



Laverne Cox

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BIOGRAPHY AND INFLUENCES

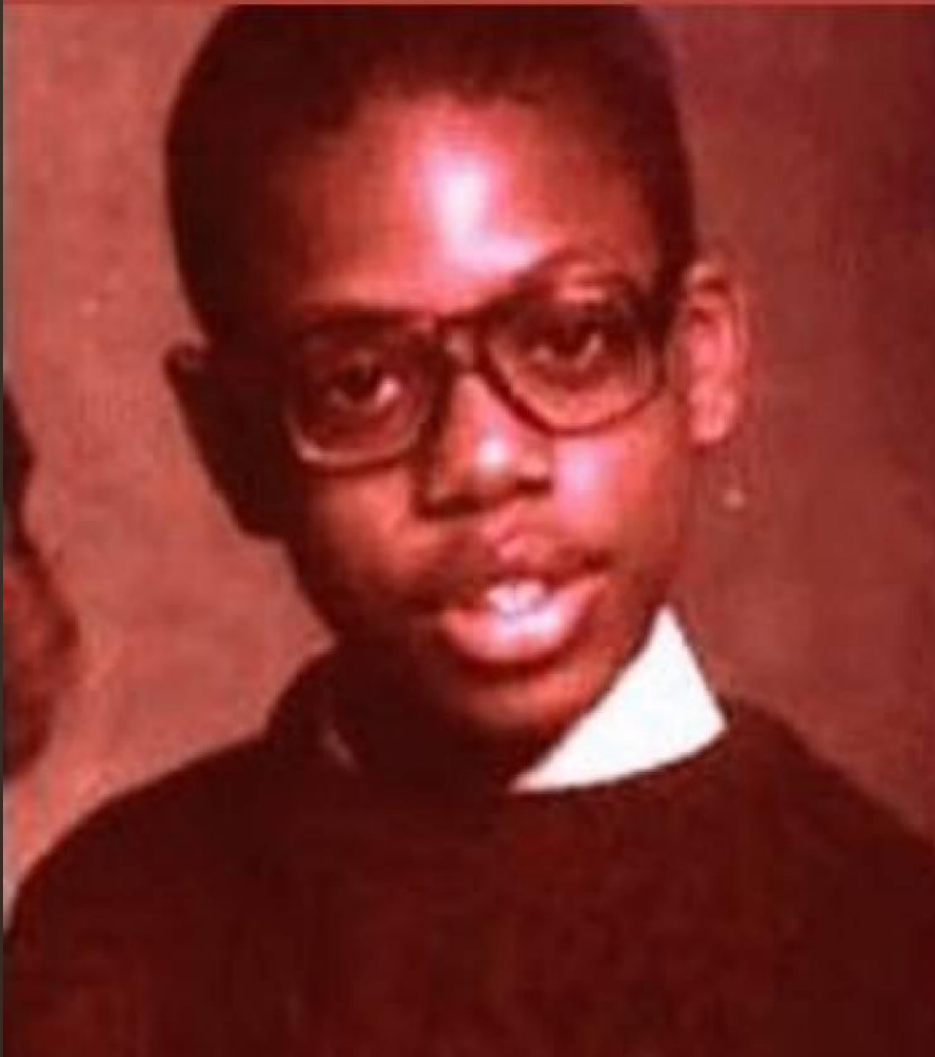
“If someone needs to express their gender in a way that is different, that is okay, and they should not be denied healthcare. They should not be bullied. They don’t deserve to be victims of violence”.

- Actress and transgender activist Laverne Cox and her twin brother, M Lamar, were born in “southern Alabama during the Civil Rights movement” (Boatman, 2014, para. 2).
- As a child, Cox was the subject of constant bullying from her peers due to her “gender expression” (para. 2). At one point, Cox attempted suicide as the bullying became so awful and consistent. In her late teens, Cox made the move from Alabama to New York City to begin her career as an actress.

BIOGRAPHY AND INFLUENCES

- From a young age, Cox knew she wanted to be an artist and found inspiration and influence from other artists, especially black women, who created spaces for themselves where being a black woman wasn't the norm.
- Cox cites opera singer Leontyne Price as being a major inspiration for her from a young age (CBSWatch, 2017). In the early 1960s, Price was the first "Black singer to headline at the Metropolitan Opera in New York" (Martin, 2021, para. 1). Cox recalls seeing a photo of Price in a book her mother gave to her and her brother highlighting important Black figures. Cox explains that she was "transfixed" by the photo of Price despite not hearing her sing (CBS Watch, 2017).
- For Cox, and many other underrepresented groups of people, seeing someone in the media or a major figure who resembles yourself can have a considerable impact on one's identity. Cox recalls seeing Price's "high cheekbones" and "big, full lips" and saw a reflection of herself (CBS Watch, 2017). Seeing these images of Price confirmed and assured her decision to become an artist and create spaces for herself and other people like her.

JOURNEY THROUGH TRANSITION.



JOURNEY THROUGH TRANSITION



- Being the first black woman to openly come out as trans in the movie and creative art industry and being the first trans woman to appear on the front covers of time Magazine story about the transgender civil rights movement, Cox talks about how her role in Orange is the New Black demonstrates an incarcerated woman who was limited in her ability to enact change in Andre Favors article “Coming Out as a transgender Advocate: Laverne Cox, intersectional Rhetoric and Intersectionality”.
- Apart from being misgendered and bullied through her transition, Cox still never gave up but rather fought through the hate from the media and society and today she's one of the most talked about people in the film industry.

MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS AND LEGACY

- Navigating the current heteronormative, patriarchal society is challenging for all marginalized groups of people. For transgender and gender non-conforming people, transphobia is present and rampant in almost every space they navigate.
- Black Transgender women, particularly, face a unique set of challenges on account of their race, gender, and queerness. Holt (2020) explains that “ninety-one percent of the reported murders of trans and gender non-conforming people in 2019 were Black women” (para. 19).
- Additionally, Black trans women show reports of being severely more depressed than non-Black transgender people. According to Bukowski (2019), “49.3% of [Black trans women] reported past week depression symptomology”, these high rates of depression make them more susceptible to other health issues such as “suicidal thoughts and attempts [and] HIV incidence” (para. 2).

➤ MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS AND LEGACY

- Throughout the course of her career, Laverne Cox has used her platform bring these issues of violence against trans people and trans representation to light. Some of her activism and community work include:

1. Raising awareness about the “Oct. 8 Title VII Supreme Court” case at the 2019 Emmy Awards (Sopelsa, 2019, para. 2). The case was to determine whether discrimination sex discrimination in the workplace should also include gender and sexuality based discrimination.

2. In 2020, Cox executive produced the Netflix documentary *Disclosure*. The film highlights the “history of transgender representation in Hollywood” (King, 2020, para. 1). The documentary discusses the relationship trans people have had in the film and television industry. The film is a landmark of its time and is one of the few mainstream projects about trans people, developed by trans people.

MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS AND LEGACY

3. In 2019, Cox was the first trans person to appear on the cover of British Vogue (Kai, 2019).

4. Cox frequently uses the hashtag "#TransIsBeautiful" in her social media posts to highlight and celebrate the "unique beauty of all transgender people" (Rankin, 2015, para. 1). She explains that trans people experience a significant amount of transphobia when trying to navigate their everyday lives. The purpose of the #TransIsBeautiful movement is to remind trans people to "embrace all of [the] things" that make trans people their unique selves. As of today, the hashtag is one of the most used "trans-related hashtags on social media" (Bean, 2018, para. 1).



WHY DOES SHE STAND OUT?

- Not only is Cox the First Black woman to come out as Trans in the media but she's also the first trans woman to be nominated for at the Emmys.
- The first trans woman to have the most current leading role seen on Netflix original series Orange is the New Black.
- She has also paved ways for many people who couldn't come out of their shell due to her role in social issues and transgender activism.



“It is time that we all see gender as a spectrum instead of two sets of opposing ideals. We should stop defining each other by what we are not and start defining ourselves by who we are”

-Emma Watson, Actor and activist.

Thank you.



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