

I'm Still Here, Still

A PERFORMANCE BY
ALEXANDRA BILLINGS

Thursday, January 26, 2017, at 7 p.m.
Bing Theatre

Is Hollywood "Transparent"? Identity and "Mis"representation in the Industry

Friday, January 27, 2017, at 3 p.m.
McClintock Theatre



TRANS REPRESENTATION BY THE NUMBERS

- ⦿ GLAAD¹ has documented 102 episodes and non-recurring storylines of scripted TV featuring transgender characters since 2002, and 54 percent of those were negative representations. Transgender characters were often victims or killers, and anti-trans slurs were present in 61 percent of the episodes.
- ⦿ In 2010, Trans Media Watch conducted a survey in which 21 percent of respondents said they had experienced at least one instance of verbal abuse they felt was related to negative media representations of trans or intersex people. 20 percent had experienced negative reactions at work that they could trace to items in the media.
- ⦿ While TV shows like *Transparent* and *Orange Is the New Black* represent a significant improvement in trans visibility, 80 percent of trans students still feel unsafe in school and in 2015 more trans people were reported murdered than in any other year on record.

DEFINITIONS

CISGENDER: This adjective applies to a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex they were identified as having at birth.

MEDIA REPRESENTATION: The way the media portrays a given social group, community, or idea.

TRANSGENDER: This adjective applies to a person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were identified as having at birth.

TIMELINE OF TRANS VISIBILITY IN U.S. DOMINANT CULTURE

- 1952** Christine Jorgensen, a former Army private, becomes the first American to undergo what was then called a "sex change" operation. She publicly announces her transition and becomes an advocate and celebrity.
- 1959** Los Angeles police officers target trans and queer people at late-night hangout Cooper's Donuts. Fed up with ongoing police harassment, the crowd fights back. Their collective resistance is an early spark of movements that will grow nationwide.

¹ GLAAD was initially the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. In 2013, they announced that they were altering the name to be simply GLAAD (no longer an acronym) to reflect a broadened mission to focus on advocating for equality for trans people.

1966 Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco is one of the few places where trans people can gather publicly. But when staff and police begin targeting trans patrons, they picket and demonstrate outside the restaurant.

1969 The Stonewall uprising in New York—which erupts when police raid the queer and trans club the Stonewall Inn—becomes a flash point in the burgeoning LGBT movement.

1975 Minneapolis becomes the first U.S. city to pass a law prohibiting discrimination against trans people.

1977 The U.S. Supreme Court rules that Renee Richards, a trans woman and tennis player, can play in the U.S. Open's women's competition.

1987 The American Psychiatric Organization adds "gender identity disorder" to *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.

1993 Brandon Teena, a trans man, is murdered. His story will later be the subject of the Oscar-winning film *Boys Don't Cry* (starring cisgender actor Hilary Swank as Brandon Teena).

1998 The murder of Rita Hester in Boston galvanizes a movement to end violence against trans people.

1999 Barry Winchell, an Army soldier who was dating a trans woman, is murdered by a fellow soldier. His story became central in the debate over the U.S. military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy regarding sexual orientation.

The first Trans Day of Remembrance honors Rita Hester and others whose lives were lost to transphobic violence.

2004 San Francisco's first trans march.

2008 Stu Rasmussen of Silverton, Oregon, becomes the first transgender mayor in the United States.

America's Next Top Model features a transgender contestant.

2009 Chaz Bono, whose parents are Cher and Sonny Bono, comes out as trans.

2010 Employment protections are extended to transgender federal employees. Kye Allums is the first Division I college basketball player to compete as an out transgender person.

2012 The EEOC officially protects transgender people against workplace discrimination.

The Miss Universe contest changes its rules to include trans contestants.

2013 The American Psychiatric Association replaces the term "gender identity disorder" with "gender dysphoria."

2014 Laverne Cox, a star of *Orange Is the New Black*, becomes the first transgender person to appear on the cover of *Time* magazine.

The first season of *Transparent* airs.

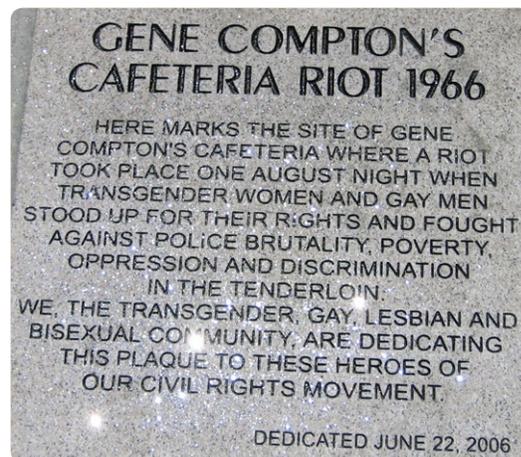
The Department of Justice rules that Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act applies to claims of discrimination based on gender identity.

Duke University Press launches *Transgender Studies Quarterly*.

2015 President Obama becomes the first U.S. president to mention transgender people in a State of the Union address.

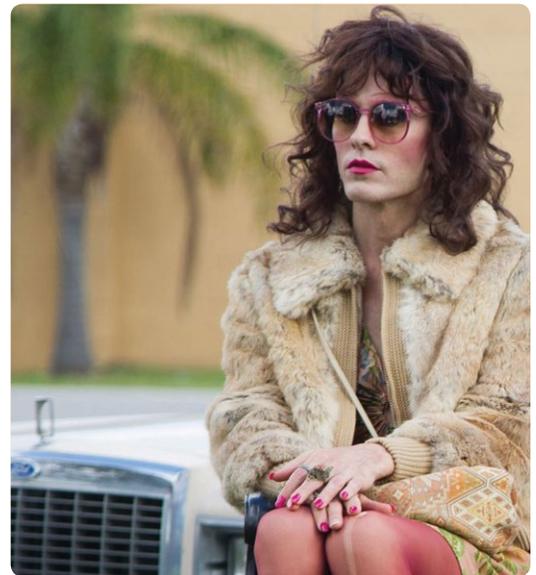
Olympic gold medalist Caitlyn Jenner announces her transition.

More trans people are reported murdered than in any year on record.



HOT-BUTTON ISSUE: CASTING TRANS ACTORS TO PLAY TRANS CHARACTERS

When Jared Leto won an Oscar for his performance as a trans woman in *Dallas Buyers Club*, many transgender people and their allies were dismayed. Advocates argue that casting cis men as trans women perpetuates the false idea that a trans woman is “a man in a dress.” Some even call the common practice of casting cis actors for trans roles “transface,” drawing a parallel with the practice of putting theatrical makeup on a white actor to perform a black role, usually for offensive “comedy” rooted in racist stereotypes. Cisgender actors have played transgender people in numerous films and TV shows, including *Transamerica* and *Transparent*. On *Orange Is the New Black*, Laverne Cox is one of very few transgender women to play a transgender woman character. Upon accepting his second Emmy for Outstanding Actor in a Comedy Series for his portrayal of a trans woman on *Transparent*, Jeffrey Tambor said, “Please give transgender talent a chance ... I would not be unhappy were I the last cisgender male to play a female transgender on television.”



TRANSGENDER PEOPLE’S STRUGGLES

While widespread positive media representation may contribute to a reduction in violence and discrimination against trans people, the struggle for justice and liberation is bigger than visibility. In the context of a society rooted in patriarchy, a binary gender system, and white supremacy (among other things), the trans struggle is intersectional and multi-issue. Individuals and organizations such as the TGI Justice Project, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, the Gender Justice LA, Brown Boi Project, the National Center for Transgender Equality, the Audre Lorde Project, and BreakOUT! (among many others) are organizing every day to create a world where trans people—and all people—are free from discrimination and violence.



SOME OF THE KEY FRONTS OF TODAY’S TRANS MOVEMENT ARE:

BATHROOMS: Trans people are still fighting for the right to use whichever public bathroom they feel most safe and comfortable in. Conservative “bathroom bills” in several U.S. states seek to force people to use the bathroom that matches the sex indicated on their birth certificate.

CRIMINAL-LEGAL SYSTEM: Trans people—especially trans people of color—are disproportionately targeted by police. If they are incarcerated, they immediately face the additional violence of a jail and prison system structured by binary gender norms.

DISCRIMINATION: Though laws are changing, transgender people still face discrimination in employment, housing, and elsewhere.

HEALTH CARE: Many health-insurance plans still have exclusions for transgender-related health care, and even when that’s not an issue, not all medical providers are adequately informed about and sensitive to trans people’s health needs.

HIV: Transgender women, especially Black transgender women, are at especially high risk for HIV.

IDENTITY DOCUMENTS: Policies and laws regarding name changes and gender identity on IDs such as driver’s licenses vary state by state and are often cumbersome if not outright anti-trans.

VIOLENCE: More than 1 in 4 trans people have experienced a bias-based physical assault.

SUICIDE: Suicide rates are much higher for trans people than for the general population, especially for trans youth. A study by the *Journal of Homosexuality* connected high suicide rates among young trans people to the daily stress of experiencing discrimination, harassment, and marginalization on college and university campuses, including being denied access to bathrooms.



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- What do you want to see more of in TV and film?
- How has increased visibility helped transgender people? Why do you think reported violence against trans people is so high even while positive media representations are increasing?
- Do you agree or disagree with the critique of “transface”? Why?

TO LEARN MORE, EXPLORE THESE RESOURCES:

- The Museum of Transgender Hirstory and Art (MOTHA)
www.sfmottha.org
- Tangerine* (dir. Sean S. Baker, 2015)
- Kate Bornstein Is a Queer and Pleasant Danger* (dir. Sam Feder, 2014)
- Redefining Realness* by Janet Mock (2014)
- The documentary *Major!* about trans activist Miss Major Griffin-Gracy
www.missmajorfilm.com
- The Sylvia Rivera Law Project, which works to guarantee that all people are free to self-determine gender identity and expression
www.srlp.org
- TGI Justice, a group of transgender, gender-variant, and intersex people creating a united family in the struggle for survival and freedom
www.tgijp.org

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

Music librarian **ANDREW JUSTICE** has selected the following resources to help you learn more about Alexandra Billings and the themes addressed in these events. Access these electronic resources through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu.

ALEXANDRA BILLINGS AS AUTHOR

- “The Moment Before, The Moment Before.” MFA diss., California State University, Long Beach, 2013.
- “On Jared Leto and ‘Dallas Buyers Club.’” *Windy City Times*, January 22, 2014.
- “On Suicide.” *Windy City Times*, July 25, 2012.
- “Sticks and Stones.” *Windy City Times*, October 13, 2010.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- Baim, Tracy, and Owen Keehnen. *Jim Flint: The Boy from Peoria*. Chicago: Prairie Avenue Productions, 2011. Ebook.
- Erickson-Schroth, Laura, editor. *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves: A Resource for the Transgender Community*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. (Available in print at Doheny Memorial Library: HQ77.9.T714 2014.)

RECOMMENDED ARTICLES

- Forman, Ross. “Alexandra Billings Reigns on Her Parade.” *Windy City Times*, June 24, 2009.
- Funk, Steven and Jaydi. “Transgender Dispossession in *Transparent*: Coming out as a Euphemism for Honesty.” *Sexuality & Culture* 20/4 (2016): 879-905. doi:10.1007/s12119-016-9363-0.
- Leventhal, Micki. “Catching Up with Alexandra Billings.” *Windy City Times*, December 9, 2009.
- Schenden, Laurie. “Always a Woman to Me.” *The Advocate* 786 (1999): 36-41.
- Villarreal, Yvonne. “‘Transparent’ Progress Report: The Show’s Women Discuss the Series and What it Has Achieved.” *Chicago Tribune*, October 3, 2016.

