

DREAM AGAIN MARCH FORWARD BLACK & QUEER ACTIVISTS POSTER EXHIBIT

In August of 1963, while in a Birmingham, Alabama, jail cell, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." In this poster exhibit, we look into the intersectionality between Black and queer activists who fought and continue to fight for equality and acceptance.

The 10 activists and writers spotlighted in this exhibit remind us that we, too, must continue to create the beloved community that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. hoped and dreamed for. As you learn about these 10 trailblazers, please note that there are still many voices and key figures, some known and some unknown, that paved the way and continue to pave the way for a more just and fair society for all. It is up to us to learn those stories.





UVU
LGBTQ+ STUDENT
SERVICES

DREAM AGAIN
MARCH FORWARD
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
COMMEMORATION WEEK 2024

MARSHA P. JOHNSON

Marsha P. Johnson was born on August 24, 1945, in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and was assigned male at birth. After moving to New York City in 1963, Johnson began performing as a drag queen under the name Marsha P. Johnson. The “P” stood for “pay it no mind,” a sarcastic remark Johnson often used when questioned about her gender. While the term transgender was not commonly used while she was alive, historians and friends describe Johnson as a transgender woman. Johnson self-identified as a “gay person, a transvestite, and a drag queen.”

Johnson was a key figure in the Stonewall uprising in 1969. Many accounts claim that Johnson started the riots, but in 1987, she recalled arriving at Stonewall at 2 a.m., after the riots had begun. Johnson participated in the uprising until the riots ended days later. On the second night, she climbed a lamppost and dropped a heavy bag onto a police car, shattering the windshield. After Stonewall, Johnson became one of the most prominent members of the gay rights movement. She was a founding member of the Gay Liberation Front immediately after the Stonewall riots. Johnson also co-founded Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) with her close friend, Sylvia Rivera, in 1970.

Until her death in 1992, **Johnson was a dedicated gay liberation and AIDS activist and advocated for houseless LGBTQ+ youth.** Johnson continues to be one of the most iconic, admired trailblazers of the early LGBTQ+ rights movement.



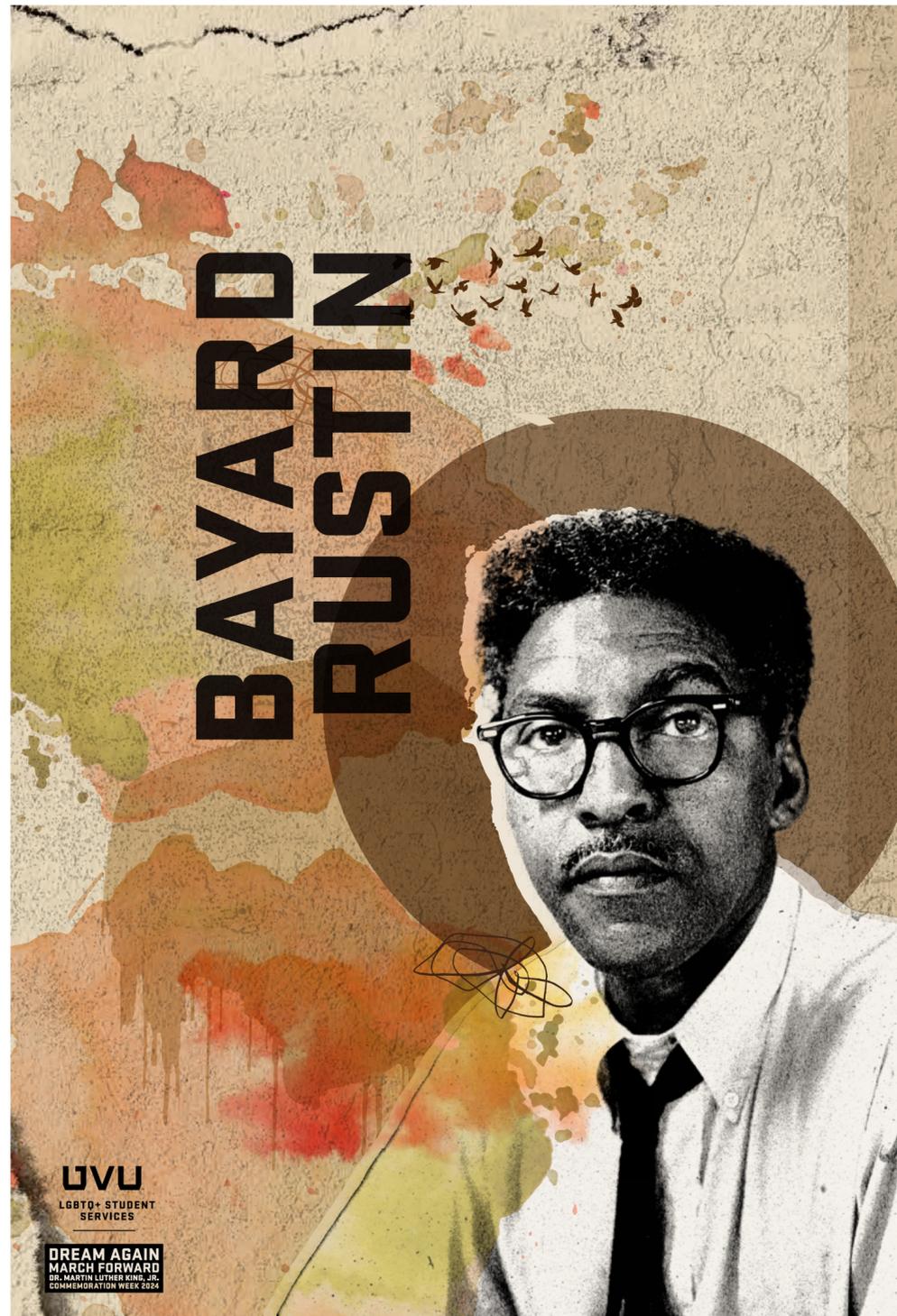
JAMES BALDWIN

Born on August 2, 1924, James Baldwin was the oldest of his mother's nine children. He was born and raised in Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural revival of Black literature, art, and culture that lasted through the 1930s. From a young age, Baldwin was passionate about reading and writing, and he published short stories, poems, and essays in his schools' magazines and newspapers. At 24, Baldwin moved to Paris to establish himself as a writer outside of New York's Black literary scene. Baldwin published his first novel in 1953, the semi-autobiographical "Go Tell It on the Mountain," while in Paris. The book explores the positive and negative impacts of the Pentecostal church on the lives of Black community members.

Baldwin returned to the U.S. in 1957 as the Civil Rights Movement was gaining traction. The movement was hostile to the queer community, and Baldwin was one of only two out gay men involved in it, the other being Bayard Rustin. Despite his prominence and activism, Baldwin was uninvited from speaking at the March on Washington in 1963 out of fear that his speech would be too inflammatory.

Throughout his literary career, Baldwin explored themes of masculinity, race, and sexuality in his work and how different identities can intersect. **Baldwin featured gay and bisexual men in his fiction as early as 1956, decades before the gay liberation movement began.** Baldwin's work in literature and social activism emphasizes the obstacles minority groups face as they search for social and self-acceptance.





BAYARD RUSTIN

Bayard Rustin was born on March 17, 1912, and raised by his maternal grandparents. His grandmother, Julia Rustin, was a Quaker and an early member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). At an early age, Rustin met other prominent civil rights activists, such as W. E. B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson. **Rustin was openly gay as a teenager in the 1920s, long before it was safe for queer people to express themselves freely.** He felt little guilt or shame around his sexuality, which may be due to his grandmother's influence. When he told her that he preferred to spend time with men, Julia Rustin replied, "I suppose that's what you need to do." When Rustin moved to Harlem in 1937, he became a Quaker himself and joined the Fifteenth Street Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends.

Beginning in 1941, Rustin was extensively involved in the Civil Rights Movement. He engaged in public transportation boycotts in the 1940s and later organized the Freedom Rides in 1961. He was a close advisor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and organized the March on Washington in 1963 and the New York City school boycott in 1964. Rustin was not involved in gay rights activism until the 1980s at his partner's urging. **He worked to bring the AIDS crisis to the NAACP's attention and testified in favor of New York State's Gay Rights Bill in 1986.**

Rustin remains one of the most influential figures of the Civil Rights Movement. In 2013, President Barack Obama posthumously awarded Rustin the Presidential Medal of Freedom, stating, "Bayard Rustin was an unyielding activist for civil rights, dignity, and equality for all [...] As an openly gay African American, Mr. Rustin stood at the intersection of several of the fights for equal rights."

AUDRE LORDE

Audre Lorde began using poetry to communicate when she was a child. Born on February 18, 1934, Lorde was extremely nearsighted and classified as legally blind as a toddler. At age four, she learned to talk while she learned to read and write. Later in her childhood, Lorde memorized large amounts of poetry. When asked a question, she would often answer by reciting a poem. Lorde graduated from high school in 1951 and spent a year at the National University of Mexico in 1954. There, she solidified her identity as a lesbian and a poet. **Lorde self-described herself as a “Black, lesbian, feminist, mother, warrior, poet” and wrote about the intersection of these identities in her poetry and prose.**

After graduating with a master’s degree in library science and working as a librarian, Lorde briefly lived in Mississippi in 1968 as the writer-in-residence at Tougaloo College, a historically Black college (HBCU). She taught a six-week poetry workshop to young, Black undergraduate students. During this time, largely inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, Lorde began to use poetry as a force for social change.

Identity, community, and solidarity were key themes in Lorde’s writing. She understood and celebrated the importance of intersectionality and diversity in activism and social change. In her 1984 book “Sister Outsider,” she asserted, “When we define ourselves, when I define myself, the place in which I am like you and the place in which I am not like you, I’m not excluding you from the joining — I’m broadening the joining.”





STORMÉ DELARVERIE

Stormé DeLarverie was never certain of her date of birth. Her father was a wealthy white man living in New Orleans, and her mother was Black and worked as a servant for his family. Throughout her childhood, DeLarverie was bullied for being biracial by both the white and Black children she went to school with. She could pass as Black or white, and later, her style was androgynous enough that she could also pass for male or female.

DeLarverie was a butch lesbian and became an icon for LGBTQ+ entertainment and the gay rights movement. She was a singer and worked as a drag king during an era when there were very few drag kings performing. In 1955, she was the MC and only drag king at the Jewel Box Revue, the first racially integrated drag revue, where she sang baritone. The Stonewall uprising became violent when a butch lesbian in handcuffs, who was likely DeLarverie, was brought through the crowd, bleeding from a head wound as she fought police. She shouted at bystanders to do something, and the crowd quickly became a mob. Throughout her life, DeLarverie was adamant that calling Stonewall a riot was misleading, saying, **“It was a rebellion, it was an uprising, it was a civil rights disobedience — it wasn’t no damn riot.”**

After the Stonewall uprising, DeLarverie was an activist for gay liberation and women’s rights. She organized and performed at fundraisers for battered women and children. DeLarverie continued to work as an MC and drag king, but she was also a bouncer, bodyguard, and volunteer street patrol worker. Long after her death, she is considered the “guardian of lesbians in the Village” and the “Rosa Parks of the gay community.”

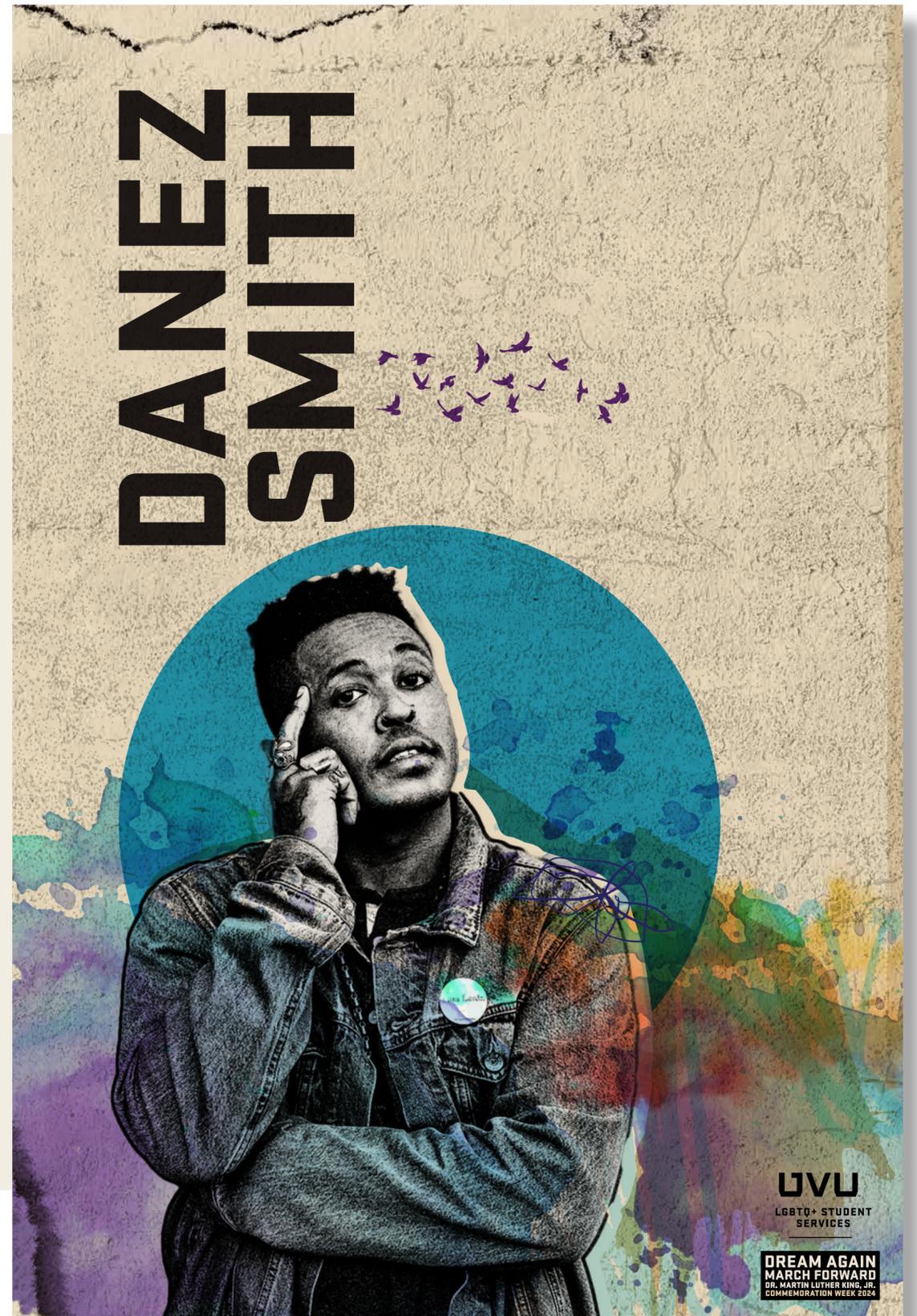


DANEZ SMITH

Danez Smith (they/them) was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, but their family was originally from Georgia and Mississippi. During Smith's early education, they struggled with literacy until a caring teacher encouraged them to take reading more seriously so they could read video game magazines. Smith would later attend the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

In 2014, Smith was diagnosed as HIV positive. Despite their devastating diagnosis, they resolved to live a happy and fulfilled life while being inspired by and finding solace in the poets and writers from the 80's AIDS crisis. Smith has been awarded multiple times and has written a plethora of poems discussing topics such as sexual identity, race, and friendship.

A modern-day symbol for the generations of what it means to be queer and Black, Smith is known by their contemporaries as being passionate about confronting American racism and creating a space for the oft-underrepresented and oppressed Black queer community. Smith is also a founding member of the Dark Noise Foundation. An organization of poets that explore deep topics and raise awareness for conversations about race and sexuality.

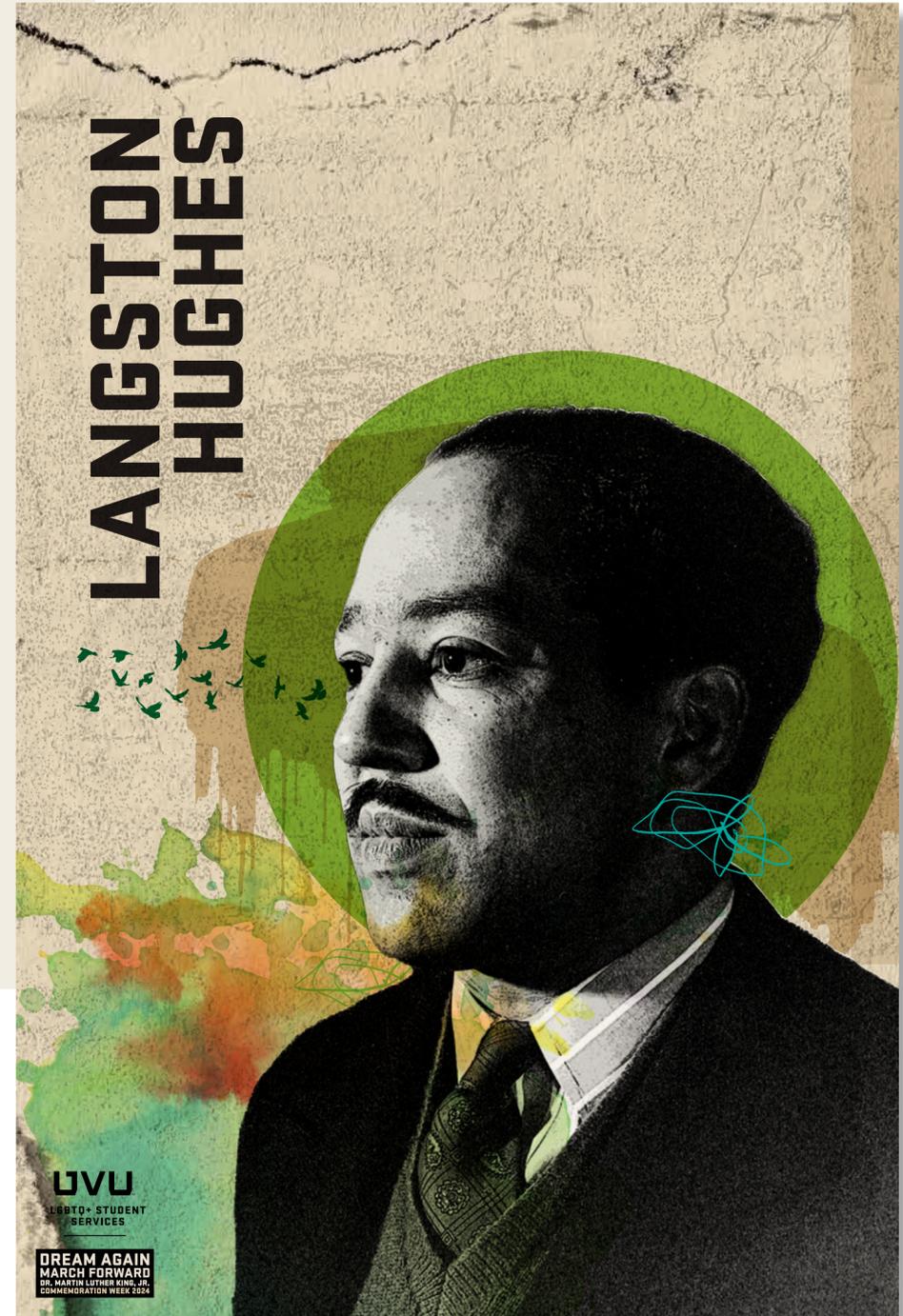


LANGSTON HUGHES

Langston Hughes was born in Missouri in 1901, a difficult time and place to be a young Black man. At the age of 20, his first poem, "The Negro Speaks Rivers," was published in The Crisis magazine, which **established him as a serious writer and a future leader in the Civil Rights Movement.**

Langston moved to New York and attended Columbia University, all the while still writing poetry and raising awareness about the Civil Rights Movement. He was an influential figure during the Harlem Renaissance, writing prolific poems, novels, plays, and newspaper columns.

Biographers and academics hotly debate Hughes' sexuality. Many argue that Hughes was homosexual but chose to remain closeted to remain in the good graces of predominantly Black churches, whose support was vital during the Harlem Renaissance. While others point to unpublished poems as evidence of his romantic relationship with Arnold Rampersad, Hughes' principal biography contends that he was most likely asexual. While this aspect of his life remains inconclusive, his fierce dedication to advocating for oppressed minority groups through activism and writing is certain.



LORRAINE HANSBERRY



Lorraine Hansberry was born in Chicago, Illinois, on May 19, 1930. At age seven, her family was threatened with eviction after purchasing a house in a neighborhood with a restrictive covenant that prevented Black people from buying property. Anna M. Lee and multiple residents took the Hansberry family to court. When the court sided with Lee, Hansberry's father, Carl, took the case to the Supreme Court. The initial ruling was then reversed, and the Hansberrys were allowed to keep their home. However, the courts had made it clear that they had only reversed the decision because the Hansberrys did not have proper representation during the first court case. Though the courts failed to see fault in the racially targeted covenants, *Hansberry v. Lee* is still a significant case that led the way for *Shelley v. Kraemer* to end racially restrictive covenants.

Inspired by her family's case, Hansberry wrote "A Raisin in the Sun" in 1959 about Black Americans living in Chicago during racial segregation. **It became the first Broadway play written by a Black woman.** "A Raisin in the Sun" was a major success that ran for 19 months and is still performed today. Two years after its release, the play was adapted into a film, with Hansberry writing the screenplay. In 1964, Hansberry wrote a second play called "The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window," which discusses themes of race and homosexuality. On top of this, Hansberry was very dedicated to the Civil Rights movement and even called out Robert F. Kennedy at the Baldwin-Kennedy meeting, claiming he needed to make a "moral commitment" to the revolutionary movement.

In 1950s New York, where homosexual relationships were strictly illegal, Hansberry wasn't fully out as a lesbian. She married a man named Robert Nemiroff in 1953 but began to embrace her sexuality in 1957 when she began to date other women. In 1962, the couple divorced but stayed close friends. Hansberry wrote some letters to *The Ladder*, the first lesbian publication to ever be nationally available in America, where she discussed topics such as her journey with discovering her sexuality and struggling as a lesbian woman in a straight marriage. Tragically, Hansberry's life was cut short by pancreatic cancer at just 34 years old in 1965. Hansberry lived as she promised to, writing in one diary entry, "[...] How free I feel today. I will create my life— not just accept it." Her letters were preserved and donated by her ex-husband to the New York Public Library and recently became available to the public in 2013.



MA RAINEY

Ma Rainey, **known as the “Mother of the Blues,”** significantly impacted the world of music during the early 1900s. Born Gertrude Malissa Nix Pridgett in 1886, Rainey demonstrated an incredible talent for singing at a young age and began performing as a teenager. Her deep-throated voice and the energy she brought to the stage drew large audiences. **Her unique melodies and lyrics reflected her experiences as an independent and openly bisexual Black woman.**

Rainey faced many challenges as an entertainer in a racially segregated world. Despite this, she rose to stardom. She combined traditions of vaudeville and southern blues in her music style. Rainey’s influence went beyond her music. She served as a mentor to Bessie Smith and later inspired artists like Dinah Washington, Big Mama Thornton, and Janis Joplin. Her story inspired August Wilson’s play “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom,” which became a great success on Broadway and even a film adaptation.

Despite her struggles, Rainey was a trailblazer for Black queer women and left a that resonates with people to this day. **Rainey’s story preaches the power of authenticity and self-expression in the face of adversity.**





ANGELA DAVIS

Angela Davis was born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1944. As a Black lesbian woman growing up in racially segregated America, Davis faced many challenges. In the 1960s, **Davis passionately advocated for racial equality and justice and became deeply involved in the Civil Rights Movement.** Her unwavering commitment to these causes led her to join the Communist Party USA and become a professor of philosophy.

In the 1970s, Davis was charged with murder, kidnapping, and conspiracy. These allegations stemmed from suspicion of her involvement in aiding prisoners during an armed courtroom takeover. Ultimately, Davis was acquitted of all charges. The trial was a turning point in her career, reinforcing her dedication to the cause. Davis continued her work as an activist and a scholar, with much of her work focusing on prison abolition and the rights of marginalized communities. **Her enduring legacy stands as a symbol of resilience and unwavering advocacy for those who have been oppressed,** solidifying her status as a prominent and influential figure in the ongoing fight for social justice.

