BLACK HISTORY MONTH

GLSEN®

Black Heroes of the LGBT Community

John Amaechi

John Amaechi was a professional basketball player, who started with the Cleveland Cavaliers in 1995. After playing a few years in Europe, he returned to the states and played with the Orlando Magic in 1999. During his retirement, John has been a broadcaster, educator, author, and advocate. In his memoir, *Man in the Middle*, John came out as a gay man, the first former NBA player to do so. He has been elected into the Basketball Hall of Fame, won championships and awards, and been awarded honorary degrees, such as a Doctor of Science by Manchester Metropolitan. He has been actively engaged in charitable work, public speaking, and attempting to combat homophobia in sports.

James Baldwin

James Baldwin was an author, activist, playwright, and essayist and was one of the first people to explore the intersections of race, class, and sexuality in fiction. He was a noted public speaker, who provided a voice for black men and wrote about their struggles in highly acclaimed essays and speeches. James was highly active in the civil rights movement, taking part in marches and helping to mobilize and motivate African Americans to fight for their civil rights in the South. He was a Guggenheim Fellow and his works of fiction and his essays are still regarded as essential reading in the modern literary canon. Books, such as *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country*, are his best works of fiction and some of the first pieces of literature with clear and outright examination of same-sex relationships. He has left a lasting mark on American literature, society, and politics.

Simone Bell

Simone Bell has served in the Georgia House of Representatives since 2009 and is the first openly lesbian African American to serve on a state legislature. During her three sessions in the House, she has been an advocate for social justice and human rights, particularly as they relate to women, children, seniors, and the economically disadvantaged. She serves as the Deputy Whip within the House Democratic Caucus and on the Bi-Partisan Women's Caucus and the Legislative Black Caucus. Simone also focused on LGBT and HIV issues through her work at the Atlanta Lesbian Health Initiative and Lambda Legal, where she mobilized the LGBT community to increase rights around healthcare, safe schools, housing, and the recognition of relationship status. She has won numerous awards for her work and continues to advocate for the LGBT community and their protection, as well as serving as a mentor to LGBT youth who are interested in government.

> **" You write in order to change the world ... if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way people look at reality, then you can change it."**
>
> – *James Baldwin*

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Cathy Cohen

Cathy Cohen is an author and activist who has worked as a professor of political science at the University of Chicago since 2002. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in 1993 and her tenure from Yale University. Recently, she received the Quantrell Award for Excellence for teaching at UC. Her work has focused on intersectionality and looks at gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, race, and power. She was one of the founders of the Audre Lorde Project and has been involved with the Applied Research Center, the American Political Science Association, and the Black Youth Project. She is also the author and editor of several books on black youth, politics, and the influence of AIDS. She has served as the Deputy Provost for Graduate Education and as the Director of the Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture at the University of Chicago. Her work includes gender and women's issues, as well as gay and lesbian politics.

Marsha P. Johnson

Marsha P. Johnson was a transgender rights activist and has been designated by some as a queer saint. She was a loud and colorful personality who was popular in New York City's gay, art, transgender, and activist communities between the 1960s until the 90s. Marsha took part in Andy Warhol's 'ladies and gentlemen' series of photographs and in the flamboyant theatrical troupe, Hot Peaches. She was one of the first people to fight back against the police at the Stonewall Inn in 1969, screaming for her civil rights. Marsha told the judge during a court case that the P. in her name stood for "Pay it No Mind," which became her trademark. She along with Sylvia Rivera founded Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) in the early 70s and they were the mothers of STAR House, which was provided food, clothing, and housing to transgender and non-gender conforming youth in NYC, one of the first organizations to advocate and support this population.

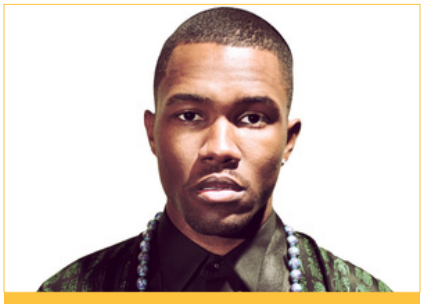
Don Lemon

Don Lemon is an anchor for the weekend primetime edition of CNN Newsroom, where he has been working since 2006. He has also worked at NBC News, the Today Show, and MSNBC and helped cover important stories about race and marriage equality. He was named one of the most influential blacks in America by Ebony magazine in 2009 and won the Edward R. Murrow award for outstanding achievement in journalism. He has won several Emmys for his reporting. Don is an adjunct professor at Brooklyn College and the author, of a memoir, entitled *Transparent*. The book, which was released in 2011, covers his experiences with homophobia, racism, and sexual abuse and serves as his official coming out. He is the first openly gay, black male anchor on CNN or any major news network and has used his position to vocalize the issues that face gay men of color.

" That's how come I've been walking for gay rights all these years instead of riding in cars and celebrating everything. Because you never completely have your rights-one person-until you all have your rights. And I think as long as one person has to walk for gay rights, darling, all of us should be walking for gay rights."

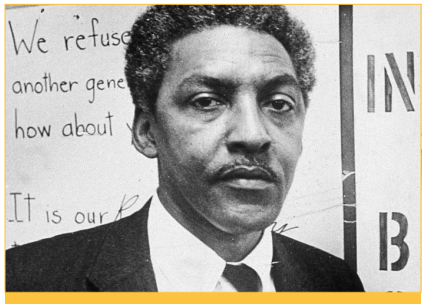
– Marsha P. Johnson

Frank Ocean



Frank Ocean is a song-writer and hip hop artist, who is noted as being one of the first big-named African American artists to declare same-gender love. Starting his career by writing hit songs for other artists, Frank eventually joined Odd Future, a hip hop collective in LA. He continued to write songs for other artists, but also collaborated with other artists and released his first mixtape, *Nostalgia, Ultra*. In 2012, Frank released *Channel Orange*, which reached number 1 on the US hip hop charts and was labeled album of the year by several critics and reviewers. Before the release of the album, Frank published a letter on his website about a man, to whom he was attracted, making him one of the first men to admit to same-gender attraction in the hip hop industry, often characterized as being homophobic.

Bayard Rustin



Bayard Rustin began his career in activism when he was just a child by protesting against segregation alongside the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Throughout his life Rustin was involved in countless boycotts, protests, and initiatives aimed at protecting the civil rights of all minority groups. He was an expert in non-violent resistance having studied in India with leaders of their independence movement and organized many demonstrations of his own. Bayard played a pivotal role in the Black Civil Rights movement as an advisor to Martin Luther King Jr. Leaders of the movement asked Bayard to stay out of the public spotlight, for fear of being associated with what was at the time his "illegal" life as a gay man. Rustin continued to advocate for civil rights until his death in 1987, including LGBT rights, a cause he adopted in the later part of his life.

Wanda Sykes

Wanda Sykes is a comedienne, actress, and Emmy-award winning writer, who has starred and guest starred on several popular sitcoms. She has also hosted her own late night talk show on Fox and several stand up specials on HBO. She has had roles in several feature films, including Evan Almighty and Monster-in-Law. In addition to her acting and tv-writing, she has authored a book, entitled, *Yeah, I Said It*. She was named one of the 25 funniest people in America by *Entertainment Weekly* and ranked on Out Magazine's Annual Power List and has won several awards, including a Commie Award for Funniest TV Actress, Primetime Emmys, the American Comedy Award for Outstanding Female Stand Up Comic, and a GLAAD award for promoting a good image of equal rights. She was the first African American lesbian to be the featured entertainer for the annual White House Correspondents' Association. After the passing of Prop 8 in California, Wanda officially came out and has been a vocal advocate for marriage equality and LGBT rights, having participated in the True Colors tour and GLSEN's own Think B4 You Speak campaign.

" The principal factors which influenced my life are
1) nonviolent tactics;
2) constitutional means;
3) democratic procedures;
4) respect for human personality;
5) a belief that all people are one."

– Bayard Rustin

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