities and an untold number of them never came out publicly or passed before getting the opportunity to tell their stories.

Aubree: And today we're focusing specifically on a number of Black queer activists, but it's also worth noting that so many White gays and lesbians were also heavily involved in the Civil Rights Movement demonstrations, organizing leadership. And that these folks:

"drew upon their experiences working for the Black Civil Rights Movement to later support a sexual orientation equality."

And many had their own motivation stemming from their own disenfranchisement as queer folks, many of them were Jewish or are Jewish or from other disenfranchised groups or immigrant groups. And the Civil Rights Movement may have played a part in contributing to these activists identity formations as gays and lesbians. Some of those activists to look into our Jane Stenbridge, Faith Holsaerts, Allard Loewenstein, Elizabeth Slade Hirschfield and Joan Nestle, founder of the Lesbian Her Story Archives.

Leigh: Yeah, and if you want to learn more about all of these folks, one of the main sources we'll be drawing from is a really great dissertation by Jared E. Leighton called *Freedom Indivisible: Gays and Lesbians in the African American Civil Rights Movement*. And this contains research from several oral histories and interviews that he conducted himself with over 50 lesser known LGBTQ activists in the movement. And with that, we're going to start with the first of our group of folks we're going to be talking about for people today.

And the first one we're going to be talking about is Dr. Rodney Powell. So he started out as a young medical student in Tennessee when he joined the

National Student Movement, an organization protesting the city's segregation. And he participated in the lunch counter sit-ins and later in life he advocated for LGBTQ rights. So let's get started with him.

He was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1935, to Norma and Raymond Powell. He attended St. Joseph's University in Ohio with the goal of attending medical school. The school itself was integrated but he described it as not exactly welcoming. He recalled several incidents and experiences of the college that cemented his outcast- cemented his status as an outcast due to his race. He was one of the only Black students in his class year and he said that quote:

"I was there, but I wasn't invited into any of the social activities."

One story he told in an article was that in 1955 he was approached by a bunch of classmates who he had never spoken to before, who were performing in a theater competition. And they convinced him to perform *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen* which is a song that was originally published in the 1867 compilation *Slave Songs of the United States*. He said quote:

"Basically, they were asking asking me to subject myself to all of the indignities and the suffering of my ancestors who were slaves...and I guess in my desperation not to make waves, to fit in, I agreed."

After he graduated in 1957 he moved to Nashville to attend Meharry Medical College and he was seeking out a quote "more authentic Black experience" from the historically black college where he became officially involved in the movement.

Aubree: So in 1960, in his sophomore year he met a group of students at the International Center of Fisk who had become leaders in the student movement and among them was Diane Nash and Bernard Lafayette. Amid his demanding medical school schedule he attended trainings and nonviolent direct action under the guidance of James Lawson and began joining sit-in and stand-in demonstrations at lunch counters in Nashville in

February of 1960, one of the first major cities to stage these demonstrations.

Many times during these protests, Powell experienced situations which made it increasingly difficult to adhere to nonviolence. A philosophy he was committed to but did not feel was a natural fit for him. He once noted that as a child he once took on a group of bullies with his violin case.

Leigh: [laughs] It's so great.

Aubree: I know. And so, he recalled one time when he was removed from a stand-in at a restaurant in downtown Nashville, because a man had begun violently shoving several girls in their demonstration group, came up to Rodney, hit him in the chest and held him by his collar.

The Reverend C.T. Vivian, who was an advisor to the students, stepped in when he realized Rodney was getting more and more clearly angry as the minutes went by and suggested he take a break, saying to him:

"Go back to the church and renew yourself to nonviolence."

So this was hard, y'all. [laughs] This idea of not reacting in a violent way is just so hard to imagine. In 1961 he worked with Diane Nash on administration and coordination of the Freedom Rides that CORE, the Congress on Racial Equality, had initiated that challenged segregated buses and bus terminals. And he didn't get to really participate in the rides themselves since his school threatened to not graduate him if he didn't stay and finish his classes.

As an aspiring doctor, other movement leaders were hesitant to let Powell do too many of the more dangerous actions or do anything to risk his emerging medical degree because the Black community was in sore need of doctors. It was also during this time in the movement he met his future wife Dr. Gloria Johnson Powell who went on to become a prominent child psychiatrist and Ivy League professor. Together they joined the Peace Corps serving in Africa.

Leigh: And Powell and Johnson ended up having three children: April Powell William, Allison Powell and Daniel Powell. And Johnson and Powell ended up actually divorcing in 1975 when Powell came out as gay, although they remained friends and to this day apparently the families are quite nicely blended.

Aubree: Yeah.

Leigh: He moved to Hawaii after his divorce to continue his medical practice and live openly as a gay man where he met his husband, who he's still together with. And he would begin in the late 1990s to delve into LGBTQ rights activism using his experience and knowledge from his work in the 1960s to inform the movement. He's currently retired in Hawaii with his husband and we'll talk more about the queer aspects of his life and activism in our next section. But for now let's move on to our next person, which is Ernestine Eckstein.

Aubree: All right.

Leigh: You wanna- you wanna to start us off with Ernestine?

Aubree: Absolutely. And the thing about Ernestine Eckstein is that not much is known about her. And much of what we do know comes from an interview and cover story in the publication *The Ladder*, the first nationally distributed lesbian publication in the U.S. And will talk a little bit about her life outside lesbian activism here and dive more into her in the next segment. But the big picture to know is that she was one of the first and most visible Black lesbians in the homophile movement in the 1960s, leading the vanguard and shifting the movement towards a more activist focus.

Ernestine was born in April 23, 1941 in Indiana with a given name Ernestine Delois Eppenger and the majority of her LGBTQ activist work was done under the name Ernestine Eckstein to protect herself, her job and prevent herself from being outed. As she attended the Indiana University in Bloomington and graduated in 1963 with a degree in magazine journalism and a minor in government and Russian.

Leigh: So accomplished.

Aubree: I know, right? [laughter]

Leigh: I love that she's like-

Aubree: I guess the Russian makes sense in the Cold War it's like eh, Russian.

Leigh: Yeah, yeah, Russian. I'll just, you know, take some Russian classes. Fine.

Aubree: I mean, right? I mean, if you look at that government minor, Russian, magazine, if she was White she could have been recruited as a spy.

Leigh: There you go.

Aubree: But, you know, with her being Black, the government, you know, not going to do it. She-

Leigh: Well, and not to mention like the Lavender Scare at the time.

Aubree: Oh, true. Yes. [laughter] So, if that for all of those things she would have been an excellent spy.

Leigh: Right. Yeah.

Aubree: So, while at Indiana State, she became a local NAACP chapter officer. However, she felt the pull toward more progressive organizations, believing organizations like the NAACP were structured with White liberals in mind.

Leigh: And so, after graduating from college in 1963, she moved to New York, got a job as a social worker, and this is where she began working with CORE. New York City is where she first started exploring her lesbian identity and discovered homophile organizations like the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis.

But in the 1970s, she had grown kind of disillusioned with some of the movements going on on the East Coast. And so, she actually moved out to the West Coast and settled in the Bay Area, where she joined the radical activist group Black Women Organized for Action in San Francisco. And her involvement in this organization can really speak a lot to her radical politics, so we'll go into some details of Black Women Organized for Action and their structure.

So, it was collectively founded in 1973 by 15 different women and was formed, quote:

"in response to the lack of representation of Black women in local women's organizing."

Many BWOA members had roots in the Civil Rights Movement, but more so than any of the other organizations, BWOA exhibits a clear link to the women's movement. And was one of the first Black feminist organizations in the U.S. They issued hierarchical leadership structures in favor of collective leadership and responsibility, ensuring that, quote:

"leadership, work, and community involvement were shared among members willing to participate."

There's an article by historian Kimberly Springer about Black Women Organized for Action in which she writes that the organization, quote:

"subverted discrimination between [correction: within] Black communities based on color, physical appearance, or class by welcoming all Black women into the organization. The organization focused on activism, rather than social constructions of beauty or social class...[their] avoidance of the label 'feminism' while practicing feminism was indicative of future developments in Black feminist organizing."

And, you know, we'll say also the evolution of womanist as a specifically Black feminist ideology. After she became a part of Black Women Organized

for Action, we really don't know anything about her. She kind of disappeared, and so we really just kind of know that from death records, she died in San Pablo, California in 1992. We've got a whole bunch more to talk about her, but we're going to move on to our number three person, Aaron Henry.

Content warning: violence mention

Aubree: Yes. So Aaron Henry was born and raised in Mississippi, in the part of Mississippi known as the Mississippi Delta, and he was a- more of a quiet leader, preferring to work mostly behind the scenes, and really he avoided garnering a lot of national attention. Aaron was the son of sharecroppers. He was drafted into the army during World War II, but after the war ended, he attended pharmacy school at Xavier University in New Orleans before returning home to Clarksdale, Mississippi, to open the Fourth Street Drug Store.

His business would serve as a key meeting place for activists, and because of this activism, both his home and business would be targeted for violence by White segregationists, and we'll go on to some of that violence a little bit later. Part of this idea of him staying in Mississippi is that he was a central figure in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement. He helped organize the Regional Council of Negro Leadership, the RCNL, the Council of Federated Organizations, and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

All organizations dedicated to registering black Mississippians to vote and take part in political activities. At the infamous 1964 Democratic National Convention, Henry was a part of the MFDP delegation led by Fannie Lou Hamer that demanded to be seated, and this was at- during a time when the regular Mississippi Democratic Party did not let Black people in.

In 1959, he served as the state president of the NAACP, and as I said, he was a kind of a man of quiet influence, but he was said to have had the ear of many high-ranking Democrats. He maintained friendships with both Bobby and JFK, as well as having connections to Hubert

Humphrey and Lyndon Johnson. In the 1960s, he organized boycotts of segregated Clarksdale businesses, which remained in place until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Aaron Henry was also a part of the Freedom Vote of 1963, which was a mock election to show that Black Mississippians would vote if given the chance.

And during this mock election, over 80,000 votes were cast, and his name was actually slated as the candidate for governor during this time, so he was well known within his state. In the '80s, Aaron Henry's activism turned into electoral success, which is a path we see for a lot of activists, if you look at people like people like John Lewis, and he- Aaron Henry was elected to the Mississippi State House of Representatives. While in the legislature, he pushed for the removal of the Confederate battle flag from the state flag of Mississippi, and that itself was only achieved finally in 2020.

While in the state house, Aaron also called for the reopening of the investigation of the murder of his friend, Medgar Evers. In his lifetime, pushing for civil rights, his house was set on fire, his drugstore was bombed, and he himself would be beaten, jailed, and shot at. Later, we know that Aaron Henry died in 1997 at the age of 72.

Leigh: So next, we have the famous author Lorraine Hansberry, which many of you may have become familiar with through learning about her play, *A Raisin in the Sun*. Most people, I mean, hopefully, most people have that on a school curriculum at some point in their educational career, but not a lot of people know that she was queer. So we're going to dive into her.

Aubree: And a lot of people don't know about her activism work either.

Leigh: That is very-

Aubree: A lot of people know her just as the playwright, so I think she's interesting.

Leigh: Just as the playwright. Yeah. So she was born in Chicago in 1930 to comfortably middle-class parents. Her father, Carl, was a successful real estate broker, and he founded Lake Street Bank, one of the first Black owned

banks in Chicago. Her mother, Nannie, was a schoolteacher, and she raised four children. Lorraine was the youngest of the bunch, and she generally was kind of considered the oddball. [laughs] So she-

Aubree: Hey, here's to oddballs!

Leigh: Yeah, oddball siblings!

Aubree: Here's to us!

Leigh: The Hansberrys- so her parents were activists and intellectuals. In 1937, they bought a house in an all-White Chicago neighborhood that had restrictive covenants preventing African-Americans from purchasing homes. The family was subjected to taunts and violence, including bricks and rocks being thrown at the house. And Lorraine would later describe how her mother stayed up nights clutching a pistol to defend her children from hostile mobs.

Hansberry's parents challenged the covenants in a case that made it to the Supreme Court, and this experience of being one of the first Black families to integrate a Chicago neighborhood inspired a lifetime of activism, and I believe actually served as one of the inspirations for her story in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Hansberry's parents would socialize with activists, intellectual writers, and business figures, so she grew up in a relatively radical activist oriented environment.

In terms of her education, she was an activist and art student at a variety of schools in Wisconsin, Chicago, and Mexico before ending up moving to New York to attend the New School, and that's where she kind of spent the rest of her life and work.

Aubree: So while in New York, she wrote for Paul Robeson's *Freedom* newspaper, which was a Harlem publication known for its radical Black politics, and she also authored the text for a book commissioned by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. She spent some of her time joining protests and committed herself to the Communist Party, which did catch the attention of the FBI and they stripped her of her passport and began surveillance on her in 1952.

So in 1959, her first play, *A Raisin in the Sun* premiered at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, making her the first Black woman to author a Broadway play. The work is notable because the little Black theatrical representation that had existed up to that point had been comedic varieties or musicals. Dramatic theater was a space that had not been welcoming of Black voices until Lorraine Hansberry.

The play was nominated for four Tony Awards, and Hansberry became the youngest winner of the prestigious New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play. James Baldwin actually raved:

"Never before in the entire history of the American theater had so much of the truth of Black people's lives been seen on the stage."

In an interview with Studs Terkel following the premiere of *A Raisin in the Sun*, she spoke about the significant challenges of being both Black and a woman, and she said:

"the most oppressed group of any oppressed group will be its women, obviously."

Essentially concluding that those who are twice oppressed can become twice militant.

Leigh: And Twice Militant, I believe was the name of an exhibit of some of her letters at, I can't remember what museum, but it'll be in the sources that we post.

Aubree: Yes.

Leigh: So it was around 1951 when she was working with the *Freedom* newspaper that she met her husband, Robert, affectionately called "Bobby" by her and many friends, Nemiroff. And they actually met at a protest in a picket line against the White's Only Basketball team at NYU. Robert shared her enthusiasm for the arts, politics,

and intellect, and they married on June 20th, 1953. And two days before, they had actually spent the days and nights together protesting the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Hansberry wrote that while he didn't necessarily make the Earth move, that's not a direct quote, but that's the way that I like to call it, it was in her quote:

"sincerest political opinion that we have reached a point in a truly beautiful relationship where it may become the fullest kind of relationship between a man and a woman."

So he supported her through multiple jobs and encouraged her writing and Hansberry leaned on him in times of depression and isolation, providing both emotional connection and financial support. It was a practical relationship, if not necessarily the stuff of fairytale love, and we'll go into that a little bit more later about why, why that is.

Aubree: Yeah. So on January 12th, 1965, Lorraine died from pancreatic cancer. She was only 34 years old. That same night, her second play, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, ran its last performance. Marie Rupert reflects on the complexities of Lorraine's life and how we have learned so much about her, and as you'll hear shortly, at her closeted lesbian life, and politics had she lived longer. So Marie Rupert says:

"She was intellectually such a genius that her emotional life didn't catch up. If she had lived longer, there would have been a developing and a growing. She would have been more able to cope with the conflicting aspects of her nature."

So after her death, her ex-husband Robert Nemiroff compiled her unpublished writings and adapted them into a stage play titled *To Be Young, Gifted and Black: Lorraine Hansberry in her Own Words*.

Leigh: And he would also manage her estate after death as well.

Aubree: Yes.

Leigh: And even though they divorced in, I think 1964, right before her death, but he would continue to call himself her husband through- through her death. They were very close in terms of his connection to her work. So with that, we've done some abbreviated bios for folks. Obviously, there's so much more to the story, and we hope that you look into our sources to learn even more about all these folks, but we wanted to be relatively brief because we are talking about so many wonderful people.

Why do we think they're gay?

So now let's move on to the juicy stuff, or why do we think they're gay, segment? So as we mentioned up at the top, most of these people and many queer people who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement were closeted during the time of their involvement in the movement.

And so you'll also hear folks like Rodney Powell and Ernestine Eckstein mentioned, many of these folks didn't actually come to a realization of their sexuality as an identity until later in their lives.

So they were either closeted during their actions in the Civil Rights Movement or hadn't yet explored that part of their identity. And it's likely that a lot of their actions in the Civil Rights Movement and thinking about various aspects of their identity led to formation of these facets of themselves.

Aubree: And I mean, I think it's just important to remember that because so much of the Civil Rights Movement was grounded in religion, religious organizations, religious ministers, religious gathering points, it's just very hard to separate those two identities because many of these people were also very religious. So you can see that struggle.

So let's start with Rodney Powell. And some early thoughts on his identity, as we mentioned earlier, it wasn't until the late 1990s that Rodney Powell began speaking out and demonstrating for LGBTQ rights. But his sexuality informed his commitment to justice from an early age, knowing he was different from other boys around him since the age of 10. He took a trip to Montreal in college where he first encountered a gay community, but he didn't really see himself reflected with much of the flamboyant and

effeminate expression that he saw which really pushed him further into the closet.

And one quote he has is that:

"It was hard to accept that I was the person that was the object of derision when people used terms like 'queer' and 'faggot' and sissy,' and I didn't want to be that person. Did I know I was gay [when I was younger]? Not really, but I knew I was very different. I never quite put a name on it until much later in life."

And so he felt like he needed to keep his sexual orientation a secret to continue his work in the Civil Rights Movement. And he said- he continues to say:

"It wasn't until my student protest experiences in the Civil Rights Movement...that I had new language and positive strategies to affirm my racial identity. The new language and positive strategies to affirm my sexual orientation were not part of that experience....the palpable homophobia of the Black clergy in the Black Christian churches where we trained in nonviolence and the homophobic attitudes of my fellow students necessitated that I keep my 'secret' to myself, if I wanted to be an effective student leader."

Leigh: And we saw that a little bit with Bayard Rustin while he was relatively open, when it came to him actually doing the work and being a public face of the movement, they had to kind of push him to the back because he was so open in his identity.

Aubree: I mean I totally get that because you know, me, I went to college in the early 2000s and I was very active in Black student organizations and I was not out yet as trans, I was not out yet as queer. I hid most of that so that I could really be a part of Black student life. So I totally, I can identify with what Dr. Powell was saying here because even in the 2000s I did the same thing. Yeah.

Leigh: So he remained in the closet for several years but eventually came out in 1970. He separated with his wife Gloria Johnson in 1975, so that's five years after he came out to her and revealed that he was gay. And he, you know, had said that he finally wanted to stop living a life that was a lie and a deception and he wanted to make sure that his kids knew who he fully was.

So after he came out he moved to Hawaii to live openly as a gay man and there's this really great, this adorable little anecdote where when he was in Hawaii, a colleague suggested setting him up on a date with a female flight attendant and he instead replied that he'd quote "much prefer a steward" which I think is just adorable. He met his now husband Bob Eddinger who was described as a "quiet but not shy" zoologist shortly after moving there and they're still together 40 years later.

Powell's children and ex-wife now consider Eddinger a part of the family. At first his wife had some real trouble with it. His kids were pretty accepting pretty much right off the bat and now they kind of exist as a nice blended family and apparently spend holidays together.

So in the late '90s Powell was pulled into the social movement for LGBTQ rights after he met a woman named Susan Ford Wiltshire who's a historian and author of *Seasons of Grief and Grace: a Sister's Story of AIDS* and hearing her story of losing her brother to HIV. He wrote a letter to Wiltshire in 1998 where he writes about his, you know, own kind of connection to these two movements. He says,

"I think we need to harness the sadness imposed upon gays and lesbians by our society into a sustainable social activism. The Civil Rights Movement lifted and enhanced America with visions for a better America for all citizens. Perhaps we can find a way to harness the philosophy of nonviolence and direct social action for civil rights for gays and lesbians."

So Wiltshire actually introduced him to an organization called Soul Force which was seeking to break down religious opposition to LGBTQ rights and was directly inspired by Martin Luther King's teachings and commitment to nonviolence and he was excited by that and quickly got

involved. In 2005 he helped organize their Equality Rides which was directly inspired by the 1960s Freedom Rides that he organized. And during these rides Soul Force would travel to Christian colleges and military locations and protest their anti-LGBTQ policies and rhetoric.

Powell noted that:

"Soul Force really moved the needle. It helped to highlight the injustices of homophobia and the church's role in it."

Aubree: I mean, I think the difficulty with Powell though was that with the exception of James

Lawson, Dr. Powell just didn't get a lot of support from his former activist friends in Nashville. He was met with silence from the people from the Nashville student movement and when he asked for their help with his LGBTQ movement and he says:

"I wrote emails to everyone, no one responded, no one was interested in joining."

His disappointment, related to their reluctance to support his struggles as a gay American, prompted him to distance himself from his Civil Rights past for a while and he ended his membership in the NAACP, declined invitations to speak about the Civil Rights Movement and struggled with the sense of belonging to the Black community. And he says:

"I didn't reject Black friends, but I no longer felt the affinity as a member of the community. It was something I had been feeling all my life. Being gay and Black in the Black community, you could be gay and Black and do it on the down-low. But you couldn't be gay and Black and be open."

Powerful. I think that's just so interesting to say.

Leigh: Yeah. And I think, you know, folks like John Lewis eventually came around but he- he really didn't experience a lot of direct support right at the beginning. These days, he largely considers himself retired from activism. He says that it's- it's more of a younger person's game [laughs] but he serves on the board of directors for an organization called Faith in America which

seeks to transform groups that discriminate towards queer members on the basis of religion.

He also posted and recorded a video open letter to renowned homophobe Reverend Rick Warren, who was the leader of Saddleback Church, after he was selected to deliver a keynote address at MLK's birthday. We have an excerpt here and we'll post the video in our show notes page so you can listen to it in entirety. He says in this letter:

"When you seek to force your views and intolerance on others, you are no different from racists, segregationists, sexists, anti-Semites and other bigots throughout America's history of religion-based bigotry....Emmett Till and Matthew Shepard were innocent victims of hate and bigotry, and their deaths are directly related to such words spoken by religious leaders...Mr. Warren, your pastoral leadership would not please Dr. King, and it certainly does not honor him."

Aubree: In a letter to Soul Force members ahead of the Equality Rides, Powell acknowledged the role of queer folks in the Civil Rights Movement and the importance of learning from the lessons of the 1960s for the current movement. And he says:

"Many closeted LGBT [correction: GLBT] persons, Black and White [correction: White and Black], also risked their lives for racial justice during the African-American Civil Rights Movement, especially those who participated in the Freedom Rides. Their contribution and personal sacrifices have never been acknowledged....Gay and straight youth alliances should give major emphasis to the lessons learned from the African American Civil Rights Movement and the Legacy and Dream of the Beloved Community by Martin Luther King, Jr.

The liberation of America's GLBT community through the redemptive power of love and nonviolence will require relentless struggle, sustained nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience by gay and straight alliances throughout American society, in every rural and urban community....To be effective, the character and intensity of our social protests and civil rights struggles must match the character and intensity of the sit-ins, freedom

rides, voter registration drives and other acts of nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience used by African Americans to overcome racism."

Leigh: Yeah, so he really, really draws like a very close-

Aubree: Connection

Leigh: Comparison and connection.

Aubree: Parallel.

Leigh: Yeah, definitely. So onward to our next person, we're going to dive back into Ernestine Eckstein. In photos of gay rights picket lines, there's this one iconic one in front of the White House in 1965 where she's the rare visible Black lesbian and she's also one of the few women of color who were established leadership in the Daughters of Bilitis.

Which was, as we had said, the first national lesbian organization. One of these days we'll do like a full episode on the Daughters of Bilitis, but just know that it will continue to come up and be brought up as we talk about the 1960s and the creation of the homophile movement.

Most of what we know about her comes from an interview and also a cover story. She's the only Black woman to have ever been featured on the cover of *The Ladder*. And this was part of the 1966 issue in June. We'll put a link up to the issue on the site and you could read the entire interview. But what's really interesting is that before coming to New York, she didn't describe herself as a lesbian or really even know that the term or identity existed. She knew that she had been attracted to teachers and girlfriends growing up, but she never pursued it. She has this one quote from the interview:

"I had never known about homosexuality, I'd never thought about it. It's funny, because I'd always had a very strong attraction to women. But I'd never known anyone who was homosexual, not in grade school or high school or in college. Never heard the word mentioned...this was a kind of blank that had never been filled in by anything – reading, experience,

anything – until after I came to New York when I was 22. I look back and wonder! I didn't know there were other people who felt the same way I did."

She tells the story about how it was actually a gay college friend who had come and moved to New York before her, and he came out to her and suddenly it was like a light bulb went off in her head. This is what she has to say on it.:

"I had a college friend who had come here earlier....and he was a homosexual, but I didn't know it then, he didn't tell me. Anyway, we had a very good relationship going in college...just the best of friends. So when I came to New York he was one of the first persons I looked up. And he said, 'Ah...Ernestine, you know I'm gay?' And I thought: well, you're happy so what? I didn't know the term gay! And he explained it to me. Then all of a sudden things began to click. Because at that time I was sort of attracted to my roommate

And this is where Leigh inserts themselves and goes, they were roommates!
[laughs]

"and I thought: am I sexually as well as emotionally attracted to her? And it dawned on me that I was. And so my college friend sort of introduced me to the homosexual community he knew. Still, I went through the soul-searching bit for several months, trying to decide if I was homosexual, where I stood."

I love that. I love that story.

Aubree: I love that so much.

Leigh: She's so young, like she's just coming to it.

Aubree: Ah, they're roommates. [laughs]

Leigh: Yeah, there's actually a really wonderful unedited audio version of the interview that ended up going into *The Ladder* that you can listen to in full on a really fantastic episode of

the *Making Gay History* podcast with Eric Marcus. And so- as a part of that unedited interview, there's also another quote from her that she says:

"He sort of introduced me to the homosexual community. Cuz he's a real queen. I mean here. He was a little bit different here in New York than he was in Indiana. You know, he's a nice-looking guy. He sort of swishes around, you know, and looks at all the boys on the street. A real... Way out."

Aubree: [laughter] That's my favorite part.

Leigh: It's so good. See, my favorite part is this. It that- so naturally, once she decided she was definitely a lesbian, she literally was like, 'Okay, now to find the movement. Where do I go to activist?' Like, she has a quote that's literally just:

"But then having once decided, the next thing on the agenda was to find a way of being in the homosexual movement – because I assumed there was such a movement, or should be."

So Ernestine Eckstein 1,000% was like, 'okay, but what is the gay agenda?' [laughter] And so she mentioned that having been involved in the Civil Rights Movement was a huge influence on this line of thought. Right? Like, she had had experience with Black organizations and she automatically assumed that queers would too.

Aubree: I mean, don't you just love that level of, to me, I think so many people can relate to that. I'm out. Where are the gays?

Leigh: [laughs] Where are the gays? Show me the gays.

Aubree: Okay. I'm out!

Leigh: Ernestine Eckstein, show me the gays!

Aubree: Take me to the movement!

Leigh: [giggles] Take me to your leader!

Aubree: I'm out. Now what? What's the next step?

Leigh: [laughs] Ernestine Eckstein is a gay alien. Show me to your leader.

Aubree: Yes. Take me- [laughs] just a second. She did eventually find the movement. She saw ads for the Mattachine Society in the New York's *Village Voice* magazine and started attending meetings and lectures, which led her to discover the Daughters of Bilitis mentioned in the Mattachine literature, and she became heavily involved in the New York DOB chapter.

So by 1965, debates about the direction of the homophile movement and where it should be headed, we're heating up. Older, veteran members emphasized the importance of negotiating with psychologists and doctors. Whereas the newer, activist wing, which included Ernestine, wanted to focus on directions like demonstrating, lobbying government officials and pursuing court actions.

In 1965, Eckstein marched in Philadelphia at the First Annual Reminder Day, which is one of the earliest picketing demonstrations by homophile organizations. And this- these went on from 1965 to 1969. And also at the White House, an iconic photos from this event appears that she's the only woman of color there, rocking some cool, badass white sunglasses, and a sign that says:

"Denial of Equality of Opportunity is Immoral"

Leigh: And she wore those sunglasses in part to conceal her identity as well.

Aubree: Yes.

Leigh: But she also just looks really fucking cool. She's just very stylish in this picture.

Aubree: Yes. And so she was appointed vice president of the New York DOB chapter and served for three years before she moved to Northern California

to do political advocacy work with BWOA, which we mentioned earlier. Historian Marcia Gallo writes:

"her plan was to reach out to women who saw the gay struggle as linked to other civil rights issues and hope that during her time as vice president of the local chapter she would help build a more social action oriented group."

Leigh: And she had a lot to say about the directions that the homophile movement should move in. And she was really influential in saying like 'Hey here's what we have done and here's what the homophile and the queer movement needs to be going towards.' The homophile movement needed to move into a more direct demonstration area if they wanted to be taken seriously. In her interview in *The Ladder*, she said:

"Picketing, I regard, is almost a conservative activity now. The homosexual has to call attention to the fact that he's been unjustly acted upon. This is what the Negro did."

She also says:

"One thing that disturbs me a lot is that there seems to be some sort of premium placed on psychologists and therapists by the homophile movement. I personally don't understand why that should be. So far as I'm concerned, homosexuality per se is not a sickness. When our groups seek out the therapists and psychologists, to me this is admitting we are ill by the very nature of our preference. And this disturbs me very much."

She also talked about the difficulties of being queer, laying on society, not on a queerness itself, in a quote that just kind of seems to be ahead of her time she says:

"I think some homosexuals do find it hard to overcome these pressures – not because they are homosexuals per se, but because of the pressures exerted by society and the prohibitions against homosexuality...I think the best therapy for a homosexual is reinforcement of his way of life, by associating with people who are like him."

Aubree: I think that's interesting, you know?

Leigh: Yeah:

Aubree: She believed there should be a concentration on:

" the discrimination by the government and employment and military service, the laws used against homosexuality and the rejection by the churches."

And that, in the homophile movement at the time, she didn't find:

" enough stress on courtroom action. And I would like to see more test cases in court so that our grievances can be brought out into the open."

Which, you know, again, is a reflection of the large part of the Civil Rights Movement strategy was so much of it began as court cases before moving into public demonstrations. So she knew she was living through a shift in the movement, and that it would take time and work to move in these directions. She said:

"I think our movement is not ready for any forms of civil disobedience. I think this would solidify resistance to our cause. This situation will change eventually. But not now."

While some of Eckstein's thoughts were relatively conservative or assimilationist, like saying that gays and lesbians who reflected stereotypes, which was very masculine women or effeminate men, shouldn't necessarily be officers or ambassadors for the movement, which, you know, she was still pretty new to the movement and probably still working out her own identity. She still emphasized the importance of collective action for queers. And she said:

"I'd like to find a way of getting all classes of homosexuals involved together in the movement. I think that if we meet on the common ground of our unjust position in society, then we can all go from there."

Leigh: Yeah, I mean, you know, she was really young and just trying to figure out where she stood and just started to get involved in these organizations. But at the same time, she said some really interesting things, specifically about advocating for the inclusion of the trans community, who at the time were being referred to as transvestites, to be included, specifically, in the homophile movement. She has this great quote:

"There are certain broad, general problems that we all have as homosexuals...Maybe even the question of transvestites, I think this has been neglected. Anything that can affect us at all...I feel that the homophile movement is only part of a much larger movement of the erasure of labels. And I think the right of a person to dress as he chooses must necessarily follow when we expand our own philosophy of bringing about change for the homosexual...And so far as society's concerned, the two are lumped together. And therefore, once we solve ours, I see no reason why we cannot begin to expand into other areas. And this one is so closely allied to our own."

So, you know, not the greatest of statements, but like for 19- what, 1963, '64?

Aubree: For the early 1960s I mean, this idea that, hey, maybe we are all more connected than you think? That's pretty revolutionary.

Leigh: Yeah, and this part of her quote was actually- this left out of *The Ladder* interview that was final- that was edited down.

Aubree: Oh, really?

Leigh: So I thought- Yeah, I think this is something that was important to bring up.

Aubree: I didn't know that.

Fun Segment: Word of the Week

Leigh: Yeah, and so this actually, with our talk about Ernestine Eckstein, leads us our wonderful segment, which we haven't done in a while, and I'm really excited about our word of the week.

♪[Word of the Week jingle plays]♪

♪Word of the Week♪

♪Gay word of history!♪

So for today's edition of Word of the Week, we're going to be talking about the phrase, come out or coming out of the closet. It's ubiquitous today, but how did it come about? Hahaha. Ernestine Eckstein actually used it in her interview at a time when it wasn't really in the lexicon with the same meaning as we see today. Historian Marsha Gallo, who we've mentioned before, says that:

"Barbara [Gittings] talked about "revealing ourselves." And folks talked about "becoming more visible," "taking off the mask," those kinds of things. [Ernestine] used the term "come out," and I thought maybe it's starting to become the way we talked about it."

So this is a quote from the interview that is part of the audio interview that was unedited. Barbara Gittings asks Ernestine:

"Do you think it's possible in the present climate of opinion for homosexuals who have self-confidence in themselves to do this openly?"

Ernestine responds:

"I think it takes a lot of courage, and I think a lot of people who do it will suffer because of it. But I think any movement needs a certain number of courageous martyrs. There's no getting around it. That's really the only thing that can be done, you have to come out and be strong enough to accept whatever consequences come. I think."

So how did we get to the phrase coming out of the closet? The phrase coming out itself actually originates from the tradition of debutante balls, where young women "came out," essentially debuting themselves as

marriage material to eligible bachelors. And this was their like official introduction to society. We've mentioned this briefly on the show before. And so before World War II, it actually ended up being adopted in gay men's communities in much of the same manner. They threw elaborate drag celebrations, patterned on debutante and masquerade balls, and these were held frequently in large cities like New York, Chicago, New Orleans, and Baltimore.

And so for these men, at the time, the phrase coming out wasn't in reference to coming out of hiding, but in joining a society of his peers and of being welcomed into the community. There's a 1931 Baltimore *Afro-American* article that read, quote:

"The coming out of new debutantes into homosexual society was an outstanding feature of Baltimore's eighth annual frolic of the pansies."

Which is my favorite way to frame that. [laughter] Frolic of the pansies! Can someone write an opera called "Frolic of the Pansies," please?

Aubree: Are we sure John Waters isn't already on that?

Leigh: Probably. Honestly. [laughter]

Aubree: Harvey Firestein.

Leigh: Oh yeah.

Aubree: So the phrase as reference to a more personal coming out as revealing your inner identity to society outside of the queer circle took a few more decades to develop. A historian George Chauncey note that:

"there [must have been] a a shift from that specific meaning to a more colloquial sense that in order to 'come out' one must have previously been 'in' something."

So it's not clear where or how the closet metaphor came about, but it's likely that it wasn't used until the 1960s, as we could see with Ernestine's

comment. Chauncey has found several other metaphors to refer to their needing to lead separate lives when among straight people, but could not find reference to the term "closet" in novels, diaries, or letters from the 20th century. And Chauncey writes:

"Many gay men, for instance, described negotiating their presence in an often hostile world as living a double life, or wearing a mask and taking it off...each [image] suggests not gay men's isolation, but their ability--as well as their need--to move between different personas and different lives, one straight, the other gay, to wear their hair up, as another common phrase put it, or let their hair down. Many men kept their gay lives hidden from potentially hostile straight observers (by 'putting their hair up'), in other words, but that did not mean they were hidden or isolated from each other – they often, as they said, 'dropped hairpins' that only other gay men would notice."

Leigh: I love that.

Aubree: It would.

Leigh: Let's bring some of these back, man.

Aubree: I don't know though. It seems so subtle. I know that I would miss all of them. I would totally-

Leigh: [laughs] I mean, but if you didn't have the context, like coming out of the closet would, you know, just go over your head too. So specifically for the closet metaphor, there really isn't a lot of information about it, but it could be that that specific metaphor came about with a shift of emphasis that queerness was like something to hide and be shameful about, which could go back to the added skeletons in the closet, the idea that you're hiding something in there. The word closet also comes from the Latin word *clausum*, which means closed, which fits in well with the idea of a secret and something that you keep out of sight.

Aubree: Yes.

Leigh: And that's what we have. So now you've learned a little bit of history-

Aubree: Yeah.

Leigh: About why we say come out or coming out of the closet.

Aubree: And in *Beauty and the Beast*, there's also a closet with Belle, and that has nothing to do with anything at all. But you did Latin, so I'm like, well, I gotta give something here. [laughs]

Leigh: There you go. I mean, I don't know.

Aubree: That is nothing to do with anything but *Beauty and the-*

Leigh: [laughs] But I think it's- I think it's a sentient closet that opens up-

Aubree: And kills a townspeople.

Leigh: And kills a townspeople is relatively queer energy.

Aubree: Well, I mean, you do have Lumiere and Cogsworth.

Leigh: Yeah, oh boy. That's one gay ass movie.

Aubree: I'm getting us off track.

Leigh: [laughs] All right. So back to it.

Aubree: Back to looking at how gay or how queer some of these people are. Let's go back to Lorraine Hansberry. So while Lorraine had married Robert Nemiroff and they separated in '57 and officially divorced in '64, in recent years, there has been much exploration into Lorraine's somewhat closeted identity as a lesbian. Most of what we know about this comes from her personal writings, unpublished essays, and her letters to gay publications, including *The Ladder* and *ONE Magazine*.

Sadly, we'll never know how her thoughts or life could have progressed as she died of pancreatic cancer at the age of 34. Hansberry lived at a time when it was still dangerous and illegal to be an out-home asexual, compounded that with the difficulties of being Black and a woman, it is understandable why she may have kept some things private.

Until recent years, most of this material was inaccessible, save for her letters to the gay magazines, primarily because Nemiroff, who ran her estate, restricted access to archival material that expanded upon her identity. Not until 2010, where researchers granted access to these restricted boxes and materials by the Hansberry estate.

Leigh: So we're going to dive into a couple of different areas, starting with her letters to *The Ladder*. So around the time of her separation from Nemiroff and as she was completing *A Raisin in the Sun*, she sent two letters to the editors of *The Ladder* and she had actually, prior to this, she had welcomed Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin to her home to visit and she had gotten involved with the daughters of Bilitis but never actually went to a meeting.

But she sent these letters to the editors along with a money order for two dollars to receive some back issues and she talks about her own identity as a heterosexually married lesbian and her appreciation for organizations like DOB and their publications. So, some choice quotes we wanted to pull out:

"I'm glad as heck that you exist. You are obviously serious people and I feel that women, without wishing to foster any strict separatist notions, homo or hetero, indeed have a need for their own publications and organizations. Our problems, our experiences as women are profoundly unique as compared to the other half of the human race. Women, like other oppressed groups of one kind or another, have particularly had to pay a price for the intellectual impoverishment that the second class status imposed on us for centuries created and sustained. Thus, I feel that The Ladder is a fine, elementary step in a rewarding direction."

Aubree: Hmm. Another one of those that she says is

"I wanted to leap into the questions raised on heterosexually married lesbians. I am one of those. How could we ever begin to guess the numbers of women who are not prepared to risk a life alien to what they have been taught all their lives to believe was their natural destiny and their only expectation for economic security?"

And then one last quote she says is:

"As one raised in a cultural experience (I am a Negro) where those within were and are forever lecturing to their fellows about how to appear acceptable to the dominant social group. I know something about the shallowness of such a view as an end to itself."

Leigh: Which is such an interesting comment that kind of goes against the grain of what DOB was committed to at the time, which was following assimilationist ideas in terms of dress and presentation. She would have had, you know, a very specific experience of respectability politics in the Black Civil Rights Movement. So it's really interesting that she carries it over into this. She actually- says later on in one of the letters:

*"Someday, I expect the 'discrete' Lesbian will not turn her head on the streets at
the sight of the 'butch' strolling hand in hand with her friends in their
trousers and
definitive haircuts."*

[laughter] Which, I love.

Aubree: You love that. That's so great.

Leigh: It's so great. I love it. That's a great quote.

Aubree: The definitive haircuts, you know?

Leigh: The definitive haircuts. She- she definitely was like, these queers are going to have so many weird fucking do's.

Aubree: God! We're going to look so great. We're going to say fuck all the rules.

Leigh: Yeah. [laughs]

Aubree: So she signed these letters anonymously as simply L-H-N, Lorraine Hansberry, Nemiroff, and was identified as the author of these letters by Barbara Grier in *The Ladder* issue from 1976 following her death. Other documents that reveal her lesbian identity include poems, short stories she published in *The Ladder*, and one under the pseudonym Emily Jones. A self-portrait and a 1961 essay titled *On Homophobia, the Intellectual Improvement of Women and a Homosexual Bill of Rights*.

Leigh: Mhmm. She also, this is really fun, she kept like a diary of sorts. These were pages that she called Myself in Notes where she wrote yearly inventories of who she was at the time. She started them when she was 23 and they went all the way to, you know, her death and they included things like what she liked, loved, hated, was bored with. They're basically just like lists, which is great. It's like, here's what I enjoyed and what sucked in my year on Earth. And so we wanted to highlight some of these because they're just really fun.

Aubree: [laughs] So at 23, her list for likes, she included things like "to look at well-dressed women," "deeply intelligent women" and Eartha Kitt's legs. Which, I mean, no one can disagree with that. Under dislike, she writes "masculinity in women."

Leigh: So she wasn't- she wasn't into the butch herself personally, I guess.

Aubree: She was definitely more on the feminine side, you know. At 26, Eartha Kitt, again- [laughs]

Leigh: Sensing a theme.

Aubree: Anna Magnani and intellectual women under likes and she remains "indifferent to most men."

Leigh: Mood, mood, Lorraine.

Aubree: Alright. Sometimes these highlights- these notes could also be contradictory. Like at 29, as she included "my homosexuality" under both things that I like and things that I hate.

Leigh: Mhmm. And we'll see this too, there was a lot of kind of conflict going on about this, but she turns 32 and suddenly things can get very bodied. Like this one, her likes include "69 when it really works" and "the inside of a lovely woman's mouth." [laughter] Which is so good. One of these lists that was on display in an exhibit about her was her list at the age of 28. Her list of things was "I am bored to death with" and these included *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*, in like all caps. I guess she was- she was tired of everything around it.

Aubree: Move on people. Move on.

Leigh: Yeah. Drinking without happiness, Eartha Kitt. So speaking of moving on, it looks like she finally moved on to a new obsession. She- a couple of years and Eartha Kitt is out. She wrote, being a les, ""Lesbians" (the capital L variety)" and I'm not saying that. That was like literally her quote, the quote is lesbians, parentheses, the capital L variety. Silly White people, the great American money obsession, my own loneliness, SEX, in all caps, myself being a quote "celebrity."

There's more, but those were just some of my favorites. She lists under "I want" things like to work, to be in love and Dorothy Secules at the moment, which leads us into talking about Lorraine's gay life and loves

This is probably, I mean, Lorraine is probably our most extensive section just because there's like-

Aubree: There's so much there.

Leigh: There's so much there.

Aubree: And there's so much work just now rediscovering.

Leigh: Yeah.

Aubree: Yeah.

Leigh: Jonathan Ned Katz, who's behind outhistory.org, was not able to access the restricted boxes in her collection until 2013. So like, this is a little relatively new.

Aubree: Yeah. So she's been famous since the '60s and we're just now learning this. So that's amazing.

Leigh: Yeah.

Aubree: So much of Lorraine's life seems to be simultaneously marked with a hectic and glamorous lifestyle and a profound sense of isolation and loneliness and a battle with herself over her closeted attractions in life. In the film *Lorraine Hansberry: Sighted Eyes/Feeling Heart*, Hansberry biographer Margaret Wilkerson says:

"She was an artist, a Black woman, and a gay person at a time when these groups were not connected. She didn't have a community where she could. She didn't really have that. Most of her gay friends were White women."

Leigh: Yeah, one note from her private writings shows her mood one morning as she decides to like fully embrace her identity. She wakes up and she writes:

"As for this homosexuality thing (how long since I have thought or written of it in that way--as some kind of entity!) Am committed to it. But its childhood is over. From now on--I actively look for women of accomplishment – no matter what they look like. How free I feel today. I will create my life--not just accept it."

That's like such a powerful statement of self-determination.

Aubree: Love that so much.

Leigh: Yeah. So she- she had a trip to the hospital in 1964 and upon returning from that, she writes of her intense desire for her lover at the time and she gets super into some juicy details. And Jonathan Ned Katz notes that, quote:

"the loneliness and illness became entangled in Hansberry"

as she recalled the evening that they spent together in a quote that I saw and just went, 'What? Wow!' So she wrote this, which I'm reading because Aubree was like, 'Mmm, you take that one.' So she writes:

"So much was pent up. I consumed her whole. I recalled also when she first lay in my bed – how very, very wet the place on my leg when she moved. She was very ready."

[high-pitched] Okay, Lorraine.

Aubree: Okay, Lorraine. Yes, thank you.

Leigh: Just writing some porn there.

Aubree: Uh-huh. I mean.

Leigh: Yeah, that's fine. Like Wow, that's explicit. Wow.

Aubree: Wow, that is- Okay. So the details about who Lorraine spent her time with, dated, slept with, etc. was revealed in an *Out* magazine article in September 1999 by Elise Harris who had spoken with Renee Kaplan, one of Hansberry's girlfriends, and interviewed many of Hansberry's lesbian friends. She went to the house parties in the village in the Upper East Side with queer luminaries like Edith Windsor, Louise Fitzhugh, author of *Harriet the Spy* and Patricia Highsmith. She was close friends with James Baldwin who lived eight blocks away from her.

Leigh: Yeah, she would go to a lot of his, kind of, you know, entertaining things in his apartment, and they would often, like, leave parties together, just being like, 'Oh man, this is boring. Let's get out of here.' [laughter] So

let's start off. We're going to go into a couple of her relationships. So we mentioned Renee Kaplan. They were introduced to one another at a party following the debut of *A Raisin in the Sun*, where she had flirted with multiple women there but paid special attention to Renee. Renee Kaplan said in her interview with Elise Harris:

"She flirted with me outrageously at that party. I was very surprised. I think our relationship started after--five minutes after-- opening night."

[laughter] They were together for about two years and Kaplan recalls how they enjoyed some of their time together on one weekend away at the Catskills, which they would do a lot. So she says of this, like, one particular time:

"I got to know Lorraine better because she was considerably much more relaxed than she was at social gatherings. We made a very, very seductive snowwoman, and then we made a bunch of snow angels. She had a much lighter touch. Because she was very serious!"

And what I love about that is it just shows that she really did feel like she had to lead a double life. She put up a very particular mask when she was in these intellectual circles and also in White circles. And she really felt like she had to have a very specific public identity. And what I love about this is that you get to start seeing her just when she gets to kind of let that guard down.

Aubree: Yeah. In those private moments, you know?

Leigh: Yeah. Of their breakup, Kaplan noted that quote:

"I probably should have been a friend of Lorraine's more than her lover. Sexually it was not a great relationship"

But they actually remained friends until Hansberry's death and were really close for many years after.

Aubree: Yeah. Another relationship with Eve Ward. And that is a pseudonym, so not her real name. And Eve is- was a writer from Tennessee who was on the rebound from a disastrous affair that ended because the girl wouldn't have sex in Rome while the Pope was there.

Leigh: Deal breaker, I guess

Aubree: I mean, even though that's, is that where the Pope lives though? It's like, uh...

Leigh: Well, I mean - Yeah. Like Vatican City.

Aubree: I'm kidding. I'm kidding. I'm kidding. [laughter] When Hansberry and Ward went to parties and dinners together with a village click of dykes and Marijane Meaker described Lorraine as:

"delightfully in love with Eve."

Another was Molly Malone Cook and this is the same Molly Malone Cook who would go on to have a 40-year romance with poet Mary Oliver. Cook's affair with Lorraine was mentioned via veiled comments in Oliver and Cook's book, *Our World*. And it says:

"[Cook] had...an affair that struck deeply: I believe she loved totally and was loved totally. I know about it, and I am glad...This love, and the ensuing emptiness of its ending, changed her. Of such events we are always changed – not necessarily badly, but changed. Who doesn't know this, doesn't know much."

Oh, wow.

Leigh: Yeah.

Aubree: That is deep and romantic.

Leigh: Right? I love it. I know, I'm excited to get into Mary Oliver.

Aubree: Oh, yeah.

Leigh: So finally, we come to Dorothy Secules, who was the woman Lorraine wrote about that she wanted on her list, at the moment, from age 28. So in 1960, Robert Nemiroff and Hansberry actually invested in a house in Greenwich Village, where Secules, who was 15 years older than Lorraine, had been renting since the 1930s. She stayed and Hansberry and Nemiroff took the top floor, and basically their love affair essentially started on the stairs in between. So she was a blue-eyed blonde woman, and she was described as, quote:

"feisty and enthusiastic about things she liked, which was usually politics"

So she met Lorraine's desire for an intellectually interesting woman. They went to events together with their friend Miranda d'Aconda and her girlfriend, and d'Aconda recalled:

"We went to plays and things. The four of us would have grand times – I remember Lorraine lined us all up, all three of us, she in front, to teach us [the latest dance]. We all collapsed laughing; it turned into total silliness. That was the part of Lorraine that was so irresistible, where her intellect could take a rest for a while and just enjoy the fun of the evening."

Aubree: Aw. That's amazing. That's just so cute. So Lorraine moved in the summer of 1962 to a second home in upstate New York to help her write, and while she loved it in the country she was also separated from Dorothy. D'Aconda again says:

"Dorothy was deeply unhappy about this, about Croton about Bobby and this constant tug, and about Lorraine being so very divided in her attachment. It made for no full relationship either way."

And at this time Lorraine became consumed with doubts about her marriage to Bobby and was extremely conflicted. Both Dorothy and Renee Kaplan were listed as honorary pallbearers in the program at her funeral, and she told Secules, "I love you" on her deathbed. Upon her death, the *New York Post* noted that

her will included a \$1,000 bequest to a Dorothy Secules of New York City, not otherwise identified.

Leigh: And so a little bit on her relationship with Robert. So we talked about their relationship a little bit up top, but there's a really good quote from d'Aconda again about kind of how she felt being in this relationship:

"Lorraine was someone who felt personal honesty was very, very important, and she felt that she'd been using that relationship for quite a while and felt she ought to get out of it. I think she realized that situation was an almost constant struggle within her. Bobby was very supportive in her work, I mean, he was the person. It was almost too much so. I could see that it was her need of his advice, support, nurture, and also criticism, as well as his need to hold on to that aspect of her, if he could have nothing else. She needed it, but he needed for her to need it. She wanted (his support), but it didn't free her to be totally herself, and it didn't free him to have his own life."

Aubree: I mean, it's just all so complicated, you know, none of this is cut and dry, and none of this is simple.

Leigh: Yeah.

Aubree: So just a last note on Lorraine's queer writings. After completing *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lorraine would go on to write a few other plays and stories. Her play, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* explored themes of sexuality, including same-sex attraction, her third play, *Les Blancs*, which she never finished, included a gay character.

Content warning: suicide mention

She wrote *Flowers for the General* in which college student Marca falls in love with her classmate Maxine after which she's outed to the entire school and attempt suicide.

Leigh: So- so basically, and *Autostraddle* said this. Basically, she wrote *Lost and Delirious*, but in 1956.

Aubree: Yeah. [laughter]

Leigh: So.

Aubree: Super great. All right. So we did want to talk a little bit about Aaron Henry again, just a little bit, because there's probably the least here about him. We do know that beginning in the 1960s, he was accused of having a sexual relationship with a young man, a teenager. And in 1962, he was convicted of having an inappropriate relationship with a teenage boy. Those charges were later overturned by the Mississippi Supreme Court.

And it should be noted that accusing leaders- Civil Rights leaders of being homosexual was actually a common smear tactic used by local law enforcement and federal law enforcement. And of course, at the time, Aaron Henry denied the charges.

Leigh: That was what happened to Bayard Rustin.

Aubree: Yes. Yes. Which was part of the reason he got pushed to the background, right? Yeah. However, in the 1970s, Henry did become more open about his attraction to the same sex, and it is widely believed that he was bisexual. The biographer Curry, who spent a lot of time diving into this, did note that when Henry was serving in the Mississippi State House, his bisexual orientation came to be taken for granted by his colleagues.

It was an open secret, and they grew accustomed to seeing young men as companions and roommates at motels around the Capitol and in the visitor's gallery. When he died, his writings were also filled with letters to and from young men discussing their relationships. So quietly bisexual, one of those open secret kind of things.

Leigh: Right.

Aubree: Yeah.

Main Takeaways and Final Conclusions

Leigh: And so finally, we come to kind of our end here. Kind of the final takeaway is that many gays and lesbians really learned to fight for their rights from participation in or learning about the Civil Rights Movement as opposed to solely getting involved with organizations like the Mattachine Society or the Daughters of Bilitis.

And Jared Leighton, who wrote the dissertation we mentioned, *Freedom Indivisible* chocks this up largely to the fact that the Civil Rights Movement was national, even though it was comprised of a whole bunch of different regional groups but the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis were seen as more kind of isolated to coastal cities like San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles. So folks who were in the middle of the country, who were in rural areas, could really kind of start to explore their identity and experiences in activism through their own actions in the Civil Rights Movement.

Aubree: Yeah. Absolutely. And it was harder to get those gay and lesbian publications because of all the laws and rules that prohibited a lot of it from being sent through the mail without postal service inspection. So it was just harder to find those connections as it was with the Civil Rights Movement. Do we have any fun pop culture tie-ins?

Fun Segment: Pop Culture Tie-In

Leigh: Yeah, I think- I think there's just a few. We mentioned the documentary, *Lorraine Hansberry: Sighted Eyes/Feeling Heart*. There's also a really great *Making Gay History* podcast episode on Ernestine Eckstein. And you can watch Rodney Powell's video essays to Reverend Rick Warren on YouTube as well as a video letter to Soul Force members about the Equality Rides. And you had one that was really fun.

Aubree: Oh, yes! My favorite one. And this is where I'm kind of showing my- my history growing up being Black and middle class. I heard Nina Simone's song, *Young Gifted and Black*, so many times growing up. I heard it at church. I heard it at school. I heard it from all my relatives saying, "Yes, you are young, gifted, and Black, and you are the next generation of us." And I didn't know that Nina Simone

wrote that song about Lorraine Hansberry. So, yeah, It was- Nina was inspired by Lorraine. So I did not know that when I've grown up on that song my whole life.

Leigh: Yeah, I just, I really wish that we could have seen the ways in which Lorraine would have grown. And I want to see how she would have responded to later Black feminists like Barbara Smith and Audre Lorde, Angela Davis.

Aubree: Yes.

How Gay were They?

Leigh: We've come to the end of our time together. And we're going to close out the show like we do always with our How Gay were They? So, Aubree-

Aubree: Yes.

Leigh: I want to ask you, "How gay were they?" And please give a score for each of our four wonderful queer civil rights babies.

Aubree: All right. Okay.

Leigh: If you can.

Aubree: If I can, I think for Dr. Rodney Powell, I'm going to give him seven protest signs out of ten. You know.

Leigh: Nice. Nice.

Aubree: Seven. Now, I'm going to bump it up to eight because of his later activism work, you know?

Leigh: Yeah.

Aubree: Eight protest signs out of ten. For Ernestine, I think, God, she's got to be at least what a ten out of ten on the protest sign scale. [laughter] I

mean, we got the pictures. You got the sunglasses, the fact that she was smart enough to protest and picket in cities she didn't live-

Leigh: Right.

Aubree: Just to protect her own identity. That's a ten out of ten. I mean, right there.

Leigh: Traveling gay.

Aubree: Yes. For Aaron Henry, I'm going to give him a three protest signs out of ten. You know?

Yeah, never really open about it, never really confirmed. I want to respect the privacy. So I'ma give him a three out of ten.

Leigh: And what about Lorraine to close things out?

Aubree: God, for Lorraine, ten million protest signs out of ten, [laughter] ten plays, ten literary plays and queer poems out of ten.

Leigh: I love it.

Aubree: Okay. I said, go to nine out of ten. I give her a nine out of ten. [laughter]

Leigh: I don't know. So nine million out of ten? [laughs]

Aubree: Nine million out of ten. Nine million lesbian plays and queer sonnets.

Leigh: There we go. [laughter]

Aubree: How gay would you rate them?

Leigh: Alright. So, let's see. Who did you start with? You started with Rodney Powell.

Aubree: I started with Rodney Powell, Dr. Powell.

Leigh: Let's see. I'm going to give Rodney. I think I'm going to go with your same scale.

I'm going to give him eight out of ten delightfully hunky stewards since that seems to be his jam.

Aubree: [laughs] That would be his thing.

Leigh: I'll give- You know what? I'll give him eight out of ten delightfully hunky stewards and one quiet but not shy zoologist giving him a total of nine out of ten.

Aubree: Yes.

Leigh: I love that he just made a conscious decision to just switch over into this activism and then he did it, you know, it years and years later and it's one of the few examples that we've really seen of 1990s queer activism, which I think is really interesting.

Aubree: I mean, he got drawn back into it and it's this multi- it's this intergenerational thing. I love that.

Leigh: Yeah. Yeah.

Aubree: And I love that he's just retired. Like he is still here.

Leigh: He's like, I'm done. Whatever.

Aubree: He's still with us. He's still with us.

Leigh: He's the first person that we've ever talked about who is still alive. So Rodney Powell, if you listen to this, thank you for being awesome and I hope that you like this episode.

Aubree: Thank you for everything you've done, you know.

Leigh: Yeah.

Aubree: Please. What about Aaron Henry? Let's go Aaron Henry.

Leigh: Aaron Henry. Yeah, I think probably like a three or a four just because he, you know, he kind of, he never quite got out of that closeted life. And we just, you know, unfortunately, we really don't know that much about him. He was kind of in the footnotes in terms of his- his sexuality, even though he was such an influential figure in Mississippi. But I'm just also, you know, I got to give him points for being like, get that motherfucking Confederate flag off of our state flag.

Aubree: He tried- he tried-

Leigh: He tried

Aubree: So long.

Leigh: And eventually succeeded just, you know.

Aubree: I can't believe it took till 2020 though. I can't- that's how long that campaign went. Was 2020 when they finally changed it. What about Ernestine Eckstein?

Leigh: For Ernestine, I'm going to give her twelve out of tens pairs of white sunglasses on the gay scale.

Aubree: Yes.

Leigh: I- I love the stuff that she has to say about the fact that she was just like, well, I had lots of attraction to women, but you know, there was never no word for it. And I love that she was just like, 'so you're happy. What of it?' And she had to learn about being gay from her gay college friend. And then, you know what? You know what? I'm going to give her twelve out of ten gay agendas.

Aubree: Yes.

Leigh: We'll do that.

Aubree: Yes. Cause she just jumped right into it.

Leigh: She jumped right into it.

Aubree: I love that. She's like, I'm gay, where's the movement? Let's go.

Leigh: I'm gay. Take me to your gays. And then for Lorraine, I'm going to give 18 out of 10, God damn it, I'm going to say this, wet spots on her leg [laughs] because I can't believe I just read that. She just, she really loved hobnobbing around with all of the like village lesbians.

Aubree: Yeah.

Leigh: And I want more. I wish that we could have had more. I'm so happy that she wrote down the granular details of what she liked and disliked, which included the ever- ever changing position of Eartha Kitt-

Aubree: Yes.

Leigh: Specifically her legs. So I think when you've written yearly inventories of your obsession with Eartha Kitts legs, you can't be below a 10-

Aubree: No.

Leigh: On the how gay were they scale. [laughs]

Aubree: And you know how there's that play in that movie, *The Boys in the Band*. I want that, but centered around Lorraine Hansberry-

Leigh: Yes.

Aubree: And living in New York and going to these parties with Edie Windsor and all these poets, I want that movie.

Closing and Where to Find us Online

Leigh: I wonder if she ever met. I wonder if she ever met Eartha Kitt. I don't know. Well, so that leaves us with our closing, my wonderful friends. Thank you so much, Aubree, for coming on here again and joining me and talking about all these wonderful people. And I'm excited to dive into Paulie Murray with you in the future as well, which will be one of our upcoming episodes.

Aubree: Well, thank you so much for having me. You're the only person in the world I'll actually read a dissertation for fun for. Because I'm an academic and I don't even read dissertations as my job and I will read a dissertation for your show apparently.

Leigh: Well, I feel completely honored. Oh, thank you. So Aubree, please tell our wonderful listeners at home where they can find out more about you.

Aubree: So when I'm not nerding out about Dr. Who, you can find me on my own podcast, *Southern Queeries* where my co-host, India Bastien and I talk to guests about what it's like to be queer in the South. And right now we're doing our series on LGBTQ weddings. And so we're at [Southern Queeries.com](https://SouthernQueeries.com). You can also read my published essays at AubreeCalvin.com and Aubree is spelled with two 'Es'.

Leigh: And I'm Leigh and when I'm not nerding out about extremely explicit diary entries by Lorraine Hansberry, I'm usually talking about comics and queer TV over at @aparadoxinflux on Twitter and crying about Xena episodes on my couch, which is a relatively consistent position these days in the pandemic. *History is Gay* podcast can be found on Tumblr at @historyisgaypodcast, Twitter at @historyisgaypod and you can always drop us a line with questions suggestions or just to say hi at historyisgaypodcast@gmail.com.

If you enjoy the show and want to support us in continuing to make it, you can support us on Patreon where you can get access to Sappho Salon minisodes, special sneak peaks, the opportunity to have your voice show up in the show and more. You can become a patron by going to the [support](#) section on our website and join the ranks of our amazing Patreon community along with the wonderful Alicia Drier, Gabriella Reagan, Victoria Trimble, Lyra Hall, and Ilan Anthony Sewell!

So thank you all so much for your support. I say this every time but we literally couldn't do this without you. You make this show absolutely possible. You can also get awesome merch at our *History is Gay* store click on [shop](#) on our website and lastly remember to rate, review and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts. It helps more people find the show and we can expand our awesome community. And as a last plug also please remember to fill out the survey that we are sending out for folks. We really want to hear your opinions that is at historyisgaypodcast.com/survey. And so Aubree would you like to help me close out the show tonight?

Aubree: I would love to.

Leigh: Wonderful. That's it for *History is Gay*. Until next time.

Aubree: Stay queer.

Leigh: And stay curious.

♪ [Outre Music Plays]♪