

# NIKOLAY ALEXEYEV

b. December 23, 1977

## RUSSIAN ACTIVIST

*“Without an ideal, nothing is possible.”*

**His leadership  
brought international  
attention to LGBT  
rights in Russia.**

Nikolay Alexeyev is Russia’s best-known and most quoted LGBT activist and the founder of Moscow Pride. In 2010 he won the first case on LGBT rights violations in Russia at the European Court of Human Rights.

Alexeyev was born and raised in Moscow. He graduated with honors from Lomonosov Moscow State University, where he pursued postgraduate studies in constitutional law. In 2001 the university forced him out, refusing to except his thesis on the legal restrictions of LGBT Russians. Claiming discrimination, he filed an appeal, but the Moscow district court denied it.

In 2005, after publishing multiple books and legal reports on LGBT discrimination, Alexeyev fully dedicated himself to LGBT activism. He realized “that it wouldn’t be possible to change things in Russia just by writing” and that he should be involved in more direct activism.

Despite an official ban on LGBT events, Alexeyev founded and served as the chief organizer of Gay Pride in Moscow. Participants in the Gay Pride parades were attacked and bullied by anti-gay protesters. Police arrested Alexeyev and fellow activists multiple times.

Through both illegal public protests and legal appeals, Alexeyev’s uncompromising fight for the right to hold Moscow Pride drew international attention to the issue of LGBT rights in his country. In 2009, alongside Russian, French and Belarusian LGBT activists, Alexeyev organized a protest to denounce the inaction of the European Court in considering the legality of the Moscow Pride bans. In 2010 he finally won his battle. The European Court of Human Rights ruled that Russia had violated Alexeyev’s right to protest and fined the government. The verdict marked the first international legal defeat of the Russian government on the issue of LGBT rights.

In Russia’s intensely homophobic political and social environment, few have risked as much as the publicly outspoken Alexeyev. He has campaigned against Russia’s “homosexual propaganda” and anti-LGBT hate speech; against the gay blood-donation ban; and for recognition of same-sex marriage. In 2008, in response to Alexeyev’s campaign, the Russian Ministry of Health eliminated a provision banning homosexuals from donating blood.

Alexeyev has received numerous international awards, including an honor from the International Gay and Lesbian Cultural Network (IGLCN) for “outstanding and courageous efforts in the face of unusually fierce homophobia.”



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# DEBORAH BATTS

b. April 13, 1947

d. February 3, 2020

## FIRST OUT FEDERAL JUDGE

*“I’m a mother, I’m an African American. I’m a lesbian.”*

Deborah Batts was the first openly gay federal judge. She presided over prominent cases involving political corruption, terrorism and criminal justice. A trailblazer for women, African Americans and LGBTQ people, she is remembered as a devoted jurist whose humanity inspired generations of lawyers.

**She was the  
first openly gay  
federal judge.**

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Batts graduated from Harvard Law School in 1972. She worked in private practice before becoming an assistant U.S. attorney in the Criminal Division of the Southern District of New York. In 1984 she joined Fordham University as a law professor.

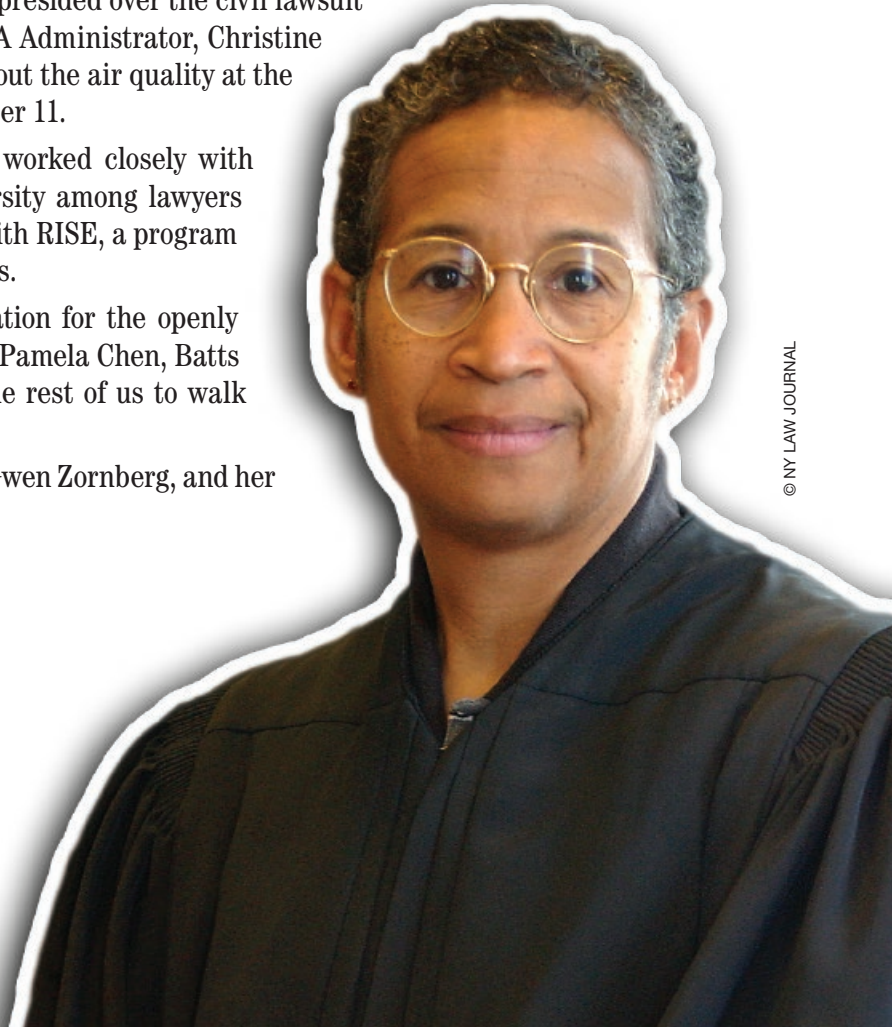
In 1994, President Clinton nominated Batts for a federal judgeship. Her sexual orientation, about which she was open, was not an issue. The Senate unanimously confirmed her. Batts, who addressed her sexual orientation publicly, did not want to be known for that single aspect of her identity. “I’m a mother, I’m an African American, I’m a lesbian, I’m a former professor,” she said.

Batts presided over many high-profile cases, including the decade-long civil litigation brought by the Central Park Five, a group of minority youth who were wrongly convicted of the widely publicized assault and rape of a female jogger in 1989. In 2007 Batts denied the motion to dismiss the case against the City of New York, which led to a \$41 million settlement. She presided over the civil lawsuit in which New York residents accused the former EPA Administrator, Christine Todd Whitman, of making misleading statements about the air quality at the World Trade Center site after the attacks of September 11.

A lifelong advocate for equality and justice, Batts worked closely with a mentoring program that sought to increase diversity among lawyers appointed for indigent defenders. She also worked with RISE, a program aimed at reducing recidivism among at-risk offenders.

Batts’s presence on the bench served as an inspiration for the openly gay federal judges who followed. According to Judge Pamela Chen, Batts “literally broke down the closet door and allowed the rest of us to walk through it.”

Batts died at age 72. She is survived by her wife, Dr. Gwen Zornberg, and her children, Alexandra and James McCown.



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# ANGIE CRAIG

b. February 14, 1972

## GROUNDBREAKING CONGRESSWOMAN

*“We need elected officials who are honest  
and work for the people.”*

**She is the first  
openly gay mother  
elected to Congress.**

Angie Craig is the first openly lesbian mother elected to Congress and the first openly gay person elected to Congress from Minnesota.

Born in West Helena, Arkansas, Craig was raised in a mobile home park by a single mother. Her family struggled to pay bills and lacked health insurance. Craig worked two jobs to get through college. She earned a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Memphis and took a job as a local news reporter.

Beginning in 1997, Craig and her partner, Debra Langston, faced a heartbreaking struggle to adopt a child, whom they named Joshua. The couple lived in Tennessee, a state generally hostile to homosexuality with no provision for gays and lesbians to adopt jointly. The couple's ensuing three-year legal battle led to an unprecedented ruling, allowing them to adopt Joshua and making it easier for other same-sex couples to adopt in the state. Although Craig and Langston separated in 2006, they continued to share custody of their son.

Craig moved to Minnesota looking for a “more open and accepting” community. Professionally, she advanced through the ranks to lead a workforce of 16,000 for a major Minnesota manufacturer. As a business leader, she used her position to advocate for marriage equality in the state.

Life experiences inspired Craig to fight injustice through politics. In 2016 she ran as a Democrat for Congress against a conservative anti-LGBT talk show host. She lost by fewer than 7,000 votes. In 2018 Craig defeated her former opponent in a rematch, becoming the first openly gay Minnesota Congressperson.

Craig has worked on initiatives around health care affordability, educational access and support for rural communities. She authored the State Health Care Premium Reduction Act and co-sponsored an act aimed at lowering prescription drug costs. She introduced the bipartisan Feed Emergency Enhancement During Disasters (FEEDD) Act to provide farmers with additional emergency flexibility.

Craig has denounced the Trump administration's anti-LGBT adoption waivers. In 2019 she introduced the Every Child Deserves a Family Act, which sought to end anti-LGBT discrimination in foster care and adoption.

Craig lives in Eagan, Minnesota, with her wife, Cheryl Greene. They have four children.

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# EMILY DICKINSON

POET

b. December 10, 1830

d. May 15, 1886

*“If I can stop one heart from breaking,  
I shall not live in vain.”*

**She is one  
of America’s  
greatest poets.**

Emily Dickinson was a reclusive American poet whose stylistic ingenuity challenged conventions and profoundly influenced poetry in the 20th century. Unrecognized in her own time, she has been celebrated since as one of America’s greatest, most original voices.

Dickinson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts, to a prominent, conservative Protestant family. Her grandfather helped found Amherst College. Her father, a lawyer, served one term in the U.S. Congress. Dickinson attended Amherst Academy, where she excelled in the sciences, Latin and composition.

At age 15, Dickinson pursued higher education at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. She departed a year later. Against her upbringing and the religious norms of the day, Dickinson never joined a church denomination. Her feelings about religion were influenced by transcendentalism and the poetry of one of its central figures, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Dickinson lived with her sister, Lavinia, on the family homestead. In her early 20s, Dickinson began to restrict her social activity, staying home for communal events and cultivating intense relationships with a small number of correspondents. She and Lavinia cared for their ailing mother for years until her death, after which, Dickinson further withdrew.

By the late 1860s, Dickinson rarely left her home. She became a prolific poet. Over seven years, she created 40 booklets containing roughly 800 poems on themes such as nature, love, death and spirit, including the favorites “A Bird came down the Walk,” “If you were coming in the Fall,” “Because I could not stop for Death” and “‘Hope’ is the thing with Feathers.”

Dickinson expressed ambivalence toward marriage. She maintained one of her strongest relationships with her sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert. Many scholars interpret the relationship as a romantic one. Dickinson sent Gilbert more than 270 letters enclosing her poems.

Very few of Dickinson’s poems were published during her lifetime. Those that were, were altered to conform with literary conventions of the day. After Dickinson died, Lavinia discovered hundreds of her sister’s poems. In 1890 the first volume of those works, published in their original, intended form—complete with random capitalization, imaginative word usage and other intentional quirks—reached the public. Dickinson’s poignant, compressed verse and haunting personal voice quickly established her as one of the most important figures in American literature.



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# FELICIA ELIZONDO

b. July 23, 1946

## TRANSGENDER ACTIVIST

*“I am your history. You can never change that no matter what you do to me.”*

**Her activism has been crucial in raising public awareness of transgender history.**

Felicia Elizondo is a self-described “Mexican spitfire, screaming queen, pioneer, legend, icon, diva, 29-year survivor of AIDS and Vietnam veteran.” Her activism has been crucial in raising public awareness of transgender rights and history.

Elizondo was born in San Angelo, Texas. Assigned male at birth, she knew she was “feminine” from the age of 5. Due to the lack of awareness of transgender people, Elizondo grew up believing she was gay. She was sexually assaulted by an older man and suffered bullying and name calling from her peers.

At age 14, Elizondo moved with her family to San Jose, California. Around the age of 16, she found refuge at Gene Compton’s Cafeteria in San Francisco’s Tenderloin neighborhood, where she became a regular. It was one of the few places in the city where drag queens and transgender women could congregate publicly. In 1966, three years before Stonewall, it became the site of one of the first LGBT riots in U.S. history. The Compton’s Cafeteria riot was led by a group of transgender women against police harassment.

Elizondo joined the Navy at age 18 and volunteered to serve in Vietnam. She decided, “If the military couldn’t make me a man, nothing would.” While serving, she realized she would always be attracted to men and told her commanding officer that she was gay. Consequently, she was interrogated by the FBI and the CIA, and the Navy dismissed her with an undesirable discharge. Later, she successfully petitioned to have her discharge reclassified as honorable.

After seeing “The Christine Jorgensen Story,” a film about the first nationally known transgender American woman, Elizondo came to understand her own identity. She completed gender confirmation surgery in 1973.

In 1987, during the AIDS epidemic, Elizondo tested positive for HIV. She returned to San Francisco and began working with community organizations seeking to improve quality of life for people living with HIV/AIDS. She became a trans drag queen and organized drag shows to raise funds for numerous HIV/AIDS nonprofits.

Elizondo has worked extensively to bring public attention to transgender history. In 2006, due largely to her efforts, the city of San Francisco renamed the 100 block of Taylor Street as Gene Compton’s Cafeteria Way. In 2014 Elizondo successfully worked with San Francisco city supervisors to rename the 100 block of Turk Street in honor of her late friend Vicki Marlane, a transgender icon.

Elizondo appeared in the documentary “Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton’s Cafeteria” (2005). In 2015 she served as the lifetime achievement grand marshal of the San Francisco Pride Parade.



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# ROB EPSTEIN

b. April 6, 1955

## OSCAR-WINNING DIRECTOR

*“[Filmmaking] gave me the opportunity to speak to the world.”*

**He is a multi-award-winning nonfiction filmmaker whose work focuses on LGBT issues.**

Rob Epstein is an American film director, writer and producer, and the cofounder of the production company Telling Pictures. Best known for his groundbreaking feature-length documentaries, he is the first openly gay director to win an Oscar for an LGBT-themed film.

Epstein was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey. At age 19, he moved to San Francisco. He started his career as one of the six-member Mariposa Film Group. Mariposa created “Word Is Out: Stories From Some of Our Lives” (1977), the first feature-length

documentary by and for LGBT Americans. The pioneering film aired nationally in theaters and on primetime public television, increasing visibility for the gay community during a transformative period in the LGBT rights movement.

Epstein conceived, directed and co-produced his next project, “The Times of Harvey Milk” (1985), about the slain gay San Francisco board supervisor. Premiering at the Telluride and New York film festivals, the film touched audiences worldwide. It won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, along with Peabody,

Emmy and Sundance Awards. It made Epstein the first openly gay director to win

an Oscar for an LGBT-themed movie. In 2013 the Library of Congress selected

“The Times of Harvey Milk” for the National Film Registry. The prestigious Criterion Collection also includes it in their catalog.

In 1987 Epstein and his husband, Jeffrey Friedman, founded Telling Pictures, a San Francisco-based production company. Together they produced “Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt” (1985), an HBO documentary about the AIDS epidemic, for which Epstein won a Peabody and his second Academy Award. Their box-office hit, “The Celluloid Closet” (1995), a retrospective of LGBT images in Hollywood, featuring interviews with luminaries such as Tom Hanks and Whoopie Goldberg, won a Peabody and an Emmy Award. Other acclaimed films by Epstein and Friedman include “End Game” (2018), “State of Pride” (2019) and “Paragraph 175” (2000). Shifting from documentary to biopic, the duo also collaborated on “Lovelace” (2013), starring Amanda Seyfried, Peter Sarsgaard and Sharon Stone, about the porn star Linda Lovelace, and “HOWL” (2015), starring James Franco as the famous gay poet Allen Ginsberg.

In addition to filmmaking, Epstein is a professor and co-chair of the film program at California College of the Arts. He has served on the Sundance Institute's board of trustees and on the board of the governors of the documentary branch of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. In 2008 he received the Pioneer Award for distinguished lifetime achievement from the International Documentary Association.



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# EMILE GRIFFITH WORLD CHAMPION BOXER

b. February 3, 1938

d. June 23, 2013

*“I kill a man and most people forgive me ...  
I love a man ... this makes me an evil person.”*

**He won five  
world boxing  
championships.**

Emile Griffith was an American professional boxer who won five world boxing championships. He fought more world championships than any other prizefighter.

Griffith was born in St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands. One of eight children raised by a single mother, he moved to New York City as a child. While working as a 14-year-old in the heat of a garment factory, Griffith asked his boss if he could remove his shirt. His boss noticed Griffith's athletic physique and introduced him to Gil Clancy, the famed boxing trainer.

Griffith officially entered professional boxing in 1958, winning the Golden Gloves open championship the same year. Three years later, he won the welterweight championship, defeating acclaimed fighter Benny “Kid” Paret with a 13th-round knockout.

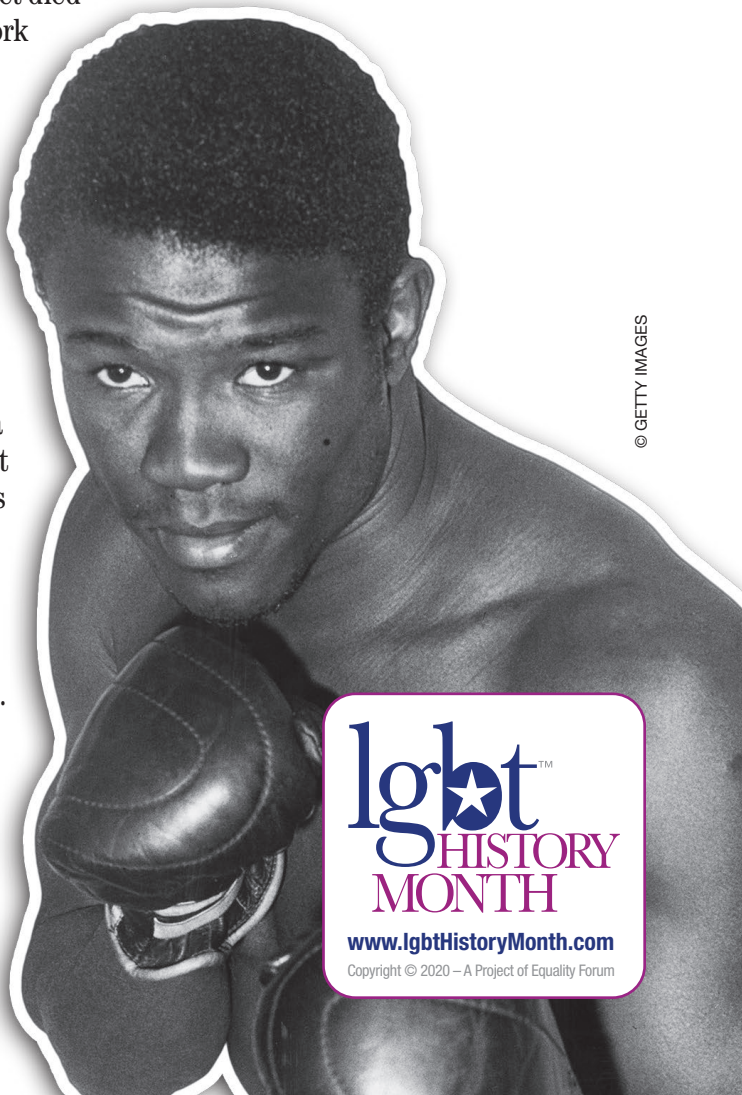
Griffith faced Paret in a nationally televised rematch in 1962 at Madison Square Garden. It was their third encounter. At a weigh-in, Paret taunted Griffith with a homophobic slur, angering Griffith. Although it was not publicly known, Griffith had sexual relationships with men as well as women. In the 12th round of the fight, Griffith pummeled Paret with more than two dozen blows, rendering Paret unconscious. Paret died in the hospital 10 days later. An investigation by the state of New York subsequently cleared Griffith of blame.

Haunted by guilt over Paret's accidental death, Griffith claimed he was never again as aggressive in the ring. Despite this, he went on to fight 10 world championships—more than any other fighter in history—during his nearly 20-year career. He held a lifetime record of 85 wins with 23 knockouts, 24 losses and 2 draws. He headlined at Madison Square Garden 23 times.

In 1971 Griffith married a dancer, Mercedes Donastorg. The union lasted less than two years, although he adopted Donastorg's daughter. After he retired from boxing, Griffith worked briefly as a corrections officer at a juvenile facility in New Jersey. There he met his longtime companion, Luis Rodrigo, whom he publicly called his adopted son.

Griffith straddled the hypermasculine professional boxing world and the Manhattan gay club scene for most of his life. In 1992 he was brutally beaten by a gang after leaving a gay bar in downtown New York. The attack left him near death from kidney failure. He spent four months in the hospital recovering.

Griffith was inducted into the World Boxing Hall of Fame and the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1990. He was the subject of the documentary “Ring of Fire” in 2005. Griffith died from complications of boxer's dementia at the age of 75. The New York Times published his obituary.



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# MENAKA GURUSWAMY & ARUNDHATI KATJU

# INDIAN LGBTQ RIGHTS LAWYERS

Guruswamy: b. November 27, 1974

Katju: b. August 19, 1982

“How strongly must we love to  
withstand [these] terrible wrongs.”

**They won a  
historic Indian  
Supreme Court case  
decriminalizing  
homosexuality.**

Menaka Guruswamy and Arundhati Katju are Indian lawyers who won a historic 2018 Indian Supreme Court case decriminalizing homosexuality. For the pair, who came out as a couple in the international media afterward, the ruling represented a personal triumph as well as a watershed victory for LGBTQ people in India.

Guruswamy and Katju graduated from the National Law School of India University, Bangalore. Guruswamy studied law as a Rhodes Scholar at the University of Oxford, earning a doctorate degree in 2015. Katju practiced law for 11 years before receiving an LLM in 2017 from Columbia University, where she was a Human Rights Fellow and a James Kent Scholar.

The two lawyers litigated many notable cases before the Indian Supreme Court prior to their 2018 victory. In 2015 they helped secure a judgment on behalf of a transgender man who was confined by his parents. They also played a prominent role in a multimillion-dollar corruption case.

In 2013 Guruswamy and Katju served as co-counsel in the Supreme Court case *Sureth Kumar Koushal v. Naz Foundation*, defending the 2009 Delhi High Court ruling that Section 377 of the British Penal Code, which criminalized gay sex, was unconstitutional. During the hearing, they realized they would lose the case because the judge had “no imagination of who was a gay Indian.” When Section 377 was upheld, Guruswamy and Katju decided “they would never let LGBT Indians be invisible in any courtroom.”

Emboldened to build a new legal strategy to win LGBT rights, Guruswamy and Katju employed an old technique: a writ petition. The device allows claimants to go directly before the court. During the 2013 case, the court never heard direct testimony from LGBT Indians. For the new approach, the lawyers sought participation from gay Indian public figures, such as the classical dancer Natvej Singh Johar and his journalist partner, Sunil Mehra.

In 2016 Guruswamy and Katju petitioned on behalf of Johar, Mehra and three other claimants, including the famous hotelier Keshav Suri, in the case of *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*.

In 2018 the Supreme Court made its landmark decision, declaring Section 377 unconstitutional and ending the 155-year-old colonial law. The decision not only decriminalized homosexuality, but also accorded LGBTQ Indians the rights and protections of the country’s constitution. The ruling also set an important legal precedent for LGBTQ rights in other non-Western countries. In 2019 Botswana cited India’s decision in reversing its anti-gay law.

In 2019 Time magazine named Guruswamy and Katju to its list of the 100 most influential people.



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# ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT

b. September 14, 1769

d. May 6, 1859

## FATHER OF ECOLOGY

*“The most dangerous worldview is ... of those who have not viewed the world.”*

**He profoundly affected the way science viewed nature.**

Alexander von Humboldt was a renowned Prussian naturalist, explorer, and geographer, and the preeminent scientist of his time. Regarded as the father of ecology, he laid the foundations for modern biogeography and meteorology and shaped the concept of climate zones, weather forecasting and the theory of man-made climate change.

Humboldt was born into a wealthy Prussian family. In 1791, as a compromise between his mother’s desire for him to become a civil servant and his own interest in science and geology, he enrolled at the Mining Academy at Freiburg. As a mining inspector, he investigated the effect of light exposure on wildlife, collected thousands of botanical specimens and invented a breathing mask.

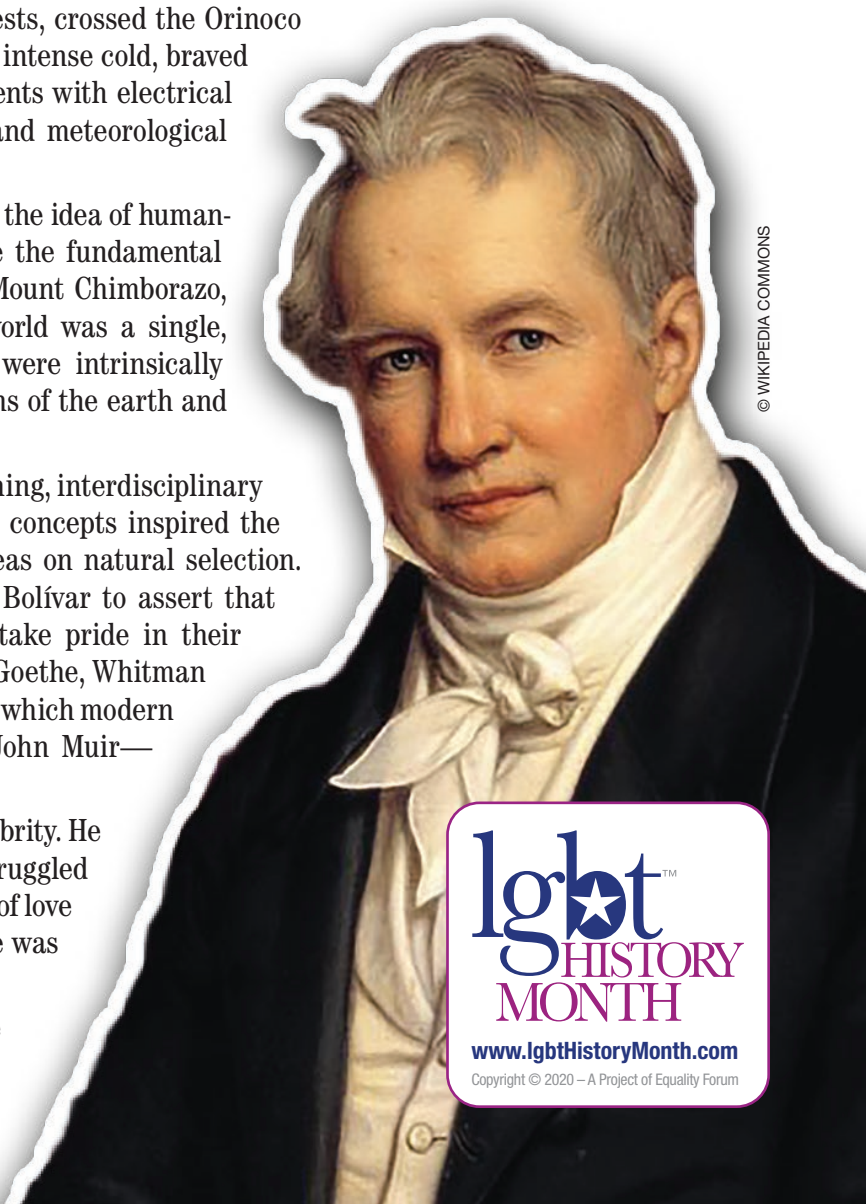
The death of his mother and his inheritance in 1796 enabled Humboldt to fulfill his dream of travelling the world. Along with Aimé Bonpland, a botanist, he explored Latin America for five years. He landed in modern-day Venezuela, where he traversed rainforests, crossed the Orinoco River and ascended the Andes mountains. He suffered intense cold, braved earthquakes and conducted life-threatening experiments with electrical eels. He returned with notebooks full of geological and meteorological observations and more than 60,000 plant specimens.

At Venezuela’s Lake Valencia, Humboldt first developed the idea of human-induced climate change. He was the first to describe the fundamental impact of the forest on ecosystems and climate. On Mount Chimborazo, Humboldt had an epiphany: he reasoned that the world was a single, interconnected organism. His view that ecosystems were intrinsically linked contrasted with previous scientific classifications of the earth and transformed the way scientists viewed nature.

Humboldt’s published works on nature made a far-reaching, interdisciplinary impact on major 20th and 21st century thinkers. His concepts inspired the young Charles Darwin to travel and informed his ideas on natural selection. Humboldt’s views prompted the revolutionary Simón Bolívar to assert that they had awakened the South American people to take pride in their continent. Humboldt influenced great writers such as Goethe, Whitman and Poe, and provided the scientific undergirding upon which modern environmentalists—from George Perkins Marsh to John Muir—built their ideas.

Humboldt’s personal life contrasted with his public celebrity. He held intense feelings for a series of male friends but struggled with loneliness. Contemporaries noted Humboldt’s lack of love for women, and a newspaper article insinuated that he was a homosexual.

Humboldt died in Berlin, Germany, the city where he was born. He was 89.



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# CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

b. August 26, 1904

d. January 4, 1986

## TRAILBLAZING WRITER

*“One should never write down or up to people, but out of yourself.”*

**His best-known works include the novel that inspired “Cabaret.”**

Christopher Isherwood is an Anglo-American writer who was among the first to bring gay themes to mainstream literary audiences. Much of his work is semi-autobiographical, including “Goodbye to Berlin,” the novel that inspired the Tony Award-winning musical and Academy Award-winning film “Cabaret.”

Isherwood was born in 1904 near Manchester, England. From an early age, he formed friendships with people from all walks of life, some of whom later became his creative collaborators. In 1924, after submitting joke answers on his second-year exams, Isherwood was asked to leave Cambridge University. Embracing his newfound freedom, he took part-time jobs as the secretary of a string quartet and as a private tutor. He worked on his first novels and briefly attended medical school.

In 1929 Isherwood visited his friend, the poet W.H. Auden, in Berlin. The trip changed his life, bringing him “face to face with his tribe” and beginning his liberation as a gay man. Isherwood moved to Berlin later that year. His experiences and friendships there provided material for his novels “Mr. Norris Changes Trains” and “Goodbye to Berlin.” The latter, which depicts Germany’s pre-Nazi decadence, became Isherwood’s most famous work and cemented his legacy. The book was adapted into the play “I Am a Camera” and the musical “Cabaret,” which earned eight Tony Awards. The film version of “Cabaret,” starring Liza Minnelli, won eight Academy Awards.

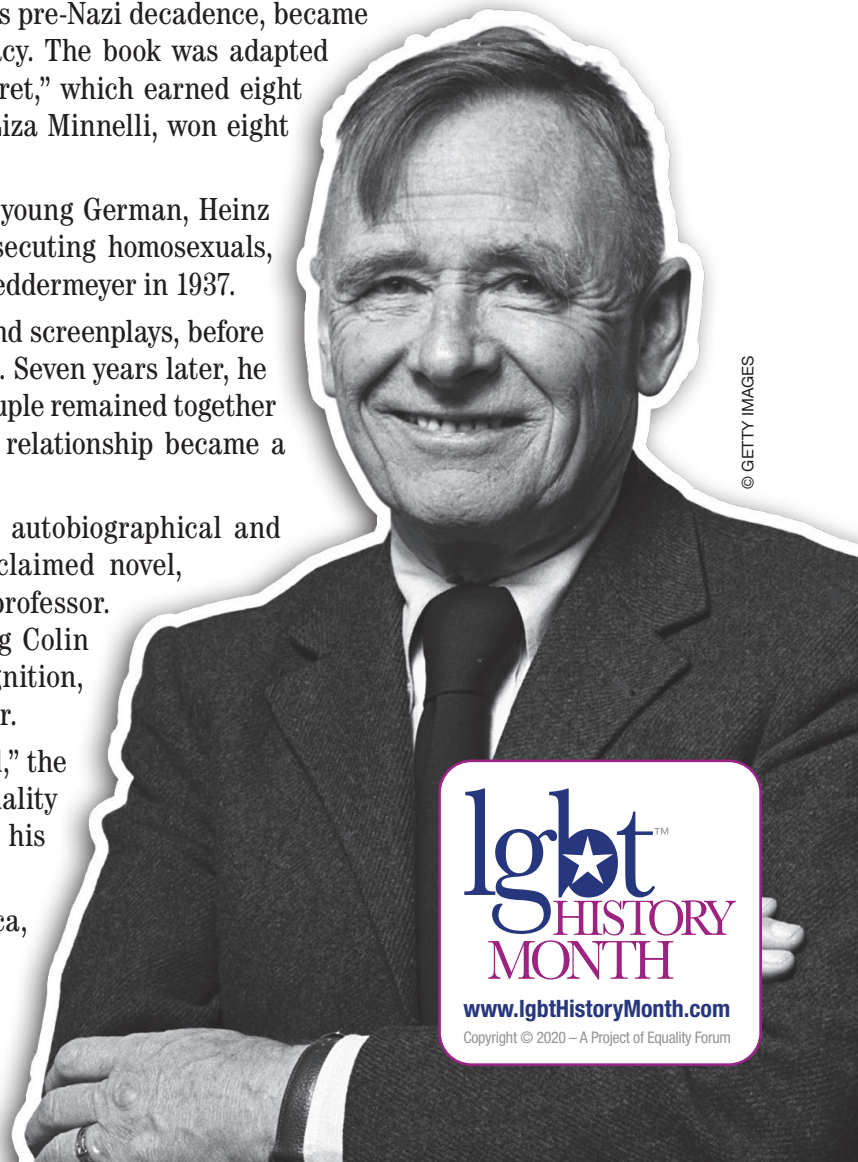
In Berlin, Isherwood also began a relationship with a young German, Heinz Neddermeyer. The pair fled the Nazis, who were persecuting homosexuals, and moved across Europe until the Gestapo arrested Neddermeyer in 1937.

Isherwood returned to London, where he wrote plays and screenplays, before settling in Hollywood. He became a U.S. citizen in 1946. Seven years later, he fell in love with a college student, Don Bachardy. The couple remained together for more than 30 years, until Isherwood’s death. The relationship became a model for many gay men.

In his later years, Isherwood turned increasingly to autobiographical and gay themes. In 1964 he published the critically acclaimed novel, “A Single Man,” about a gay middle-aged English professor. A film adaptation, directed by Tom Ford and starring Colin Firth, premiered in 2009. It earned international recognition, including an Academy Award nomination for best actor.

In Isherwood’s 1976 memoir, “Christopher and His Kind,” the author renounced his reticence to admit his homosexuality in his earlier work. The memoir speaks candidly about his life in Berlin as a young gay man.

Isherwood died of prostate cancer in Santa Monica, California. He was 81.



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# MOISÉS KAUFMAN

# AWARD-WINNING THEATER DIRECTOR

b. November 21, 1963

**“The Laramie Project”  
(2000), about the murder  
of Mathew Shepard,  
is one of the  
most-produced plays.**

*“Art is a great prism through which we can understand history and current events.”*

Moisés Kaufman is an award-winning theater director and playwright. His work is known for its bold, perceptive portrayals of contemporary social issues, particularly those of sexuality and culture. His groundbreaking play, “The Laramie Project,” inspired by the brutal killing of a gay college student, Mathew Shepard, generated worldwide empathy and dialogue around LGBT hate crimes.

Born in Venezuela, Kaufman grew up in an Orthodox Jewish family. As a youth, he was exposed to avant-garde theater. While working toward a business degree in Caracas, he joined an experimental theater group and toured as an actor.

In 1987 Kaufman moved to Manhattan to study theater direction at NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts. Recognizing the originality of Kaufman’s ideas, Arthur Bartow, the university’s dean, advised him at graduation, “No one will hire you. You should start your own theater company.”

In 1991 Kaufman and his husband, Jeffrey LaHoste, founded the experimental Tectonic Theater Project, dedicated to developing consciousness-raising, innovative works that push the boundaries of theatrical language and form. In its early years, the cash-strapped troupe rehearsed in the couple’s apartment. Under Kaufman’s artistic direction, Tectonic eventually flourished. The theater company has since created and staged more than 20 plays and musicals. Many, including the “The Laramie Project,” “Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde” and “33 Variations,” have garnered international acclaim.

Shortly after the murder of Mathew Shepard in 1998, Kaufman took his Manhattan-based theater company to Laramie, Wyoming, the small college town where the crime occurred. They conducted more than 400 hours of interviews with 200 local residents. Kaufman used the conversations to write and produce “The Laramie Project.” The play, which premiered in 2000, became one of the most-produced works of the decade. It has been performed worldwide in theaters and schools and used to educate people about homophobia. Kaufman also wrote and directed a screen adaptation that was released on HBO in 2002.

Kaufman has earned numerous accolades for his work, including an Obie Award for his Broadway directorial debut, “I Am My Own Wife”; two Tony Award nominations: one for “I Am My Own Wife” and one for “33 Variations”; the Outer Critics Award for “Gross Indecency”; and two Emmy nominations for “The Laramie Project.” In 2009 President Obama invited Kaufman and Tectonic to witness the signing of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act. In 2016 President Obama presented Kaufman with the National Medal of Arts.



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# LORI LIGHTFOOT

b. August 4, 1962

## MAYOR OF CHICAGO

**She is Chicago's  
first openly  
LGBTQ and first black  
female mayor.**

*“Breaking the back of the Chicago machine,  
it’s quite monumental.”*

Lori Lightfoot won a historic landslide victory in Chicago’s 2019 election to become the city’s first openly gay and first black female mayor. It is her first elective office.

Lightfoot grew up in a struggling working-class family in southern Ohio. Her father, who suffered hearing loss, often juggled three jobs. Lightfoot credits her family’s difficulties and her mother’s fierce strength with her own determination to succeed. Her mother insisted that Lightfoot pursue education, strive for excellence and “take on hard fights,” regardless of the consequences.

Lightfoot earned her bachelor’s degree from the University of Michigan, paying for her own education through loans and work-study jobs. She attended the University of Chicago law school on a full scholarship. After graduation, she spent six years working in private practice.

Lightfoot entered public service as assistant U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, prosecuting defendants accused of drug crimes, bankruptcy fraud and public corruption. Thereafter, she was appointed chief administrator of the Chicago Police Department Office of Professional Standards, which investigates alleged cases of police misconduct, including shootings of civilians.

After Lightfoot served as top administrator in the Office of Emergency Management and Communications, Mayor Richard Daley hired her as deputy chief of the Chicago Department of Procurement Services. There, Lightfoot made waves, targeting powerful wheeler-dealers and a top Daley fundraiser.

Mayor Daley’s successor, Rahm Emanuel, appointed Lightfoot president of the Chicago Police Board, which decides disciplinary cases. Under Lightfoot’s leadership, the board changed course, terminating police officers in 72% of misconduct cases. As chair of a special Police Accountability Task Force, Lightfoot filed a report critical of the police department’s practices. She pushed Mayor Emanuel to more aggressively pursue police reform.

In May 2018, Lightfoot announced her candidacy for mayor of Chicago. She ran on a platform of outsider politics and progressive change, promising to reverse decades of political corruption and bring opportunity to neglected neighborhoods. In April 2019 Lightfoot defeated her opponent with over 74% of the popular vote, winning a majority among white, black and Latinx voters. Her victory made Chicago the largest city in U.S. history with an openly LGBTQ mayor and the largest city led by a woman.

Lightfoot and her spouse, Amy Eshleman, have a daughter.



# CLAUDIA LÓPEZ

b. March 9, 1970

# MAYOR OF BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA

*“Today was the day of the woman.”*

**She is the first female and first openly gay mayor of Colombia’s capital and largest city.**

Claudia López is the first woman and the first openly gay person to be elected mayor of Bogotá, Colombia. She holds the second most important political office in the country.

López was raised with her five younger siblings in the working-class neighborhoods of Bogotá. She discovered her passion for politics in college as part of the mass student movement La Séptima Papeleta (The Seventh Ballot). The movement came about following the assassination of Colombia’s president. It demanded the formation of a National Constituent Assembly to modify the Colombian Constitution.

López landed her first political position as an assistant to Enrique Peñalosa’s 1995 campaign for mayor of Bogotá. After Peñalosa was elected, López directed his

Community Action Administrative Department and launched a career as a newspaper columnist, becoming one of Colombia’s most respected political analysts.

In 2005 López began exposing the infiltration of paramilitary groups in some of the highest levels of government. Her research and reporting on the parapolítica network triggered a national scandal that led to the prosecution of more than 60 congressman—greater than one third of the Congress.

In 2008 López joined a think tank, New Rainbow Corporation, as coordinator of armed conflict research. Her work led to a 2013 publication that established ties between Francisco Gomez, the former governor of La Guajira province, and a major drug trafficker. Gomez was investigated and sentenced to 55 years in prison. López received death threats and was forced to flee the country. Despite this, she returned to Colombia the following year to run for the Senate.

As a senator, she co-led a ballot referendum to reduce corruption. She resigned from the Senate to run as vice president to Sergio Fajardo in Columbia’s 2018 presidential election, but Fajardo was defeated.

Thereafter, López began her mayoral campaign, running on a platform of improving public education, supporting infrastructure and fighting corruption. She won the election in October 2019 by a narrow margin. Her win as a woman and a lesbian made history in the conservative country. In her victory speech, López declared it “the day of the woman,” crediting the unity of her diverse constituency for her success.

In December 2019, López married Representative Angélica Lozano Correa. López took office on January 1, 2020.



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# BERNÁRD LYNCH

# CATHOLIC PRIEST

b. May 17, 1943

**As a gay priest, he advocated for LGBT rights at great personal sacrifice.**

*“Sexuality and spirituality are seen ... in continuous and consistent conflict.”*

Fr. Bernárd Lynch is a gay Irish Catholic priest, activist and author. Renowned for his work with the HIV/AIDS community, he founded the first AIDS ministry in New York City in 1982. He was the first Catholic priest in the world in an out same-sex partnership.

Lynch was born in Ireland. His father was a deliveryman for the local railway. Lynch attended seminary outside of Belfast and was ordained in 1971 at Saint Colman's Cathedral Newry. After a brief mission in Zambia, he returned to Ireland and came out to another priest, who suggested he go to the United States to pursue graduate studies.

After arriving in New York City in 1975, Lynch completed an interdisciplinary doctorate in counseling psychology and theology from Fordham University and New York Theological Seminary. He began serving as a priest at Saint Gabriel's parish in the Bronx. For 15 years, he served as theological consultant to Dignity New York, an organization for LGBT Catholics and their friends.

In 1982, during the height of the AIDS epidemic, Lynch founded the city's first AIDS ministry program at Dignity New York. The ministry was available to all, irrespective of sexual orientation, race or religion. It aided thousands of people with HIV/AIDS, providing spiritual healing by reconciling individuals with their faiths and their families and by guiding them through their deaths. He also served for 10 years on the Mayor of New York's voluntary Task Force on HIV/AIDS. Despite intense opposition, Lynch became increasingly visible and outspoken as the epidemic worsened. He publicly campaigned and testified for the 1986 New York City bill banning discrimination based on sexual orientation in jobs and housing.

Lynch pursued his advocacy at great personal sacrifice. In June 1987, the archdiocese denied him his canonical rights, thus banning him from serving as a priest in the United States. Shortly thereafter, a false sexual abuse charge was filed against him. Cross-examination in court revealed that politically motivated actors had forced the accuser to testify against his will. Lynch was fully exonerated.

In January 2017, Lynch married his longtime partner, Billy Desmond, in Ireland. On their wedding day, the New York City Council honored Lynch's service to the LGBT and AIDS communities with a Proclamation. In 2019 the Irish government presented him with a Presidential Distinguished Service Award, the highest honor bestowed on citizens abroad.

Lynch has published a number of books and articles. His life and work are featured in three documentary films: “AIDS: A Priest's Testament,” “A Priest on Trial” and “Soul Survivor.”



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# ANNE MCCLAIN

# NASA ASTRONAUT

b. June 7, 1979

**She is the  
first out American  
astronaut.**

*“There are no average days or  
normal days in outer space.”*

Anne McClain is a former NASA astronaut and U.S. Army lieutenant colonel who served as flight engineer for Expeditions 58/59 to the International Space Station. She is the second LGBTQ person to become an American astronaut.

Born and raised in Spokane, Washington, McClain dreamed of becoming an astronaut from an early age. She graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point with a degree in mechanical and aeronautical engineering. She earned a master’s degree in aerospace engineering from the University of Bath and a master’s degree in international relations from the University of Bristol, where she was a Marshall Scholar. A competitive athlete, she played rugby for the Women’s Premiership in England and for the U.S.A. Rugby Women’s National Team.

Following her studies, McClain joined the U.S. Army as a helicopter pilot, rising through the ranks to detachment commander. She served 15 months in Operation Iraqi Freedom, flying more than 216 combat missions as pilot-in-command. In 2010 McClain was appointed commander of C Troop, 1st Battalion, 14th Aviation Regiment, responsible for the Army’s initial entry training, instructor pilot training and maintenance test pilot training in the OH-58D Kiowa Warrior. During her military service, she logged more than 2,000 flight hours in 20 different aircraft.

In 2013 McClain was selected as one of eight members of the 21st NASA astronaut class, becoming the youngest astronaut on NASA’s roster. The selection made her the second gay American astronaut after Sally Ride and the first out active NASA astronaut. In 2015 McClain completed the rigorous candidate training process, including scientific and technical training, physiological training, intensive instruction in International Space Station systems, spacewalks and robotics, T-38 flight training, and water and wilderness survival training.

From December 2018 to June 2019, McClain served as flight engineer on NASA Expedition 58/59 to the International Space Station. The flight launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan aboard the Soyuz spacecraft. McClain was one of three crew members on the expedition, along with Canadian David Saint-Jacques and Russian Oleg Kononenko. McClain and the crew contributed to hundreds of experiments in biology, biotechnology, physical science and earth science, including investigations into small devices that replicate the structure and function of human organs, editing DNA in space for the first time, and recycling 3D-printed material. McClain conducted two spacewalks totaling 13 hours and 8 minutes. She returned to earth after spending 204 days in space.

McClain resides in Houston, Texas. She has a six-year-old son, Briggs.

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# KATE MCKINNON

# SNL COMEDIAN

b. January 6, 1984

*“One of my favorite things is to try and make an unlikable person endearing.”*

**She is the first openly gay cast member of “SNL.”**

Kate McKinnon is an American comedian, writer and Emmy Award-winning actress. She is best known for her work on the sketch comedy series “Saturday Night Live” (SNL).

McKinnon grew up on Long Island, New York. A self-professed “theater kid,” she showed a knack for mimicry and impersonations as early as fifth grade, when she convincingly imitated a British accent while auditioning to play the “queen of reading week.” After high school, McKinnon studied theater at Columbia University. In her senior year, she beat thousands of competitors for a spot on Rosie O’Donnell’s television series “The Big Gay Sketch Show.”

McKinnon joined the cast in 2006, where she remained for the run of the program.

In 2008 McKinnon began regularly performing live sketch comedy at the Upright Citizens’ Brigade Theater. When “SNL” called her to audition, she realized a longtime dream. McKinnon joined “SNL” as a featured player in April 2012. She became the show’s first openly gay cast member and the second known gay cast member since Danitra Vance in the 1980s.

On “SNL” McKinnon quickly became a breakout star with her off-the-wall yet eerily accurate impressions of celebrities and politicians, such as Justin Bieber, Ellen DeGeneres, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Jeff Sessions and Hillary Clinton. She has created a host of iconic characters—from a crass mermaid to an alien abductee. McKinnon’s uncanny ability to make unlikable characters relatable won the hearts of viewers.

Since she joined “SNL,” McKinnon has appeared in a number of screen productions. She starred in the all-female reboot of “Ghostbusters” and in “Office Christmas Party” (both in 2016) and in “Rough Night” (2017) and “The Spy Who Dumped Me” (2018). She has also performed as a voice actor for animated films such as “The Angry Birds Movie” and “Finding Dory.”

Among other comedy awards, McKinnon received two consecutive Emmys (2016 and 2017) for her work on “SNL.” She delivered a heartfelt acceptance speech thanking fellow lesbian comedian Ellen DeGeneres for “making it less scary to be gay” and for encouraging her to pursue her dreams. McKinnon has credited her gay identity for informing her unique comedic voice. “As minorities, we’re on the fringe,” she said, “and there’s just something so wonderful about that perspective, something so inspiring.”



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# HARRIS GLENN MILSTEAD “DIVINE”

## ACTOR

b. October 19, 1945

d. March 7, 1988

**He was a trailblazing  
drag actor best  
known as Divine.**

Harris Glenn Milstead was an American actor and musical performer best known as Divine. A muse of the gay independent filmmaker John Waters, Milstead, as Divine, played female characters in the director's often shocking comedies, including the cult classics “Pink Flamingos”(1972), “Female Trouble” (1974) and “Polyester” (1981).

Milstead was born in Baltimore, Maryland, the only child of a middle-class, conservative Baptist couple. His parents met at the diner where his mother worked.

A high school outcast, Milstead was severely bullied by his classmates. Troubled by their son's attraction to both women and men, Milstead's parents sent him to a psychiatrist when he was 17. At 18, Milstead enrolled at Marinella Beauty School, then worked for a time as a hairdresser. He threw extravagant parties and began performing in drag.

Milstead and John Waters, a fellow high school outsider, began a lifelong friendship and professional collaboration as teenagers. Waters helped launch Milstead's career, dubbing him “Divine,” and designating him “the most beautiful woman in the world, almost.”

Milstead appeared in roughly 20 films, most of which were made by Waters. In the majority of his roles, Milstead starred as bawdy, outrageous women. Between films, he performed live drag shows. He had a successful cabaret career in Europe and recorded several disco singles in the 1980s that hit the Billboard U.S. Dance Club charts.

A few weeks before he died, Milstead reached the apex of his career with the release of Waters's first PG-rated movie, “Hairspray” (1988). In the beloved comedy-drama, Milstead played a more sympathetic and realistic female character, Edna Turnblad, opposite Ricki Lake as Turnblad's daughter. In 2002 “Hairspray” was adapted into a Tony-winning musical. A 2007 remake of the film starred John Travolta in the role Milstead originated.

Both lauded and reviled as a “drag queen,” Milstead saw his career differently. As early as 1976, he told The New York Times, “I'm not a female impersonator; I'm an actor.” Later in life, he landed a few male roles, including a gangster in “Trouble in Mind” (1985), starring Kris Kristofferson. In addition to his part as Edna Turnblad, he also played a man in “Hairspray.”

Milstead died at 42 of an enlarged heart. The New York Times published his obituary. A 12-foot statue of Divine, created by acclaimed sculptor Andrew Logan, stands on permanent display in Baltimore's American Visionary Art Museum. “I Am Divine” (2013), a documentary about Milstead, received widespread critical acclaim.

*“They can call me whatever they want ...  
I don't care. You always change your  
name when you're in the show business.”*



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# DAVID MIXNER

# POLITICAL ACTIVIST

b. August 16, 1946

**He is an activist, a powerful political advisor and a best-selling author.**

*“Issues come and go; values and principles never come and go. They are the core of your essence and who you are.”*

David Mixner is a human rights activist, a political operative and a best-selling author. Newsweek once named him the most powerful gay man in America.

Mixner was born in New Jersey to a family of moderate means. His father worked on a corporate farm. His mother was a bookkeeper. In high school, Mixner supported Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and demonstrated for civil rights.

In 1964 Mixner enrolled at Arizona State University, where, in addition to civil rights, he engaged in antiwar activism. He entered his first same-sex relationship with a man he refers to as “Kit.” When Kit died in an automobile accident, the heartbroken Mixner could only attend the funeral as a friend, fearing Kit’s parents would learn their son was gay.

After Kit’s death, Mixner transferred to the University of Maryland to be closer to the political action in Washington. His activism soon took precedence, and he dropped out of college. He became a grassroots organizer for the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, which coordinated the 1967 March on the Pentagon, a defining moment in the antiwar movement.

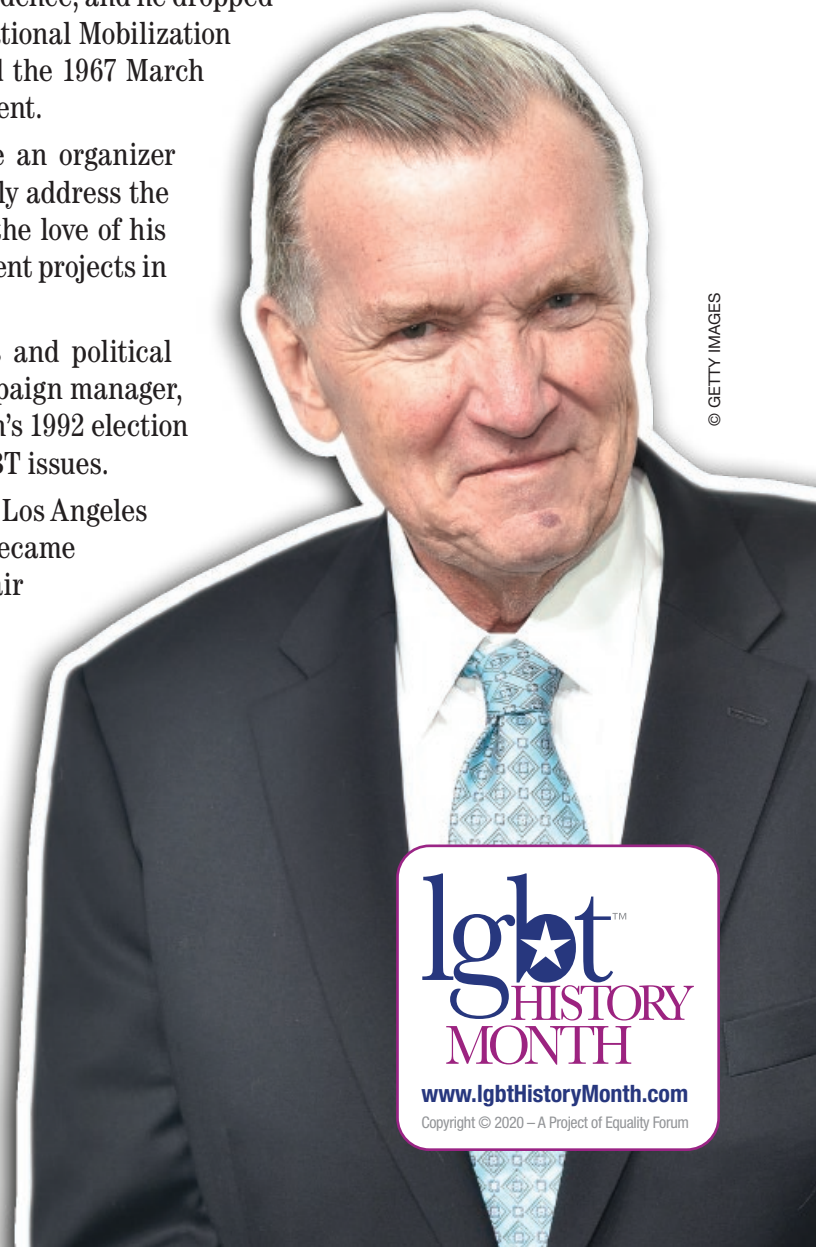
During the height of the AIDS epidemic, Mixner became an organizer and a fundraiser, lobbying for the government to proactively address the crisis. He lost hundreds of friends to the virus, including the love of his life, Peter Scott. He worked on AIDS prevention and treatment projects in the U.S. and abroad, including in Russia and Africa.

Mixner has raised tens of millions for charitable causes and political candidates. He worked on more than 75 elections as a campaign manager, fundraiser or strategist. He was instrumental in Bill Clinton’s 1992 election and served as President Clinton’s unofficial advisor on LGBT issues.

Mixner helped found the Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles (MECLA), a group of donor-class LGBT individuals who became involved in local politics. He served as the national co-chair of the Victory Fund, whose mission is to elect LGBT politicians and allies. He is a former member of the Democratic National Committee and the Democratic Party Delegate Selection Committee.

Mixner is the author of three best sellers, including his critically acclaimed memoir, “Stranger Among Friends” (1997). In 2014 he premiered in “Oh, Hell No!,” the first of his three autobiographical one-man shows known as the “Mixner trilogy.”

In 2005 Yale University Library established the David Benjamin Mixner collection, which houses his personal books, papers, photos and other media. In 2019 he announced his retirement after 60 years of activism.



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# LAUREN MORELLI

b. July 22, 1982

## WRITER & PRODUCER

*“There are so many more queer stories being told on television, but often we’re still presented with overwhelmingly white, overwhelmingly male.”*

**She is an award-winning writer and the co-producer of “Orange Is the New Black.”**

Lauren Morelli is an American screenwriter, producer and director. Her work often depicts lesbian relationships and issues. She is best known for two Netflix series, “Orange Is the New Black” and “Tales of the City.”

Morelli grew up in McCandless, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Pittsburgh. At Marymount Manhattan College in New York City, she followed her passion for dance until a back injury forced her to reconsider her career path. She pursued writing but graduated with a BFA in Modern Dance.

After graduation, Morelli moved to Los Angeles. She wrote short stories and blog posts before securing a position as the lead writer for “Orange Is the New Black.” Premiering on Netflix in 2013, the series is an adaptation of Piper Kerman’s memoir, “Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women’s Prison” (2010). The show features lesbian relationships in a low-security women’s federal prison.

Ranked by The Guardian as one of the 100 best TV shows of the 21st century, “Orange” earned praise for humanizing prisoners and showcasing diversity in body types, racial backgrounds and sexualities. Nominated for 17 Emmys, six Golden Globes and six Writers Guild Awards, it remained the best-watched series on Netflix, three years after it ended.

Morelli worked on the series for five of its seven seasons. Writing for lesbian characters awakened her own latent sexuality. A year into the show, she came out as a lesbian and divorced her husband.

Following the success of “Orange Is the New Black,” Morelli continued to work on lesbian-themed material at Netflix, becoming the executive producer and writer of “Tales of the City” (2019). An adaptation of Armistead Maupin’s 1978 books on LGBT romance in San Francisco, the series starred Oscar winners Ellen Page and Laura Linney.

Morelli’s work extends to playwriting. Her short play “Roach & Rat” was produced in 2013 by Lesser America, a theater company in New York City.

In 2017 Morelli married Samira Wiley. The couple has been together since shortly after Morelli came out. In 2019 Diva Magazine, Europe’s leading publication for lesbian and bisexual women, featured Morelli on its cover.



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# IFTI NASIM

b. September 1946

d. July 22, 2011

## POET & ACTIVIST

*“I don’t practice [Islam].  
But I compensate by helping other  
people, by doing my activism ...”*

**He was a trailblazing  
Pakistani-American  
poet and LGBT activist.**

Ifti Nasim was a gay Pakistani-American poet whose unique LGBT-themed collections, written in Urdu, were published internationally. He helped establish Sangat Chicago, an organization supporting South-Asian LGBT youth.

Nasim was born in Faisalabad, Pakistan. He was the middle child in a large, traditional Islamic family. Throughout his teens, Nasim experienced bullying, ostracization and loneliness as a gay youth. A passionate poet and an activist who opposed Pakistan's martial law, Nassim was once shot in the leg during a protest.

Inspired by a Life magazine article touting America's acceptance of gays, Nassim emigrated to the United States at the age of 21. He enrolled at Wayne State University

in Detroit, Michigan, where he continued his poetry. He spent most of his life in Chicago, Illinois, and became a naturalized U.S. citizen. Some of his siblings joined him in America.

In 1986, at the age of 40, Nasim helped found Sangat Chicago, an advocacy organization and support group for young people of South Asian origin. Sangat's participants found solace connecting with one another and sharing experiences, particularly of being LGBT Muslims. Nasim also regularly hosted a weekly radio show and contributed to an American Pakistani newspaper.

Nasim wrote poems in English as well as in Urdu and Punjabi, two of the languages spoken in Pakistan. He published three books of poems in Urdu, which conveyed novel themes of the plight of LGBT people in Muslim and third-world countries. His most popular collection, “Narman” (1994), which translates to “hermaphrodite,” became the first published articulation of gay themes in Urdu and sparked a movement of “honest” poetry.

“Narman” was distributed in the United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden and Germany, and underground in India and Pakistan. His other two books of poetry, “Myrmecophile” (2000) and “Abdoz” (2005), explored gay love, longing and the pressures of heteronormativity.

In 1993 Nasim became the first poet from a developing nation to read his work at Chicago's Harold Washington Library Center. The following year, Chicago's South Asian Family Services awarded him the Rabindranath Tagore Award for his poetry. In 1996 he was inducted into the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame.

Nasim died in Chicago of a sudden heart attack at the age of 64. The Chicago Tribune published his obituary.



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# JESS O'CONNELL

b. June 9, 1973

## NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC STRATEGIST

*“Every single day we are witnessing unprecedented activism and excitement across our nation.”*

**She was the first openly LGBT CEO of the Democratic National Committee.**

Jess O'Connell is a national political strategist who works to advance progressive candidates, policies and organizations. She was the executive director of Emily's List and the first openly LGBT CEO of the Democratic National Committee (DNC).

O'Connell grew up in Phoenix, Arizona. She earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Colorado at Boulder and graduated with an MBA from the University of Denver, Daniels College of Business. When she was in high school in the 1980s, O'Connell lost a family friend to AIDS. Her first job was in HIV/AIDS activism, where

she dealt with issues of LGBT health and poverty. In 2000 she became the first female director of AIDS Walk Colorado, a program of the Colorado AIDS Project.

In 2003 O'Connell joined Emily's List as deputy director of major gifts and events. Emily's List is the largest organization in the United States working to elect pro-choice Democratic women. She subsequently worked as development director of the Children's Defense Fund and on Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign.

In 2007 O'Connell became the national director of operations for Senator Hillary Clinton's first presidential campaign. She grew the staff from a handful of workers to 1,500 at more than 400 offices across the country.

In 2011, after holding senior positions at the ONE Campaign and the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition, O'Connell became the chief of staff and senior vice president of the Center for American Progress (CAP), the preeminent organization that researches and implements progressive ideas and policies. Three years later, she returned to Emily's List as executive director.

Following the 2016 elections, O'Connell became the first openly LGBT CEO of the DNC, where she oversaw a significant reorganization and revitalization effort. During her tenure, Democrats won 36 state legislature flips from red to blue and record-breaking victories in New Jersey, Virginia and Alabama. After less than a year, she announced her departure, saying, "I'm proud to have helped to rebuild our party." DNC Chairman Tom Perez told the Washington Post that O'Connell took the position when the Democrats "needed her most." He said, "Her leadership brought a laser-like focus on winning elections."

O'Connell went on to serve as senior advisor to Pete Buttigieg's presidential campaign. She led the early states strategy, resulting in Buttigieg's history-making first-place finish in Iowa and second-place finish in New Hampshire during the 2020 primaries. Thereafter, she became the cofounder and partner at NEWCO Strategies, a majority women/majority LGBT-owned consulting firm.

O'Connell has appeared on CNN, MSNBC, NPR and other media outlets. She lives in Maryland with her wife, Holly, and their son.



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# MARY OLIVER

b. September 10, 1935

d. January 17, 2019

## PULITZER- WINNING POET

*“I want to say: all my life / I was a bride  
married to amazement. I was the bridegroom,  
taking the world into my arms.”*

Mary Oliver was a Pulitzer Prize-winning American poet who wrote with reverence and poignancy about the natural world. She published 15 collections of poetry during her more than 50-year career.

Oliver was born and raised in Maple Heights, Ohio, outside of Cleveland. She was sexually abused as a small child. In her early teens, she wrote her first poems in the neighboring woods, where she sought refuge from a difficult homelife.

Oliver attended Ohio State University and Vassar College, but never completed her degree. Profoundly inspired by the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay, she lived for a time during the 1950s in Millay's home, helping the poet's sister organize papers after Millay's death. There, Oliver met her life partner, Molly Malone Cook, a photographer.

In the 1960s Oliver moved to Provincetown, Massachusetts, to be with Cook, where the couple remained for more than 40 years. Though Oliver was open about her sexuality, she fiercely protected her privacy.

**Her highly  
acclaimed poetry  
provided a window  
into the natural  
world.**

In 1963 Oliver published her first collection, “No Voyage and Other Poems.” Known for the accessibility of her writing, she intentionally avoided “fancy” words. Her blank verse is rich with earthy themes stemming from her observations both of nature and the excesses of modern civilization. Many of her poems are based on memories of Ohio and Provincetown.

Oliver earned prestigious fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. Her list of honors includes an American Academy of Arts & Letters Award and the Poetry Society of America's Shelley Memorial Prize. In

1984 Oliver won a Pulitzer Prize for “American Primitive,” her fifth collection of poetry.

In 1990 her collection “House of Light” won the Christopher Award and the L. L. Winship/PEN New England Award. In 1992 her “New and Selected Poems” won the National Book Award.

Oliver held the Catharine Osgood Foster Chair for Distinguished Teaching at Bennington College in Vermont. She was a Poet in Residence at Bucknell University and the Margaret Banister Writer in Residence at Sweet Briar College. In 2003 Harvard University made her an honorary member of Phi Beta Kappa. Dartmouth conferred her with an honorary doctorate in 2007.

Oliver died in Florida of lymphoma. She was 83. The New York Times published her obituary.



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# BILLY PORTER

b. September 21, 1969

## AWARD-WINNING BROADWAY ACTOR

*“Pride is a protest. It’s a march, not a parade.”*

**He is an Emmy,  
Grammy and Tony  
Award-winning  
actor and singer.**

Billy Porter is an Emmy, Grammy and Tony Award-winning actor and singer whose roles are frequently LGBT-themed. He was the first openly gay black man to win a Primetime Emmy Award in a lead acting category.

Porter was born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His father abandoned the family, and his stepfather sexually abused him. His mother suffered from a neurological disorder. A flamboyant child, Porter was suspected of being mentally ill and frequently bullied.

Porter found his escape in performing. He graduated from the Musical Theater Program at the Pittsburgh Creative and Performing Arts School. He earned a BFA in drama from Carnegie Mellon University School of Drama in 1991 and completed a professional certificate in screenwriting from UCLA.

Porter received his first major national award 1992, winning Male Vocalist Grand Champion on the television program “Star Search.” In the following decade, he established himself as a rising star, performing on Broadway in the revival of “Grease” (1994), Off Broadway in “Myths and Hymns and Songs for a New World” (1995), and at Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera in “Dreamgirls” (2004). He also starred in several films, including the gay-themed “Twisted” (1996) and in “The Broken Hearts Club” (2000), which portrayed stories of gay-romance.

In 2005 Porter performed a one-man autobiographical show, “Ghetto Superstar: The Man That I Am,” at Joe’s Pub, a noted Manhattan performance space. “Ghetto Superstar” earned Porter an Outstanding New York Theater nomination at the 2006 GLAAD Media Awards.

In 2013 Porter originated the principal role of Lola, the cabaret drag queen, in the hit Broadway musical “Kinky Boots.” The same year, he captured both the Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards for Outstanding Actor in a Musical and the Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical. In 2014, as part of the cast performance of “Kinky Boots,” he won a Grammy Award for Best Musical Theater Album.

In 2018 Porter began starring as the character Pray Tell in the television series “Pose” about 1980s New York ballroom culture. In 2019 the role earned him a Golden Globe nomination and a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series. The Emmy made him the first gay black man to be nominated and to win in a lead acting category. On the red carpet, Porter’s often wild, gender-bending fashion statements have added to the media attention he attracts.

Porter lives in Manhattan with his spouse, Adam Smith.



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# LAURA RICKETTS

b. December 15, 1967

## CO-OWNER OF THE CHICAGO CUBS

*“I think the Cubs have come quite a long way ... I'd like to see it expand for the LGBT community.”*

**She is the first openly gay owner of a major-league sports team.**

Laura Ricketts is a lawyer, a philanthropist, a businesswoman and the first openly LGBT co-owner of an American major-league sports franchise. She is also an activist who supports LGBT and Democratic causes.

Ricketts and her three brothers grew up in Omaha, Nebraska. She is the daughter of John Joseph Ricketts, the multibillionaire founder and former CEO of TD Ameritrade. Ricketts's brother Pete is the governor of Nebraska. Her brother Tom is chairman of the Chicago Cubs.

Raised in a conservative Catholic family, Ricketts worried about coming out. In the early 1990s she told her family, and to her relief, they were immediately supportive.

Ricketts earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Chicago in 1994 and her Juris Doctor degree from the University of Michigan Law School in 1998. She became a corporate attorney practicing with Schiff, Hardin & Waite, a Chicago law firm.

Ricketts left the practice to cofound Ecotravel, LLC—a company dedicated to promoting ecotourism worldwide—that operated Ecotravel.com, an online magazine. The Wall Street Journal named Ecotravel.com one of the top websites of its kind in 2002.

Ricketts has generously supported organizations such as Lambda Legal, GayCo Productions, Opportunity Education and the Democratic Party. She serves on the boards of Lambda Legal and Housing Opportunities for Women (HOW), Inc., an organization supporting homeless women and children in Chicago.

Although her parents and siblings are Republicans, Ricketts champions Democratic politics. She co-chaired the Democratic National Committee's LGBT Leadership Council and became the cofounder and chairwoman of LPAC, the first lesbian political action committee. She was a prominent fundraiser for President Barack Obama's 2012 reelection campaign and for Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign. At the 2016 Democratic National Convention, Ricketts served as an Illinois superdelegate.

In October 2009, with her brother as board chairman, the Ricketts family paid \$845 million for 95% ownership of the Chicago Cubs and Wrigley Field. Ricketts and her brothers are board members of the Cubs.

In 2013 the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame inducted Ricketts. In June 2015 she married Brooke Skinner, an executive at Cars.com. They live in Chicago with their daughter.



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# ANGELICA ROSS

b. November 28, 1980

## TRANSGENDER RIGHTS ADVOCATE

*“My mission is to prove that everyone has the right to pursue their dreams.”*

**She is a businesswoman, a transgender rights advocate and an actress.**

Angelica Ross is a television actress and the founder and CEO of TransTech Social Enterprises, an organization that helps transgender people find work in the technology industry.

Born male, Ross grew up in Racine, Wisconsin. Perceived as feminine by the eighth grade, she came out as gay at age 17. Her evangelical Christian mother responded so negatively, Ross attempted suicide.

Ross entered the University of Wisconsin-Parkside but dropped out after one semester and joined the U.S. Navy to qualify for the G.I. Bill. After six months of service and harassment, Ross requested and received a discharge under the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” policy.

At age 19, Ross transitioned to female. Her mother and stepfather rejected her gender identity. Ross eventually went to live with her biological father in Roanoke, Virginia, where she waitressed so she could attend cosmetology school. After facing discrimination in Roanoke, she moved to Hollywood, Florida, where she overhauled a website for her employer and taught herself computer code. She used the experience to start her own web design and consulting firm, while she studied acting.

Ross later found a position as the employment coordinator at the Trans Life Center in Chicago, helping transgender people secure jobs and health care. In 2014 she launched her own nonprofit, TransTech Social Enterprises, to train transgender workers in technical computer skills and help them find employment. In 2015 she participated in the White House LGBTQ Tech and Innovation Summit as a featured speaker.

In 2016 Ross landed a role in “Her Story,” a web series about transgender women in Los Angeles. The same year, the program was nominated for an Emmy Award for Outstanding Short Form Comedy or Drama. Ross also served as executive producer and star of the short film “Missed Connections,” a black transgender love story. “Missed Connections” was an official selection at the 2017 Outflix and Outfest film festivals.

In 2018 Ross joined the cast of the critically acclaimed television series “Pose,” about New York City’s underground black and Latinx LGBT ballroom culture of the 1980s. The following year she starred as a psychologist in the FX television network series “American Horror Story.”

In 2018 the Financial Times named Ross a top 10 LGBT executive. In 2019 she served as a celebrity ambassador of the 50th Anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. Late in 2019, she became the first transgender person to host a national presidential candidate forum, when she hosted the official discussion of LGBTQ+ issues with the 2020 Democratic candidates. In January 2020, the luxury brand Louis Vuitton featured Ross in its ad campaign.

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# SAPPHO

b. 630 B.C.

d. 570 B.C.

# SEVENTH CENTURY B.C. POET

*“You who judge me, for me you are nothing.”*

Sappho was a lone female voice among the great ancient Greek lyric poets. She flourished in an age when women were rarely afforded a formal education, a place outside the home or a standing among men.

Born to aristocratic parents, Sappho lived most of her life in Mytilene on the Greek island of Lesbos. She had at least two brothers, Larichus and Charaxus. One of her poems describes a daughter, Cleis. Experts have long debated the facts of her personal life, including her sexuality and her marriage to Ceryclas, a wealthy man from the island of Andros.

In the third century B.C., Alexandrian scholars collected Sappho's poetry into nine books. Today, only fragments of various lengths remain. Just two of her complete poems have survived.

**She was one of  
the great Archaic  
lyric poets.**

In ancient Greece, “lyric” poetry was meant to be sung, accompanied by a harp-like instrument known as a lyre. Sappho would have been a musician as well as a poet. Her sensual songs largely conveyed themes of eroticism, passion and longing—explicitly toward women. Examples from her canon include a hymn to Aphrodite, the goddess of sexual love and beauty, calling upon her to join the poet as a “comrade in arms.” In Fragment 31, Sappho speaks of her yearning for a woman in the company of a man: “He seems to me an equal of the gods—whoever gets to sit across from you and listen to the sound of your sweet speech so close to him.”

Sappho became a symbol of female same-sex ardor. The word “sapphic,” referring to the unique style of four-line stanzas she devised, comes from her name, and “lesbian” derives from her home on Lesbos.

Throughout history, Sappho's lyrics sparked praise and controversy. Ancient critics celebrated her work and poets imitated it. The Greeks referred to Homer as “the poet” and Sappho as “the Poetess.” Plato, who generally disapproved of poetry, called her the “tenth Muse.” She was honored on coins and in public statuary. Christian censors through various ages in Alexandria, Rome and Constantinople rejected her work. In the first millennium A.D., Saint Gregory of Nazianzus and Pope Gregory VII ordered her verses burned. Victorian moralists and literary editors condemned her.

Sappho's impact is clear: she altered existing ideas about poetry, which had previously been ceremonial, structured and impersonal. She turned it into an art form, creating unique meter and intimate, descriptive language directed toward female love interests and friends. Scholars recognize Sappho as one of the great poets of world literature.



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# MEGAN SMITH

b. October 21, 1964

## U.S. CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER

*“You have to iterate before you’re successful,  
you’re always learning with each step.”*

**She was the first  
female and first  
lesbian U.S. chief  
technology officer.**

Megan Smith is an award-winning technology expert, entrepreneur and activist who served as the nation’s chief technology officer in the Obama administration. She is the first female and the first lesbian to hold the position.

Smith grew up in Buffalo, New York, and Fort Erie, Ontario. She spent several childhood summers at the Chautauqua Institution, a nonprofit educational resort. Her mother was the director of the Chautauqua Children’s School.

Smith earned her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in mechanical engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). She completed her thesis at the MIT

Media Lab and helped build a solar race car that competed in the first cross-continental solar car race.

Smith went on to work for General Magic in California, where she was the product design lead on emerging smartphone technologies, and at Apple in Tokyo. In 1995 she helped launch PlanetOut, an early leading LGBT website community, becoming its COO in 1996 and CEO in 1998. She was instrumental in forming partnerships between PlanetOut and AOL, Yahoo!, MSN and other industry innovators. Smith helped oversee PlanetOut’s successful merger with Gay.com, an LGBT dating and social media site.

In 2003 Smith joined Google, where she advanced to vice president of business development across the organization’s global partnership teams. She led important acquisitions of platforms such as Google Earth and Google Maps and created Google’s “Women Techmakers,” an initiative to promote women and diversity in the tech field.

Smith joined the Obama administration in 2017, becoming the third U.S. chief technology officer and assistant to the president. Smith and her team focused on leveraging policy and innovation to advance the technological capabilities of the White House.

After her White House tenure, Smith helped established Tech Jobs Tour to promote female and multicultural diversity in the American technology sector. In March 2018 she founded and became CEO of shift7, a company that uses technology to help tackle social, environmental and economic problems.

Smith serves on the boards of MIT, the MIT Media Lab, and Technology Review and is a member of the selection committee for the prestigious Carol L. Wilson Award at MIT. The World Economic Forum named her a Technology Pioneer in 2001 and 2002, and Out magazine named her among its 50 most powerful LGBT people in the USA in 2012 and 2013.

Smith and her longtime partner, Kara Swisher, a technology journalist, married in 2008 and divorced in 2018. They have two sons.



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# BARON VON STEUBEN

# REVOLUTIONARY WAR GENERAL

b. September 17, 1730

d. November 28, 1794

*“I am obliged to say to the American, ‘This is why you ought to do this’ and then he does it.”*

Baron Friedrich von Steuben was a German-born American general and a hero of the Revolutionary War. Historians believe he was openly gay—a rarity at the time, especially for a military officer.

**He helped  
America win the  
Revolutionary War.**

Born in Magdeburg, Germany, the son of an engineer lieutenant in the Prussian Army, von Steuben joined the military at age 17. He served as the personal aide to Frederick the Great, a gay monarch, in the Seven Years War (1756 – 1763), a world conflict that arose from the French and Indian War in North America.

In 1763, when von Steuben was an army captain, the military abruptly discharged him. Some scholars believe he was dismissed due to his homosexuality. He then worked for the German courts. In 1771 the Prince of Hollenzollern-Hechingen named him a baron.

Struggling financially in 1775, von Steuben tried unsuccessfully to join the French, Austrian and other foreign armies. When he learned that Benjamin Franklin was in France, he traveled there to offer his service to the American Army fighting the British. He impressed Franklin with his knowledge of military order and discipline.

Von Steuben was eventually assigned to George Washington’s winter quarters in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Valley Forge functioned as the third of eight military encampments for the main body of the Continental Army.

With the help of translators, von Steuben taught the troops crucial military structure and tactics. Borrowing from his own strict Prussian Army training, he shaped the ragtag recruits and militiamen into organized, efficient fighters and boosted morale under the difficult conditions at Valley Forge. George Washington was so impressed, he extended von Steuben’s training to his entire command. He appointed von Steuben the first inspector general of the Army.

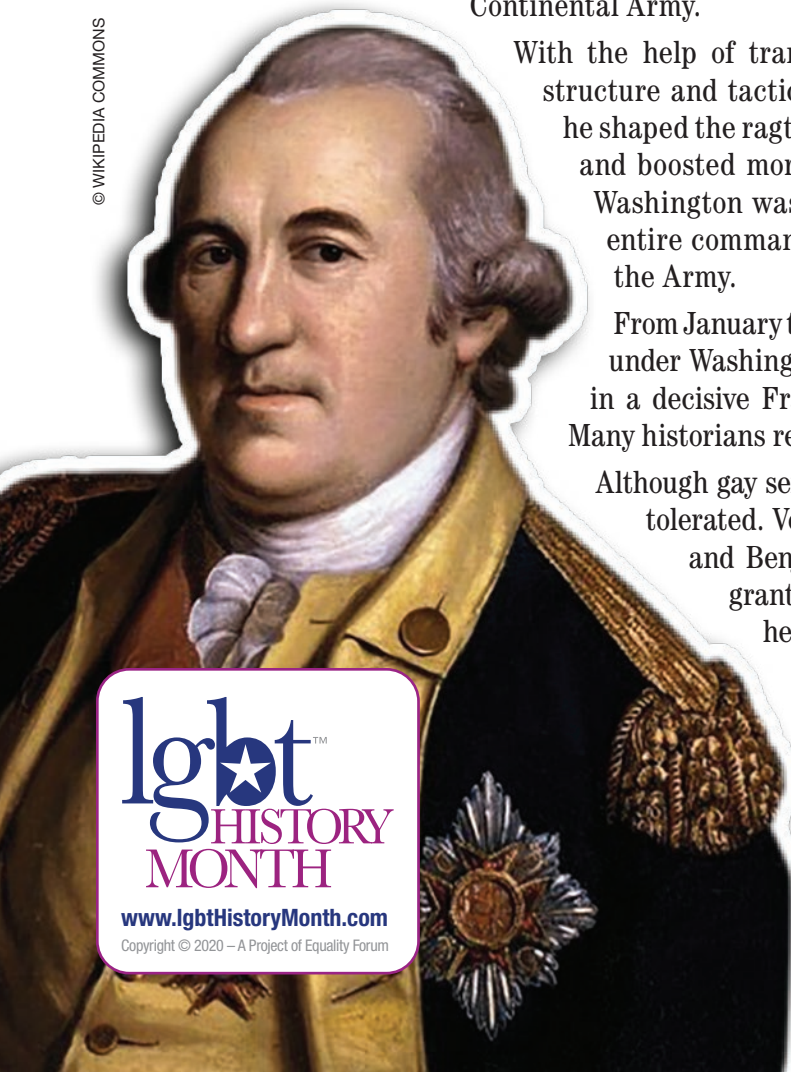
From January to October 1781, von Steuben served as a divisional commander under Washington in Yorktown, Virginia. The Yorktown campaign resulted in a decisive Franco-American victory and the start of peace negotiations. Many historians regard von Steuben as second only to Washington himself.

Although gay sex was a crime in the 1700s, same-sex romantic liaisons were tolerated. Von Steuben formed serious relationships with William North and Benjamin Walker. When the Revolutionary War ended, the U.S. granted von Steuben citizenship. He moved to New York, where he legally adopted both men, a practice commonplace among homosexuals, centuries before gay marriage.

When von Steuben died, North and Walker inherited his estate. The baron’s secretary, John Mulligan, with whom he was also believed to have had a relationship, inherited his library.

Von Steuben’s burial place became the Steuben Memorial, a state historic site in Steuben, New York.

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# LAXMI NARAYAN TRIPATHI

b. December 13, 1978

## INDIAN TRANSGENDER RIGHTS ACTIVIST

**She is among the most influential figures in India's LGBTQ community.**

*"It is only through faith that the original status of the transgender people ... can be reclaimed."*

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi is an Indian transgender rights activist, dancer and television star. She is among the most influential figures in India's LGBTQ community.

Tripathi was born male in Thane, Maharashtra, near Mumbai, to an orthodox Brahmin family. Brahmin is the highest caste in Hinduism. Growing up, Tripathi was sexually abused by a close relative and bullied by her classmates.

Tripathi graduated with an arts degree from Mumbai's Mithibai College and a postgraduate degree in Bharatanatyam, a form of Indian classical dance that often expresses religious and spiritual themes.

After starring in several dance videos directed by Ken Ghosh, an Indian director and producer, Tripathi took up choreography and became a well-known dancer in Maharashtra. When the state shuttered its dance bars, Tripathi organized protests against the decision.

Tripathi identifies as a female in the Indian sense of hijra. Considered nonbinary, hijras can be intersex, transgender or eunuchs. Historically, Hinduism viewed hijras as divine. In the late 1800s, when India was a British colony, transgenderism was criminalized. For centuries, transgender Indians have lived as outcasts. Tripathi is working to reclaim the hijras' holy status.

During India's HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1990s, Tripathi was one of the first activists to demand that the national anti-AIDS program include hijras as a separate category. She attended the 2006 World AIDS Conference in Toronto, Canada, and participated in HIV/AIDS activism at other international forums. In 2008 she became the first transgender person to represent Asia Pacific in the United Nations, where she spoke of the plight of sexual minorities around the world, particularly in India.

Thanks to Tripathi's successful petition, in 2014 the Indian Supreme Court ruled to officially recognize a third gender. The landmark decision paved the way for transgender people to receive government benefits and for India's decriminalization of same-sex relationships in 2018. In the wake of her Supreme Court victory, Tripathi formed the nonprofit Astitva Trust, Asia's first transgender organization, and established a Hindu hijra religious order, the Kinnar Akhara.

Tripathi was featured in the 2005 documentary "Between the Lines: India's Third Gender." In 2011 she starred in the celebrity edition of the Indian reality television series "Big Boss" and in "Queens! Destiny of Dance," an acclaimed Bollywood film about hijras. In 2012 Tripathi published her autobiography, "Me Hijra, Me Laxmi."

In 2017 at the KASHISH Mumbai International Queer Film Festival, Tripathi received the Rainbow Warrior Award. She received the Sree Narayana Guru Award for social service the same year.

Tripathi lives with her fiancé, Aryan Pasha, a transgender man. The couple has two adopted children.



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# DEBORAH WAXMAN

b. February 20, 1967

## NATIONAL RABBINICAL LEADER

*“Creating a world that goes beyond inclusion ... is work for us all.”*

**She is the first woman to lead a Jewish seminary and a national congregational union.**

Rabbi Deborah Waxman is the first woman and the first lesbian to lead a Jewish seminary and national congregational union. She serves as president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) and of Reconstructing Judaism, the leading organization of the Reconstructionist movement.

Waxman was born to conservative Jewish parents in West Hartford, Connecticut. Her father was a traveling salesman and her mother was the president of their synagogue's sisterhood.

Waxman earned her bachelor's degree in religion from Columbia University, her Master of Hebrew Letters from the RRC, and her doctorate in American Jewish history from Temple University. She also completed a certificate in Jewish women's studies from the RRC in conjunction with Temple University.

In 1999 the RRC ordained Waxman. She began teaching at the seminary and served as the rabbi of Congregation Bet Haverim in New York, before becoming vice president for governance of the RRC. In that role, she merged the RRC and the Jewish Reconstructionist Communities. Together, they form the Jewish Reconstructionist movement. In 2014 she became its president.

Waxman won grants from prominent donors, such as the Kresge, the Wexner, and the Cummings Foundations. She led initiatives to create interactive digital content, to bolster Reconstructionist Judaism's ties to Israel and to help young people through camping programs.

Waxman is regarded as the Reconstructionist movement's thought leader. She has provided an important voice for feminism in Judaism, encouraging gender equality in Jewish leadership. A member of the Academic Council of the American Jewish Historical Society, she researches, writes and speaks at conferences about Jewish identity, women in American Judaism and Reconstructionist Judaism. Publications such as *The Times of Israel*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, *HuffPost*, *Forward*, and other media and academic outlets have published her articles. She also created and hosts the podcast "Hashivenu: Jewish Teachings on Resilience."

In 2015 Waxman was named to the "Forward 50," a list of Jewish Americans "who have made a significant impact on the Jewish story." She was interviewed by MSNBC following the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting in October 2018, and she wrote an opinion piece on Jewish values amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Waxman lives in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, with her partner, Christina Ager, a professor at Arcadia University.

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# LIL NAS X

b. April 9, 1999

# RAPPER

**He is a Grammy Award-winning rapper, singer and songwriter.**

*“I 100% want to represent the LGBT community.”*

Montero Hill, known as Lil Nas X, is a Grammy Award-winning rapper and social media sensation.

A trailblazer in the hip-hop community as a gay rapper who speaks freely about his sexuality, Nas X entered the international spotlight with his single “Old Town Road.”

Nas X was born outside of Atlanta, Georgia. His father is a gospel singer. His parents divorced when he was 6, and he spent much of his childhood living in housing projects.

As a youth struggling with his sexual orientation, Nas X spent most of his time alone. At age 13, he turned to social media and experimenting with memes.

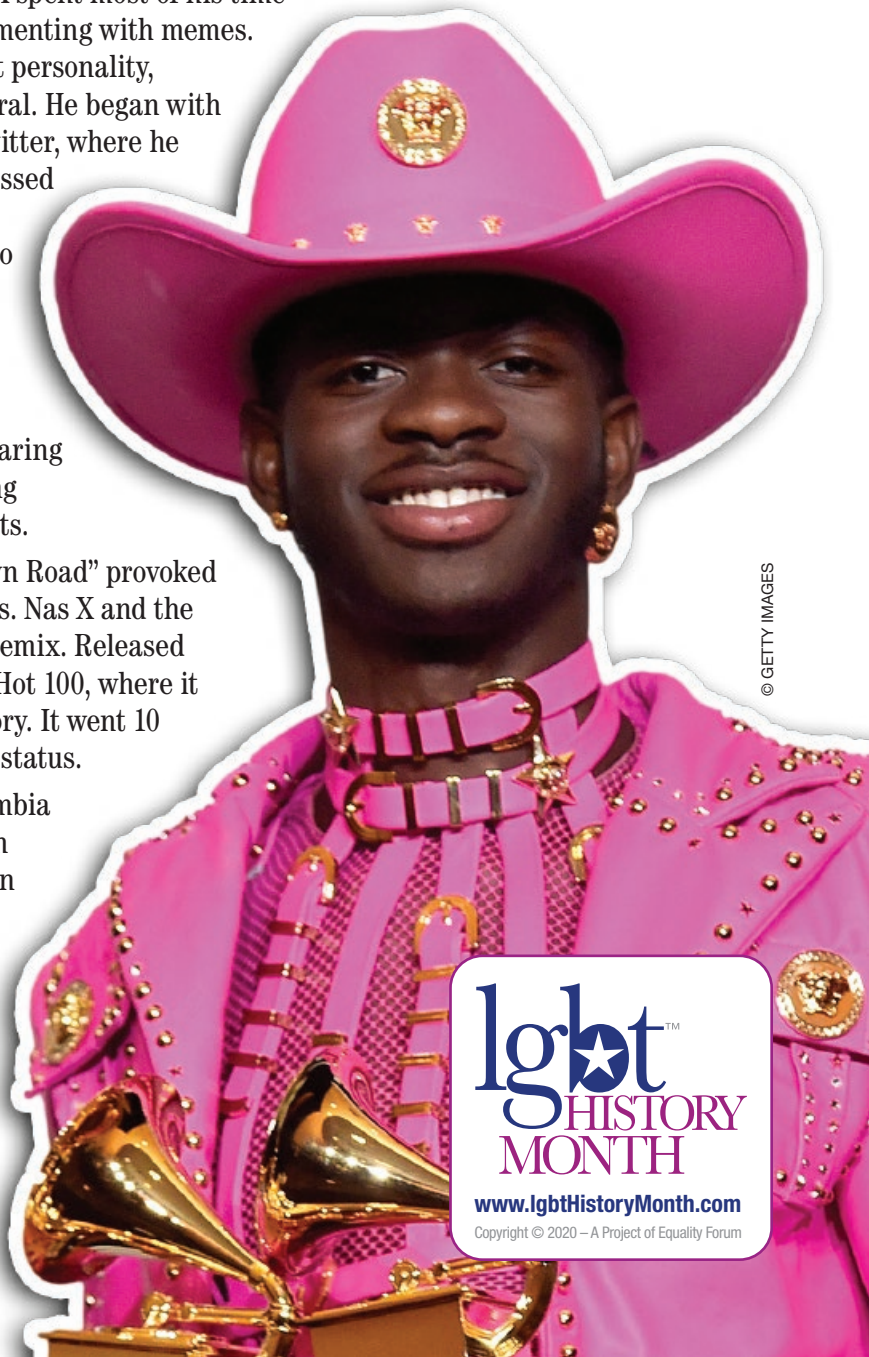
He eventually carved a niche for himself as an internet personality, working to create catchy content he hoped would go viral. He began with short Facebook videos and finally found success on Twitter, where he accumulated more than four million followers. He amassed nine million followers on YouTube. As his songwriting progressed, he adopted his stage name as an homage to the rapper Nas.

In December 2018, Nas X bought beats online and recorded the country rap song “Old Town Road.” He promoted the song on social media with hundreds of memes and with a musical “challenge” on the video-sharing app TikTok. Popular with all kinds of listeners, the song rapidly jumped to the radio, then to the Billboard charts.

With its unique blend of country and hip-hop, “Old Town Road” provoked controversy about its place on the country music charts. Nas X and the country star Billy Ray Cyrus subsequently recorded a remix. Released in April 2019, the single shot to No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100, where it remained for 19 weeks—longer than any song in history. It went 10 times platinum. Only 34 songs have ever achieved this status.

In June 2019, Nas X released “7,” his debut EP on Columbia Records. The seven-track recording features “Old Town Road” and the single “Panini,” which peaked at No. 5 on the Hot 100. Nine days after the EP’s release, Nas X came out as gay on Twitter. He is the first artist to do so with a No. 1 hit currently on the charts.

Nas X was nominated for six Grammy Awards in 2020. He won two for “Old Town Road” and also became the first LGBT artist to win a Country Music Association (CMA) Award. He was named to the TIME 100 Next list and the Forbes 30 Under 30 list.



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