



## ERASING LESBIANS

OLOC BOSTON (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change), and

Last Gasp Productions (power through irreverence)

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OLOC BOSTON (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change), and

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## INTRODUCTION

Sarah Pearlman, Sue Reamer and Alice Fisher

I have to cast my lot with those  
who age after age, perversely,  
  
with no extraordinary power,  
reconstitute the world.

—Adrienne Rich<sup>1</sup>

Lesbian erasure has become a topic of great importance. To Sarah Pearlman, “Lesbians, written out of history, may be facing a more current erasure. Ignored by mainstream heterosexual feminists, dominated by gay men in the gay civil rights movement, assimilating into the mainstream through marriage equality, and overshadowed by the transgender movement, lesbians are now clearly being eclipsed. Adding to erasure are butches transitioning to male, younger lesbians identifying as queer and the emergence of the “alphabet generation.”

We have had numerous requests for copies of the four papers on lesbian erasure presented at Boston OLOCS’s February meeting and are pleased to have compiled these papers, along with a fifth essay, in this unique booklet. The first paper, “Lesbian Erasure,” by Sarah Pearlman takes you on a lesbian deletion journey from pre-history to more current erasures. She calls the lesbian-feminist movement, beginning in the middle/late twentieth century, an extraordinary historical span of time during which political activism and a unique culture of

<sup>1</sup>From Rich, A., Natural resources. *The dream of a common language: Poems 1974-1977*, Copyright © 1978 by W. W. Norton & Co. Reprinted by permission of W. W. Norton & Co.

literature, music, women's centers, book stores, and festivals flowered—creating possibilities for new generations and new identities—a time that should not be forgotten, or become a casualty of erasure.

Jyl Lynn Felman's performance piece, "Lesbians and Soup: It's All In The Chicken," traces her upbringing in Dayton, Ohio as a religious Jew who refused to say "The Lord's Prayer" in public school in the 1950s to preparing her for a life of radical lesbian feminist activism. She fears "Marriage Equality" has taken sex out of lesbian identity and assimilated her sisters into mainstream culture.

In "Sinking in the Alphabet Stew," Kathy McCloskey provides a political power analysis of the LGBTQIA generation, stating that it is essentially a masculine endeavor that represents the age-old strategy of divide and conquer. She concludes by saying that unless there is new energy, advocacy, and activism, lesbians will become more and more invisible—and risk sinking to the bottom of the "stew pot."

Lynne S. Brandon in "No More Erasers" says the following: "Butches have always existed. In some eras we were glorified, in many we have been vilified. At least we got some attention. The point of the American melting pot is to eliminate those chunky differences that are sometimes hard to swallow. Assimilation is erasure, the ultimate power play of the dominant race, culture, sexual expression (add your favorite here). Be loud and proud!"

The final paper by Sarah F. Pearlman, "Post Script: The Great American Erasure," focuses on how American lesbians led the fight for suffrage (Susan B. Anthony was a lesbian) as well as women's rights and civil rights for African-American people. Lesbians were in leadership roles in the abolitionist, temperance, labor union and workers' rights movement. They were also at the forefront of the fight for women to have access to higher education and to become economically independent by entering such professions as the law, medicine, and the ministry.

Boston OLOC (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change) is an organization of older lesbians. Our commitment has been to establish a community of older lesbians and to preserve and enhance the lesbian voice—as well as increasing lesbian visibility in a world that stifles and

threatens to erase it—through creating programs of importance to older lesbians. Founded by Alice Fisher, Sarah Pearlman, and Judith Stein (now relocated to California), OLOC Boston came into existence following OLOC's national conference held in Woburn, MA in 2012. Since that time, we have held monthly programs (except for summers) on topics such as class, affordable senior housing, medical, disability, and end-of-life issues.

One special program was a Panel discussion/presentation called. "Lesbian Cross-Talk: A Conversation between Young and Old Lesbians"—a conversation between two generations of lesbians that included topics such as how life has changed for LGBT people, feminism today, relationships, gay marriage, and current politics. Another was the showing of "Lesbiana: A Parallel Revolution," a film about the lesbian-feminist movement of the 1970's. We also convened a major conference, "To Bed or Not to Bed: Sex and the Older Lesbian" held at Fenway Health in November, 2013, attracting an audience of over eighty women.

We are one of fifteen local OLOC chapters and groups affiliated with National OLOC. Our chapter representative, Sue Reamer, participates in regularly held chapter representative conference calls, bringing back news and information reported on these calls by other chapter representatives. This year in June and held in St. Louis, National OLOC sponsored a meeting of chapter representatives with National OLOC Steering Committee Members.

We wish to thank the Brookline Senior Center for their support and generosity in hosting our meetings as well as the many women who participated on our panel presentations. Important, as well, is acknowledging our Boston OLOC Planning Committee: Sarah Pearlman, Alice Fisher, Sue Reamer, Jyl Lynn Felman, and Ann Kennedy. Without them, Boston OLOC would never have happened. And welcome to the new members of our Planning Committee: Cynthia Bauman and Sue Katz. Finally, we look forward to BOSTON OLOC's continuing presence in the Greater Boston area and presenting exciting new programs of interest to older lesbians.

## ERASING LESBIANS

Sarah F. Pearlman

I go where I love and where I am loved

—H. D.<sup>1</sup>

Erasure is the practice that makes certain people and/or groups invisible, eliminating or deleting their existence: their history, life stories, suffering, and achievements. The Romans called it *damnatio memoriae*—“condemnation of memory,” punishing individuals by destroying every trace of them. Examples of erasure are women, minorities, those who lost wars, the queer, the poor, and lesbians—all casualties of condemnation.

There has, and always will be, women who love and desire other women. However, what they will call themselves—and how they will identify—is now a question. Lesbians, written out of most of history, may now be facing more current erasures. Ignored by mainstream heterosexual feminists, dominated by gay men in the gay civil rights movement, assimilating into the mainstream through marriage equality, and overshadowed by the transgender movement, lesbians are clearly being eclipsed. Adding to erasure are butches transitioning to male, younger lesbians identifying as queer, and the emergence of the “alphabet generation,” i.e., LGBTQ along with Q (questioning) and I (intersex). One question is: is this erasure or evolution? A second question is: will the Lesbian-Feminist movement of the late twentieth century become a casualty of erasure?

Lesbian erasure is a controversial topic. To begin, I am not against transgender people—nor am I transphobic—although I am ambivalent regarding transwomen’s demands to be included in lesbian gatherings and events. I am certainly not against gay men, although I do question if lesbians are to gay men as women are to mankind—recalling how lesbians threw

<sup>1</sup>H. D. (1998). The flowering of the Rod. From *Trilogy*. New York: New Directions.

themselves into caregiving and the fight against AIDS. Gay men rarely reciprocated in our own epidemic: breast cancer. Nor am I against those who identify as queer; or those who add themselves to the ever increasing initials comprising the “alphabet generation.” However, there

is no question that I am against lesbian erasure and erasure of the Lesbian-Feminist movement of the late twentieth century.

For most of recorded history, lesbians have been a primary target of erasure through enforced invisibility and persecution—their sexual desire stigmatized and made taboo through a variety of interconnecting and institutionalized ideologies—religious, medical, psychological, and legal. For good reason. For what can be a greater threat to the dominance or rule of men, sometimes referred to as patriarchy, than women who are outside of male control—at least of individual men—and who ignore the culturally-dictated rules of femininity? In a world of compulsive heterosexuality, lesbians are unavailable to men. Lesbians refuse men sex, deny them housekeeping labor, deny them emotional work, deny them children—and by engaging in sex with women, lesbians take on the prerogatives or privileges of men. Lesbians must be erased or made invisible—especially lest they model and suggest possibilities of independence, equality, nurturance, intimacy, passion, and happiness (the world’s best kept secret) for non-lesbian women. Lesbians are dangerous.

#### From Women-Centered Cultures to Male Domination

There was a pre-patriarchal or matriarchal span of time sometime before sexual rules and constraints—and before women became male property. A time when sexual love between women took its accepted erotic place alongside heterosexuality and male homosexuality. Characterized by worship of female divinities, the centrality of the mother-line through matrilineal succession, and the unimportance of paternity—the relational role of males was as uncles and brothers—not fathers or husbands, these egalitarian or women-centered cultures insured female social power and sexual freedom.

There is evidence of matriarchal societies/cultures where sex was a component of the worship of female divinities—rituals that expressed gratitude to earth or mother-goddesses for procreation, for abundant harvests, and for sexual pleasure—now referred to as fertility cults. These sexual practices took place between both women and men—and men and men. We have no idea if sex between women were part of these rituals. Erased? Yet, there are archeological findings that portray what might be “lesbian” goddesses; carvings of what are named “double” or

twin goddesses—erased through interpretations that mislabel them as a mother and daughter—no matter that they are representations of women of identical size holding hands.

Little is known about the events that led to a massive upheaval in world order—replacing matriarchal or egalitarian cultures with patriarchal rule—a transformation that took place over several thousand years and occurred in different regions at different times. Some historians believe that this colossal world change began with successive invasions of Neolithic Greece by northern tribes with superior weaponry; tribes that eventually conquered the inhabitants of the Grecian peninsula, and then Crete. If there were battles, they are unknown. If there were wars, these wars were lost.

The eventual outcome was total male power and authority over women and subjugation of the female sex. A male dominated world order evolved, characterized by male gods, patrilineal descent, patriarchal marriage—and insistence on known paternity, thus, compelling female chastity, virginity, and sexual fidelity—and insuring the end of female sexual freedom, including sexual love between women. Moreover, new social rules dictated that sons become warriors, and girls given to men as wives to produce sons.

It is Greek mythology and the use of myth by Greek tragedians that provide the rare clues that attest to the change from matriarchal cultures to patriarchy. According to Robert Graves<sup>2</sup> embedded in all mythology (Greek, Babylonian, the Hebrew bible) are stories, many based on

<sup>2</sup>Graves, Robert (1995). *The Greek myths: I*. New York: Penguin Press.

older myths—although distorted and disguised—that tell of the massive transformation in social organization that created a new world order. A world order of gods that raped (Zeus, Apollo) and jealous goddesses, now wives (like Hera, once a revered earth goddess). Other examples are myths that tell of males who confiscated or appropriated female reproduction—patriarchal creation myths such as Zeus giving birth to Athena, or Eve—born of Adam's rib.

Other myths that tell of the transformation appear in Greek tragic theater such as the story of Clytemnestra, who first killed her husband Agamemnon—and then in retaliation was murdered by her son, Orestes. Orestes was brought to trial—a trial that concluded by affirming

that parricide, the killing of fathers—not matricide—was the more heinous crime. The play ends with a proclamation that names the male—not the female—as the true parent of the child.

As father-right took precedence over mother-right, there were also changes or reversals in symbolism such as the matriarchal reverence for horns—that, under patriarchy—became the sign of a cuckold. Also, by eight-hundred B.C.E., and attesting to the loss of female freedom, is archeological evidence that private homes in Athens were constructed around courtyards with women confined to female quarters—without direct access to doors leading out to public space—and other women.

### The Mentions

Deleted out of most recorded history, what we do have are the “mentions.” Lesbians are mentioned—but without censure—in the Code of Hammurabi (1700 B.C.E.) that made reference to women called *salzikrum* (translated as "daughter-men"); women who were allowed to marry other women. Also, mythologized by the ancient Greeks were battles with Amazons, represented in vase paintings and sculpture including sculpture attached to walls, called a frieze. Rumored to be lovers of women, one vase shows a Thracian huntress giving a love gift to the Queen of the Amazons, Penthesilea. However, there is controversy over the actual existence of Amazon women with some historians insisting that Amazonian myths were created to demonstrate and assure Greek superiority over wayward or unruly women. Another erasure?

Sex between women was mentioned during both ancient Greek and Roman times, although with contempt—referring to such behavior as lewd, immoral, lawless, wild, or inappropriate. However, in a world where male homosexuality was honored, lesbians were mostly ignored except for their occasional presence in poetry, comic drama, or myths that referred to love between women. Lesbians were also depicted in ceramic vase painting; vases that portrayed sex between women. One such vase shows two woman. One holds a phallic object, interpreted by traditional archeologists as the female desire for a penis, rather than the desire for an object—not a penis—to be inserted so as to increase sexual pleasure. We don't know if this was pornography for the male gaze.

There are also erotic mural paintings of women making love found on the walls of Pompeii. But there was no organized persecution that we know of. It seems that sex was defined in terms of a penis—and with women now property and confined to private space, lesbian sex was no threat. Of course, there was Sappho, the celebrated poet of Lesbos. But perhaps it was because she was an aristocrat, or her magnificent poetry—or because she was openly and sufficiently bisexual that she escaped censure.

A later example of love between women is the story of *Iphis* and *Ianthe* by Ovid, a Roman poet. When *Iphis*' mother became pregnant, her husband declared that he would kill the child if it were a girl. A girl is born, but her gender is concealed by calling her *Iphis*, a name of ambiguous gender. When *Iphis* was thirteen, the father chose a girl named *Ianthe* as “his” bride. The two fall in love. However, as the marriage drew closer, *Iphis* called their relationship “monstrous.” The problem was solved by the goddess, Isis, who turned *Iphis* into a boy.

### Christianity and the Suppression of Desire

The “mentions” change with Christianity as a long history of constructing sex as sin—unless for procreation—and the organized persecution of homosexuals began. Sex between women and women—and men and men—was now heresy. Women cross-dressing as men was equally taboo. There were drownings and the burning of women caught, and several “mentions” of charges against nuns with resulting penance, including convent imprisonment. Other examples of lesbianism becoming illegal—referred to as sodomy—comes from records from the late Middle Ages and laws created by the Spanish Inquisition. In Spain, Italy, and the Holy Roman Empire, sex between women was considered unnatural and punishable by burning to death. In Germany (1477 C.E.), one girl was drowned “for lesbian love,” and in France, a document (1260 C.E.) on lesbianism prescribed dismemberment for the first two offences and death by burning for the third—although what “dismemberment” meant is unknown. It is possible that it referred to the cutting off of a woman's breasts. Thus, sex between women became increasingly linked to fear, shame, and humiliation. Erasure through suppression of desire.

## Lesbians becoming Visible

Lesbians began to become more visible—but at a cost—around the end of the nineteenth century. As a result of the rise of medicine, sexology, and psychology, lesbianism emerged as a disease, an illness, an object of study—viewed not just as a behavior—but as a category. Diagnosed was what was called the *true lesbian*; undiagnosed was her temporarily misguided femme partner. The *true lesbian* was a man in a woman's body, labeled an invert, congenitally defective; alcoholic and/or suicidal—a person who would lead a tragic life—foreshadowing twentieth century lesbian pulp fiction when publishers insisted on tragic endings. Otherwise, books about lesbians were considered pornography according to post office regulations.

With Freudian psychology (and especially Freud's later followers), lesbianism soon became a mental illness caused by family relationships and arrested development. To be cured, of course, by psychoanalysis. That is, for the rich. Less privileged women were hospitalized or imprisoned (Freud's daughter, Anna, by the way, lived with another woman for most of her life). Then—with the industrial revolution and women recognized as sexual beings (thanks to Freud's theories on female sexuality)—lesbianism became increasingly dangerous. Because of access to paid employment, lesbians could now afford to move away from families, become independent, and establish relationships with other women. However, these were mostly white women. Black and Hispanic women, as well as women from other racial-ethnic groups, with different family traditions and denied adequate wage-earning employment—most often could not afford to leave home. Later, following World War II, both lesbians and gay men poured into cities, establishing social communities, and starting the first organizations leading to the lesbian and gay rights movement such as the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) and the Mattachine Society.

## Lesbians as Menace

With the emergence of the Women's Liberation movement in the 1960s, lesbians were now a menace. Convinced that the presence of lesbians would undermine the success of the early women's rights movement, Betty Friedan labeled gay women the "Lavender Menace" (she got the color right). Friedan also omitted DOB from the list of sponsors of the First Congress to Unite Women in November 1969—that is, uniting straight women. Consequently, she eliminated

any hope of heterosexual and lesbian feminists joining together in common cause—refusing to acknowledge that lesbianism and the sexual freedom of women were women’s issues.

A group of lesbians—mainly those from the Gay Liberation movement frustrated by misogyny and the domination of gay men—claimed the name. Wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the words, *Lavender Menace*, they stormed the stage at the Second Congress to Unite Women in 1970, taking over to demand that lesbians no longer be excluded and discussing concerns vital to lesbian survival and visibility. Thus, not long after the Stonewall riots in 1969—considered to be the single most important event and symbol leading to the gay liberation movement and the fight for gay rights—were two other symbols of liberation—unknown or ignored by the LGBT movement. The first symbol, the *Lavender Menace* lesbians, made lesbianism political by taking over NOW’s Second Congress.

The second symbol was *The Woman Identified Woman*, published in *Notes from the Third Year* (1970) by the Radicalesbians—a manifesto that further politicalized the early lesbian feminist movement. *The Woman Identified Woman* declared that lesbianism was at the heart of women's liberation—insistent that it was Lesbian Liberation only that could disrupt the established patriarchal system and end male supremacy. Less dependent upon male affirmation and economic support than heterosexual women, lesbians were freer to analyze and critically evaluate heterosexuality, masculinity and male dominance as well as male sexual entitlement. Moreover, *The Woman Identified Woman* argued that women direct their energies toward other women rather than men, abandon support of heterosexuality, and consider entering into sexual relationships with other women. Other lesbian activists proclaimed that men were the enemy and women who were in relationships with them collaborators and complicit in their own oppression. Still others joined in support of lesbian separatism.

### Lesbian Liberation

Until we find each other, we are alone.

—Adrienne Rich<sup>3</sup>

The Lesbian Liberation movement—now Lesbian-Feminism—from the late 1960s to the early 1990s was at the forefront of the fight for women’s rights and safety—making way for

succeeding generations of lesbian activists and opening doors to visibility and pride. Along with straight feminists, lesbians fought to keep women safe from rape, domestic battering, violence,

<sup>3</sup>From Rich, A., Hunger. *The dream of a common language: Poems 1974-1977*, Copyright © 1978 by W. W. Norton & Co. Reprinted by permission of W. W. Norton & Co.

and trafficking. But it was mostly lesbians who staffed women's centers, abortion clinics, rape crisis centers, and battered women's shelters. Lesbians opened book stores, initiated a psychology of lesbians, created a lesbian psychotherapy, and founded therapy collectives. Yet, the Lesbian Feminist movement was, and continues to be ignored by mainstream heterosexual feminism—a movement primarily directed towards workplace equality, women's reproductive freedom, and violence against women.

No question that there were numerous and divisive conflicts. However, it was Lesbian-Feminism that sparked the greatest explosion of lesbian creativity and activism. Poetry, philosophy, history, political analysis, literary criticism, music, spirituality, lesbian sexuality, lesbian communes, women's land, festivals, lesbian presses. **It was a lesbian renaissance!**

Poets like Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Kate Rushin, Alta, Olga Broumas, and Judy Grahn. Philosophers, theorists, and writers like Marilyn Frye, Gayle Rubin, Jill Johnston's *Lesbian Nation*, Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*, Rita Mae Brown, sociologist, Susan Krieger, Joan Nestle, Julia Penelope, and Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men*. Barbara Smith, the founder of *Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press*. Cheri Morega, co-editor of *The Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*.

Kate Millet, in *Sexual Politics*, demolished Freudian psychoanalysis as well as male writers such as D.H. Lawrence and Norman Mailer. Mary Daly challenged religions based on male gods in *Beyond God the Father*. And in *Gyn/Ecology*, Daly named Chinese foot binding, Indian Suttee, African genital mutilation, European witch burnings, and American gynecology as massacres of women that was no less than gynocide.

There was women's music and the founding of Olivia, a women's music company. Meg Christian, Alix Dobkin, Chris Williamson, Kay Gardner, Margie Adams, Linda Tillery, Theresa Trull, Mary Watkins.

Lesbians founded presses such as *Naiad Press*, *Bella Books*, *Spinsters Ink*, *Rising Tide Press*, *Crossing Press*, *Seal Press*, *Cleis Books*, *New Victoria*, *Firebrand Books*, *Virago Press*, and *Auntie Lute*. Nearly all gone.

There was Judy Chicago, the artist who created *The Dinner Party*. Judy wasn't gay, but she should have been.

It was no less than a Renaissance! No less than a revolution! A time, in the words of an English poet, that was "very heaven." An extraordinary span of historical time led by a unique generation—witness to transforming social change—now older, increasingly invisible, and disdained by the transgender movement as well as many of those in the "alphabet generation.

Lesbian-Feminism was an extraordinary political movement that, for untold numbers of lesbians, ended shame and concealment—and birthed new generations of activists, new freedoms, and new identities. However, Lesbian-Feminism of the late twentieth century was—and is now—a movement that in spite of archives, books, and film is struggling not to be forgotten. Lesbians are struggling not to become obsolete. Struggles that must not conclude with *damnatio memoriae*—casualties of erasure.

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## LESBIANS AND SOUP: IT'S ALL IN THE CHICKEN

Jyl Lynn Felman

In 1962 when I was eight years old I pledged allegiance to the American flag every day in the third grade. Then I waited for Mr. Hoover to come on the P.A. system. Usually he coughed first. This was the signal to jump up, bow heads, close eyes, lock hands together and *doven* the Lord's Prayer. Josie Kahn, Hope Schear, Alice Greenberg and I filled the back of the class. It was there, in Dayton, Ohio we staged our first demonstration. United in our cause, we never uttered a sound to the infamous Lord Jesus. We only mouthed the words.

At exactly 3:15 p.m., Monday through Thursday, Mrs. Schear whisked us away from the third grade to Hebrew School. By four o'clock, I was no longer Miss Felman but *Giela*, Josie became *Yocheved*, Hope turned into *Tikvah* and everyone called Alice *Aviva*. We sat in a circle because Rabbi Fox's wife had a bright new idea that Jewish children learned better face to face. At six o'clock we rose again, exhausted from a schedule that was meant for graduate students at Harvard or Yale.

I did not grow up surrounded by Jews. I grew up hermetically sealed by them. All four Jewish children in the third grade lived on my block, which early settlers divided in two. The first half of the street was populated by gentiles. The second half was where the Jews lived. My mother kept kosher although she had to drive to Cincinnati, for a ritually slaughtered chicken.

Fridays when the kids at school made plans, mine were always the same. Friday night was roast chicken, kugel with raisins and stewed carrots. I walked around the Sabbath table, studying the hand embroidered *challah* cover and my grandmother's white lace tablecloth. My father sang the *kiddush*; his father from Russia in a halting Hebrew said the *motzi*. And with her eyes closed, my mother blessed the candles gently pushing the light out onto the table.

I am a bicultural baby whose survival depended on an ability to negotiate more than one world at once. At home, Jewish culture and religious observation were central. At school,

however, signs of Jewish life were nonexistent. Christianity and an Anglocentric curriculum were the norm.

So my political activism began in the classroom, where opposition to all forms of oppression became second nature to me. From the moment I walked beyond the pale of my neighborhood, I knew that I was "other." This daily navigation back and forth from visibility to invisibility prepared me for a life of lesbian activism as sacred and significant as the celebration of *Shabbat*. Only, at sixty-two, I don't celebrate *Shabbat* anymore. My favorite food is a plate of very unkosher grilled shrimp and I don't know where all the outrageous, radical, furious lesbian feminists are. Except that I do, they're married. And so am I.

Lesbian assimilation has been very hard on me. I've lost a community of beloved, trailblazing amazons. Over twenty-five years ago I called myself a *Jewish lesbian vegetarian chicken writer* and everyone thought I was edgy and over-the-top. Brown rice was queen and vegetarians were *de rigueur* in the "sisterhood." Back then I held on fiercely to being a Jew and a radical dyke by cutting off my hair and eating chicken in secret, Jewish, female enclaves. I knew I was *treif*, unkosher and forbidden in both the lesbian and Jewish worlds. My characters didn't just imagine what eating pussy is like, they actually ate it and I did too. I was a *vilde chaye*, a wild beast, as my mother used to say in Yiddish.

Now nobody cares what I eat or how short my hair is. And gourmet, rotisserie chickens are flying around everywhere. I am a Jewish lesbian writer in mourning for what was an earth-shattering time of life. Radical lesbian feminism was an elixir, heady and intoxicating. Audre Lorde's magnificent words shattered white lesbian tranquility. We were on the warrior path and filled with a raw, uncompromising energy. I had a particular outsider zest for life, which I no longer feel. When my first book of short stories, Hot Chicken Wings, came out, I travelled the country performing at women's books stores -- that are all now closed -- to huge crowds of women with a "y," instead of an "e" in their alphabets. I played with calling myself *Jyl Lynn Edithchild*, after my mother. I was furious with my father.

In the late 1980s I taught women's studies long before gender and queer studies took over. And was fired from Brandeis University because the word "lesbian" appeared too many

times on my syllabus. It was a post-modern witch hunt and I was accused of creating a feminist cult on campus. For years, in the classroom, I denounced marriage as archaic, an insidious, patriarchal institution. *We are not property!* I admonished, pleading with my way-too-timid students to keep their birth names. Never in my wildest imagination did I think I would ever get married. But I had to.

In May 2004, Massachusetts was the first state in the union to legalize same-sex marriage. I read the Court's opinion. Word by word, the language was profound. Even the *legaleze* was beautiful. All the lesbos I knew were ecstatic! Jubilant straight allies celebrated. In Northampton, one after the other, my friends got married. Hotels draped the rainbow flag off their balconies. Local stores had gay gift registers. The ceremonies made me cry. Women talked about the new acceptance they had from their relatives and coworkers. I was afraid to be the lone, dissenting voice. I didn't want to be a downer, yet my vision for a revolution was shattered.

Everyone wanted to know when Lynne and I were going to have our big day. Only we weren't. We had registered as domestic partners at UMass, Amherst where I was teaching so Lynne could have health insurance. I wanted to keep things that way. It was a compromise I could live with. But the judicial ruling nullified state domestic partnerships, forcing any couple who needed health care to marry. I had to make a choice. Except there was no choice to make.

My big bad butch had stage-four breast cancer and a mastectomy. A year of chemotherapy and radiation. She had an eighty percent chance of recurrence. We married in secret and told almost no one. I was politically crushed. And worried that I betrayed my deepest self. At my feminist core, I had been against marriage my whole life. Plus I had learned the cost of assimilation to Jews and Jewish culture in the US.

When the United States Supreme Court legalized gay marriage Lynne and I were in Cape Town, SA for an international conference of women playwrights. I got all the papers I could find. And read everything on line. With Justice Kennedy's deciding vote he reaffirmed the rights and dignity of all people under the Constitution. I could celebrate this monumental shift. Over the years I understood that I had made a truce and was living a contradiction. While I remained

against the social construction of marriage, and resented that I had to legally change my status, I was pleased about the benefits that flowed to me.

When the news came, we had just come from a tour of the townships outside Cape Town. Our guide was a black South African lesbian minister. Neighborhood by neighborhood she showed us where butch lesbians had been raped and murdered by gangs of men performing what they called “corrective rape.” Lesbian erasure was a reality not a fiction. It was devastating. I didn’t know how to reconcile my own newly recognized national liberation with the oppression and state sanctioned violence against my South African sisters.

Legal marriage rights for lesbians gave us acceptance into mainstream US culture, but at what cost? The very nonthreatening, asexual language, “marriage equality” made homosexual wedding vows palatable for the “average American.” I feel homogenized under the stars and stripes. Most straight people I meet shrug their shoulders when I say I am a lesbian. Even the young Vietnamese woman who paints my toenails green with sparkles understands “the issue” is about civil rights. But tell me, if I’m no longer “other” who am I? I can hold Lynne’s hand on the street or in our favorite restaurant. But please do not call my butch “my wife!” I do not want to mimic heterosexual society. I’m afraid that all my favorite lesbians have become domesticated.

The good ones marry, have children, and join the PTA. Only bad lesbians fuck their brains out and still say “dyke.” We really did have to give up sex to marry into the land of “spacious skies from sea to shining sea.” Or at least we had to stop talking in public about vibrators, Magic Wands, dildos, harnesses, and Astroglide. Monogamy is the sacrament. Our desire is invisible. *America, America God shed His grace on thee. And crown thy good in brotherhood.* Where is the radical sisterhood I used to love so deeply?

When I look around, I’m scared. Planned Parenthood is rapidly being defunded. Access to safe, legal abortion has been severely restricted. And women, lesbians, do not have control over our bodies, even if we think we do. I worry about the daughters and granddaughters. Poor and rural women. What will they do? The pro-life movement is misogynist and suppresses full sexual expression for women in any way it can. We must not kid ourselves. Our bodies are not our own. A fetus has more legal rights than a pregnant woman. And getting more all the time.

Lesbians are at risk even if we don't feel it. Assimilation is like a warm blanket on a cold night. When I pull the covers up next to my honey I feel good and protected. I'm happy knowing we can spoon all night. Then I close my eyes and admit the truth. "Marriage equality" makes us feel safe and sound. Only safety is an illusion. Patriarchy isn't going away, it's just going underground. The boys will do anything they can NOT to elect a woman president.

Where are the women's voices? We have gay marriage but still can't pass the ERA. I have nightmares that lesbians are disappearing from ourselves because we're everywhere. We can watch Rachel Maddow nightly on MSNBC. Everyone likes Rachel who's figured out how to do it. She's got her eye make-up down and her butchness under control. If you want a softer touch, during the day there's Ellen DeGeneres with her very tailored look. Her gorgeous smile makes all the straight gals sweet. But hey, that's cotton candy for you.

I am in shock at how far we've come in my lifetime. Returning to Boston from Cape Town we went through US Customs as a married couple. Taking our passports, the agent didn't blink an eye as he said, "Welcome home," sending us on our way. It is so seductive, this marriage business. Who could complain? But I can't believe I had to give in. I never wanted to be married, even to get Lynne's social security. This is so personal. My finances are much more secure because I said "I do." It's easy to think that "marriage equality" is the panacea we've all been waiting for. But it's not. The straight married couple with two young kids who live next door, will barely say, "hello" when we're on the front porch. They want to put a six foot fence around their house.

What's a lesbian to do? Gender isn't fixed at birth, and sexuality is fluid. Did you know that after eighty years "Campbell" is changing its recipe for "Chicken Noodle Soup?" They can't compete with "Annie's." She's organic. Even "Progresso" is low sodium. Thank God, no more MSG. But they're taking out the celery and the onions too. The kids who were the taste testers complained. The celery I understand, but the onions? Seriously? It's chicken soup! But you don't need a vagina to be a woman anymore. It's deep, changing the recipe. At times, the loss feels overwhelming. I can't say what makes a lesbian today. At least they're keeping in the carrots. They add a lot of color. Are lesbians evolving or are we becoming obsolete? Because it's hard to know what's really in the soup and what's not.

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## LESBIANS SINKING IN THE ALPHABET STEW

Kathy McCloskey

### The Alphabet Stew

The alphabet stew takes many forms. A common one is LGBTQIA (and RSTUVWXYZ). Ok, not really that last part.

Still, the first part of the stew continues to expand, and includes the well-known labels of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, and asexual (LBGTQIA). The longer part of the infinite alphabet stew includes such extensive, obscure descriptive categories as pansexual, omnisexual, multisexual, polysexual, pomosexual, FTM, MTF, transman, transwoman, transsexual, two-spirit, gender blender, gender bender, questioning, unsure, and non-labeling, to name just a few (Jackson, McCloskey, & McHaelen, 2011).

The original two labels, lesbian (or dyke) and gay (or fag), were both known as “homosexual.” But for most people, the word homosexual almost always conjured up gay men, with lesbians as an afterthought (if we were thought of at all). The erasure of women, not just lesbians, started early and continues today (Walters, 1996).

Currently, the word “queer” is meant to refer to the entire alphabet stew -- based on their genitals, a person does not adhere to the appropriate gender expression or is not attracted to the appropriate sex object. Another phrase in common use is “sexuality and gender diversity,” or SGD (Jackson, McCloskey, & McHaelen, 2011).

Basically it goes like this: anyone with a clit should look, act, and talk like a “woman” and should only desire someone with a “real” dick for sex play of any kind. Same for anyone with a dick, just in reverse. Otherwise, you’re queer or SGD or located somewhere in the alphabet stew.

So, once again, everything is defined against heteronormativity -- clits play with dicks, dicks play with clits, feminine with masculine, and masculine with feminine -- no

exceptions. The alphabet stew does nothing to reduce the “health, wellness, desirability, and wealth” of hetero reality in our culture. In other words, alphabet stew provides nothing new.

### Pros/Cons of the Alphabet Stew

#### Pros

With such an extensive list of descriptors and identities to choose from, we can all now fully assert our special type of individuality. This is a good thing!

When I get to choose amongst any of the long list of letters in the alphabet stew and then full-throatedly announce who I am, I’m deeply honoring the lived meaning of human variation. I become a living breathing testimony that heteronormativity is a toothless, naked sham (Lane, 2009). And...I get to declare that biology is not destiny, I can change my mind at any time, and I can explode the old straight-jackets of lesbian and gay polarized identities (Jarach, 2004). The individual is centralized – yay! Me, me, me!!!!

It’s quite fun, actually. Imagine being young, with boi culture at your fingertips, and able to act like a sex-crazed, sexist seventeen year old boy through much of your twenties’s and thirties’s without consequence within your local queer scene. Or pass as genderqueer at night and high fem at the office, and no one bats an eye. Imagine trying on and taking off all the different gendered roles (and outfits) you can possibly think of!!! And if you want to sleep with men, no one even understands what “gold star” means, let alone ostracizes you for it.

Instead, you’re a prude if you don’t express your gender in multiple transgressive ways and your sexuality with everybody, if only at least once, or for a little while.

#### Cons

The problem with this individual focus is that *it’s an individual focus*, as if the whole thing resides in each singular person. This exclusive focus is a major faux pas, especially since we are embedded within culturally-driven shared reality structures. Very real resources flow to

or away from us based on the social categories we either freely choose or have thrust upon us (or some combination of both; (Jarach, 2004; Lane, 2009).

Here's a thought experiment. I declare myself asexual. That means I'm not sexually attracted to anyone and don't want sex. Okey-dokey. Now where are the politics in that? Well, good luck finding anybody else (except another asexual) to share your housing expenses, joys or sorrows, etc. on the level of partnerships found in contemporary American culture. Friendships with people who may or may not answer a call at three pm are the norm. Also, try to imagine stoking the fires of advocacy for asexual rights. Dead on arrival. Resources flow away from this category, and if we ignore that, the personal declaration of being asexual is empty and virtually means nothing except for the person declaring it (and almost always to their detriment).

Here's another thought experiment. I declare myself bisexual. That's cool until I select a sexual partner. The genitals of my selected partner now drive whether resources flow toward me or away from me, and I'm no longer bisexual – our culture simply won't allow it. I'm now either lesbian or straight based on the genitals I'm fondling at the moment. The personal declaration of bisexuality is empty the minute I choose a sexual partner because of structurally imposed resource allocation. I can claim bisexuality only as long as I don't select a sexual partner.

Clearly, we can't get away from socially constructed resource allocation, which is just a stand-in phrase for politics.

### We Ignore Feminist Analyses of Power at Our Own Peril

The alphabet stew suffers from a severe lack of political power analyses, which is the hallmark of feminism. Each of the stew categories describes smaller and smaller “straight-jackets” of identity, until we've fractionated ourselves, like a million atoms being puffed out in a cloud of cigarette smoke. Splitting is the old term for it, and divide and conquer is now an old patriarchal political strategy reborn in today's alphabet stew.

We fight amongst ourselves in ways unknown before, where transwomen want access to lesbian or women-only space. Transmen want women to help them solidify their male identities, replicating old hetero relationship scripts (“Do the housework, woman!”).

Meanwhile, reproductive realities are deeply buried. Bio females are the only ones who can create another human, but lesbians are expected to honor newly minted transwomen for their life-long sacrifices of hair-removal, plastic surgeries, penectomies, and other cosmetic tragedies in efforts to pass as bio females.

It is time for lesbians (and everyone else too!) to recognize that the current atomization of identity, along with the current clamor for trans rights, is *an inherently masculine endeavor*.

First, the divide and conquer phenomenon is an age-old strategy to keep feminists from organizing. Think back to the old feminist fights about the lesbian menace, or white women talking for women of color – now it's gender and sexuality categories listed to the nth-degree that splits us up. Just old wine in a new skin.

Consider the inherent masculinity of transwomen who insist on being accepted within women's space, especially lesbian space. Cheeky and intrusive demands are part of left-over male privilege that transwomen deal with, which is difficult to dislodge (Ruby & Mantilla, 2000). They expect women, especially lesbians, to be understanding and accepting in ways they don't with men, and especially gay men. Imagine the laughter if transwomen wanted entrance into gay male culture -- and didn't just want in, but wanted to be centralized as the "new and improved" social justice movement (or if transmen tried the same thing with gay men). Please!

Consider the inherent masculinity of transmen who insist that their previously lesbian lovers -- now converted to straight lovers as a result of transition – must "solidify" their new-found masculine privilege. Transmen clearly revel in male privilege – who amongst us wouldn't? It would be wonderful! With little thought, all too many transmen trade their lifelong female experiences for male privileged superpowers (Pfeffer, 2010).

Lesbian feminists just can't win. Males transitioning to female just become men in women's clothing, and females transitioning to male just become men (Pfeffer, 2010; Ruby & Mantilla, 2000).

Where does that leave lesbians? Well, we keep floating in the alphabet stew, but we're getting a little water-logged. Without new energy, new advocacy, and new activism, we won't just become more and more invisible, we risk sinking to the bottom of the social stew pot.

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## NO MORE ERASERS

Lynne S. Brandon

The original title of my OLOC presentation was “Erasing Butches,” but I didn’t bring my big pink eraser. Instead, welcome to “NO MORE ERASERS.” The opening section is followed by two performance pieces from an unruly work-in-progress trying to be a play.

### ONE

Did I ever want to be a boy? Of course. So much about girl-ness didn't fit. I didn't understand “feminine.” I hated being restricted /constricted by my body, gender, and clothes. I wanted all the privileges that go with being male, or at least how males are treated.

I'm not trans\*, don't want to be trans\*, and never wanted to be trans\*<sup>1</sup>. But: if it had been an option when I was twelve? I don't even want to think about it. Except to say I'm really glad it wasn't.

A dictionary definition of the prefix "trans-" is not all that different from the Latin (always a personal favorite since I won a national award in tenth grade):

trans: across, beyond, through, so as to change

Don't trap me in a definition. I don't want to be “In Process,” or “Across,” “Beyond,” in “Change.” The physical ambiguity of trans\* provides some freedom. But there is also loss. For FTMs, the expanse of female is lost. Jettisoned. “Butch” is a far broader world than “Trans\*.” It does not omit an expression, or escape it, or forget it. All of the woman's mental and physical memories can remain.

It makes me nuts, women adopting male identity without investigating butchness. There's a lot more to figure out than “go directly to male, do not pass Go, get 200 dollars.” Such as coming to terms with all that “butch” means. Internally as well as externally. Incorporating femaleness AND maleness. Femaleness that contributes to your whole, not detracts from it. “Butch” allows moment-to-moment fluidity in a varied universe.

Who wouldn't want the gender privileges men have, that women do not? It's too simple a question, and sexist on its face. A transman does not challenge sexism, he adds to it; the gender

binary is enforced, not ameliorated. And don't even get me started on transmen who are attracted to straight men -- why go through all that when straight women do have a few perks ...

I'm sure you're thinking, well, what about living as a male? Sure, much easier, rewarding, powerful. And being a guy is simpler - all the routes have been laid out for you. You can always revert to type when too many privileges are threatened.

Debra A. Wilson made a film, "The Butch Mystique" in 2002, interviewing nine African-American butch lesbians, teens to elders. A viewer commented: "I felt my identity as butch kind of disappearing recently. It was interesting to me to hear a younger woman talking about 'butch' as a title being for the older generation. It's clear that the name may not be used as often, but maybe butch isn't going away." So here we are, 14 years later, talking about erasure. I want to know – by whom? Who says? Johnnie, a performance artist in the film, says: "Society as a whole is not right, because it's very box identified: you know, female, male ... I'm not trying to pick one box over the other. I'm trying to be true to all that encompasses me."

All the changes since 2002? It's still about surviving. Culturally, physically, personally. It's a fine line between being noticed - and possibly getting fucked up, or over - or being ignored, having all that dyke juice dribble away and nobody but your buds giving a shit. Butch is not just a plot point on the graph of life. It's a presence, a performance, a neighborhood of style and attitude and desire that pushes everything else to be bigger and bolder.

So we are the outlaws and "they" are the status quo-ers. We are the threat, they are the fearful. For a confident person, difference is opportunity, newness, questions, wondering, deciding what resonates and what doesn't.

I really don't give a shit if someone classifies it as "difference." POWER is and always will be the issue. Fundamentally, there's nothing wrong with going mainstream, getting out of the line of fire. But way better is to make more of the parts and complexities we already have. Stubbornly put out those new shoots no matter how many times we get cut to the ground. A weed is a plant that grows where somebody doesn't want it. Weeds are wicked hard to eradicate.

In "The Butch Mystique," artist/activist Pippa says, "Just to walk in the street, and to be a woman who does go outside of that female box that we're told we have to fit in – you have to be strong to do that." Butch comes from inside. As many variations as the women. Putting ourselves at risk every day for our desires and dreams. Courage 100% of the time.

## TWO

I'm standing in the six-or-fewer line at Whole Foods, clutching bananas, bread and milk. The stranger in front of me is checking me out, those looks that last longer than necessary and definitely of the quizzical variety: is that a woman or a man? I want to shout, "WOMAN!" so they can get on with their day already. Or lean in and whisper, "Want some?"

Or: I have to pee. The airport bathroom has a curving entrance, no doors. I get around to the stalls, and this woman at the sink fixes me with a glare that would peel paint. She says, "You're in the wrong place." I stop dead, glare back: "I can read." I take the stall right behind her, let loose a flood, and do my damndest to fart as loud as I can. If there were butch restrooms, I betcha I'd never have to wait on line.

Don't you love the one about "butches run after women all the time?" That's a straight guy's fear fantasy if I ever heard one. They're afraid we're gonna take all the good ones. It's not about taking. Part of butch mystique is to read the signs, wait for the invite, then glide through the open door.

Butchness encompasses a parade of disguises, whatever the culture of the time, whether Paris or Hoboken or Dayton, Ohio. Fashion panic! Polo shirts and khakis are eight-hundred percent asexual. Really - how not to be seen for the body you have, muscles included. We've been around long enough. Let it show!

Still, a conundrum: butch at its core is about masculinity - female, male, trans, queer, questioning, whatever. Maleness, under the iron-fist rule of patriarchy, is built on hating femaleness. Hate. Go ahead, start screaming in protest. But think about it for more than a hot minute. It's the overwhelming, infuriating, and depressing truth.

I don't know about everywhere, but in the U. S. of A. women do not move about freely, earn what they deserve, decide what to do with our bodies, or get taken seriously 100% of the time. Doesn't matter your color, your religion, having money - poor women definitely get the shit end of every stick - or even who you have sex with. Not true for men, especially white men. So how can a butch, who loves women, want to have anything remotely to do with maleness?

I don't know what to tell you. It's not like I decide when I'm five that I want to be more like my brother than my mom. I know even then that he's not a great role model. But he's free to

run around, mouth off, be loud, get dirty, do things I can't get away with. But please, this is not about my child-self running the show. I was a full-fledged butch at eight. I can show you the picture.

### THREE

I read this piece in the paper about high-school kids taking advanced math classes. The picture had a Latina woman talking with a lithe, young African-American female. The student, in plain sweater, jeans and sneaks was sitting backwards on a chair, arms on the seat back, gesturing. They were deep in conversation.

This young woman was not posing for the camera. She was sitting so she could be completely involved in what she was learning. She was comfortable.

Butch might be the natural expression of the body, which we can then do with whatever, and however, we want. Be loose, be strong, take up space with long strides, legs spread, arms extended. Not check how you walk and talk and sit every second.

That physically free butchness, you'd have to learn it as an unfettered child - boy, girl, whomever. Can you imagine it? Think about how that kind of beginning might have changed your travels into adulthood.

Say it happens. Say the whole next generation of kids - not just the lucky few right now - what would their lives be like growing up like that? And, how would they look at the rest of us? Pity comes to mind. Not to mention, so many gender identities you wouldn't be able to count them. The role police would totally lose their jobs.

Yeah.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans\* is the preferred notation as of this writing. The asterisk implies all the other descriptors that could follow, e.g., transman, transwoman, transgender, transqueer, etc.

## POST-SCRIPT: THE GREAT AMERICAN ERASURE

Sarah F. Pearlman

I have been enslaved, yet my spirit is unbound.

I have been cast aside, but I sparkle in the darkness.

I have been slain but live on in the river of history.

—Pauli Murray<sup>1</sup>

In 1999, Lillian Faderman<sup>2</sup> published an amazing book on American lesbians who led the fight for suffrage and women's rights as well as civil rights. Unmarried and regarded as spinsters (literally unmarried, but often a code word for women in relationship with other women), these women did not self-identify as lesbians. Nor (except for Pauli Murray, a twentieth century lesbian) did they regard themselves as gender or sexual inverts as that came later with the distorted ideas of sexologists, Havelock Ellis and Kraft-Ebing. However, they were clearly in primary relationships with other women. Faderman documents their relational/sexual orientation through personal letters and journals that attested to these women's love and commitment to their female partners as well as their shared sexual passion. Many were in lifelong relationships with another women. Others had a series of sequential relationships, or were non-monogamous. Although some were briefly married, most deliberately avoided heterosexual marriage with all its domestic responsibilities. They understood that such an arrangement would limit their lives and prevent full participation in causes related to women's rights. Thus, they consciously coupled with women who were not only supportive (either financially, or practically by assuming household responsibilities),

<sup>1</sup>Murray, Pauli (1943). "Prophecy," in *Dark testament*.

<sup>2</sup>Faderman, Lillian (1999). *To believe in women: What lesbians have done for America – A history*.

New York: Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt Publishers Co.

but who also joined with them in the fight to obtain full equality for women and/or to improve the lives of African-American people.

Lesbians were in leadership roles in the abolitionist, temperance, civil rights, labor union and workers' rights movement. They were also at the forefront of the fight to obtain the vote for women, access to higher education, and the right to become economically independent by entering such professions as the law, medicine, or the ministry.

All of the women described in this paper were lesbians.

Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) was a pioneer crusader for the woman suffrage movement in the United States. She was president (1892-1900) of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, later transformed into the League of Women Voters. Anthony's work over four decades helped to pave the way for the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution—passed in 1920—giving women the right to vote. The amendment was popularly known as the Susan B. Anthony Amendment.

Carrie Chapman Catt and her partner, Mollie Hay, Alice Paul, Frances Willard, and Anna Shaw were all activist leaders in the suffrage movement (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries).

Jane Adams (1860-1935) established social work as a profession for women through her work with immigrants and other impoverished women. She founded a series of settlement houses in urban Chicago.

Mary Woolley (1863-1947) was president of Mt. Holyoke College and the first woman student to attend Brown University. Martha Carey Thomas (1857-1935), an educator and suffragist, was the second president of Bryn Mawr College. Both women were instrumental in assuring women's right to higher education.

Emily Blackwell (1826-1910) was the second American woman to attain a medical degree. She fought for women to be admitted to medical schools and dedicated her life to making certain that women had the right to medical training and education.

Belva Lockwood (1830-1917) was one of the first female lawyers in the United States. In 1879, she successfully petitioned Congress to be allowed to practice before the United States

Supreme Court, becoming the first woman attorney given this privilege. Lockwood ran for president in 1884 and 1888 on the ticket of the National Equal Right Party and was the first woman to appear on official ballots. She was a fervent supporter of world peace as well as a temperance movement activist.

Mary Louise Booth (1831-1889) was the first editor of Harper's Bazaar, beginning in 1867 until her death in 1889.

Numerous African-American lesbians were both early civil rights and women's rights activists. Among them was Rebecca Cox Jackson (1795-1871) who was a leader in the Shaker religious movement and who founded the first Black Shaker community in Philadelphia. Her partner, Rebecca Perot (date of birth and death unknown) continued Jackson's work following her death in 1871.

Rebecca Primus (1836-1932) was one of the many women who traveled south after the Civil War to teach the newly freed men and women. She founded a school for ex-slaves in Royal Oak, Maryland—later named in her honor, the Primus Institute.

Ionia Whipper (1872-1953) was the first African-American physician of her generation; dedicated to training rural Black women in midwifery.

Mary Jane McLeod Bethune (1875-1955) was committed to helping ex-slaves to read and write. She fought to better the conditions of African-Americans by educating girls and women who would later work to improve the lives of Black people. In 1896, the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) was formed to promote the needs of Black women. Bethune served as the Florida chapter president of the NACW from 1917 to 1925. She worked to register black voters—actively resisted by white society—and made almost impossible by numerous obstacles in Florida law and practices controlled by white administrators. She was elected as national president of the NACW in 1924.

When President Barack Obama spoke of Stonewall, Seneca Falls, and Selma during his second Inaugural address, he added Pauli Murray's name. Murray (1910-1985) was an African-American civil rights lawyer, feminist, poet, and priest who successfully challenged the exclusion of women on juries in Alabama on the basis that jury service was a basic right of

citizenship. She fought on the front lines of the civil rights and feminist movements before they were actually viable movements and was the first Black woman to be ordained as an Episcopal priest.

Consuela Reyes (I could not find the date of her birth or death), a Latin-American, was a committed suffragist as well as a world peace activist.

In 1930, Good Housekeeping Magazine listed twelve women as the greatest living women in America. Of the twelve, four—Jane Adams, Mary Woolley, Carrie Chapman Catt, and Willa Cather—were lesbians.

Playwright, Lorraine Hansbury and anthropologists, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict. All four were lesbians.

And countless others.

As you read about this partial list of American lesbians who achieved so much, ask yourself: How many of these lesbians and their amazing accomplishments are you familiar with? Erasure has served to hide our amazingly rich lesbian history.

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#### AUTHORS NOTE

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Alice Fisher is a long-time activist in the LGBT Community. She has been interested in housing and services for LGBT people for many years and, at present, is seeking other interested parties in becoming the founders of the first Village for LGBT people that redefines “aging in place.”

Kathy McCloskey is a faculty member at the University of Hartford’s clinical psychology doctoral program. Born and raised in southwestern Ohio, she has been a lesbian ever since she realized the difference between boys and girls. From a working class background, she can attest that middle America is twenty to thirty years behind both coasts.

Sarah Pearlman escaped from marriage to land in a radical lesbian-feminist community—years that were among her happiest and most thrilling. A teacher, writer, and activist, she is nationally recognized for her pioneering role in establishing a psychology of lesbians. She is the author of *Mother-Talk Conversations with Mothers of Lesbian Daughters and FTM Transgender Children*, published by Demeter Press and *The Lesbian Erotic: Bad Gird Persona and Other Poems*.