QUEER AMERICA TRANSCRIPT

Incorporating LGBTQ History

LEILA RUPP

Around 1995, I introduced my first course on queer history. I was teaching, then, in the History department at Ohio State University. Back then Columbus, Ohio, was still a pretty conservative place. To give you a sense, even some of the activist students in the class told me they were nervous about having "Lesbian and Gay History" listed on their transcripts. The next year, I actually changed it to "Historical Perspectives on Sexuality: Same-Sex Sexuality in the Western World." Problem solved, at least until the end of the term, when one of my students called me after he had gotten his grades. He said, and I've never forgotten this, "How am I going to explain to my parents that I got a B in 'Same-Sex Sex?'" Fortunately, I was able to get the registrar to change how they abbreviated the listing.

I was excited to be teaching this subject. I was committed to being out to my students. But the university was still not a totally comfortable place for queer students and it was important to me that students not feel nervous or anxious taking my class. I knew some would sign up because they were lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. I knew others would choose it because they had a family member or friend who identified that way. I hoped some would take it just because they thought it sounded interesting. And I knew, because I had been teaching for many years at that point, that some would take it because it just happened to fit in their schedule.

The course was amazing and inspiring that first year. Students were open and intellectually curious in ways I hadn't expected. But there was one student—I'll call him John—whom I've never forgotten. I have no idea why John registered for the class. I'm not sure he even knew what the topic was when he signed up. John was a fraternity guy, right out of central casting. And he was convinced that homosexuality was wrong, that it was against the teachings of the Bible. After the first day, I was surprised when he stayed in the course. And he stayed and stayed. As the weeks passed, I dreaded reading his written assignments. Often, I struggled with his views. If he began sharing them aloud in class, how might that affect other students? How would I handle that discussion? But he kept most of his opinions confined to paper.

Well into the term, I gave students their central assignment. I asked them to interview someone who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer and write an analysis of the interview in terms of the history we had been studying. I was a little surprised that John knew anyone who was gay, but he told me he already had someone in mind. John had a job, and one of his coworkers was gay and agreed to be interviewed. And I have to admit, I worried about how that guy would fair.

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The assignment went really well. It's one I continued to use, each time I taught that class. As I was grading their work, I could tell that most of the students learned a lot from doing it and seemed to relish the experience. And then I got to John's analysis. What happened in the interview turned John's world upside down. The guy he interviewed turned out to be a Christian too and he explained in some detail why he saw no conflict between his religion and his sexuality. He talked about his life, his family, his partner, his identity, his politics. Reading the transcript of their conversation, I was blown away by the guy's honesty and openness and insight. And so was John. As I read his analysis, I was amazed by how much just talking with this gay man completely changed John's views about homosexuality. How could one conversation do that? Maybe those views were never very strongly held. Maybe he had just never thought a gay man could be a real and good person. It sounds unbelievable that one conversation with one person could have such an impact, but it did.

When I was planning the course, it hadn't even occurred to me to worry about homophobic students signing up. I hadn't considered the positive impact a queer history course might have on their lives. But I learned. At the end of that first term, John told me he was going to tell all his fraternity brothers to take the class. I'll admit, the thought of that made me more than a little nervous, but I was continually encouraged as more and more straight students signed up each year. And that taught me how important and life-changing teaching queer history could be for all of my students.

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.

So, how do you incorporate LGBTQ history into your curriculum? In this episode, Daniel Hurewitz offers strategies for doing just that with middle and high school students. He will walk us through lesson examples from throughout U.S. history, and you'll hear practical insights from teachers around the country who are already teaching queer history in their classrooms. Here's Daniel Hurewitz.

DANIEL HUREWITZ
I've been teaching LGBT history at Hunter College in New York for about a dozen years. At Hunter, I also teach general American history and part of my teaching also involves teaching Masters students who are mostly getting their teaching certification, who want to be public, mostly high school teachers. I remember I was teaching one of those classes when Tyler Clementi, a gay student from Rutgers University in New Jersey, just across the river, climbed

out on to the George Washington Bridge and jumped off of it. Because he had been outed by one of his roommates. I knew, in the wake of his suicide, that I wanted to respond. That I wanted to make a difference for students and kids like Tyler. And as I thought about what could I do, a history teacher, I realized that one of the things I could do was not only teach LGBT history myself, but I could help other teachers. In fact, the ones I was already training to do that kind of work in their classrooms as well.

To be clear, I didn't learn anything about LGBT history in high school or college. Before I went off to grad school, what I learned about LGBT history I learned on my own. And even at grad school, there were very few courses on LGBT anything. Certainly not history. Now that's 20 years ago, and certainly, there's much more content available, but I know the feeling of wanting to teach something but not knowing where or how to begin. So, in this discussion, what I'm hoping to do is explain to you how easily and readily you can begin including LGBT content into your social studies or history classrooms. And try to address some of your worries, maybe that you don't know enough, or that it can get out of hand and be overwhelming. And I want to say, first of all, that the feeling of wanting to teach this material but being uncertain about how to do so, is quite common. In fact, I've talked to lots of teachers over the last few years who shared your worries. And in addition to sharing your fears, many of them have also figured out how to navigate them, and I want to tell you what they told me about how to navigate those worries and ultimately really make a difference in your classroom, and with your students.

And then, to try to help you with this feeling of not knowing enough, I want to walk you through a handful of moments in U.S. history where you can start making a space for LGBT content in your classes. And finally, I want to conclude by looking at the impact that you can have by doing this work. But the basic message that I want to deliver is that this is not too hard for you to do. In fact, I think you'll find it's kind of easy and that actually you and your students will get so much out of doing it.

So the place to start is by talking about worries, at least with my background, my set of neurosis, that's where I like to start. Let's get the worries out of the way. And I think one of the first worries that so many teachers have is this feeling that "If I'm going to teach LGBT history, I have got to be an expert on all things related to sexual identity or gender expression and all the nuances of that." When in fact, the truth is that if you have just a basic handle on what lesbian and gay mean, and some sense of who transgender people are, well, you're expert enough to do this. Because teaching LGBT material often means talking much more about the relationships that people formed in the past, and the meanings that they attached to those relationships. It really does not entail our explaining homosexuality or homosexual identities to our students.

And, in thinking about that, I'm reminded of one teacher, Will Grant, who taught at a private high school in the Bay Area. I'm reminded of a couple things that he told me when I spoke to him. One is, he said, "Let's remember that we talk about relationships and intimacy in our history classes all the time, without ever actually discussing sex." So, when we talk, for instance, about

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Henry the VIII's desperation to have a son, we're alluding to his intimate life. Or, when we're talking about the role of a given first lady in American politics, we're alluding to the relationship she and her husband had. We talk about relationships all the time. We can do that quite well, and we can do that without talking about sex. So I think that's a first point of comfort.

But then, the second thing that Will said to me, which I think is also such a great reminder, is that the students that we're teaching are not our generation. The way Will put it, he said, quote, "These kids are totally immersed in the media world. And they are very familiar with homosexuality. There are gay characters on television. They're all on the Internet. There's stuff on Facebook. Where maybe in our generation, a teacher teaching on homosexual history would have been introducing the topic, we're not introducing anything to these kids. All we're doing is normalizing it and indicating that it had a place in history." When Will said that to me, a light went off for me because I think providing a context and a background is often what we set out to do in most of our history and social studies classes and I think what we do best. Namely, we give our students a frame for understanding the world that they're already in. And that's what we would be doing with addressing LGBT content. Not introducing, but giving a context and a frame.

A second worry that I heard from many teachers is that opening the door on talking about LGBT history means opening the door to a potentially out-of-control discussion, in which nasty, homophobic comments will be thrown around your classroom. Comments that you are unable to manage. And what I want to say, first of all, is what Michelle Berry said to me. Michelle is a private school teacher in Arizona, and she reminded me that, to some degree, yes students will have a reaction to these issues. She said it this way. She said, quote, "You have to recognize that these are controversial issues for these kids. These are things that they've never talked about before in the classroom." So while Will Grant is right that our students are familiar with LGBT characters and people, they haven't necessarily had a classroom discussion about them before. But it's probably also true that they haven't necessarily had a sophisticated discussion about racism or sexism before. And we still bring up those topics in our classes.

What Michelle reminded me is that what we do in all of these cases is, quote, "Create a learning community that is full of trust and full of respect." And therefore one where everybody feels safe, including the most conservative student that thinks homosexuality is a sin against God. Finding the balance for all of those student views, she said, is not easy, but it's well worth doing because inevitably, what you see, and I think this is what she's seen, is students meeting each other halfway with lots of care and consideration for one another. Now creating that kind of learning community requires relying on the kind of ground rules I think we normally use in all of our classes. Rules about language and respect. We use those same rules when we're opening a discussion about slavery or immigration policies or women's rights. We create a space for students to talk about their differing views while still holding a line of respect. That means that a student could still feel like they could support the view, say of that cake maker in Colorado, who said it was against his faith to bake a gay wedding cake. But they can do so without us having to tolerate homophobic slurs or homophobic language.

And that's really important. That we make clear our unwillingness to allow homophobic language in our classroom. We certainly already don't allow racist or sexist language in our classes, but in some schools, if you draw a line at homophobic language, that might make you a unique teacher. Kurt Dearie, a high school teacher in a public high school in Southern

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California, in a pretty conservative part of Southern California, told me about when he helped students at his school start a GSA. He said that the students talked with him about how many teachers, they're hearing all of these words in their classrooms and they're pretending that they don't. And the signal, Kurt told me, that they are giving the students is that that kind of language is perfectly acceptable. So that is where we have to draw a line. That's where we teach respect. But what Kurt pointed out to me, and his view was echoed by so many teachers, is, quote, "As soon as a teacher intervenes, and intervenes consistently, with the right tone and education, then it starts. Students adapt and they change their behavior."

I think the final worry that so many of us have about teaching this material is that somehow we might provoke a backlash. Not just inside of our classrooms in some kind of discussion but maybe, especially, from parents. And what I want to flag for you is what many teachers told me. How important it is to identify, in your school, and then cultivate support for you doing this kind of work. Now, one kind of support might just be, let's say the AP Standards, which now include LGBT content in American history curriculum. But there also might be city or state curriculum that mandates now teaching that content, and that gives you a justification for it.

But more important, I think than that kind of support on paper, what teachers told me, is the importance of discussing your work with your fellow teachers, or with your department chair, or your assistant principal. That way, those people will have your back and become resources for you. People that you can lean on if something difficult does occur. A few teachers told me about a phone call coming into the school from a parent that went to the assistant principal who they had already talked to about what they were doing and so the assistant principal was the one who screened the call to say, "Yeah, I know what she's up to and that's part of the curriculum and we're really excited about it. And we think our students are going to benefit from it." And that gives you a community of support right there in the workplace.

So I think all of these worries feel big, but I think they're all manageable.

All right, so let's jump in then, and start to walk through this array of places where I think it's really easy for you to start incorporating LGBT history into your history classes. There are so many possible ways. And in fact, in some of them, I think doing this work will really just mean not putting new content into your classes, but asking different questions about the content that's already there. Starting to ask questions that make students think about their assumptions about heterosexuality.

All right, so let's jump into the nitty-gritty: Where are the places you can start incorporating LGBT content into your history classes? And the first thing I want to make clear is that many of these places do not require you to alter your curriculum. They often don't require you to add new content even. In some places, they simply require that you ask different questions about the content that you're already teaching. Questions that might push back against students' assumptions of heterosexuality.

The place I want to start is with the world of the 19th century. We know that in today's world, the boundaries of same-sex intimacy are heavily scrutinized and patrolled. What does that mean? That means you just have to watch how young male friends can and cannot touch each other before they get teased for being gay, to see how the culture patrols same-sex intimacy. What historians tell us is that in the 19th century, those boundaries about what was allowed

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and what was not allowed were very different and the behaviors that we, today, identify as gay, were not read as inappropriate or abnormal. Nineteenth-century culture was not rife, not full of the kind of homophobic anxieties that came to define so much of American culture in the middle of the 20th century.

I want to flag that for you with two topics that I'm sure you already talk about in your American history classes. The first is the Gold Rush, which in my experience comes up in fourth grade and probably shows up in your curriculum in a variety of places. I think one of the things that we talk about, and we almost assume about the Gold Rush, is the kind of loneliness of all of those men in this, what we might call "bachelor society." How hard it must have been for them to be out there, away from all the women of American society and culture. Stuck in the woods, stuck in the mountains with other men. What's interesting, though, is that you can find paintings, drawings, etchings from the 1800s, and I think these are great items to bring into your classes, that show the men of the mines actually having a great time together. One of the things that they often did was have dances where men danced with other men. And there are great drawings of this that might show a couple of men paired up together in sweet embrace dancing around like a saloon room, while the other men stand around singing, playing an accordion, cheering them on. Not mocking them, not ostracizing them, but celebrating men having this kind of intimacy together.

Or, there's a great painting that I love to show in my classes. It's called "Sunday Morning in the Mines." It's from Charles Nahl in 1872 and it's an outdoor scene kind of set up, outside of—I don't know, like a lean-to. And if I look at it, it looks to me like a kind of triptych. That's my art history word for the day. At the center of the painting is one man, sitting down on the ground with a book open on his knees, while two men sit on either side of him, close by, listening to him read. So, assuming he's the literate one, they're the listeners who are learning from him. To your left, as you look at the painting, is a second scene that shows two men grabbing onto a third young man, and maybe they're dancing with him, maybe they're chasing him around, playing a game. It's not clear, but they're definitely physically entangled and gleefully so. And then to the right, on the backside of the cabin, or lean-to, are two men who are doing laundry. One of them is sitting down on the ground scrubbing his shirt. The other is standing up, it seems like hanging his freshly washed pants to dry. He's standing there just in a shirt with no pants on, and he's giving this warm look down to the man who's squatting on the ground scrubbing his own shirt.

All of these are moments of incredible intimacy. Probably in the realm of friendship, but certainly with those laundry guys, maybe there's something more going on. But it's certainly a kind of intimacy, a playful warmth between men, that would be scrutinized and ostracized in 20th-century American culture and was not in the 19th century. So why is this gay history? Well, some of the men of the Gold Rush in their diaries and in their poetry, we know that they also were lovers with some of the other men. But more significant, I think, than claiming any of these miners as specifically gay, more significant, I think, is flagging for our students how so many of the ways in which these men were living 100-odd years ago, would only be called gay today. And in a pejorative or ostracized way, versus how it was seen at their time. Which is to say, these men were happy to be in a community only with other men. They were happy dancing together. They were happy naked doing their laundry together. They were happily having intimate lives just with other men.

So what I'm trying to say here is that in the 19th century, men were allowed to crave intimacy

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with other men in ways that in the 20th century, would only be understood or treated as strange and abnormal and gay. Men could make their lives with other men without it claiming some kind of nontraditional identity. This was how men got to live. They got to live in great intimacy with other men and got to celebrate that without that being scorned in American culture. That was normal. That was acceptable male behavior. That's a really different world than the world of the 20th century, which marked just those kinds of desires and behaviors as wrong. And recognizing that places a historical frame around the 20th century or our own time, and our own ideas about what's a different identity, gay versus not gay. And I think we can open up a really interesting conversation with our students if we ask them to study this kind of image and consider what was allowable between men 100 or 150 years ago versus today. And what do we make of that difference? What we're doing by asking questions like that, I think, is starting to put our ideas in a historical context that says, "Our ideas weren't eternal, aren't traditional, aren't the way all Americans always thought and felt. But in fact, are different from the way they thought and acted 100 ago."

I think we can do something similar if we look at the women of the progressive reform movements at the end of the 19th century. I'm sure you talk about, in your classes, the importance of women in progressive reform in general. And probably, you talk about the way becoming progressive activists allowed middle-class and upper-middle-class women a kind of access to a professional life by being guardians of urban moral culture. Access that they wouldn't have had otherwise. One of the familiar institutions of progressive reform is the Settlement House. And I'm sure you talk about the Settlement House movement and how these houses were set up in cities around the country as social centers for immigrants. The houses themselves were dominated by women, the middle- and upper-middle-class women who came to live in these immigrant, poor neighborhoods in order to help care for these newest Americans.

And I think when we talk about settlement houses and progressive reform women, probably the most famous woman that we discuss is Jane Addams. I'm sure you know about her. She founded Hull House in Chicago in 1889 and really is recognized and celebrated as an American hero. One of the things that's so striking about Addams, though, is that she never married a man. Instead, she launched Hull House with one woman as her partner and then shared the rest of her career and life with a second woman, Mary Rozet Smith. Jane Addams and Mary Rozet Smith lived together. They shared a room. If they traveled, they shared a bed. If Addams had to travel on her own, she often brought a painting, a portrait of Smith, with her. So here's this American hero at the end of the 19th century who made her life with other women.

This kind of relationship between two upper-middle-class, or middle-class women, was not uncommon at the time. It was so frequent that women who spent their lives with other women were often referred to as living in a "Boston marriage." And when I tell students about Boston marriages like Addams', the students will ask me, "What do you mean, they shared a bed?" "Does that mean that Jane Addams was a lesbian?" And what I like to say back is, "Wow, that is a great question. We don't know what was happening in the bed between Addams and Smith. Given what we do know, that they made their lives together in this way, do you think we should consider them lesbians?" One of the things we do know, and I think is so interesting to flag for students, is that Jane Addams organized her life this way. It did not earn her a special or derogatory label in late 19th-century American culture. She and Smith were not marginalized, or treated as unusual, or disgusting, as they might have been by the middle of the 20th century or even the 21st century. In fact, what's so striking about Addams and

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these two women is that these relationships allowed her to become a hero of the progressive reform movement, and really of American history more generally. That, to me, is an incredible historical fact.

So, when we start talking about the 19th century, from the perspective of LGBT history, we're talking about a period in which homophobia was not the governing culture. We're talking about a period in which spaces were left open for same-sex intimacy and relationships. And you can see that; you can show it to your students in content that you're already discussing with them by helping them to notice what's going on. Helping them to see that what was considered acceptable masculine behavior or an acceptable intimate relationship was different back then than now. And that those ideas have a history.

That sense of a history, I think, is even more clear when we turn to the 1920s. I'm certain that in your teaching about the 1920s you probably talk about the Jazz Age or the Harlem Renaissance, these hugely significant cultural or social phenomena. And often, I think, when we talk about the 1920s we talk about the changes in women's lives and women's fashions. We talk about how they get to wear short skirts, they cut their hair short, they're suddenly smoking. And really, what we're talking about there is the way in which, in the 1920s, there was a kind of public celebration of heterosexuality. But less discussed by historians but still quite prominent in the 1920s was an equivalent celebration of homosexuality in that era. And that celebration was at its fullest in Harlem. Now, one of the ways that we can start to bring that out for students is by looking at the prominent LGBT writers who we celebrate as part of the Harlem Renaissance. Whether that's Countee Cullen, Alain Locke or Langston Hughes. But I have to say, the way that I like to present this part of 1920s culture, and this fact about 1920s America, is through the music of Ma Rainey.

Ma Rainey was one of many African-American women who embraced the genre of the blues in the 1920s as a vehicle for expressing, for singing about African- American women's emotional lives. And they did so in an unprecedented way. That is, used the blues to communicate about what it was like, what it felt like, to be living as an African-American woman. Ma Rainey was identified and labeled as "the mother of the blues," really the leading blues singer of the time. And she has great songs that you can share with your students that I love to bring into the classroom. All it requires is YouTube, where most of her songs are available. And you can play these songs for your students, share the lyrics with them and then ask them what they think.

A typical Ma Rainey song that I might begin a conversation with students with is a song called "Don't Fish in My Sea." And it's a pretty typical, my-man-has-wronged-me, heartache kind of a song. Its lyrics include the line, "If you don't like my ocean, don't fish in my sea. Stay out of my valley, let my mountains be." There's a little double entendre there, that maybe you can or cannot unpack with your students, depending on their ages. But nonetheless, it's a song about a woman whose husband or boyfriend has wronged her, and that's familiar to us. But what's great is to pair a song like "Don't Fish in My Sea" with another Rainey song like "Prove It On Me Blues." "Prove It On Me Blues" is also a heartache song, but it's a song that includes the lines "Went out last night, had a great big fight, everything seemed to be going wrong. I looked up to my surprise, the gal I was with was gone. Where she went, I don't know, I mean to follow everywhere she goes." So here's Rainey singing in another album, in another song, about her heartache when the woman she was out with has left her, has wronged her.

In addition to playing the song and having the students read lyrics, there's also a great

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advertisement for the record that the record company put out. And if your students did an Internet search for "Prove It On Me Blues" images, they would find this picture. What it shows at its center is Rainey in kind of a skirt suit, even with a vest and a kind of fedora hat on, talking to two younger women, clearly dressed as flappers. While in the background a police officer looks on. So it really creates this scene of lesbian flirtation. Saying that "here's the mother of the blues who's been wronged by men, but also interested in and wronged by women." And Rainey even has another song that is fun to include called "Sissy Blues," in which she says, "I dreamed last night I was far from harm. Woke up and found my man in a sissy's arms." So here she is singing about how her husband or her man left her for another man.

Now, we know that Ma Rainey in her own life had affairs with men and women both. And you could have an interesting discussion with your students about the truth of Ma Rainey's life. But, we also know, and you can talk about this with students, that singers are not always singing autobiographically when they sing their songs. Rather, they're singing stories and emotions that they think their audiences will appreciate and identify with. And at that level, what we see in these songs is "Wow, American audiences celebrated—as their leading blues singer—a woman who was talking both about heterosexual and homosexual relationships." Americans were excited about the blues that came on someone being wronged either by a man or by a woman. They loved Ma Rainey. And here she is, living a life that would be hard to imagine being accepted, let alone celebrated, in the middle or later part of the 20th century. So, the world of Rainey is much like the world of Addams, a world that's vastly different from our own world today, or the world at the end of the 20th century.

Now, the sad fact of it is that the world that Jane Addams and Ma Rainey operated in was constrained, was limited—and then really attacked in the middle of the 20th century. Starting first during the Great Depression, and then these attacks expanded during World War II and into the Cold War. It's really in the middle of the 20th century, the mid-century decades, that we see an American homophobic culture take root. And I just want to describe that for a minute for you, because I think we think of it as eternal, but it's so important to see, no, that this began in the 1930s. Why it began isn't entirely clear, but some historians argue that the Great Depression and the economic challenges it presented triggered a host of anxieties about the roles that women and men played in American society. We know, for instance, that men's unemployment was often explained by the fact that too many women had taken too many jobs, and if all the women could be fired, then men would be able to work again. In that context, in which men are forced out of their jobs, or men are riding the trains as hobos abandoning their women and children, in that context, women who played at being masculine or men who didn't seem to fulfill their masculinity, suddenly became sources of anxiety.

And one of the ways that we saw that anxiety expressed was, as Prohibition was lifted and new rules were established to license bars, in the new post-Prohibition bar culture, gay men and women were explicitly targeted as morally unfit and not allowed to come in to those newly licensed bars. That exclusion expanded during World War II. As the country mobilized into war and began recruiting and drafting young men especially into the military, part of that mobilization involved screening draftees about their sex lives and then, once they were in the service, court-martialing soldiers who were believed to be or found to be having active homosexual lives. There's actually a great documentary about the experiences of lesbians and gay men in the military during World War II, called "Coming Out Under Fire." It offers moving portraits of a handful of men and women who, almost by entering the service, and the kind of same-sex worlds that military service creates, there discovered that they were gay.

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They suddenly had gay friends. They suddenly found a gay or lesbian community and even a couple of them fell in love during the war, all while serving the country. Having really these joyful experiences until, what the film shows, they suddenly, each of them, hit up against the military's homophobic policies. And in several cases, hitting up against that homophobia broke them.

One of the stories that I found so moving is the story of a young man named Marvin Liebman, a Jewish kid from New York City who discovers this gay, campy world inside of the military during World War II. And he becomes friends with all these other soldiers who are writing campy letters back and forth to each other. And the military censors open his letters, discover him writing letters to other male soldiers with words like "darling" in it: "Oh, darling, how are you?" And on those grounds alone, he was discharged.

Liebman never told his family why he was discharged. And, in fact, from that time forward he went into the closet. He became active as a conservative activist. He served in the Reagan administration and didn't come out for another 45 years. Which is to say that the military's policy drove him into a closet that he stayed into for most of the rest of his life. That's a painful story. And in truth, the story about what happened to LGBT Americans during the war, I think, fits with stories that we tell about many marginalized Americans during World War II, whether it's African Americans who were so profoundly segregated during the war, or Japanese and Japanese Americans who were forced into internment camps. Here is another chapter of the way in which that great war to achieve democracy out in the world failed to cultivate democracy here at home.

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 University of Wisconsin Press, publishers of this anthology, which I edited with Susan K. Freeman. It is 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 who order the recently updated, second edition of this collection. You'll find a line to purchase the book at tolerance.org/podcasts. Just use the promotional code, QAPODCAST, all caps. Again, here's Daniel Hurewitz.

DANIEL HUREWITZ

By the mid-1950s, America was deeply entrenched in an unprecedented homophobic culture. The way it expanded during the war continued and so, by the middle of the 1950s, not only can't LGBT folks hang out in bars with straight folks, they can't serve in the military. They're marked as mentally ill and in many cases, that meant being institutionalized in a criminal hospital for the mentally ill. And they couldn't have jobs with the federal government, with state governments. They couldn't be teachers. They really couldn't occupy any positions of social importance. And they are excluded in that way, even though, 20 or 30 years earlier, they were celebrated in American culture. And like Jane Addams, celebrated as leaders in American society.

One, for me, of the most powerful instances of the way in which this homophobic culture changed people's lives, is in the life story of Bayard Rustin. Bayard Rustin was an incredible

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man, an African-American activist who, as a young man, became enthralled with pacificism and learned the techniques of nonviolent resistance. And he used nonviolent protests to challenge both America's buildup and heading into World War II, as well as American racism.

As early as 1942, there's an essay from Rustin in which he talked about challenging the segregation he found. He writes about riding on a bus where he refused to go sit in the back of the bus. And how the bus driver got the police and Rustin said to them, and this is his language. He said, quote, "'I believe that I have a right to sit here.' I said quietly, 'If I sit in the back of the bus, I'm depriving that child,' and I pointed to a little white child of five or six. 'I'm depriving that child of the knowledge that there is injustice here. Which I believe it is his right to know. It is my sincere conviction that the power of love in the world is the greatest power existing. If you have a greater power, my friend, you may move me.'"

And then, the police dragged him off the bus and Rustin did not fight back as they began to beat him. "I knew," he said, that, quote, "if I tried to get up or protect myself in the first heat of their anger, they would construe it as an attempt to resist and beat me down again. I forced myself to be still and wait for their kicks one after another. Then I stood up, spreading out my arms parallel to the ground and said, 'There is no need to beat me. I am not resisting you.'" That was 1942 and what's so striking to me reading those words today is Rustin's words and his strategy sound so familiar to us, I think. Although he himself is not. Why are those words and strategy familiar? Well, they're familiar because over a decade later, Rustin became one of the key mentors to Martin Luther King Jr. He taught King about nonviolence, about how to use it, how to make it a practical technique. And to be clear, King's first impulses as he was put in charge of the Montgomery Bus Boycott movement were not towards nonviolence, but Rustin's teachings, Rustin's mentoring, shaped him and the movement that he began to lead.

Then the question is: Why don't we know about Rustin if he was such a key figure? And the reason we don't know about him is because he had relationships with other men. And he was arrested having sex in a car in Pasadena, California, in the early 1950s. That kind of arrest for simply being intimate with other people was an example of the way LGBT lives were newly criminalized in the middle of the 20th century. And, that arrest? That brought an end to Rustin's independent career as a moral, social leader. He couldn't be that figure anymore. In the context of this homophobic world of 1950s America, Rustin could only serve as a background figure for King. He could only be King's lieutenant. And even though he wrote speeches for King, he developed strategies for him—I think, in fact, one of the first articles that was published about the Montgomery Bus Boycott published under King's name was in fact mostly written by Rustin. In spite of doing all that work for King, King kept him in the background.

In fact, when a Harlem congressman, Adam Clayton Powell, tried to force King to do what he wanted and King resisted, he twisted his arm by saying that if King didn't do what he was asking, he was going to issue a release or make an announcement that King and Rustin were having an affair. And rather than face down Powell, which is what I wish King did—threatened in that way, King fired Rustin. Better to get rid of Rustin than to be labeled gay. That was the power of this homophobic world. That even Martin Luther King was forced to bend to it. Rustin's story I find very moving and I think for us as teachers, it's a great opportunity to talk about the experience of people having multiple intersecting identities or intersectionality.

Let me just pause and say intersecting, intersectionality—it's one of those words that we hear

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floating around that I think people use simply to draw our attention to the ways in which most of us have more than one life or social identity, whether it's race, gender, sexuality. What we see so clearly in Rustin's life is the conflict created by him not simply being an African-American man but being a gay man as well. And that he had to navigate these two scorned identities inside of American culture of the 1940s and '50s. He had to figure out how to fight white racism on the one hand while also living inside of this wider homophobic culture. And his movement, his black civil rights movement, was part of that homophobic culture. So, he was navigating this territory as a black man and as a gay man. I think we're doing that kind of thinking with the black civil rights movement now, when it comes to women. We're thinking about not just the men in the movement, but the women as well—and how did gender play out inside of that movement? But Rustin reminds us that that doesn't cover the whole story. And in fact, that gay activism—and gay lives—was also part of the broader black civil rights movement.

One of the things that I find inspiring about Rustin is that he didn't quit. Even though King fired him, even though he was forced to be in the background in this way, he didn't quit. And in fact, he organized one of the celebrated moments in the history of the black civil rights movement: the 1963 March on Washington. That's the moment, that's the event, where a couple hundred thousand protestors gather on the Mall in Washington, D.C., in front of the Lincoln Memorial, and King delivers his beautiful "I Have a Dream" speech. I think, rightly, we love King's speech. We teach it. We discuss it with students. I think my son in first grade read picture books about King's speech.

I think, though, we can say pretty safely that we would not be talking about King's speech if only a few hundred people had shown up to hear it. Well, Rustin made that moment happen. He produced it. He organized the march. King's speech had significance because Rustin created the moment for it. But Rustin isn't celebrated. He couldn't be. There's an incredible photograph, I'm sure you've seen it, of King delivering the speech in mid-oration up there in front of the Lincoln Memorial, his hand raised overhead, he stands in profile. And if you look at that picture, which I'm sure you've actually looked at dozens of times, you'll see that Rustin is standing right behind him. He's right there. It's his moment as well. He's just waiting for us to recognize him and start talking about him. And I think talking about Rustin opens up talking about the black civil rights movement in a wholly new way.

Now, the arrest and hiding of Rustin is especially painful, I think, looking back in history because it happened just at the moment that a young gay civil rights movement was taking off as well. LGBT activism in this country started in the 1950s, started in that moment of Rustin's arrest. Inspired really, by racial activists, black civil rights activists, as well as leftists, who helped some LGBT folks start to imagine themselves as also an oppressed social minority. For LGBT folks to see themselves that way in the 1950's was a new idea. To see themselves as part of a community that shared an identity and was oppressed as a group was a wholly new concept. And the folks who embraced that concept deemed themselves what they called the "homophile movement." And they started with pretty quiet activist efforts out in California in the 1950s. They had, I think what we might today call "consciousness-raising" meetings, where they talked about their lives and their experiences. They published some of our first LGBT newsletters. And they tried to challenge some of the ways that, especially gay men were being entrapped by the police.

By the time the mid-1960s came around as the black civil rights movement became more aggressive—and I'm thinking here of, say, the sit-ins that young SNCC students were engaging

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in, or the pickets. Inspired by them, homophile activists also became more radical. In fact, when we talk in general, I think, and I'm sure this is true in your classes: When we talk about the 1960s and 1970s in American history we often describe those years as a period of incredible activist energy in multiple communities, and some scholars refer to those years as the period of the minority rights revolution. I think for us, looking back, it's an incredibly exciting time, but I think for us as teachers, it can also feel daunting to try to figure out, how do I squeeze in all these different activist groups into the one week that I have to talk about this period? Some of us, I think, feel a mandate to really tell fully the narrative of the black civil rights movement and then feel like, "Oh, I'm gonna try to squeeze in one other narrative if I can. Maybe it'll be the women's rights movement, or the Latino movement, or the LGBT movement."

What I want to pass along to you is an idea that a high school teacher I talked to shared with me. In his approach, rather than feeling like he had to really develop one single narrative thread very well, was, instead, to look at the variety of strategies that multiple groups shared. And by talking about changing strategies, he was able to teach about multiple activist efforts in the same amount of time that he might have only been able to include just the black civil rights movement and maybe one other. So, that might mean looking at, say, how lunch-counter sit-ins in the black civil rights movement inspired magazine sit-ins among women's activists. Or bar sit-ins among gay activists. Or the shared strategy of younger radical activists challenging earlier conservative ones. That's a strategy or an event that shows up in many of these movements. That might be the way Malcolm X or the Panthers challenged King, and we can see similar radical activists among the women, among Latinos, among gays challenging the folks who have been active before.

In thinking about strategies in that way, one figure I'd like to flag for you is a lightning rod of a man named Frank Kameny. Kameny did not set out to be an activist. He was, by all accounts, a nerdy astronomer who worked for the U.S. Army in Washington. He had a Ph.D., I think, from Harvard, got hired by the army. He was just going to be working in their maps division, but then he got fired. They found out, the army found out about some homosexual activity in his life and he was barred from any further work with the government in 1958. Historians refer to this as the "Lavender Scare." We often talk about the 1950s as the period of the "Red Scare," when government officials are hunting down communists in American life. Well, it turns out that more Americans were fired from their jobs—particularly their civil service jobs—because of accusations or suspicions of being gay than lost their jobs because of communist suspicions. So historians talk about this Lavender Scare in the 1950s that was more far-reaching and more dramatic than the Red Scare.

And this Lavender Scare destroyed Kameny's intended career. But interestingly, rather than destroying Kameny as well, it radicalized him. And he decided that out in Washington, D.C., he was going to start a chapter of one of these homophile groups. He started up an organization there in Washington, D.C., called the Mattachine Society and began to fight back. He sued the army all the way up to the Supreme Court. He wrote angry letters even to the president, to LBJ, to Johnson, for not including gay folks in the Great Society programs. And one of the most exciting moments was in 1965 when he convinced a dozen other gay men and women to picket with him in front of the White House. I hope it's clear now, LGBT folks were basically criminals just by being who they were in 1950s America. This is one of the first moments where they made themselves visible. Which is to say they put themselves in jeopardy of arrest.

There's a great photo of these men and women picketing out in front of the White House. It's

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incredible to look at and it's great to look at with students because here are these gay activists and they are dressed in suits and ties and dresses. They are so formal looking, so conservative. Nothing like what I think our students imagine queer activism looks like. Because they, in the 1950s, were trying so hard to prove their legitimacy as American citizens. And that was a fight that Kameny took on.

And one of the ways in which he succeeded was Kameny and a few other activists challenged the American Psychiatric Association to stop labeling homosexuality as a mental illness. Although there's a long history of different psychology and psychiatry theorists trying to figure out the origins and explanation for homosexuality, starting in the 1950s, the APA—the American Psychiatric Association—put in their very first diagnostic manual, homosexuality as a mental disease. That gay men and women were mentally ill. And even earlier than that, it's important to note that it was psychiatrists and psychologists who pushed for the military to ban gay men and women from the service. So, the fact that they put it in their diagnostic manual in the '50s is an outgrowth of their efforts earlier in the 1940s. But in the 1970s, '60s and, finally succeeding in the 1970s, Kameny and some of these other activists convinced psychiatrists to take that label away, to stop treating gay men and women as mentally ill. And instead, what Kameny argued and, I hope you would hear him borrowing from the argument of black activists who said, "Black is beautiful." Kameny pushed the idea that, "Gay is good." That was his phrase. You can see it on buttons from the era. Gay is good.

And Kameny's story leads directly from homophile activism into the era or phase of gay activism that we call "gay liberation." Typically when historians and others talk about gay liberation, we mark its beginnings as being provoked by the Stonewall Riots of 1969. We're coming up on the 50th anniversary of those riots and, excitingly, the Stonewall Inn where that rioting took place—the bar where that rioting took place in New York City—has been designated a national historic landmark. And now the National Park Service is actually operating at the Stonewall Inn, outside of it as one of their historic sites. And I want to mention that to you because as teachers, that means you and your students can go on the National Park Service website and find great information about the Stonewall and its historical significance. I'm certain that this year you're going to hear a lot about the Stonewall Riots.

We know that when Prohibition ended, part of the new licensing requirements in many states around the country was banning gay men and women from the bars. They were deemed as morally unfit. And if a bar owner allowed gay men and women into their bar, their bar could be shut down. And all the investment that they made in that bar, they would lose. But the end of Prohibition also meant that the mob, who had been running speakeasies during the 1920s, was also losing a source of income. And so in this weird synchronicity in the 1930s, the mob took over running bars for gay men and women to go to. These were criminal operations that the mob was willing to run, not because they loved gay people, but because there were profits to be made. These were bars that over the middle decades of the 20th century were regularly raided even as the mob was often paying off the police to try to keep these bars afloat. And these were bars that were not particularly lovely.

The Stonewall Inn was a bar in Greenwich Village. Historians' accounts show that there was no running water behind the bar, which meant that as drinks were finished from one glass, that glass was run through a bucket of water behind the bar and served up to the next customer. The liquor was watered down. It was just about making the most money off of the

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people who were there as possible. Now, the people who were there were mostly men, mostly white. But there were some women there. There were some trans folks there. And there were some people of color. The Stonewall Inn was unusual among gay bars because they allowed dancing there, but not unusual in being raided by the police as an illegal operation. And famously, on Friday night at the end of June 1969, the police raided the bar in a pretty typical raid. What was unusual was that when the police came in, they didn't come in to arrest all the people in the bar. Most of the clients, the patrons in the bar, were just simply kicked out. Their IDs were checked and they were kicked out. The police focus was on arresting the bartenders, the bouncers, the manager, and of course, also arresting people in drag. Because to be dressed in "gender-inappropriate" clothing in the middle of the 20th century was a crime as well.

So, they kick out most of the patrons—the police do, focus on arresting this handful of folks, but what was unusual was that all the patrons who were kicked out didn't just go home in shame. And that summer night, June 1969, they stuck around outside of the Stonewall and they watched as the police brought people out and loaded them into their wagons. And at a key moment, triggered perhaps, some people say, by a lesbian who was being arrested for being dressed in gender-inappropriate clothing, who shouted at the crowd, the crowd began to attack the police. Maybe the attacks first began as people reaching into their pockets to throw coins at the police, kind of to say, "You want your payoff, here's your payoff." But then, apparently, there were some loose bricks on the ground that people threw at the police. There was a knocked-over parking meter. And someone charged at the door of the bar. And the police then barricaded themselves in and called for reinforcements. And a night of rioting between these gay bar-goers and the New York Police Department began. And those conflicts continued for three or four nights of violence there in Greenwich Village. And seeing that happen, hearing about what happened, inspired this new wave of activism that historians and people at the time referred to as gay liberation activism.

Now, I think that in this way when I was mentioning before about strategies, you can talk about what happened at Stonewall as similar to what happened in Birmingham, when African Americans took to the streets there in protest. But also similar to, let's say the Watts riots, where protests turned violent. Here, in the moment of Stonewall, it's gay people who, in a similar way, are fighting for—claiming their right to be visible in public and then aggressively pushing back against the police. They are sharing a strategy that they have seen other Americans use in their protest movements. And the trajectory of the gay liberation movement parallels also that of second-wave feminism. And one of the really interesting parallels that we also can talk about in our classes, is much the way that American feminists in the 1970s were talking about the way the "personal is political," right? That was one of their key phrases. That what's happening in our personal lives, inside of our relationships with our boyfriends and husbands, actually has political significance. Well, gay liberation folks had a similar version of that. They argued that people needed to make their personal lives visible. They needed to "come out." That was the phrase that they latched onto and gave political meaning to. People needed to become visible and begin to fight publicly with the police, and with politicians, to get out of their lives and stop discriminating against gay men and women.

Probably one of the most celebrated figures of that gay liberation movement was the San Francisco supervisor Harvey Milk, who was elected into office in the late 1970s as one of the first openly gay politicians anywhere in the country. Milk called on Americans to come out and he himself made his gay identity a very public fact as part of this new wave of gay liberation activism. Now, I think in recent years, there's been a lot of talk about the incredible

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achievements that gay activism has succeeded at bringing about. And sometimes a line gets drawn from the Stonewall riots all the way forward to Obama lifting the ban on gay service people and the Supreme Court declaring that gay people have an equal right to marriage. A steady march forward from gay liberation toward our notions of present-day LGBT equality. And I think, to an important degree, there's a truth there. That we saw, launched in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a kind of gay activism that was unprecedented and that has achieved unprecedented things in American society. But to draw that line as a simple, straightforward line leaves out two important pieces of the story that we have to remember as well.

And the first piece of the story that we also have to remember, the story between the 1970s and today, is, of course, the AIDS epidemic and how across the 1980s the federal government under Ronald Reagan allowed gay men to die in this country in shocking and horrific numbers. Even though HIV appeared clearly among gay men in 1981, it wasn't for five or six years, after some 20,000 Americans had died from this disease, that Ronald Reagan spoke out about AIDS, let alone marshaled the public health resources of the federal government to fully combat the epidemic. That for me is one of the great black marks on the Reagan presidency, if not on American history, in the 20th century. And many historians argue that the path to marriage equality, where we are at this moment in the country's history, depended on this pain of this epidemic. They argue that marriage equality became a political goal for LGBT folks because of the epidemic of HIV/AIDS. That as men got sick and died and their partners were denied even access to them in the hospital because they were not legally deemed "family," or they were evicted from apartments they had shared with their partners because their names weren't on the lease and they were not recognized as spouses, those painful denials and horrible treatments inspired activists to seek protection from the law. And to demand recognition of the relationships as "legal" in American terms.

Many people also argue that the tragedy of the epidemic made Americans more generally sympathetic towards gay folks. The sorrow of the epidemic helped drive a shift in American popular culture, back towards the kind of tolerance, if not embrace, of LGBT lives that we had seen in the early 20th century. If you have time to bring in a bit about the AIDS epidemic into your classes, many teachers talk to me about a beautiful documentary called "We Were There," which focuses on San Francisco but in very personal ways allows students to imagine or to experience what it was like at one of the epicenters of this epidemic. So we can't get to the equality that we see around us today without recognizing the impact of that epidemic. The other caveat that I want to mention to you in this narrative of, "from Stonewall to LGBT equality today," is the ongoing struggle to include the T in LGBT. And I want to do so by telling you about one more person: Sylvia Rivera, who was a New York–area gay liberation activist. Sylvia was Latina, a trans woman who had been present there at Stonewall, part of the rioting the first night and become devoted to fighting for gay liberation thereafter. She was engaged in all sorts of fights, whether it was to get a petition signed, to get a gay rights ordinance passed in New York City—actually a project that took years to accomplish. Or, whether it was simply to protest at one of the local colleges, NYU, which refused to allow gay students to hold a dance on campus. Rivera was an interesting person and interesting to talk about because she represented so many intersecting identities.

And one of the sad truths about Rivera's life is even as she devoted herself to gay liberation, that movement did not simply love and support her. That movement also discriminated against her. Rivera was a working-class person, Latina. She grew up in Queens and she basically fled her home as a really young person, who ended up supporting herself on the

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streets by hustling. And so, when she showed up in the gay liberation movement organization, she was not easily embraced. As historian Martin Duberman wrote about Rivera, quote, “If someone was not shunning Sylvia’s darker skin, or snickering at her passionate, fractured English, they were denouncing her sashaying ways as offensive to womanhood.” So in terms of race, in terms of class, in terms of trans identity, she was not embraced by the movement. Now, one of the projects that Rivera nonetheless took on was working with another trans activist named Marsha Johnson. And they together started a kind of shelter for young trans kids so that they wouldn’t have to live on the streets and they wouldn’t have to engage in sex work the way she and Johnson had to support themselves.

But what they found was they could barely get attention from the larger gay liberation movement, let alone real support. Rivera told this to Eric Marcus, an oral historian who recorded interviews with several early gay rights activists and he sat and talked with Rivera, who told him, quote, “When we asked the community to help us, there was nobody to help us. We were nothing. We were nothing. We were taking care of kids that were younger than us and organizations like the Gay Activists Alliance had teachers and lawyers, and all we asked was for them to help us teach our own, but there was nobody there to help us.” The gay activist organizations had already become their own kind of mainstream and would not reach out to include Rivera.

In fact, there’s a painful video that you can watch and share with your students on YouTube of Rivera appearing at the gay rights rally at the end of the 1973 march in June in New York City. And most gay pride or gay rights marches around the country, if not around the world, take place in June as way to commemorate the rioting outside of the Stonewall in June of 1969. So at the end of the 1973 march in New York, there was a rally. Rivera wanted to speak to the crowd. She was one of the leading trans activists in the city at the time. And she had to fight just to get up to speak on the microphone. And when she got up there, the crowd booed her. And she screamed at them, both for being, quote, “part of the white, middle-class club,” and for ignoring the needs of trans people—their treatment by the police and their place in the movement in general. Rivera is full of passion that day at the rally, and very moving to me and, I’m sure, to you, if you listen to her. Nonetheless, she was followed onstage by a lesbian feminist, I think Jean O’Leary, who denounced men who, quote, “impersonate women for reasons of entertainment and profit.” And she called such women an insult to women. She called trans women an insult.

Rivera’s story reminds us that the idea of an LGBT shared community is a creation of history. It wasn’t obvious. It wasn’t assumed that all these different kinds of people would come together and form a community, let alone a shared political movement. That only took shape across time and was only achieved through political struggle, and it’s a struggle that continues. That LGBT community remains a work in progress, one that continues to unfold. Rivera’s story also points out to us how much LGBT folks are not out of the crosshairs of American culture today, especially not the “T” folks, not the trans folks.

You know, this year during June you could walk into a Target store in most parts around the country and you could find gay pride merchandise. And you could go into a lot of movie theaters around the country and see a Hollywood-produced gay teen romance. But at the same time, this past year, President Trump has asked that trans folk be barred from military service and the Department of Education has said that schools do not need to treat trans kids in a special way. That’s a painful truth of the present—that the victory of LGBT equality that

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we like to imagine has been achieved, has not been achieved. It's actually under threat in greater ways than it has been before. And saying that, I think, is also a reminder that, no doubt, current events will keep LGBT history and the issues in it present for you and your students to discuss. In fact, I suspect that the history that you teach your students will allow them to better understand the fights that are going to continue to unfold around them and probably ultimately involve them.

So, let's talk about the impact that you could have if you start doing this kind of teaching. And I have to say, that everything I've learned tells me that you have the potential to have an enormous impact in your classrooms and on your students when you do this work. I know that not simply from my own teaching, but from all of the teachers that I've been talking to over the last several years about what's happened for them as they've started folding LGBT content into their classes. And let me describe for you as what I can see as at least three different ways where you will make an enormous difference in your classes by doing this work.

The first way is by changing the culture of your school. That sounds hard to imagine—let alone to believe. But the research has made clear that if even one teacher in a school starts talking about LGBT folks in a normative way—that is, using the words "gay" and "lesbian" in a nonjudgmental way—even if just in a passing, or casual way, can radically shift a school's culture. GLSEN, an organization which works closely with high school groups around the country, has done studies that show that schools with even one such teacher begin to have a less homophobic culture in general. And those schools become schools where LGBT students feel safer, more at home, and less prone to the depression and suicide that we know haunts LGBT teens much more than their straight peers. So you, just by starting to do this work, can shift that culture.

Secondly, you can change individual students' lives. And in saying that, I'm reminded of a story that Robert King told me. Robert King teaches AP U.S. History at a school in the Los Angeles area—I think in the Palisades. And he, as he began to do this work, found that he only had room on one day in his entire AP curriculum. One day where he could include LGBT content. And that was the one day where he was talking about all of the other civil rights movements. So in that one day of class, where he's probably talking about the women's movement, the Latino movements, he also decided that he would tell his students about the Stonewall Riots. He was, by no means, an expert in this. All he had seen was one documentary and he tried simply to tell his students about what he had learned from watching that documentary.

And the day he did that, one of the top students of the school, Jack Davis, who I think was also captain of the school swim team, decided, and this is what Davis later wrote. Quote, "I shot up my hand and said, 'I think I'll take this opportunity to come out and say that I'm gay.'" And in the context of the work that King was doing, and no doubt in the culture of respect that he had created in that classroom, the rest of the students in that class burst into applause. They got up and went and hugged Davis. For him, for Jack Davis, that was a transformative day in his life, and certainly in his classmates' and of course for King. King told me about that day, because for him, it marked a highlight in his nearly 25 years of being a history teacher.

You can do that in your classes. You can change your kids' lives that way. And of course, talking about what happened to King, I want to say that I think that you also will feel this impact for yourself. That bringing in material and perspective that really affects your students so deeply will also be moving for you. Kurt Dearie talked to me about this. He was the teacher I mentioned earlier who helped his students start a GSA at their very conservative high school and shared with them the strong opposition to their efforts. And he went on from that, starting the GSA with them, to then starting to include LGBT content into his classes. What Dearie said to me—and this is his quote—he said, "You know, you go into education

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to help kids, but nowhere in my professional career or my personal life have I been able to see the effect of my good work as clearly. As teachers, we hope that we make change—but I can really see it right in front of me with my own students. It's very rewarding work," he said. "And the more you do, the better things are, and that really rewards you. So, it's become a passion for me. You can see that it's so needed and that it really makes change."

So the last thing I want to say is I want to invite you to join Kurt Dearie and Robert King and all these other teachers and be a part of making that change at your school as well.

LEILA RUPP

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So, what did you think? Come tell us on Facebook and Twitter! Review us in iTunes, and let your friends and colleagues know about the podcast. I'm Dr. Leila J. Rupp, Professor of Feminist Studies at the University of California Santa Barbara, and your host for Queer America.

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