

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

MISS MAJOR GRIFFIN GRACY

LGBTQ+ activist

“We lived our true selves. We enjoyed our lives. We did what we had to do to survive.”

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PHOTO BY MICKALINE THOMAS

Background Information

Born October 25, 1940.

Gracy was raised in South Side, Chicago. She is a transgender woman and an activist for transgender rights. She is focused on rights of transgender women of color. Gracy faced discrimination from her peers growing up. As a young adult, she was sometimes homeless. After her family kicked her out, she moved from Chicago to New York and tried to enroll in college. Gracy was removed from two colleges because of her outward expression of her identity. Because of her experiences with adversity, she dedicated her life to advocating for trans women of color and those facing poverty.

Gracy's Resistance

Gracy was involved with the Stonewall riots of 1969. When the Stonewall Inn was raided, she was struck unconscious by a police officer and awoke the next morning in jail. She returned to prison in the early 1970's, where she met leaders of the Attica Prison uprising (the worst prison riots in U.S. history)ⁱ. They largely influenced her later work with the prison system. She moved to California, where she organized grassroots movements to advocate for trans women. She provided direct services for trans women who were incarcerated, suffering from substance abuse, and homelessness. She also was heavily involved in spreading awareness about the AIDS epidemic. Gracy started the Tenderloin Resource Center and hired other transgender women to care for the sickⁱⁱ.

Achievements

In 2005, Miss Major joined the Trans Gender Variant and Intersex Justice Project (TGJJP) to advocate for incarcerated transgender women, eventually becoming the executive director. She retired in 2015, but she still works to create a safe haven for those in the transgender community through building the House of GG's: the Griffin-Gracy Educational Retreat & Historical Centerⁱⁱⁱ. She strives to bring attention to the intersection of poverty, race and gender in relation to incarceration, employment and mental/physical health.

Essential Questions

1. How can Gracy's experiences growing up help homeless transgender youth today?

2. Gracy is still heavily involved in activism, despite the fact many people in the activism community face burnout after fighting for change for so long. What should one do to avoid burnout when fighting for social change?

3. Gracy struggled against intersecting points of oppression, since she was transgender, Black and poor. How can one use an intersectional lens when making social change?

4. *"We lived our true selves. We enjoyed our lives. We did what we had to do to survive."*
 - a. Many activists talk about the need to survive. What things does the transgender community need in order to *thrive*?

ⁱ Rosenthal, Michele. "Miss Major Griffin Gracy." *Queer Portraits in History*. 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.queerportraits.com/bio/griffin-gracy>. Obtained 29 October 2019.

ⁱⁱ Prime Timers: A New Age for Activism". *Advocate.com*. Here Media Inc. Retrieved 4 September 2014.

ⁱⁱⁱ Willis, Raquel. "TransVisionaries: How Miss Major Helped Spark the Modern Trans Movement." *Them.us*. 18 March 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.them.us/story/transvisionaries-miss-major>. Obtained 29 October 2019