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PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

The Experiences of Trans People

LEILA RUPP

Billy Tipton was a jazz musician. When he died in 1989, the doctors and then the world found out that he had a woman's body, that he was what we now call *assigned female at birth.* Born Dorothy Lucille Tipton in Oklahoma City in 1914, Billy donned a man's suit for the first time when he was 19 so he could get hired as a musician. He did it because it was hard to make it in that world as a woman, but it turns out there was more than ambition going on with Billy. Even before he transitioned to Billy, he had relationships with women and he married more than once.

Some of his wives knew his secret; some didn't. Billy was careful, as he had to be, so we can never really know how he viewed himself. He told one of his cousins, one of the handful of people who continued to know him as Dorothy, that he considered himself a normal person, not a freak or a hermaphrodite. Was he transgender in the sense we use the word today? A butch lesbian who found this the best way to be in the world? Or was he something else altogether? What I find fascinating is what we can't know. We can't know how Billy thought of himself. We can't know how his lovers and wives thought of him. Even more, we can't know how they thought of themselves.

Just for a moment, let's turn from history to fiction as a way to imagine all we can't know about transgender people in the past. Scottish novelist Jackie Kay, inspired by the story of Billy Tipton, tells about Joss Moody, a biracial Jazz trumpeter and his white wife, Millie. The novel called Trumpet opens after Joss Moody's death and the discovery of his secret. Millie is besieged by the press and drowning in her sorrow. She escapes to the country where she lingers on her memories of falling in love, of her desire for him.

The first time they were moving toward making love, he became troubled and said there was something he had to tell her. She imagines he's married. She imagines he has a terrible disease, that he's committed a crime, but she doesn't care, she just wants him. Slowly, he undresses, first his jacket and tie, then his shirt, next two T-shirts, then a vest, and, finally, bandages wrapped around his chest. She thinks he has been wounded, but suddenly his small firm breasts appear. Millie is already in love. It doesn't matter to her.

"I remember feeling stupid, then angry," Kay writes of Millie. "I remember the shock of it all. How, even after he told me, I still couldn't quite believe it. I remember the expression on his face, the fear that I would suddenly stop loving him, but I don't think I ever thought he was wrong. I don't think so." Fiction allows us to hear the imagined voice of a woman in love with a man with a woman's body. It helps us to pose the questions we hope history can answer, to remember what is so often missing in the historical record, but also, it helps us to speculate based on what we do know about what Billy Tipton's wives and others like them might have thought as they made their lives with a man with a woman's body.

If there is much we can't know about transgender people in the past, there is also much that we can learn. It's true that one big challenge is in visibility. If people change gender for whatever reason and no one found out, then we don't know about them either. But a great deal of transgender history is visible. A whole range of sources tell us stories about trans people, every bit as compelling as the imagined tale of Joss Moody and Millie. From history, we know that there have always been people who crossed the gender line, sometimes secretly, sometimes openly.

We know that not all societies view gender in the same way, that some make a place for people changing gender or adopting a third gender. We learn that transgender history is not a simple story of progress, from the bad old days to the present. We learn that transgender people have formed communities, organized, and fought for their rights. We learn that crossing the gender line or rejecting binary gender is not something totally new, and that can make a difference for all students, whatever their gender identities.

I'm Leila Rupp, and this is Queer America, a special series from Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. LGBTQ history has been largely neglected in the classroom, but it's necessary to give students a fuller history of the United States and to help them understand how that history shaped the society they live in. This podcast provides a detailed look at how to incorporate important cultural touchstones, notable figures and political debates into an inclusive U.S. history curriculum.

In each episode, we explore a different topic, walking you through historical concepts, suggesting useful source material and offering practical classroom exercises. Talking with students about sexual and gender identity can be emotional and complex. This podcast is a resource for navigating those challenges so teachers and students can discover the history and comprehend the legacy of Queer America. In this episode, I interview Genny Beemyn about the challenges of teaching transgender history, how it overlaps and diverges from gay and lesbian history, and ways that transgender history adds to our understanding of U.S. history.

Well, thank you so much for being willing to do this interview on the experiences of trans people in U.S. history.

GENNY BEEMYN
Indeed. It's nice to speak with you.

LEILA RUPP
I thought it might be good to start by having you tell us a little about yourself and how you came to do trans history.

GENNY BEEMYN
I got involved back around 2000 when I was asked to do an article for what's now the Journal of LGBT Youth. And I was thinking, what do we really need? At that point, I was starting to identify myself as transgender, as genderqueer, and I was seeing more and more students, likewise, identifying, coming out as trans. And there was virtually nothing out there written about the experiences of trans college students or what colleges need to do to be supportive of trans students. And so I switched from being a faculty member to being in student affairs, wanting to work with LGBTQ students in a way that wasn't always as possible to the same extent through teaching.

That's sort of what got me started in doing the work that I've been doing for almost 20 years now. Language is just so important. You really can't know who you are until you can name who you are. For years and years, I've really had no understanding of myself. I learned about the concept of trans back in the '80s and early '90s. It was trans women, trans men, and I didn't really feel very male; at the same time, I also knew I wasn't female. I had met trans women and I knew that wasn't me. Okay, I wasn't trans woman, so maybe I'm just a different kind of guy. And the word genderqueer wasn't out there or it didn't exist as a word until roughly the mid-'90s, is when I first saw it online, it was when I discovered it and recognized that, "Oh, that really fits how I am, how I see myself."

So, I identify as being genderqueer, which for me means that I don't identify as either male or female, but someplace in between, probably closer to female than male, if you were to see those as being fixed points, which a lot of folks don't. And so, having that language was so helpful to me to be able to better understand my experience that I've seen that, repeatedly since then with my students, becoming aware of themselves through language and through social media, and just how wonderful it's been for people to go online and be able to find terms to describe themselves and recognize that there are whole communities of other people just like myself.

Or if you don't find a community, you can create one. Come up with language to describe who you are and put it on your blog and maybe other people will say, "Hey, that's really great. That describes me, too. I'm going to start calling myself that," and that's how we get the life we get. People resonate to what language is being created, and so it becomes more commonplace and gets into the language. It's a wonderful time for people to be able to discover and really find themselves and be able to be who they are, not like when I was coming of age when there were no options. You were either transsexual or you were a cross-dresser, and I was neither, so I had no place in the trans community.

LEILA RUPP
So, when you were starting to identify yourself as trans, did you find that history helped you to think about that in different ways?

GENNY BEEMYN
Yeah. It was useful to know. I've always been a historian, that was my Ph.D., so it was natural for me to want to think about how we talk about the past, recognizing that trans people come out of a context. It wasn't like all of a sudden in 1952, Christine Jorgensen invented transsexuality, or in the mid-'90s, somebody, we don't know who, came up with the word genderqueer and it begins to be adopted by theorists like Kate Bornstein and Leslie Feinberg, Holly Boswell.

Then wanting to learn more about other people who are gender nonconforming throughout history to recognize it's just so important for people to understand that there is a history. There is a context there that things don't just happen happenstance, or wanting to really delve into that more and be able to share that with other folks, to recognize that there is material here we need to be thinking about, and also material we need to be thinking about differently. That it was much more complex than that.

LEILA RUPP
Right. Well, that's such an issue for doing history because there wasn't the concept of transgender, there wasn't, certainly, the concept of genderqueer, so when you're writing about history, you know, there is an

issue always about how do we talk about transgender people before there was the concept? So what do you feel are the best words to use?

GENNY BEEMYN
Well, I think we need to very much contextualize. You're right, that trans is the contemporary term, and we don't want to willy-nilly apply that to people who, maybe from our vantage point, would seem trans, but they wouldn't maybe have conceptualized themselves in that way. At the same time, we also are really limiting ourselves if we limit the term trans just to places and times when that concept existed because that will mean that basically, trans history was the last 30 years. I think it's inappropriate to make an assumption that trans people have existed throughout history, and also inappropriate to limit trans history just to individuals who would have had that term and who used that term.

LEILA RUPP
Yeah, I think that is exactly the issue that we have to deal with because we know that those concepts weren't out there in the same way that you talked about genderqueer or some new concept, and yet we know that there are people who were gender nonconforming, it's one of the terms that we use, and it's really important to recognize that.

GENNY BEEMYN
Anthropologist Jason Cromwell in a book he did back in the early 2000s had this wonderful framework that he developed to try to understand and find a trans male history. And he came up with three questions to ask: Did the individual indicate that they were men? Did they attempt to change their bodies to look more traditionally male? And did they live their lives as men, keeping the knowledge of having been assigned female a secret even if that was detrimental to themselves? And I think you can also sort of reverse that to be talking about trans women. Okay, that works for trans women, trans men, what about people who are gender nonconforming or what we used to refer to as being cross-dressers back in the day?

How do we get a sense of, is this person someone who's gender nonconforming in how they identify themselves, or are they merely cross-dressing for some sort of gain, whether it's economic, social, sexual? And so, using Cromwell's work, I came up with two further questions to ask: did they continue to cross-dress when it was publicly known that they cross-dressed? Or, alternatively, did they cross-dress consistently but only in private so that no one knew, maybe family but no one else? So that the important question then becomes, are they doing so without getting any sort of privilege from doing so? They're doing so because it's their own sort of comfort and satisfaction.

LEILA RUPP
In some of your work, you've talked about the story of Hannah Snell, James Gray as an example of these issues about how people thought of themselves and how we talk about them. Could you tell us a little bit about that story?

GENNY BEEMYN
Indeed. Hannah Snell was a resident of England in the 18th century and began dressing in what we would consider traditionally male clothing in 1745 because their husband, who was a Dutch sailor, had deserted them while they were pregnant with their first child, so Snell Gray, wanted to go look for him. And, of course, at that time, that era, it wasn't very feasible for someone who was seen as a woman to be traveling

around on ships and such trying to find a sailor. So, Hannah Snell assumed the name, James Gray, entered the British navy and Army at various times, working in various jobs aboard ships.

And then about five years later, after doing this, found out that their husband had actually been killed because they had murdered someone. So, at that point, Snell Gray returns home and comes out, so to speak, tells folks that, "Hey, I did this." And, their story was published and got a huge amount of celebrity such that Snell Gray earned income appearing on stage dressed in their military uniform. After they retired, they continued to wear traditionally male apparel. And this is where I sort of like, "Okay, this is going beyond simply someone who's cross-dressing for safety, for convenience because here is somebody who even when they no longer needed to, when it was no longer serving their purposes, continued to do so seemingly because they felt that was who they were, that it best fit them."

So that's why I put Snell Gray into that gender nonconforming person because they were doing so not because they were needing to do so, but because they wanted to do so.

LEILA RUPP
Yeah. That is a perfect example because we know of course that there were reasons why women might cross-dress for social mobility, for geographic mobility, for all the reasons that Hannah Snell did and-

GENNY BEEMYN
Sexual relationships as well for some people.

LEILA RUPP
So we try to make sense of that. What does it mean? And I think your argument about continuing when it's no longer really beneficial is a really good example. The other thing that I think comes up in what you've said that we probably need to address is the pronoun issue, which is, of course, a really contemporary important issue. Can you say a little bit about pronouns?

GENNY BEEMYN
Absolutely. You're right. It's just so critical and that's why I refer to Snell Gray using they and them, not wanting to impose my own framework on them, not knowing, obviously, how this person would have identified themselves in terms of their pronouns. The book written about them use she and her, but we don't know if that is how Snell Gray would have identified themselves in their life. And so, using they/them is sort of an inclusive pronoun to be using for them.

LEILA RUPP
I think at some point in time we used to try to refer to people by the pronouns that they were presenting in terms of their appearance, so I think people would have talked about Hannah Snell as she and James Gray as he. And this is really the newer way to deal with that historically. Another challenge I think that we have in doing trans history is that, unless we know that someone, a historical figure, was assigned to different gender at birth, then they become completely lost to us in terms of trans history.

Sometimes we only know about people because they were discovered to have been assigned a different gender when they died. Billy Tipton, the jazz musician who died in 1989, is one example of that.

GENNY BEEMYN
Billy Tipton, sure.

LEILA RUPP
Some people knew along the way that he had been assigned female at birth, but it was only when he died that that became really a kind of public story. But there are other examples in history, from earlier in history that you've talked about. One of them is Murray Hall, a 19th-century New York politician. Could you say a little bit about his story?

GENNY BEEMYN
Sure. Murray Hall was one of those individuals who was not known to have been assigned female until his death in 1901. For the last 30 or so years of his life, presented, was known as a man, was well respected in New York City politics. He was married twice. Apparently, his wives were aware of Hall's assigned sex, but respected that is how he identified himself. He had a daughter that they raised who was unaware. Friends, colleagues did not know either until his death. What I found really interesting about Murray Hall was that most of the people, his daughter, his friends, political colleagues, continued to recognize him as a man after his death, recognizing that that was who he was, regardless of how he might've been assigned at birth. Pretty forward thinking for the turn of the 20th century.

LEILA RUPP
So that would be an example of somebody, because of the way he lived, that you would use male pronouns to describe him because he did identify as a man?

GENNY BEEMYN
Sure. Because very clearly, here's someone who, going back to what James Cromwell said about identifying as a man, presenting, taking steps to be seen as a man, and someone who died, who had breast cancer that was untreated and chose not to have it be treated because that would have obviously revealed his assignment at birth, so died from something that could've been prevented. So it was more important for him to be seen as a man than even to be alive if he had to be a woman.

LEILA RUPP
Yeah. That is a tragic story. And it reminds us of some of the things that trans people go through today. So do we know any more about the community reaction after Murray Hall's death when this did become public?

GENNY BEEMYN
Yeah. Even though it's early 20th century, very respected and treated as how he identified. There were some folks like the coroner's jury who reverted to seeing Hall as female, but most of his political colleagues continued to see him as a man because that's how he lived, and they respected who he was. So I think that is some pretty forward thinking for that time for sure.

LEILA RUPP
Yes, it is. Well, that reminds us that sometimes we tend to think that things have gotten better in terms of trans history over time and sometimes we see that there are periods in the past and societies in the past that have a more accepting view of gender nonconformity or gender changing.

GENNY BEEMYN
Emily Skidmore just did a really wonderful book called True Sex, where she goes back and looks at newspapers and finds 65 instances of female assigned individuals who lived their lives as men, who were covered in newspapers from the 1870s to about the 1930s. And what's interesting about that was that most of these trans men were not in urban areas like we would expect to try to form a queer community, but were in small cities and rural areas. Contrary to what we might expect, they were oftentimes respected and supported in those stories, in these local newspapers.

It wasn't this lurid sensational coverage, but it was very sympathetic frequently where they were treated just as any other person who would have passed away. They commented upon the fact, of course, that this person who had been assigned female at birth. But Skidmore argues that, because they fit into their communities, that they were seen as virtuous, hardworking, good family men, that they were accepted in their society, that this was simply considered an aberration. You know, the familiarity of the small communities where everyone knows each other, everyone knows each other's foibles.

So, this became, in a sense, one other sort of eccentricity, as it were, rather than some like psychological or pathological sort of thing. "Oh, that's just Joe. You know, he was assigned female but identifies as male." It was along those lines that they could get respect in a way that we would never think possible. Thinking back, oh, rural areas, you know, conservative, small minded. So I think that's a really interesting narrative to look at, that we make assumptions about what community means, and for people having to find community, especially queer people. We think, oh, you had to go to cities and find other people like yourself. Well, Skidmore finds that these people stayed where they were or went to small towns where they could simply be themselves, be men and be looked at as men, and oftentimes be treated as men.

LEILA RUPP
I think that's a really important point. And a lot of the literature about queer rural communities really makes the same point, that sometimes just being a member of a community means that people will accept you even if you are not conforming to every aspect of sexuality and gender. Actually, one of my graduate students, Carly Thomsen, who's now teaching at Middlebury, wrote her dissertation about rural queer lives and really makes the point that rural communities have been treated as if they're completely hostile to queerness and that you have to move to the city.

And she makes a whole argument about not even having to be out and be accepted even though sort of everybody knows, but you don't have to be out in the ways that oftentimes we think are essential for acceptance. So I think that's a really good example. So is it really Skidmore's the argument that it's about rural life or is there something else about that particular time period, do you think, in the first part of the 20th century that might have made this more acceptable?

GENNY BEEMYN
Well, I think that we're at a time then where the psychological literature is first starting to frame same-sex relationships as being deviant and pathological. So I think it also reflects the dominant narrative that we think is widespread. It doesn't filter down or doesn't impact how people see these individuals. One case that stands out to me is an individual that Skidmore talks about by the name of George Green, who lives in a rural town in Virginia at the turn of the 20th century. Again, like a lot of these folks, wasn't discovered to have been assigned female until his death.

And, Skidmore includes some of the newspaper coverage, and it's just amazing to read because the two local newspapers are just so sympathetic to him and to his wife and saying how awful this is for her, she must be really suffering. They quote from the wife saying how tragic this is, and what a great man he was. There's no criticism of, like, "Oh, how could somebody be doing this? This is weird, or this is inappropriate." To give a sense of just how this was even framed by the church. His funeral was held in a Catholic church, presided over by a priest then buried in a nearby Catholic cemetery.

So, again, challenges what our narrative is about that time and that place, that here is someone who could be seen as a respected citizen, even by the Catholic Church.

LEILA RUPP
Oh, that's really fascinating. And, also, that the community would not have thought that it meant anything about his wife, right? That it didn't make her some different kind of person. She was just a woman who was married to and loved a man.

GENNY BEEMYN
Right. And, in her case, she talked about how they didn't have sex. They lived as brother and sister. In her case, that might've helped. But, in other cases though, there was no sort of trying to explain away the fact that you have someone who is assigned female and someone else who was assigned female living together.

LEILA RUPP
Right. Can we move back just a moment to thinking about nonbinary gender that's accepted in some societies in the past, and, of course, one of those that's become very well known is among some native American societies where there were third genders or the possibility of gender crossing. We know a lot about that in the west among the Navajos, the Lakotas, the Omahas who recognized different kinds of nonbinary gender, and even had specific words for a kind of third gender.

So, could you talk a little bit about that and why the native American example has become so important, and what we can really learn from that?

GENNY BEEMYN
Absolutely. From really the arrival in the Americas of Europeans in the 16th, 17th century, reporting on just the visibility of individuals who adopted cross-gender roles, which included having sexual relations and marrying people of the same gender assignment, and, of course, this was totally new to Europeans in terms of having additional gender roles beyond male and female. And so their only ways of conceptualizing it was in terms of their own framework of thinking that these are same-sex relationships rather than what ... One anthropologist called them heterogender relationships because you have a cross-gender person and a non-cross-gender person hooking up.

So, it was really not a same-sex relationship, but, of course, the Europeans, that was their framework from their history. So, they were ... referred to them as being sodomites or hermaphrodites because you had someone who was assigned male taking up female characteristics or vice versa sometimes. And, of course, you see that continuing on into the 20th century with anthropologists and historians, first referring to them as being homosexuals or occasionally transvestites or using the word berdache, which

is a French adaptation of a word for male prostitute.

So, not really understanding that these are additional gender roles, that this was a very different sort of gender system. And I think that this is why you use it for a case study because it just demonstrates that there are different ways of looking at gender, that gender isn't just one thing that's universal. Different sides have different ways of looking at gender, and, also, I think it shows just how people bring their own biases to anything, but here bring it to gender and imposing their own sort of system and values upon other people.

LEILA RUPP
Yeah, and, of course, the Europeans were pretty horrified by all of this and did the best that they could to try to get rid of it whenever they could.

GENNY BEEMYN
Talking about indigenous cultures, there was a wide variety of ways that gender was looked at. There wasn't a monolithic indigenous cultural understanding of gender. Some nations had multiple additional gender roles, some didn't. Many more, from what we know, had them for individuals who were assigned male who took on traditionally female roles, but, even in the societies that had additional genders, how those individuals were treated very widely. So, it's important not to simply have this Utopian vision of, and I've seen this with some trans people who understandably are looking for a past or looking to want to have something they can point to about, "Hey, we've existed, we've always existed in some size. You know, we were even glorified and had exalted roles."

And yes, there is some indigenous cultures in which people who had cross-gender lives had a special role that was as priest or as holy figures, but there were other societies where they might've had additional roles, but those people were looked down upon. Or, more often I think, you had if say someone who was assigned male who identified as being female, they were treated in that society as other females were. So, if females in that society were treated poorly, well, so were these cross-gendered individuals who had been assigned male at birth. So it varied wildly. So it's important not to gloss over the diversity when we're looking to try to be more inclusive, and not think of there was this glorious past that wasn't uncomplicated as well.

LEILA RUPP
This is Queer America and I'm your host, Leila Rupp. You can learn even more about incorporating LGBTQ history into your classroom in a valuable collection of essays called Understanding and Teaching U.S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History. This podcast is produced in partnership with the University of Wisconsin Press, publishers of this anthology, which I edited with Susan K. Freeman. It's the first book designed for high school and university teachers who want to integrate queer history into their standard curriculum. From now until the end of the year, the University of Wisconsin Press is offering a 30 percent discount for Queer America listeners.

You'll find a link to purchase the book at tolerance.org/podcast. Just use the promotional code QAPODCAST, all caps. Again, here is Genny Beemyn.

So, as I'm sure you know, California recently revised our K–12 curriculum to include the experiences of

lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. And, getting back to the Emily Skidmore book, one of the topics that they recommend for students in the younger grades, and I think fifth grade is one of the grades where they really emphasize dealing with this particular issue, and they talk about the impact of the white settler movement into the West, and they talk a lot about using gender crossing as a way to do that.

Particularly, people who were assigned female at birth, who presented as men in that context, which again, gets back to, there are a lot of reasons you might do that for geographic mobility, for safety, for economic reasons. But I know there's some examples that you've written about from that time period. Could you say a little bit about that, and particularly how they might be used in the classroom?

GENNY BEEMYN
Historian Peter Boag did a wonderful book called Re-Dressing America's Frontier Past, where he really probably does the best job of talking about that history of the frontier, of the Old West. And makes the argument that cross-dressers, particularly individuals assigned female who live their lives as men, was really part of daily life on the frontier. It was such a widespread phenomenon that it was very common to have this happen when someone, particularly again, when they were upon their death or if they were hospitalized or sick and being treated by somebody else, to be discovered to have been assigned female.

One case involved a gold miner who became a rancher by the name of Joe Monahan, who spent more than 30 years living on the Idaho, Oregon border and, again, was well respected in his community, treated as any other guy, and wasn't until his death that he was discovered to have been assigned female. So, this was something that was very much ubiquitous at that time and that place. And I think Boag argues, and I think it's a great argument, that it was because of how the Old West was constructed as being this place where men are men, right, that this could be so prevalent because if someone could present themselves as a masculine man, there was no question about that because this was a man's domain, a manly man's domain. So it made it very possible, very easy for someone to present in that world and just be accepted as being part of that world.

LEILA RUPP
And I think those are the kinds of examples that both teach about gender and how fluid it can be, but also could be really supportive to students who identify as trans or genderqueer in any way to know that there's even this sort of frontier myth of American society as a place where there was a lot of fluidity of gender.

GENNY BEEMYN
Yeah, I didn't see that in John Wayne movies.

LEILA RUPP
[Laughter] That's right. They need to remake some of those.

GENNY BEEMYN
I think we see through the work that's being done now on the frontier, on rural America, just how common it was for people who lived cross-gender lives to be woven into the fabric of society. We have had this misguided, I would call it notion, that it was only in these small enclaves in urban areas where what we now refer to as being LGBT individuals existed and were able to have a sense of community. We know that we were everywhere, and I think it's important to acknowledge and recognize that, because that was

reality. It was not the exception; it was really the rule.

LEILA RUPP
It's really in the early 20th century that medical professionals began to talk about the concept of transsexuality as distinct from homosexuality in some of the ways that you've been talking about. And that, of course, is a really important part of the story of separating gender identity from sexual identity. And I've always thought that it's really important to recognize the role that people played in this, not just the doctors coming up with concepts that get placed on people, but people with same-sex desires and people with transgender subjectivities really are a very important part of the story because, of course, the doctors partly get their ideas about transsexuality and homosexuality from looking at the communities that were already in existence.

GENNY BEEMYN
Absolutely.

LEILA RUPP
So, I think it's really important to emphasize that idea—that the doctors didn't really come up with this just totally out of the blue. but, nevertheless, the doctors, the sexologists, were important in terms of developing some of these concepts. Can you say a little bit about some of the key figures in this story of classification and particularly in developing the concept of transsexuality?

GENNY BEEMYN
Well, I would start with Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, a German lawyer who was interested in other men and tried to understand that, and really popularizes this idea of gender inversion, of having a gender that's the opposite or inverted from what would be expected. He referred to himself as having a female soul enclosed within a male body. This is 1860s, he's using this language, which you see this language continue for really the next century. That's the language that people used to describe transsexuality. Obviously, he's not using it in that sense, he's easily more attracted to people of the same sex, but that sort of gets to that blurring of gender and sexual identity.

And it's really not until the German sexologist, Magnus Hirschfeld, who is the one who coins the word transvestism, which is Latin of course for cross-dressing, that there begins to be that separation. He started seeing people in his practice who were interested in other people of the same sex, but were not gender inverted. They did not see themselves as being different gender. They just simply were attracted people of the same sex, or you had people who were asexual, we'd use the term today, who felt themselves to be a different gender.

So, he began to recognize this difference between sexual identity and gender identity, and really I think more than anyone else at that time, recognized that this was not something as pathological, really going against so much of the medical literature, doctors at that point, which saw both being attracted to people of the same sex and individuals who identified as a gender different than themselves, being something that was immoral, deviant. He was very much supportive of recognizing these people were simply just being who they were. He has got this wonderful description of cross-dressing, which you could use that today to describe what cross-dressing was, simply just, "This is just who I am. This is how I feel

comfortable and who I am. It doesn't mean I'm gay, it doesn't mean I'm a fetishist, this is just who I am."

The literature also at that point looked at cross-dressing as being simply a male thing, and he was very, very clear in his work as well that we had women who also cross presented and could be of any sexuality. Actually, in his research, the majority of those individuals were heterosexual rather than being gay. The one fault about Hirschfeld is that, if you can make any fault, is that he did not distinguish transvestites, what we'd call later on cross-dressers, what we might now call gender nonconforming people from transsexuals. He lumped them both together as being transvestites.

It really isn't until the 1940s, '50s, that that distinction begins to get made. It was very controversial at the time and there was a great deal of resistance to making that separation. And, of course, we still see that confusion, where today people who are trans are often thought of as being gay.

LEILA RUPP
One of the things that you talk about in your work is that it's important to undermine the stereotypes that all trans people are gay, even though we include trans people under the umbrella term queer. And one of the places that you talked about this is where there's kind of an intersection between the gay-lesbian communities and trans communities in the drag balls in the early 20th century, which brought together a whole range of people, trans people, what we now call cis people. People who are not trans, black and white, particularly in New York, Chicago and places like that. So, can you tell us a little bit about the balls and what students might learn finding out about them

GENNY BEEMYN
Well, essentially because, in a sense, what goes around comes around because of course, balls are very popular and have been for the past several decades, and I think a lot of people look at that and think that that's a contemporary phenomenon, and then they see Paris Is Burning or the new series Pose and they think, "Okay, this is something that started in the 1980s." And, really, you go back to the 19th century and you see examples of these huge drag balls taking place where you have thousands of people both participating and being spectators of these events.

And some of them were licensed, they had police present to direct traffic and control the crowd, because, at that point, in most places, cross-dressing was against the laws. They had dignitaries who came and sometimes were the ones who presented the trophies to the winners, and these were often covered quite favorably in particularly the black press in the 1920s, 1930s, where they were commenting upon how these individuals were dressed and who had the best gown, did the best hair, again, not what we would expect to be seeing at that time.

You'd think, "Oh, this is something that would have to be underground, that wasn't going to be." It all seemed in a favorable light, and, of course, there was some of that. There was some criticism there, there were attempts to shut them down. Washington DC, where I've done a lot of research, they basically prevented drag balls from taking place, but, in other places, they were widely popular, widely accepted. They were popular until the 1950s, and then sort of in the '60s and '70s, sort of become more under the radar. I think it has to do with how culture shifted and became much more conservative in the post-World War II period.

But I think that really challenges what we think of as this progress of history, that there were times and eras, places where there was a level of acceptance and some ability to be oneself and to be able to, in this case, cross-dress and at least for one night, not have to worry about laws against cross-dressing.

LEILA RUPP
Yeah. I think that that's a really good example of where students can really see the ways that things had been different in the past and not just bad and getting better all the time. And, of course, one of the really important figures in this whole story is Christine Jorgensen, who becomes the first—

GENNY BEEMYN
Poster child.

LEILA RUPP
—person in the U.S. widely known to have undergone actual surgery to become a woman in 1952.

GENNY BEEMYN
Jorgensen was born in New York City, 1920s, Danish-American. From what she has described in her autobiography, had, from a young age, intense feelings that she should have been born female, began wearing her sister's clothes in secret as a youth. By her teens, had acquired her own wardrobe of traditionally women's clothing. By her early 20s, though, began to recognize that she wasn't a cross-dresser, that she really was a heterosexual woman. And began to examine whatever she could find in the medical literature to explain herself and comes across this idea of what was then referred to as being sex-change.

GENNY BEEMYN
So Jorgensen reads some of the first studies, looking at hormone treatments and also what we now call gender confirmation surgeries, and she was able to obtain hormones and then traveled to Denmark to seek surgery.

LEILA RUPP
You know, because Christine Jorgensen got so much attention and actually became quite a celebrity and a nightclub performer and was a GI before the transformation, it's hard not to think about Caitlyn Jenner, who's also getting a lot of attention. So, can you say a little bit about the similarities, the differences and what they tell us about transsexuality?

GENNY BEEMYN
Yeah, there is some interesting parallels there. You know, both became super famous for simply transitioning, you know, which thousands and thousands of individuals do through surgery and many thousands and thousands more do simply socially without medical intervention, but they both became international celebrities. Of course, Jenner was famous before that to a significant degree—Jorgensen wasn't, but it's really interesting to see, like, how that simple act of just being themselves, really, causes them to become these international celebrities. And I think there are some similarities, too, about why these two people, in particular, achieved that kind of stardom.

You know, with Jorgensen, here was somebody who had been a U.S. service man during World War II, so sort of in a sense, the epitome of masculinity, who was in a sense reborn as what was described as

being this blonde bombshell, the symbol of white, 1950s feminine sexiness. You saw this with the very first newspaper story that was published in 1952, where he had sort of the before and after shots, and the service shot was actually called Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty, and you have on the one side the before picture, the army photo of her, this nerdish-looking, male-looking individual with goofy smile and ears sticking out.

And then you have the after picture, which is this gorgeous, professionally taken profile picture of Jorgensen looking very feminine, very Grace Kelly-ish, for those people who remember who Grace Kelly was. So you have this whole being caught up in just how beautiful she was. Look at most of the covers, especially early on in '52, '53. The coverage was all about just how amazing this was, how beautiful that this person was. And some people saying, some newspaper reporters saying, "You know, hey, I would date her." You know, so, it was very interesting how it gets framed because of her attractiveness fitting into the dominant sort of pinup image of what is beautiful, how that really played.

And Susan Stryker also talks about how, in a sense, 1950s that Jorgensen fit into the whole fascination with the power of science at that time; you have a real tidal wave of inventions taking place at that time: television, transistor radios, the atomic bomb. So this was just one more way that, "Wow, look at what science has, has done." At the same time, also it raised fears because, of course, the atomic bomb didn't have a good ending there. So, it was both a symbol of scientific progress, but also the fears of what science was doing, and, "Are we playing God here?"

And, in some ways, Caitlyn and Jenner was the same issue of, here is somebody who won the decathlon at the '76 Olympics in a very highly masculine role, the all-American male hero, world greatest athlete and becomes this highly feminine image. I'm thinking particularly of the Vanity Fair cover in 2015 and, you know, again, another airbrushed, hyperfeminine photo. You know, again, the sort of before and after the chiseled muscular person and a very curvaceous woman thereafter. Also good comparison here between the two of them, I think, in terms of neither was a very good post person for trans people.

Jorgensen, as much as she was a pioneer, wasn't really ready, I think to be an activist. And certainly, Jenner's politics are, you would have to say, are largely contrary to the struggle for trans rights today.

LEILA RUPP
Yeah. That's exactly what I was thinking is that a lot of the difference is the context around them, and the fact that, you know, there's been a lot of criticism of Jenner, not just for politics, but for being the white, glamorous celebrity when, you know, there's a whole movement out there of activists. And I think that story, the story of the emergence of trans activism and the trans rights movement is a really important way that this history can be incorporated into U.S. history in general. So, can you talk a little bit about the emergence of trans activism, and where it began, why it began when it did.

GENNY BEEMYN
Oftentimes, the summer riots in New York City, Greenwich Village, in 1969, are pointed to as the start of the modern LGBTQ rights movement. But, as Susan Stryker really eloquently shows in her book Transgender History, really Stonewall was the culmination of more than a decade of, I guess you would say, militant opposition by poor working-class, LGBT people to discrimination and police brutality. That Stryker points out that two other conflicts that were largely unknown in history where people fought

back against the police: in 1959 at a donut shop in Los Angeles and at a cafeteria in San Francisco in 1966.

Both cases it was, from what we can tell, young drag queens, many black, Latinx who were being hassled, harassed by the police, and they simply fought back, you know, and started throwing things at the police and causing a riot, similar to what happened in some ways at Stonewall. And, really, this comes about because of people recognizing that they just had had enough. What people don't often recognize is that many of the folks at Stonewall had come from other movements. People like Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson, two trans women of color who were involved in the Stonewall riots, have been active in other movements—movements for women's rights, for civil rights, the anti-Vietnam War movement.

And so had a history of being activist and being speaking out and really recognizing that, "Hey, we need to be fighting for our rights as LGBT people as well." So, really, it isn't surprising that this comes about when it comes about in the 1960s, where you started seeing the movement of people in the streets, because they had nothing to, they had nothing, and they had nothing to lose by fighting back, whereas the 1950s, 1960s, Homophile Movement, mostly white middle-class men had everything to lose and were unwilling to even be visible, meeting in church basements and secretly in people's houses and using pseudonyms. You know, very different lives than these people who were literally on the streets and being harassed every day by people and by the police.

LEILA RUPP
That's such a good example of the ways that, in terms of teaching about social movements of the 1960s, it's important to incorporate these kinds of stories as well. So, it's a place that civil rights and the women's movement, the anti-war movement, the gay movement, trans movement, really all come together. And there's a story; it's a complicated story to tell, and I think this is an important part of that. In terms of development since, say, Stonewall and beyond, since the '70s, how do you see things developing in the trans movement? Are there any, like, big important developments in that period that we should talk about?

GENNY BEEMYN
Well, I think, it's interesting, you know, things coming around because you have people of color, particularly trans people of color, playing such a pivotal role in the LGBTQ liberation struggle in the late '60s and very beginning of the 1970s. And then they get pushed out of the movement that they helped create, that they were largely responsible for. Because, if we had waited for those white, middle-class homophile people to decide to do something, we'd probably still be waiting for a lot of change to have happened.

But, very quickly after Stonewall, you start seeing white, middle-class gay men suddenly coming out and wanting to be visible and basically taking over the movement and pushing out people of color, pushing out trans people. So you have groups like the Gay Activists Alliance in New York being founded in the year after the riot and being only concerned with a very narrow understanding of gay rights. They're not interested in looking at other issues of oppression or how people face other struggles, the intersections of identity, not wanting to work in coalition with other groups.

And, also, other cities seeing the same phenomenon or with lesbian separatist groups that were predominantly white in the 1970s forming and isolating trans women. So you had this really tragic history of there being militant activism mainly by people of color, trans people of color, really being turned into the antithesis of all of that. And it's only, like, now that we're sort of getting back to creating a

different sort of movement where we have much more visibility of trans people, more visibility of people of color in the movement and starting to really recognize intersections of identity and the need to work on intersections of oppression as well.

LEILA RUPP
You know, I think that's a really important point that, if we think about the popular understanding of the Queer Movement, if you think about Stonewall and people do know about street queens and drag queens being a part of that, I mean being a really central part of that story, and then there's sort of nothing else until the present, that you think of this part of the story. And I think some of that is this notion that, "Let's not be too alienating right from the beginning, so let's be—you know, let's get what we can get and then, you know, move along to something else." So, there is a way in which the more radical demands about both gender and sexuality have kind of gotten pushed out a little bit.

Can you talk about some of the latest developments? As you say, this has really come back into the story, I think, lately, and, you know, obviously, we have these struggles over the so-called bathroom bills, other issues of hate crimes, the whole question of students being allowed to identify whatever gender they identify with. How do you see things right at this present moment?

GENNY BEEMYN
If you look at progresses, two steps forward, one step back, we are currently seeing one huge step back in terms of the current administration really and all ways it can think of to reverse the gains that have been made for trans people and LGBTQ people in general from its re-reading of Title VII and Title IX, its not addressing discrimination against trans people, packing the court with anti-LGBTQ judges, not protecting the right of trans people in places like prisons and shelters, immigration centers. And basically, anywhere where there's gender separation, trans people are being forced to be housed in accordance with their assigned sex, rather than how they identify themselves.

So, it's really a horrific landscape for trans people and we're seeing the last few years, just, it seems like every year there are more trans people that we know of that are killed in this country, mostly trans women, mostly trans women of color, mostly trans women of color who are poor, who are being killed, and just the silence oftentimes around that, and no one's really raising the red flags about that or enough people are raising red flags about that. But, at the same time, I also have a lot of hope about where things are going because I look at polls. For example, you mentioned the bathroom bills. If you look at polling around access of trans people to bathrooms, and it's very much like same-sex marriage was.

At one point, public opposition was strongly opposed to same-sex marriage, but it started to change, and it changed because young people didn't see it as an issue, that heterosexual individuals like, "Why can't two people who love each other get married? Duh." So, very quickly, we started seeing a shift because of demographics, and so the number of people who were in favor began to shift. And so, even politicians who were strongly opposed to same-sex marriage didn't dare run on that as an issue because they know the numbers were against them. And we're seeing the same thing around trans rights issues—that younger people are incredibly supportive.

It's only a matter of time before we get to a place where trans rights are going to be a given, but it's going to be a rocky road to get there, you know, which is all the same with sex marriage, that there were all

these state laws, constitutional amendments that got passed to prevent same-sex marriage. There's going to be that pushback, there's going to be that attempt to try to limit trans rights before we get to a place where it's going to be accepted because young people are supportive and you're not going to change that.

LEILA RUPP
Yeah, I totally agree with you and I have the same kind of hope, because not only have attitudes about same-sex marriage changed, but they changed so quickly. I mean, it's just a phenomenon in American society, and I have the same hope. I think we know that young people are much more familiar with issues of trans, they know people who identify as gender queer or non-gender-conforming or agender. And I think they're our future and they're going to make the difference. I think that's one of the things that's so important about teaching about transgender history and reaching, not just the students who themselves identify as trans in some way, but students who are going to make our future worlds.

As we wrap up what I think has been a really fascinating conversation, could you say a little bit just to conclude about how you see transgender history as important in this context and also what teachers can do really to help students and recognize that not all students identify as either girls or boys and how history fits in with all of that.

GENNY BEEMYN
So, what we do as historians is we try to better understand the past and help other people better understand the past. Really, all the work we do as historians is trying to create complexity on what people see as being simplicity. And so it paints a more vivid picture, it paints a bigger picture, and I think it's important to have that full picture so we see life as how it really is and not just simply a narrow segment of life and call it the big picture when it's only representing a certain segment of society, typically those with power and privilege.

What comes to mind is a song lyric, actually, from Bob Marley. "If you know your history, then you know where you're coming from, you wouldn't have to ask me, 'Who the hell I think I am.'" I think, in some ways, that rings really true in terms of it's really important to know your history, to be able to really understand yourself. That's why I think it's so important to have curricula that is LGBT inclusive so that people see themselves reflected in what they're learning and recognize that they're a part of history, they're a part of the fabric of society, that it's important to who we are to understand our past and the diversity of our past.

And California is great in terms of, as you mentioned earlier, about mandating inclusion of LGBT people into the curriculum because really not being part of the curriculum sends a signal that you are not important, that your experience, your life doesn't matter. And so it's really important to be visible so people, people learn. And we're seeing today more and more young people coming out as trans, being willing to be visible as trans. They need role models, they need to see themselves reflected in curriculum, and, as you mentioned, cis students need to learn so that they recognize that this is a part of our mosaic that we have in the world. And I would argue that it has to go beyond simply adding a lesson on, I don't know, Jorgensen or Stonewall or indigenous culture, gender.

Really, we need to be looking at how we teach around gender issues, not presuming, taking for granted that everyone in history identified as women and men, you know, going back to some of the ... I'm sure

we talked about earlier about individuals living cross-gender lives. We need to make that center of how we understand the past; we can't make assumptions about how people identified in the past. You know, we recognize now that history wasn't all white male and Christian; we also have to recognize that it was not just people who were cisgender as well. So, we need to be challenging some of the assumptions we have about the Old West or about colonial times, which we didn't really talk about, but there was a whole bunch of individuals there who crossed gender lives.

And, in terms of teachers, classroom practices beyond simply including trans as part of the curriculum or LGBTQ as part of the curriculum, also respecting how students identify themselves. So be asking the names and pronouns that students use for themselves and then respecting those names and pronouns, and have the other students in the class to do so as well. And avoiding gender language that reinforces a gender binary like saying "Boys and girls," or "Ladies and gentleman." That kind of thing. Because it does make a difference, language we use.

I use they/them as my pronouns. Every time that someone misgenders me, uses he, if they might hear my voice or meet me or uses she, if they just simply see my name, it's invalidating. It makes me feel invisible every time that happens or someone says "Sir" to me when I go to a, I don't know, coffee shop or something, or I go to a doctor's office and I'm confronted with a form that says only M and F, it's like you don't know I exist, you don't probably care that I exist, like, you've already alienated me. What kind of medical care am I going to get—going a place where they don't even know anything about me or want to know anything about me?

So, having this material be part of the curriculum and having gender identity be respected in the classroom is just so important for people to feel they can be themselves and feel that their selves are respected.

LEILA RUPP
Thank you so much, Genny. This has really been a fascinating conversation, and I love that you ended on a really passionate note about how much this means to you personally. I think this has been really informative and, really, in the end, I think hopeful about what the future will bring based on the kinds of young people that are coming up in our society today. Thank you so much.

GENNY BEEMYN
You're very welcome. This was fabulous.

LEILA RUPP
Genny Beemyn is director of the Stonewall Center at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. They are the author of A Queer Capital: A History of Gay Life in Washington, D.C., co-author of The Lives of Transgender People and editor of the forthcoming anthology Outside the Gender Box: Trans People in Higher Education. Genny is also coordinator of the Trans Policy Clearinghouse for Campus Pride. Queer America is a podcast from Teaching Tolerance in partnership with the University of Wisconsin Press. They're the publishers of the award-winning anthology Understanding and Teaching U.S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History.

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