

Merrick Moses
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

The Transgender Oral History Project
Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies
University of Minnesota

January 17, 2017



The Transgender Oral History Project of the Upper Midwest will empower individuals to tell their story, while providing students, historians, and the public with a more rich foundation of primary source material about the transgender community. The project is part of the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. The archive provides a record of GLBT thought, knowledge and culture for current and future generations and is available to students, researchers and members of the public.

The Transgender Oral History Project will collect up to 400 hours of oral histories involving 200 to 300 individuals over the next three years. Major efforts will be the recruitment of individuals of all ages and experiences, and documenting the work of The Program in Human Sexuality. This project will be led by

Andrea Jenkins, poet, writer, and trans-activist. Andrea brings years of experience working in government, non-profits and LGBT organizations. If you are interested in being involved in this exciting project, please contact Andrea.

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1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Merrick Moses -MM
3
4 AJ: So hello.

5 MM: Hello. Hola.

6 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins, and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project
7 at the University of Minnesota. Today is January 17, 2017. I am in the City of Brotherly Love,
8 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at the Creating Change Conference.

9 MM: Woo, Creating Change!

10 AJ: And I'm sitting here today with Merrick Moses. Merrick, how are you?

11 MM: Blessed and highly favored!

12 AJ: Blessed and highly favored. I love it, I love it, I love it. So, Merrick, can you spell your name -
13 state your name, spell your name, so that we have the correct pronunciation and the correct
14 spelling. Tell me your gender identity as you claim it today, your gender assigned at birth, and
15 the pronouns that you use.

16 MM: My name is the Reverend Merrick Moses. That's M-E-R-R-I-C-K M-O-S-E-S. I am a Black trans
17 man. I was assigned female at birth, born in Brooklyn, New York, on the ninth of April, 1974.

18 AJ: Wow. And which pronouns do you use?

19 MM: I am he.

20 AJ: He.

21 MM: Yes.

22 AJ: I am he.

23 MM: I am he, yes.

24 AJ: Wow. Merrick, what's the first memory you have in life?

25 MM: I was in a crib, and somehow I put my leg over the crib, over the - the side of the crib, and that's
26 really, like, the first memory that I truly have.

27 AJ: Really?

28 MM: Yes.

29 AJ: So you were in a crib. You had to be less than two years old.

30 MM: I might - I might have been two, hovering over three, because I do remember actually speaking
31 some words.

32 AJ: Oh, wow.

33 MM: But I don't remember what they were.

- 1 AJ: Okay.
- 2 MM: And I remember my parents speaking to me.
- 3 AJ: Wow. That's quite a memory. You were - you grew up in Brooklyn?
- 4 MM: I grew up in - actually, in Queens. We moved to Brooklyn - I mean, we moved to Queens in 1977.
- 5 AJ: Okay. Wow. Queens, New York.
- 6 MM: Yes.
- 7 AJ: What was that - did you guys live in an apartment, did you live in a -
- 8 MM: We lived in a -
- 9 AJ: - single family home?
- 10 MM: We lived in a single family home. So the first part of my life in Queens, I lived in a place - a
11 section in Queens called Cambria Heights, and that's right near the suburbs. Right near Nassau
12 County. And then we moved to Hollis, Queens, in 1984 when I was ten, and that's where I spent
13 the bulk of my life.
- 14 AJ: So the first neighborhood you mentioned - Cambria?
- 15 MM: Cambria Heights. Mmhmm.
- 16 AJ: How do you spell - C-A-M-B -
- 17 MM: B-R-I-A. Yeah.
- 18 AJ: - R-I-A. Okay. All righty.
- 19 MM: Mmhmm.
- 20 AJ: Yeah.
- 21 MM: Very quiet, sleepy part of Queens. Not too much going on. Hella residential - they're near
22 suburbia.
- 23 AJ: Right. It's kind of suburbia.
- 24 MM: Definitely. Lawns...
- 25 AJ: Yeah. Trees.
- 26 MM: Trees, definitely trees, yeah. We had trees in Hollis, too, but by the time I got to Hollis, in 1984,
27 it was full swing crazy in terms of drugs, crime, HIV/AIDS, so those are my memories. I mean, it's
28 good memories, too, but -
- 29 AJ: Right.
- 30 MM: But - yeah. But it -
- 31 AJ: And so it - this was 1984, you said?

- 1 MM: Yes.
- 2 AJ: Wow. Yeah, that was the height of the - actually, that was the beginning of the AIDS epidemic.
- 3 MM: I remember seeing people with AIDS. My mother was a - a news junkie. She loved the news, and
4 so I remember seeing people with something called Gay-related immunodeficiency disorder,
5 something like that. GRID. And it was these white men who looked famished, but little did I
6 know, around me, there were people that I loved, and I knew, who had AIDS. And I didn't know
7 that until after they died.
- 8 AJ: Were you a single child?
- 9 MM: I was. I am an only child. That I know about. But I am an only child.
- 10 AJ: I don't know what made me ask that question. You just -
- 11 MM: Somebody might be in your air over there.
- 12 AJ: Yeah. You - I don't know, you just kind of struck me as, just, growing up without siblings.
- 13 MM: Yes. I don't have any blood siblings. I do have cousins who are like my siblings.
- 14 AJ: Sure. Absolutely. Yeah.
- 15 MM: But I don't have any siblings of my own.
- 16 AJ: So what was elementary school like in Hollis?
- 17 MM: Elementary school was fun, but lonely. Now that I look back on it, I had a lot of gender issues.
18 My cousins would come by during the summer and we would play. We would play ball in the
19 backyard, play stickball in the street.
- 20 AJ: Male cousins?
- 21 MM: Yes.
- 22 AJ: Okay.
- 23 MM: I had a cousin who was like my brother. His name was Telly. And we used to just play all types of
24 - all types of games. I tried to climb fences. That wasn't too successful. Build tents. We tried to
25 reenact some of the Little Rascals stuff. But he also had an older sister, and her name is Kim.
26 And so sometimes we would play dolls. I had - as an only child, I got lavished with a lot of toil, so
27 - toys. So we would play Barbies, and all of that.
- 28 AJ: Right.
- 29 MM: But I was much more attracted to the ball playing, actually.
- 30 AJ: Yeah?
- 31 MM: Yes.
- 32 AJ: Wow. So you kind of had some gender-specific activities growing up.

- 1 MM: Oh, absolutely.
- 2 AJ: Did you consider yourself a tomboy, or did other people?
- 3 MM: It - it -
- 4 AJ: Was that language that -
- 5 MM: Yes.
- 6 AJ: - you used?
- 7 MM: I would - I definitely considered myself a tomboy, and I - my parents did, too. I didn't really have
8 any gender expectations on me until puberty, or prepubescence in - when people start
9 developing, and then all of these things start growing on your body. Things get pretty confusing.
10 You aren't necessarily allowed to romp and roll like you did.
- 11 AJ: Right. Right.
- 12 MM: And so that was hard for me. Particularly around the development of my breasts. I didn't really
13 like it, nor did I understand it. I didn't under - necessarily understand what was going on. We
14 had a conversation, my mother and I had conversations about the birds and the bees and stuff.
15 But it's a - one thing to have a conversations and another thing to live in a body
16 that's...betraying you. And so when menstruation started, that's when the hell began, like, really
17 seriously for me.
- 18 AJ: Wow.
- 19 MM: And it was difficult. It was very difficult.
- 20 AJ: So you said when the hell began.
- 21 MM: Yes.
- 22 AJ: Like, what does that mean?
- 23 MM: That means that your life now centers around your time of the month, and there are just several
24 things that you can't do. It also means, like, I had a very very hard periods, very - a lot of pain, a
25 lot of suffering. I remember one time I passed out.
- 26 AJ: Oh, my goodness.
- 27 MM: So literally, my life for many years, was centered around this event. It was terrible, actually.
- 28 AJ: Wow.
- 29 MM: It was. And I -
- 30 AJ: Were you able to work? And go to school? And -
- 31 MM: I was able to work and go to school, but it often - what it often looked like, like, my first day on, I
32 wasn't able to go to school. It would look like hope-praying that my cycle would come around
33 the weekend, so that I could go to school on Monday. It was - it was very difficult. It was very

- 1 difficult. It was -
- 2 AJ: Wow. Did - did you experience any sort of harassment, or bullying in school at all?
- 3 MM: Oh, all the time.
- 4 AJ: Around gender? Around your gender, or...?
- 5 MM: Well, around - around my gender in terms of - I wasn't the girliest of girls.
- 6 AJ: Right.
- 7 MM: And so that look like, "Why aren't you like them?" I had issues with my hair, and so oftentimes it
8 would be all over the place. And so that was a big deal, right? And then -
- 9 AJ: So girls would -
- 10 MM: Well, it was girls -
- 11 AJ: - mean girls -
- 12 MM: Yeah, it was girls and boys, right? And then it - it also looked like, when I was in high school, I
13 was bullied around being in AP courses, and - and honors courses.
- 14 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 15 MM: Yeah. I was accused of being white, because apparently I was able to speak American Standard
16 English in school.
- 17 AJ: Right.
- 18 MM: And a lot of times, the classes that I was in, it was - there were a lot of white kids, and a lot of
19 Asian kids, and so I was often one to three Blacks in - in those classes. And so apparently, I was
20 white, at that point. And - but I rejected all of that, and I had a - a mother. I had parents. I had a
21 - a mother and father that really helped my self-esteem in that space. But in terms of - in regard
22 to gender, there was this pressure to wear skirts, and then my mother gave up on that. And so it
23 was difficult to be in a space where I knew in my - in my heart that I wanted to be a boy, so to
24 speak, and it's so interesting, because I remember seeing the first transgender person that I
25 saw, that I - that I knew was transgender, was someone on Phil Donahue.
- 26 AJ: Okay.
- 27 MM: And I said to my mother, "Mommy, did you ever want to - to be a man?" And I asked her that,
28 because I was just hoping she would say yes.
- 29 AJ: Right.
- 30 MM: So that I wouldn't feel like a weirdo.
- 31 AJ: Yeah.
- 32 MM: And then she said "Hell no, I never wanted to be a rusty-ass man!" And I tell people, "That shut
33 me down for years!"

- 1 AJ: Is that right?
- 2 MM: Yeah. That - that - that took - completely shut that down. And so that - that was the end of that.
3 And -
- 4 AJ: Rusty-ass man -
- 5 MM: Yeah.
- 6 AJ: - got to put Vaseline on -
- 7 MM: Yeah, exactly!
- 8 AJ: - all the time!
- 9 MM: It was hilarious. And so that was the end of my - my actual telling someone halfway what I
10 thought around that.
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 MM: And so it - it was - it was difficult, but I remember wanting to join the Boy Scouts. I remember
13 wanting to join a Little League team. Because I just felt - I felt like I would just have more
14 freedom. And on this side of the - of the pond now, I realize that whole time that I was a
15 masculine child, but - in that time, there was really no room for me to fully be all I wanted to be.
- 16 AJ: Yeah.
- 17 MM: We just didn't - it just - we just didn't have the faculty.
- 18 AJ: Wow. So were you in a two-parent household -
- 19 MM: I was.
- 20 AJ: - for most of your -
- 21 MM: Mmhmm. Yes.
- 22 AJ: - life, or -
- 23 MM: Yes.
- 24 AJ: - all of your life, I guess?
- 25 MM: Most of my life. My parents split up when I was thirteen.
- 26 AJ: Okay.
- 27 MM: But my father was a Black Panamanian man from Colón, Panama. He came to America in 196 -
- 28 AJ: From Colón?
- 29 MM: Yes.
- 30 AJ: Okay.

- 1 MM: And he came to America in 1960, and my mom was born here. She was born in Pitts - like, the
2 Plttsburgh area. Pennsylvania. And she was born in 1931, and my father was born in 1928. And
3 so I'm a - I'm a child of my parents -
- 4 AJ: Older parents.
- 5 MM: Yes.
- 6 AJ: Yeah.
- 7 MM: My old - older parents, and so that's a very interesting experience.
- 8 AJ: That is. I mean, that's a interesting way of being shaped in the world. And I don't know if you
9 want to speak on it, but -
- 10 MM: I thank god that my parents were older, because they gave me a level of perspective,
11 particularly around history, that many of my peers did not have, because they hadn't - their
12 parents hadn't lived it. Their grandparents did.
- 13 AJ: Right.
- 14 MM: And so my parents could clearly -
- 15 AJ: Or even, in some cases, particularly in Hollis and Queens -
- 16 MM: Right.
- 17 AJ: - and - like, maybe their great-grandparents.
- 18 MM: I would say that, too. Yes.
- 19 AJ: Yeah. I mean, 'cause -
- 20 MM: Yeah.
- 21 AJ: In - in - in our communities -
- 22 MM: Right.
- 23 AJ: - people have children at a -
- 24 MM: Very young.
- 25 AJ: - very young age.
- 26 MM: Very young age.
- 27 AJ: So you could be eighteen, with two children, right?
- 28 MM: Yes.
- 29 AJ: Yeah.
- 30 MM: You could be eighteen, and a - and I had those folks in my life, too. And I just got a historical
31 perspective that most of my friends did not get. Like, my parents could clearly tell me what the

- 1 Depression was like. Where they were when Pearl Ha - Harbor happened. Where they were
2 when King got shot. What they - what was it like to live in a segregated place. And my father had
3 a very unique perspective, being a Black person from outside of the US.
- 4 AJ: Right.
- 5 MM: And coming into a space where America - being in, like, the home of Jim Crow. I mean, he faced
6 Jim Crow in Panama in that he grew up in the canal zone. His - his parents were canal builder
7 people.
- 8 AJ: Okay.
- 9 MM: So - so American hegemony at that time in Panama looked like gold and silver water fountains,
10 right? So the white people had gold fountains, the white Americans had gold fountains, and the
11 Black West Indians had silver fountains. And my grandparents were from St. Lucia, and my
12 grandmother, I think her parents were from Barbados.
- 13 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 14 MM: And so, you know, growing up with - him growing up in that environment, and - he actually
15 came to the US because he was working on the canal zone, and he wanted a fourteen cent
16 raise. And his boss had to wire to the states to request.
- 17 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 18 MM: And the boss came back, said no. And so he came here. His sister - his oldest sister was already
19 here, and my mother grew up in rural Pennsylvania, and in 19 - I want to say 1945, she - the
20 family moved to New York. And that's where she went to high school and eventually graduated
21 from high school. And went - went straight into the business world, so she started working at a
22 department store called Abraham and Strauss, and so in her -
- 23 AJ: What was it called?
- 24 MM: Abraham and Straus.
- 25 AJ: Abraham and Straus. Okay.
- 26 MM: Also known as A&S. And so she retired there. She worked for - for them for twenty-five years,
27 and then she actually became part of the management in that store.
- 28 AJ: Okay.
- 29 MM: And she was one of the first Black managers in that department store.
- 30 AJ: Wow. Yeah, and - you know, I mean, Panamanians, you know, I don't want to necessarily
31 stereotype, or whatever, but many of the people that I've met from Panamania and other sort
32 of Caribbean islands and countries have a very political, intellectual outlook on life -
- 33 MM: They do. You have to to survive.
- 34 AJ: - that's really different from many, quote, African Americans. I don't - you know, I think -

- 1 MM: I would - I would say that's true. Most of the Panamanians I know now, most of the Caribbean
2 people that I know, are very political because they realize that - you know, people get killed for -
3 for politics in these countries, okay?
- 4 AJ: Right.
- 5 MM: And people you - I mean, your bread can come from the politician that's in power now. And if he
6 loses power, then you don't have no bread.
- 7 AJ: Right.
- 8 MM: Who gets the jobs? The people that's connected. Who don't get the jobs? The people that's not
9 connected. So, like, literally, your life depends on knowing politics. And so I - I think that that's
10 how I became so infatuated with politics, from my parents.
- 11 AJ: Wow. So, your infatuation with politics has led you to some very interesting places. Including
12 your current position, which is...?
- 13 MM: I'm a community liaison with the office of the State's Attorney for Baltimore city. And in the
14 summer of 2016, I was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention from the state of
15 Maryland.
- 16 AJ: Wow.
- 17 MM: I was the only out Black trans man at the entire convention, and there were about, from what I
18 understand, about three thousand people there, and I was the only out Black trans man.
- 19 AJ: Yeah. And you - I - I hear your emphasis on the word out, but we can probably safely assume -
- 20 MM: Yeah.
- 21 AJ: - that you were the only Black trans man there.
- 22 MM: That could be a possibility. I don't want to throw nobody shade, 'cause I don't know.
- 23 AJ: Right? Well, you -
- 24 MM: But that - that's probably a safe thing to say.
- 25 AJ: Yeah. We - we never know. But, you know, in 2016 -
- 26 MM: Right.
- 27 AJ: - most Black trans men are not stealth. Like, they're - they're out, you know?
- 28 MM: I mean, a good portion of us are out, but there are also - I mean, I've met a lot of guys who are
29 either low- or non-disclosing. And a lot of that has to do with safety.
- 30 AJ: Yeah. Absolutely. Speak.
- 31 MM: And where - right. And where people live, and - I had to tell a - a girl that I was dating at one
32 point - I had to tell her that, for some people, transition is not a choice, so to speak.
- 33 AJ: Right.

- 1 MM: You are transitioning to survive and live in that environment. So that may look like a young,
2 butch-identified, female-bodied person, deciding to go by male pronouns, and appearing male
3 so that they can actually live in safety.
- 4 AJ: Yeah.
- 5 MM: And this is happening all over the country. And I think that one of the things that people don't
6 realize is that people don't necessarily always have the level of choice others have, particularly
7 based on social or economic status. Based on life's experiences. Based on survival. You know,
8 you've got kids in foster care that are doing gender identity issues, so they not - may not be able
9 to transition 'til they get out of the foster care system.
- 10 AJ: Sure.
- 11 MM: And then after they get out of the foster care system, are they even supported? I mean, do they
12 - I mean, it's a - just a lot going on, and I just want to hold those individuals up, you know -
- 13 AJ: Absolutely. No, I get it. And that's -
- 14 MM: Because I'm - I'm out because of them. And I - and I want to be able to assist them in - in telling
15 their stories, so that we don't forget the most marginalized segments of our community.
- 16 AJ: Thank you for saying that. Tell me about this DNC experience! Like, what was that like? And then
17 I do want to - 'cause you actually worked for one of the most courageous quote politicians in the
18 country right now, Marilyn Mos - Mos -
- 19 MM: Mosby.
- 20 AJ: Mosby. Who - who made the choice to prosecute the six police officers who were implicated in
21 the death of Freddie Gray. So I want to talk about that, but first, I wanted to hear about the
- 22 AJ: DNC.
- 23 MM: - the DNC experience.
- 24 MM: It was - it was like Christmas, Easter, and my birthday all rolled up into one night.
- 25 AJ: What!
- 26 MM: On one side, it - it was just so incredible, like - it was so incredible to be in that space. To be with
27 people I had read about for - like, my entire life. Meeting Barbara Mikulski, meeting Elijah
28 Cummings, meeting members of the Baltimore city delegation to the general assembly, meeting
29 people -
- 30 AJ: And we should say, Barbara Mikulski is senator, and -
- 31 MM: Yes. Former - former senator from the state of Maryland. She'll always be Senator Barb.
32 Meeting members of the Baltimore county council and actually having cogent conversations
33 with people, legislators, about our community and how folks are showing up. Because
34 oftentimes, because some of us blend really well, people don't know that trans folks are in the
35 room.

- 1 AJ: Right.
- 2 MM: And so when - when folks show up, and you're like, "I'm trans," you know, they're like, "Wow!"
3 Right? And so that was a very interesting experience, but the other part of that was in - in the
4 realization of that we really have to change the trajectory of a lot of these party politics, because
5 politics is an - an expensive endeavor. I had to raise money for that. I had to raise a - a couple of
6 thousand dollars for that, to go, and I live in Baltimore, so Philadelphia was on right up the
7 street.
- 8 AJ: Right. It wasn't that far.
- 9 MM: It wasn't that far, but in terms of accommodation, make sure I had money to eat and all of that,
10 room paid for. And actually, there was a mysterious donor who kicked in the rest of the funds
11 for the - for the room, and I'm - I'm incredibly grateful. And how we really need to turn back to
12 the small town local shop politics that really represent the interests of the people, because right
13 now, regardless of party, things are out of control. And - and - and common, everyday folk don't
14 have a voice.
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 MM: In - in the process, and I think that we really need to revamp, and - and if we are to move
17 forward in a trajectory of equality and equity, right, for everyone, we have to change the nature
18 of this political system.
- 19 AJ: Right. Not just equality, but equity.
- 20 MM: Equity.
- 21 AJ: Right?
- 22 MM: Right. Because you - because the thing about it is when people say equality, that's often a very
23 loaded term, because oftentimes - how does that show up in real time? Like, does that - so does
24 equality necessarily mean, like, okay, so now that there's same-sex marriage, so now people of
25 the same sex can get married, but you still can get fired on Monday, though, in some of these
26 states.
- 27 AJ: Right.
- 28 MM: So is that really equality?
- 29 AJ: Right.
- 30 MM: It's not equitable. It's not fair.
- 31 AJ: Right.
- 32 MM: And so what we need to talk about now, in this day and time, is equity and how it shows up for
33 people. Do - so should your destiny as a human being be decided according to your zipcode?
- 34 AJ: Yeah.
- 35 MM: Because that's what's happening in Baltimore right now. I mean, you've got areas in Baltimore

- 1 where life expectancy for Black people is the same as sub-Saharan - some areas of sub-Saharan
2 Africa.
- 3 AJ: Right.
- 4 MM: And so we need to address that, because if America is supposed to be what it says it is, then
5 there's such - then this situation is untenable.
- 6 AJ: And you live in Baltimore.
- 7 MM: I do. I live in Baltimore now. I've been there for about twenty years.
- 8 AJ: And you work for Marilyn Mosby.
- 9 MM: Yes.
- 10 AJ: What is that like? What was the mood of the office during the trials, and - and, you know, for
11 people who are watching this who may not know, all six of those officers were exonerated,
12 basically.
- 13 MM: Well, Chief -
- 14 AJ: Even though I know they don't -
- 15 MM: Right.
- 16 AJ: - feel that way.
- 17 MM: Yeah. I mean, a couple of them we decided not to pursue - the office didn't pursue charges, the
18 others - the others were acquitted, and one was ended in a hung jury. Working for Mrs. Mosby
19 is one of the greatest joys in my life because she gets it. And she is about justice. She is the real
20 deal. She understands that the criminal justice system needs reform, and she also understands
21 that all people should be treated with fairness before the law. And I think what is so
22 extraordinary about her is not just her youth, but her depth of understanding around the
23 everyday problems that people face, and her effort to try and right the ship that wasn't - that
24 hasn't been right since we got here, and her effort to equitably apply the law. And when she
25 said no one was above the law, she meant that. And I think that what overturned so many apple
26 carts in terms of that particular case was that she decided that she - she decided that folks
27 needed to be held accountable for the death of a young man. And I think that, in terms of the
28 uprising - the uprising happened, not because of this individual one person. It's been years and
29 years and years of abuse. I mean, you know - the rough ride that he got - that he got and
30 sustained his injuries?
- 31 AJ: Right.
- 32 MM: They called it a nickel ride in Baltimore.
- 33 AJ: A nickel?
- 34 MM: A nickel ride.
- 35 AJ: Right.

- 1 MM: Because you get a - marks, the size of a nickel, on your head when you bouncing around -
2 AJ: Bouncing around in the back of that.
3 MM: - in the back of that metal van.
4 AJ: Sure.
5 MM: So this is a thing, and it's been happening for years. My - my Buddhist godmother, who is sixty-
6 seven now, she could tell you about nickel rides that happened in her time, and she's sixty-
7 seven.
8 AJ: Right.
9 MM: So I think what people need to understand that this was a collective outrage. After years of
10 abuse and neglect.
11 AJ: It wasn't just Freddie Gray.
12 MM: Right.
13 AJ: Freddie Gray was the symbol for all of this -
14 MM: Right.
15 AJ: - pent up -
16 MM: Rage.
17 AJ: - anger, and -
18 MM: Yes.
19 AJ: - frustration -
20 MM: Yes.
21 AJ: - over years and decades. Yeah.
22 MM: Yes. People are tired of being dehumanized, and so that was a - a - a cry for help, and she
23 understood, and the evidence led her to do what she did. And at the end of the day, she never
24 promised that they would be found guilty. She did promise they would have their day in court.
25 AJ: Yeah.
26 MM: And some of them did.
27 AJ: Yeah. Wow. That's fascinating. What's your job like? What's your job?
28 MM: Well, I am a community liaison for the office, and so what I do is I connect members of the
29 community to the services that we have in the office. So the office itself prosecutes over fifty
30 thousand cases a year. But we just don't prosecute cases. So one of our main jobs - I'm working
31 in the victim services field right now, so I help people connect to services that they can - that
32 they can get if they are victims of crimes. So that looks like compensation for property, or - or

- 1 damage that you may have had because of this horrible crime. That looks like counseling, if you
2 are a victim of a crime. That looks like working with folks who feel that they're unsafe because
3 they are victims or they might be a witness, so we do safety assessments. And so I really love my
4 job, because what it has allowed me to do is, it has allowed me to go back into our community
5 to talk about the criminal justice system, which is one of the most mysterious systems that we
6 have here in the United States. And so I - I am so happy that I've been blessed with this
7 opportunity to do that.
- 8 AJ: Yeah. That's great. Great work. So when, Merrick, was the first time you recognized that you
9 were not the gender you were assigned at birth?
- 10 MM: I would have to say in childhood, I really - I really, really, really outwardly wanted to appear
11 male. And I did the best I could to approximate it.
- 12 AJ: Right.
- 13 MM: And so the blessing of growing up in that time in - in Queens, is that in the hip hop era, you
14 know, boy or girl, you could wear baggy pants, jeans -
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 MM: - Carhartts -
- 17 AJ: Hat to the back.
- 18 MM: Hat to the back. I remember stealing some of my father's clothes.
- 19 AJ: Okay.
- 20 MM: Particularly his Carhartt flannels and stuff. And so that was a blessing, right? So - I had to been
21 about maybe five - maybe six or seven when I was like, "I don't resonate with those folks." But
22 there was no outlet.
- 23 AJ: Women.
- 24 MM: Yeah. Yeah, like, I just - I wasn't a girly girl. I wasn't doing that. I didn't want to do that. And - ha.
25 I mean - but - at that time, it was like, really no outlet -
- 26 AJ: Sure.
- 27 MM: - for me to express that at all, right? And so I did what I could. I watched Yentl like, a thousand
28 times. You know what I'm saying?
- 29 AJ: Is that the Jewish story of -
- 30 MM: Yes, where she - where Barbra Streisand becomes Yentl so that -
- 31 AJ: Right.
- 32 MM: - she could study the Torah. But ends up falling in love with her Talmudic partner, and then was
33 forced to marry a girl - like, it was just a whole bunch of stuff -
- 34 AJ: Right.

- 1 MM: - right, and I watched that, like, a good thousand times.
- 2 AJ: Oh, my goodness.
- 3 MM: Because it just so resonated with me, you know what I'm saying? And I -
- 4 AJ: That was your outlet. That was your -
- 5 MM: That was my outlet.
- 6 AJ: - escape.
- 7 MM: Yeah, absolutely. And then when I started to experience same sex attractions to other girls in my
8 environment, that was frightening for me, 'cause I didn't know what that was. But when I came
9 out as a lesbian in 1998 -
- 10 AJ: Okay.
- 11 MM: - I was able to really express that, and the - it - and the pieces started to fit together. 'Cause I
12 didn't really - I had all these pieces of my feelings, and of my emotions all over the place, and
13 when I came out, they just seemed to fit. But there was something missing, and I didn't know
14 what it was. And that was - that was until I started going to therapy in 2011, around my gender
15 identity issues. And my counselor at the time sat me down and told me that he thought I was
16 transgender, and I cussed him out. I was -
- 17 AJ: Yeah?
- 18 MM: I was not trying to hear that. Because at the time, I was involved in a - in trans exclusionary
19 radical feminism.
- 20 AJ: Really? You were a proponent of -
- 21 MM: Yeah, I was. I'm - I'm going to freely admit that. Because - and what I realized too was that when
22 people -
- 23 AJ: I'm loving this!
- 24 MM: When people are -
- 25 AJ: Speak!
- 26 MM: When people are sick, and you are running from yourself, you will run to the thing that you can
27 hide under the most.
- 28 AJ: Sure.
- 29 MM: And that was that.
- 30 AJ: Yeah.
- 31 MM: For me. And it was very interesting, being in that world, and -
- 32 AJ: And let's just clarify.

- 1 MM: Yes.
- 2 AJ: Trans-exclusionary radical feminist, the theory is that trans women are not women.
- 3 MM: Right.
- 4 AJ: Right?
- 5 MM: Right.
- 6 AJ: Trans men are not men.
- 7 MM: Right.
- 8 AJ: They are -
- 9 MM: They're -
- 10 AJ: - infiltrating, they are imposters, they are -
- 11 MM: Get sex assigned at birth, and whatever that is, is what it is. And you know, very dangerous
12 myths around transgender people. And -
- 13 AJ: So you didn't want to hear nothing this -
- 14 MM: Oh, no.
- 15 AJ: - therapist was saying.
- 16 MM: Nope. I - I didn't. I was like, "I don't know what you talking about. Why would you group me
17 with them?"
- 18 AJ: Right.
- 19 MM: I'm like, I had a real, you know, and I - and I - and I admittedly hurt a lot of people in that
20 process. And what I tell people is that hurt people really do hurt people.
- 21 AJ: That's true.
- 22 MM: And so I was so blinded by my own gender issues, so running from myself, that I could not even
23 deal with that. Like, I just couldn't deal with that. But secretly, in my heart, I was like, I - I wish I
24 could be that. I mean, it even got to the point that I started taking herbal testosterone boosters.
- 25 AJ: Really?
- 26 MM: Yes, because I thought it would butch me up, right?
- 27 AJ: Yeah?
- 28 MM: And what I realized, as I began my transition, was that was my outlet to transition without
29 transitioning and without giving up this claim of that whole womyn-born-womyn thing, you
30 know?
- 31 AJ: Wow. What - what was the turning point? How did you - I mean -

- 1 MM: The turning -
2 AJ: - the therapist was kind of giving you some insight into this -
3 MM: Right.
4 AJ: - but you said no -
5 MM: Right.
6 AJ: And then so how did you...?
7 MM: The turning point, it was - I began my medical trans - transition 2014. The turning point was at
8 the end of 2013, beginning of 2014, I decided I wanted to stop drinking so much. You know? A
9 half a pint a day of gin can grow on you.
10 AJ: Yeah.
11 MM: And so I'm carrying all this -
12 AJ: Half a pint, you said?
13 MM: Yes.
14 AJ: Okay.
15 MM: So I'm carrying all this around, I'm an activist in my community, and I just got tired of being sick
16 and tired. And so I decided - I said, "I'mma deal with this gender issue once and for all," so I
17 started seeing another therapist, a licensed therapist, around gender identity. And in, I think it
18 was February or March, I decided to try testosterone for ninety days.
19 AJ: Okay.
20 MM: See, 'cause I had heard all these horrible things about testosterone.
21 AJ: Right.
22 MM: Like it was going to kill me, shoot up my blood pressure -
23 AJ: Right.
24 MM: I could die. I could stroke out. It was a tool of the enemy. It was a tool of the medical
25 establishment to get rid of gay people, blah blah blah. So I asked a lot of questions, did a lot of
26 research, and my - and my therapist was like, "No. Look, why don't you just try it and - and
27 there's medical interventions around it, so you not going to be out here by yourself."
28 AJ: Right.
29 MM: "Just try it. See how you feel. If you like it, then continue. If you don't, then you don't have - "
30 AJ: You stop. Right.
31 MM: "You can stop." And so after ninety days, I had felt...better than I had in probably, I don't know,
32 since my early twenties. And I was like, I want to be this.

- 1 AJ: Wow.
- 2 MM: And so that looked like me staying up late at night looking at all these videos of trans men, and I
3 tell Reverend Louis Mitchell, and I tell Kylar Broadus, and - I - I haven't had the chance to meet
4 Doctor Kortney Ziegler yet, or Doctor Kai Green. But these were videos - like, the - all these guys
5 had videos. I would watch them.
- 6 AJ: Right.
- 7 MM: Like - like, two, three o'clock in the morning, because I couldn't sleep, I was just so excited. And -
8 and - and Tiq Milan, and - Brother Tiq, and they gave me a framework to work with as a Black
9 man. Because the narrative that I was hearing from the general establishment, right? So-called
10 mainstream trans establishment, the whole wrong body narrative, didn't necessarily fit me,
11 because I'm also a practicing Buddhist, right?
- 12 AJ: Right.
- 13 MM: So I did - I didn't feel like I was born in the wrong body. I felt like I created the karma over
14 lifetimes to be born in this body. So what does that mean? And they gave me a framework to
15 understand that I evolved away from my assignment at birth. That I wasn't born in the wrong
16 body, and that people like us have been around for millenia.
- 17 AJ: Right.
- 18 MM: And I think that that's another thing that really hampers the movement of - in general, in this
19 whole idea of wrong body narrative. That's not a stock narrative for everybody -
- 20 AJ: Right.
- 21 MM: - first of all. And second of all, as trans folks - as - as differently-gendered folks, we have existed
22 since humanity existed. And so I, too, have a place in the - in the panoply of the human family.
23 And I think that when we - when we start talking about that history, then it gives us a context
24 for our lives now. And - and we need a - we need to do a better job of flushing that out. And -
25 and I know, as trans folks of color, oftentimes we do talk about that, and - 'cause I've heard so
26 many people go back into the indigenous traditions, the traditions of various African ethnicities
27 around gender identity, and - and I have to say also, too, that even in the Ifa panoply, even in
28 the Yoruba panoply, we look at -
- 29 AJ: Ifa, I-F-E...
- 30 MM: I-F-A.
- 31 AJ: I-F-A. Okay.
- 32 MM: Spirituality, spiritual system in - of the Yoruba people, even Obatala is male or female. Obatala is
33 the deity of the heavens, and the sky. And Olokun, who is the deity of the bottom of the sea.
34 Olokun is male or female. So obviously, right, and this system is ten thousand years old on the
35 earth, and when we came over in the period of enslavement, it's been - it - it changed form. So
36 it - it - in the Caribbean, it may be known as Santería, and maybe known as Vodou. In Brazil it's
37 known as Candomblé, in New Orleans it's known as voodoo or hoodoo. We have always existed.

- 1 If - if we are reflection of god, and you're telling me the deity who's in charge of the sky is male
2 or female and the deity in charge of the bottom of the sea is male or female, I'm in that.
- 3 AJ: Yeah.
- 4 MM: So I've always been here.
- 5 AJ: Right.
- 6 MM: You know?
- 7 AJ: God, so many questions for you! How - what have been some of the challenges you've faced
8 since you've come out? And, related to that, you are now perceived as a Black male in American
9 culture and society.
- 10 MM: That's a - that's a - that's a big - that's a big chunk wall. First of all, I've had - I've had some family
11 issues. I've had people in my own birth family distance themselves from me.
- 12 AJ: Are your parents still alive?
- 13 MM: No. Both of them have passed on. And so I've done some spiritual work around - a - around that
14 as well. Particularly before I changed my name, because my name - my - my deadname, I was
15 named after my father's two sisters. And so the name that I current - that I have now is a
16 variation of the name that I had before, and Moses is the name that my grandfather used. My
17 last name is actually Moise, and that, in French, means Moses. And when he was in Panama,
18 people used to call my grandfather Old Mose.
- 19 AJ: Old Mose.
- 20 MM: Yes. So that's the way I got that name. So, in terms of my mother's family, that's been very
21 interesting. There are people who kind of don't talk to me. Or - it's - it's weird, but, I mean, you
22 know, I don't want to curse on camera, but I'm going to say it: like, I really don't give a shit, you
23 know what I'm saying?
- 24 AJ: You can curse on this camera if you want to! I don't have a problem with it, but -
- 25 MM: I mean, I don't - I don't - I don't - I don't really care about that, because I - I'm living the life that
26 was ordained for me.
- 27 AJ: Right.
- 28 MM: And - but, surprisingly enough, my father's side of the family has been very accepting. My
29 cousins, particularly, who I'm in touch with - that - it's just been so accepting.
- 30 AJ: The Panamanian side -
- 31 MM: Right.
- 32 AJ: Which is - you might -
- 33 MM: Right, exactly.
- 34 AJ: - think would be more transphobic, you know?

- 1 MM: Right. And I was like “Wow, okay!” In terms of my community work, at the time, like, at - at the
2 very start of that - my transition at first, you know, some people didn’t know whether they could
3 trust me or not, because of my radical feminist dallings, or whatever. And I - I know that -
- 4 AJ: So you were very vocal about this -
- 5 MM: Oh, yeah.
- 6 AJ: - TERF business.
- 7 MM: Oh, yeah, I was. I was.
- 8 AJ: Wow.
- 9 MM: And - and I’ve also written about it in - in the local gay paper -
- 10 AJ: Really?
- 11 MM: - in Baltimore. Mhmm. And how I ended up there, and how I got out, and being very clear about
12 when people are ill - when I was ill, in terms of I was running from myself, I was in no position to
13 really face the truth at that time. And it’s when I was able to deal with myself, my heart, that I
14 was able to be the man that I am today, and in segueing into Black manhood - there is a learning
15 curve, right? Because I wasn’t socialized -
- 16 AJ: Right.
- 17 MM: - as a Black man.
- 18 AJ: Nope.
- 19 MM: However, I was privy to the conversations that my uncles and my cousins had around how to
20 handle yourself with the cops, how to handle yourself in certain situations, and as a - as a kid, as
21 a young person, I often found myself in male-dominated spaces. And even when I came out, in
22 ‘98, as a gay person, as a same-gender-loving person, I still ran with gay boys. I didn’t actually
23 have any lesbian friends until a year after.
- 24 AJ: Oh, wow. Okay.
- 25 MM: Until 1999.
- 26 AJ: Other than the women you were dating.
- 27 MM: I didn’t start dating until 1999.
- 28 AJ: Okay. All right.
- 29 MM: So, like, it was this year where I was literally running with gay boys.
- 30 AJ: All right.
- 31 MM: And most of my associates were gay men. So being in these spaces -
- 32 AJ: Let me ask you: Black gay men or white gay men?

- 1 MM: Black gay men. Black gay men.
- 2 AJ: Okay. All right.
- 3 MM: Yeah.
- 4 AJ: 'Cause there's a - there's a -
- 5 MM: There is a difference.
- 6 AJ: - cultural difference.
- 7 MM: There's definitely a cultural difference.
- 8 AJ: Yeah.
- 9 MM: And I didn't really meet any white gay men until I came to Baltimore.
- 10 AJ: Okay.
- 11 MM: And so it's been - it's a very big learning curve, right? That being said, I think that one of the
12 things that I've learned is that oftentimes Black men are so beaten down, and we are expecting
13 to take the abuse. And if you stand up, and say "Well, no, that doesn't seem correct, let me see
14 the manager or who's in charge here?" Then you're the one with the problem.
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 MM: But I just come from a space where - no. I'm not going to be treated as any other thing. I'm not
17 going to be dehumanized.
- 18 AJ: Sure.
- 19 MM: I will advocate for myself and for others. And so there've been instances where I have faced
20 discrimination, and then when I spoke up or - or took out a card and showed them my business
21 card, they - everybody now want to act crazy.
- 22 AJ: Right.
- 23 MM: "Oh, oh, oh!" But I shouldn't have had to do that, because as a human being, I should be treated
24 with respect.
- 25 AJ: Right. Exactly.
- 26 MM: And so that's been very interesting. I think one of the most interesting area - areas of my life is
27 the Black fraternity and sorority space. Because when I was at Morgan State University, I
28 pledged one of the Great Eight - Divine Nine, as they say now - organizations -
- 29 AJ: Yeah?
- 30 MM: - and it is still very much a part of my life.
- 31 AJ: Is that right?
- 32 MM: Yes. And that was - it's been a very interesting experience being on this side of the veil. Because

- 1 now - I mean - I mean, I've known -
- 2 AJ: So you're not willing to name the greek letter organization you're in?
- 3 MM: I - I'll put the -
- 4 AJ: You don't have to! I'm just -
- 5 MM: I - I'll put -
- 6 AJ: - asking!
- 7 MM: - I - I'll put - I will - the colors are blue and white.
- 8 AJ: All righty. All right. All right.
- 9 MM: And so what's very interesting in that space is that I was always tomboyish. I was always boyish,
- 10 right? So now, there are frat and sorors who don't know how to deal. 'Cause I show up.
- 11 AJ: Sorors. S-O-R -
- 12 MM: S-O-R-O-R-S.
- 13 AJ: O-R-S. Yeah, yeah, yeah..
- 14 MM: That don't know how to - to deal. And it's not the people from my hometown, because you
- 15 know, when you home, people know who you is, you know?
- 16 AJ: Right. Exactly. Yeah.
- 17 MM: It's some of the other folks that may have come in lines way before I did, or had rudimentary
- 18 dealings with me, that they - you know, they really - they kind of don't know. "What - what do
- 19 we say here?"
- 20 AJ: Right.
- 21 MM: You know? But I just keep -
- 22 AJ: So you're still actively involved with this organization?
- 23 MM: I am actively involved in it in that I go to functions and affairs and I speak to my frat brothers and
- 24 my sisters. And I show up as I is.
- 25 AJ: Come on with it!
- 26 MM: And I'm not the - and I'll say this, too. I'm not the only one in the chapter that has transitioned.
- 27 There's another trans man before me transitioned.
- 28 AJ: Okay.
- 29 MM: And I show up because it is important for people to understand I'm part of this history too.
- 30 AJ: Yeah.
- 31 MM: And - and I was talking to -

- 1 AJ: You're giving me chills right now.
- 2 MM: Yeah. And - and part of the reconciling of our people is the reconciling within these
3 organizations. And I personally believe that you going to see me. I put in twenty-plus years in
4 this. I pledged in the spring of 1994. It's 2017. Yes, I'm going to take my seat at the table.
- 5 AJ: Sure.
- 6 MM: 'Cause I earned it.
- 7 AJ: Wow.
- 8 MM: I had a brand - I have two brands on my leg. I earned it.
- 9 AJ: Okay. All righty. Once a, always a.
- 10 MM: Yeah. Exactly.
- 11 AJ: Okay. That's how that goes.
- 12 MM: That's how that goes.
- 13 AJ: What have been some of the joys since you've come out?
- 14 MM: Walking in my authentic self has been probably the greatest joy of my life. The only thing
15 comparable to that is probably my ordination to the office of deacon or office of priesthood.
- 16 AJ: Wow.
- 17 MM: And to walk in fully who I always wanted to look like. To shave my face. To bald my own head.
18 To be called "sir" and "mister" is something that I have been dream - have dreamed about for
19 most of my life. It's something that I kept very close to my heart in my vest. And so to be able to
20 walk in that. When I look in the mirror, I know dreams come true. When I look in the mirror, I
21 know that there is a god. And I am so thankful.
- 22 AJ: Wow. It is quite amazing to - to not only witness, but to have experienced that sort of walk
23 across gender. Like -
- 24 MM: Right. And it's a very rare human experience.
- 25 AJ: It's very rare.
- 26 MM: And I think that is the value of that experience, because I feel that as gender-variant persons, we
27 are healers, and we can help people understand each other across this divide. Because it is a big
28 gulf! As much as people want to say "Abolish gender!" and all that?
- 29 AJ: Yeah?
- 30 MM: At the end of the day, we live in a world where gender is a very real thing, and that there - there
31 are good portion of people on this planet - half the planet - that are completely disenfranchised
32 because of their gender.
- 33 AJ: Yes.

- 1 MM: And so being able -
- 2 AJ: As evidenced by Hillary Clinton losing the election.
- 3 MM: I mean the most - one of the most qualified people to ever run for the Office of the Presidency,
4 to be...first of all, swindled out of the presidency by a buffoon - should give us all pause. And
5 also the level of internalized misogyny that persons may have. When we look at the
6 demographics, and how that rolled out. I'm - I was - and we talked about this, about how I find it
7 very curious that white women would vote against their own sister. When she steps into a
8 room, the first thing you see is white womanhood. And they would - and - and - and the majority
9 of them would vote for someone who has committed sexual assault against their own kind
10 rather than their own sister.
- 11 AJ: Yeah.
- 12 MM: You know? And for me, I'm like, well, that is some soul-searching that you all have to do. You
13 know, everybody has to do their work on the earth, and some people, by virtue of patriarchy
14 and white supremacy, feel they don't have to do that work. But this time is calling for everybody
15 to do that work, including -
- 16 AJ: Yeah. Hey - let me - let me ask you this, Merrick, and please only answer this to the extent that
17 you feel comfortable. And you've already talked a - a little bit about, you know, testosterone.
18 What have been some of the medical interventions you have pursued on your gender journey?
19 And do you have plans for others?
- 20 MM: I had chest masculinization surgery on July 10, 2015.
- 21 AJ: That's the first time I've heard that phrase.
- 22 MM: I began my -
- 23 AJ: Also known as top surgery, right?
- 24 MM: Top surgery. I had top surgery.
- 25 AJ: But I love the phrasing! Chest masculization surgery.
- 26 MM: Surgery. Yes.
- 27 AJ: Wow.
- 28 MM: And I had - I began my medical intervention on May 5, 2014. I took my first shot of test - May 6,
29 I'm sorry. May 6, 2014. I took - I took my first shot of testosterone, so approximately a year
30 later, on July 10, 2015, I had my - I had chest masculinization, and then I had a hysterectomy on -
31 what was it - February 15th, 2016. Which ended up actually saving my life, because I had a
32 thyroid surgery in '09, and apparently the scar tissue from that surgery attached itself to my
33 appendix. And so I didn't realize it, and then when they - when they removed that part, the
34 doctor told me that my scar tissue from that surgery, still attached to my uterus, had fused with
35 my appendix. So had I gotten appendicitis, I wouldn't have even known and probably died.
- 36 AJ: Oh, wow.

- 1 MM: And also, too, I had a very large thyroid. So I was unhealthy and I didn't know it. And so those
2 are the medical interventions that I've had so far. I'm not planning on bottom surgery. That's
3 not something in my purview right now. 'Cause it's a lot of plumbing to rewire.
- 4 AJ: Yeah.
- 5 MM: But I don't knock anybody's hustle.
- 6 AJ: Hey. Do your thing, right?
- 7 MM: Hey. Whatever people have to do, they have to do. It's just not for me at this point.
- 8 AJ: Sure. Yeah. Talk to me about relationships, man. Like, are you in a relationship now?
- 9 MM: I am solo. I am solo. I just -
- 10 AJ: Do you still identify...
- 11 MM: I'm -
- 12 AJ: - as a -
- 13 MM: I identify as -
- 14 AJ: Well, now heterosexual, I guess.
- 15 MM: I identify as bisexual.
- 16 AJ: Okay.
- 17 MM: Because - this is - sometimes they don't tell you about orientation shifts when you are
18 transitioning, right?
- 19 AJ: Sure.
- 20 MM: So I didn't even know that was a thing. And so when I began my transition I was in a - a
21 relationship. And that fell apart. That was kind of crazy. And then - you know, I -
- 22 AJ: With a woman?
- 23 MM: Yes. I was with a cisgender woman -
- 24 AJ: With a cisgender woman?
- 25 MM: Uh huh.
- 26 AJ: Yeah.
- 27 MM: Who Identified as lesbian. Go figure, it didn't work out.
- 28 AJ: Right.
- 29 MM: And so -
- 30 AJ: She's like. "No, dude, peace out."

- 1 MM: Yeah. Yeah. And it was crazy. It was crazy the way that whole thing rolled out. And then dating
2 two women after that - like, seriously dating two women after that. But during that processes -
3 during that process, realizing that I was also attracted to men, too. I had dated men in - in - I had
4 dated guys when I was in high school, and in fact two of my boyfriends in high school were gay.
5 Go figure. And they're, like, out gay men right now.
- 6 AJ: Wow. That's interesting.
- 7 MM: Yeah. It's a - it's amazing, seeing your ex-boyfriend after a time, like, "Wow! Okay." And so then
8 in - in this process of transition, my orientation expanding. And I didn't expect that. And it was
9 kind of frightening for me, because now it has forced me to work on my own internalized
10 homophobia.
- 11 AJ: Sure.
- 12 MM: Which was big. So even though I had hung - hung out with gay men, and I - I mean, lived for - for
13 the - for the boy children, lived for them. What I realized was that the - the recording in my head
14 was old narratives from my childhood around gayness. Around being same-gender-loving. And
15 being a faggot. I remember telling a girl that I dated, "I'm not a faggot." And I said it, like, five
16 times, and she was like, "You're doing a lot of this. What's going on with that?" And at - at the
17 time, I really couldn't say to her what it was, but now doing work on that in therapy, I realized
18 that I have a lot of internalized homophobia that I've had to unpack.
- 19 AJ: Sure.
- 20 MM: And in order for me to heal my - live my best life, I have to heal that part of me, too. So I'm in
21 active healing, in terms of that. And I am working through that.
- 22 AJ: Wow.
- 23 MM: You know, and embracing my gayness. And that's a - that's very interesting, because even dating
24 on that side is very interesting, because...I've met a lot of gay men who don't know what trans
25 man is.
- 26 AJ: Right.
- 27 MM: Like, I've literally had to Google and send the definition to one guy that I was interested in. And
28 so he just wanted to ask all these weird salacious question, that I was not here for. I've met
29 other cisgender gay guys who are interested, but they were really - I'm not Exhibit A, or
30 someone's pet -
- 31 AJ: Sure.
- 32 MM: So that's out.
- 33 AJ: Yeah.
- 34 MM: And so finding a relationship as it is now, with a man, can be quite difficult. And I do like - I do - I
35 am very attracted to trans men, so trans men I also like very much.
- 36 AJ: Okay.

- 1 MM: And so - and what is - what is that like? 'Cause we have a small community, so sometimes when
2 - you know, when you date in a community?
- 3 AJ: Right.
- 4 MM: That can be interesting, too, so I'm very hopeful about that.
- 5 AJ: Let's talk about some of those intra-communal politics. You know, I know for myself, one of the
6 most challenging coming-out experiences was coming out as lesbian, and - and being attracted
7 to female-identified people, and cisgender women, and, you know, there's a - a big taboo within
8 the Black transfeminine community, that you don't date women. Like - so that was kind of a big
9 thing. Like, how do - how do you experience that? Is that a thing in the Black transmasculine
10 community, or...?
- 11 MM: There is definitely homophobia in the Black transmasculine community. And it comes out, like,
12 sometimes I'll hear - particularly among the younger guys - "No homo," or "That's some faggy
13 shit."
- 14 AJ: Right.
- 15 MM: And it's kind of like, no. Trans men do have a sexual orientation, too.
- 16 AJ: Right.
- 17 MM: So that's another thing that we have to clarify within the community, that just because I'm trans
18 doesn't mean that I'm heterosexual. It doesn't mean that I don't have a gender - a - a - a sexual
19 orientation.
- 20 AJ: Right.
- 21 MM: So really educating ourselves around that, and how language helps or hurts, and also dealing
22 with homophobia within the trans community. In - like, okay. And so, it - there's a mirror thing
23 going on. So we - we really need to deal with transphobia within same-gender-loving and
24 bisexual spaces, but we also need to deal with homophobia and biphobia in transgender spaces.
25 And we need to have these conversations simultaneously.
- 26 AJ: Sure.
- 27 MM: So we can walk and chew gum at the same time.
- 28 AJ: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- 29 MM: And so being an out bi guy who happens to be transgender is very interesting. 'Cause I still love
30 women, but I also love men, too.
- 31 AJ: Yeah. Absolutely. What do you think the relationship is between the L, G, B, and T? Like, should
32 we stay - keep this acronym together, or should trans people just go on our own? Like, what's
33 your thought? I'm not trying to lead the question, I'm just trying to get clarity.
- 34 MM: I - I believe in self determination for all communities. So that includes the LGB - the G, the B, and
35 the T. But I'm also, too, slowly but surely moving away from the construct of that, and moving

- 1 into a space of same-gender-loving. Because what same-gender-loving does, is first of all, was
2 developed by a Black man who was very centered on Blackness and the liberation of Blackness.
- 3 AJ: Yes.
- 4 MM: And this is Dr. Cleo Manago. And he's a very controversial -
- 5 AJ: Could you spell his name? I'm sorry.
- 6 MM: M-A-N-A-G-O.
- 7 AJ: Okay.
- 8 MM: And he's a -
- 9 AJ: Clemen?
- 10 MM: Cleo.
- 11 AJ: Cleo. Okay, got it.
- 12 MM: C-L-O.
- 13 AJ: Got it. Okay.
- 14 MM: C-L-E-O. And so he's a very controversial figure. And what I've come to understand -
- 15 AJ: I know the term, I never knew the person who coined this phrase.
- 16 MM: And he's - and he's still alive, and well, and he's the - he's the head of the Black Men's XChange
17 which is a - is a organization for same-gender - same-gender-loving and bisexual Black men.
- 18 AJ: Okay.
- 19 MM: And so move - moving into this construct, what I realized is that I have - I'm moving into that
20 space because I've faced so much racism in the LGBT community. So much. And I've often had
21 to educate my cisgender, heterosexual Black brothers and sisters around it.
- 22 AJ: Right.
- 23 MM: 'Cause they think we're just one happy rainbow family.
- 24 AJ: Right.
- 25 MM: I'm like, "Child, let me tell you how - "
- 26 AJ: Okay.
- 27 MM: " - these children are trying to carry the Black children on they - "
- 28 AJ: Right.
- 29 MM: And they - like, a lot of times, they gag.
- 30 AJ: Right.

- 1 MM: 'Cause they just see us as one thing, and I'm like, "At the end of the day? I'm still Black."
- 2 AJ: Yeah.
- 3 MM: And I'm still living next to you.
- 4 AJ: Exactly.
- 5 MM: And I daresay, in the right context, feel safer in Black spaces. Sometimes, as opposed to this
6 whole suppose - supposedly LGBT space. Because the racism that I've seen in this space, and
7 personally witnessed and experienced, can be quite dangerous. And so -
- 8 AJ: Come on, preacher! Can I call you preacher?
- 9 MM: Yes! I mean, and - and - and that's another thing, too, that people need to get their minds right
10 around this. Particularly around - 'cause I did work on marriage in Maryland.
- 11 AJ: Sure.
- 12 MM: And some of the Columbusing of Malcolm X - of Martin Luther King by the so-called mainstream
13 LGBT movement, and then when Prop 8 rolled out, and was successful, all these white gays and
14 lesbians literally tried to throw Black LGBT people under the bus.
- 15 AJ: Well, they did. They - they - yeah.
- 16 MM: They threw us under the bus.
- 17 AJ: Exactly.
- 18 MM: And then when the vote came out, it was the whites in northern California who sunk that ship.
- 19 AJ: Right.
- 20 MM: And once again, negroes are to blame for your problems?
- 21 AJ: Yeah.
- 22 MM: It was then I was like, see? We need another construct. And - and so - which is what I appreciate
23 about same-gender-loving. And - I'd be a - in space. And that being said, there's education and
24 work that I'm doing in that space around transmen, and transmen who are attracted to same
25 gender. Transmen who are bisexual. Like, we need a framework for us, too, and I think that's
26 where Black Transmen, Inc. comes in. I'm a serving leader for Black Transmen, Inc. and Black
27 Trans Advocacy in the Maryland/DC area.
- 28 AJ: Which found - that was founded in Dallas?
- 29 MM: Yes. In Dallas, Texas. 2011, I believe, by Carter Brown. Shout out to Carter Brown.
- 30 AJ: What up, Carter!
- 31 MM: And my mentor in that is - one of my mentors and a very dear and old friend of mine - is Michael
32 Millhouse. And seeing strong Black transmen stand up and embrace brothers regardless of
33 sexual orientation, has been one of the most healing forces in my life. And I think that it's

- 1 important that transmen of African descent really, really learn unity. This is important for us.
2 And we learn how to cultivate a healthy masculinity, and that if I'm showing up in this space,
3 that doesn't mean that I've taken on all the toxic masculinity - I've taken on toxic masculinity
4 from my cisgender counterparts. And I think it's always - I think that we really need to start
5 talking about that, and we also need to start talking about how transmasculine folk face
6 unprecedented levels of violence in our own community, and how that shows up, and
7 oftentimes when we killed - when we're killed, we are identified as female.
- 8 AJ: Right.
- 9 MM: So we are erased. And I think that that is a narrative that we really need to talk about and
10 expand upon.
- 11 AJ: Wow. Talk to me a little bit about your spirituality and religiosity. What denomination do you
12 study under, and if it is Christian-based with - and Buddhist-based, how does that interact with
13 more traditional African religions like Santería, and voodoo, hoodoo.
- 14 MM: You got it all. I think somebody's in your ear. So I am an ordained Old Catholic priest. I was
15 raised only Catholic, but the Roman Catholicism that I grew up with was very Latin-American
16 based, because my father was Black Panamanian.
- 17 AJ: Okay.
- 18 MM: I began my religious search, my spiritual search, at the age of nine, and I taught myself how to
19 meditate - Buddhist meditation from books. And I was getting magazines from a Zen Center in
20 Queens. And I discovered Buddhism through martial arts movies. The monks always looked so
21 peaceful, and calm, and I actually wanted to do - be that. And I was suffering a lot in that space. I
22 had - like I said, I had gender issues, drug issues around me, in terms of growing up, violence,
23 people getting murdered. My cousin, who I was saying before was like my brother, he - he
24 ended up getting murdered over a girl.
- 25 AJ: Oh, no.
- 26 MM: In front of a post office. And so I was looking for a way out of that suffering, and that's how I
27 found Buddhism. And I actually began chanting nam-myoho-renge-kyo when I was eighteen, in
28 1992, and this is actually my twenty-fifth year of practice, which is amazing to me. I came back
29 to the church - so I left the church for a while, and I came back to the church around 2001. After
30 9/11, 'cause I - I was like, "Okay." Like, the catharsis was starting to kick into my psyche. I was
31 like, "I need to right - get right with God." But I needed to find a church that affirmed me and
32 who I am.
- 33 AJ: Sure.
- 34 MM: So I started to - so I started to go to different Roman churches, and I found the Old Catholic
35 church. And so when I found I was able to be ordained, and I had always wanted to be ordained,
36 I felt I had a calling in my - in my life. In 2004, I was ordained to the diaconate, and then in 2008
37 I was ordained to the priesthood. And Old Catholicism can be like the Wild Wild West of
38 Catholicism, like it can be very disorganized at times and rather dysfunctional. And the Old
39 Catholics that see this - 'cause there are a lot of Old Catholics in Minnesota.

- 1 AJ: This is my first time hearing this term, Old Catholic. I didn't know it.
- 2 MM: It actually - the Old Catholic church comes from Europe. We broke away from the Roman church
3 during the Vatican ruling council, over the doctrine of papal infallibility. So we do not believe the
4 pope is infallible.
- 5 AJ: Is - okay.
- 6 MM: So the word Old comes from the bishops of Uetrecht modeling the church after the primitive
7 church, the early church. And it's called Old because it hearkens back to a primitive church in
8 which the bishop of Rome was first among equals. But he was not infallible.
- 9 AJ: Right.
- 10 MM: And so - and so many of - much of the catechism that we do have hearkens back to the old
11 church, which is why we use the term Old Catholic, and it came to - in fact, it came to America a
12 - like, I would probably say from, like, 18 - the 18 - late 1800s with the migration of Scandivian
13 immigrants to the middle of the country. And so there was a bishop named Rene Vilatte who
14 was sent by the bishops of Utrecht to minister to these folks. And to their dismay, he started to
15 ordain people profusely.
- 16 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 17 MM: And they didn't like that.
- 18 AJ: Okay.
- 19 MM: He was ordaining people without their permission, and they were over it. And so there's a rift
20 with the American Old Catholic churches and the churches of Utrecht, which I hope will be
21 mended sometime this century, but who knows. And so the Old Catholic church is really - in
22 America is really a group of churches, denominations within Old Catholic Catholicism. And so I
23 also attend an Episcopal church, so that's a very interesting journey. And I found the Episcopal
24 Church is very - my particular church is very open and affirming and warm. And in fact, I had a
25 renaming ceremony.
- 26 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 27 MM: In 2015. And just the love that I've received in this church is amazing, and this is a mixed-race
28 congregation, and some of the Black folks are Caribbean folks, and the level of love that I have
29 received in this con - congregation is amazing.
- 30 AJ: Wow.
- 31 MM: And so in terms of Ifa, I became interested in Santería as a young person. I built my first altar to
32 a saint when I was sixteen, seventeen. And what I realized, being that this system is ten
33 thousand years old, it affirms parts of my being that are not usually affirmed in public spaces.
34 The - the deep, deep, deep, deep, deep African parts. And I find strength in that as well.
- 35 AJ: Beautiful answer. Last question, Merrick. Where do you see - no, let me reframe that just a little
36 bit. Is there an agenda for the transgender community? If so, what is it, in your mind? And

- 1 where do you see the trans community fifty years from now?
- 2 MM: I think the agenda for the trans community, if there was one, would be freedom, justice,
3 equality and equity. Would be liberation, would be being able to live life on your terms, and -
4 and really pursue happiness. What is it, the pursuit of life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness -
5 unfettered by laws, by other people's religiosity and them trying to impose that on us. I see that
6 as the central agenda and policy springing from that. Being able to get the medical interventions
7 that you deem necessary for your life without question, and without resistance. In fifty years, I
8 believe that our community will look radically different. I think that people will be transitioning
9 younger and younger, and we're already starting to see -
- 10 AJ: We're experiencing that now, right?
- 11 MM: - that right now, yeah. Yes. And that - what I hope is that we take our rightful place as healers on
12 the planet. And I hope that we also develop a global communion with our gender variant
13 brothers and sisters around the world. I think that will - for many of us, that will turn the tide
14 when we meet transgender people from all over the world, and I think that, in terms of our
15 American movement, we will understand and see that, although this is a very rare human
16 experience, it is a very valuable human experience. And so within that context, I would hope
17 that our society as a whole will move towards a humanistic framework where we value each
18 human being as a human being, as opposed to the lens of the deification of some over others,
19 right? And so as I - as I was saying before, I think that one of the things generally in this society
20 that I'm hoping for is that we move away from a Judeo-Christian framework in how we govern
21 ourselves. And I know this might sound crazy coming from a old Catholic priest, but I'm saying
22 this because so many of us have been injured by Judeo-Christian frameworks and the
23 interpretation of the sacred texts of this particular faith construct. But when we move to a
24 humanistic framework, and actually value human beings for who they are, then we can do so
25 much good on the earth.
- 26 AJ: Wow.
- 27 MM: That is my vision. That's my hope.
- 28 AJ: Merrick, I cannot thank you enough for sharing this part of your journey with me, and with
29 hundreds and thousands of others, for that matter. Eventually. Potentially. I don't know, it
30 might only be one person who watches this. Who knows.
- 31 MM: Who knows.
- 32 AJ: Who knows. But I - I - I've been educated. I've been moved. I've been inspired, and I've been
33 very much blessed in this hour shared with you. Thank you so much.
- 34 MM: Thank you for the opportunity to not just share my story, but to share it with others, and I hope
35 that this helps somebody somewhere someday.
- 36 AJ: I'm absolutely positive it will. Peace out.
- 37 MM: Peace!