[Gender Revealtheme song begins]

**Tuck**: Welcome to Gender Reveal, a podcast where we hopefully get a little bit closer to understanding what the *hell* gender is. I’m your host and resident gender detective, Tuck Woodstock.

[Gender Reveal theme song ends]

**Tuck:** Hey everyone, I hope you are safe and healthy, and hanging in there. It is me, your friend Tuck Woodstock. Don’t be fooled, new voice, new season, new me, baybee. I don’t know what that meant. Anyway, this week on the show we do not have a full episode for you, we are between Season 5 and Season 6 right now, scrambling to get back on track after the, you know, eight month rollercoaster that was uh, Season 5 plus pandemic plus protests, etc. etc.

So, in that lull I want to bring you part of the first episode of *Transcripts*. *Transcripts* is a podcast from the Tretter Transgender Oral History Project. It’s produced by my very good friend Cassius Adair, among other people. In the very first episode, which we’re going to hear part of today, hosts Myrl Beam and Andrea Jenkins investigate how trans activists are grappling with the contradictions that, even though trans-themed TV shows like *Transparent* and *Pose* have achieved mainstream popularity, trans people are still facing huge barriers to employment, housing and safety, and, you know, many trans people of color are saying that their lives are even harder than before. So we’re going to hear how Myrl and Andrea and others investigate how trans activists like Diamond Stylz, Gabriel Foster, Dean Spade, how they’re grappling with those contradictions, and what they’re doing to change the system. You can learn more about the podcast at bit.ly/transcriptspod, where there is also a transcript of the show *Transcripts*, so that’s fun. You can also subscribe to the show, wherever you get this podcast. *Transcripts* is funded through grants rather than public donations, so you actually don’t need to donate to the show. Instead, Cassius is asking that you donate to [Brave Space Alliance](http://www.bravespacealliance.org/) and [Black Transwomen Inc](https://blacktranswomen.org/). The founders of those organisations appear in this episode.

Other than that, not too much news for you. I am just, as I said, working very hard to get everything back on track. I’m *really* excited for Season 6, I really, truly think that it’s going to be our best season ever, and we’ve had some very good seasons. So, I’ll get back to work on that, enjoy the show. I miss you, I love you, stay safe.

**Transcripts​ Podcast**

**Episode 1: “I’m Seeing My Liberation Right Now”**

LASAIA WADE: It pops in my head. It was a clip of Nina Simone sitting at a table. She said, I had never felt liberation, but in this moment I'm around other Black people. I feel liberated.

ANDREA JENKINS: That’s LaSaia Wade. She’s talking to oral historian Myrl Beam in Fall 2019. And she’s talking about freedom.

WADE: It’s always going to be a bill that needs to be paid. It's always going to be a water bill that's being turned off. It's always going to be a car note that you missed. It's always going to have it be that particular stress, but I feel liberated when I'm around other Black people. I feel liberated when I'm around other trans people.

JENKINS: From the Tretter Transgender Oral History Project, this is TRANSCRIPTS,​ ​a new podcast series about how trans activists are changing the world. My name is Andrea Jenkins.

MYRL BEAM: And I’m Myrl Beam. I’m the one who spoke with LaSaia, who you heard at the top of the show, and all the other voices you’ll hear on this episode. I work on an oral history project where I collect stories of trans activists from all over the U.S.

JENKINS: I actually started that oral history project back in 2015. I wanted to hear the stories of trans people in their own words--and preserve those stories for other people to learn from.

BEAM: And I’m so glad you did because those stories are amazing. Those stories are especially important right now because so many trans people are dreaming of a new world--one without gender discrimination, or racism, or economic injustice.

JENKINS: And we’re figuring out what exactly it’s going to take to get there. We’ve been asking folks: what are the tools you’re using to make change? Who’s leading the struggle? And how in the world are people getting enough money to live and do all this work?

BEAM: So in this pilot episode, we’re going to tackle a question that sounds simple, but is actually really big: is life actually getting better for trans people?

JENKINS: Like, it’s not just LaSaia’s vision of liberation--of being around people like her, other Black people, other trans people--that got us thinking. It’s also what she was saying about her daily struggles…

WADE: It’s always going to be a bill that needs to be paid. It's always going to be a water bill that's being turned off.

BEAM: So when I interviewed LaSaia, I asked her: what about the fact that things seem to be getting better for some people?

BEAM IN TAPE: What’s your sense of that paradox? That, at the same time we have this visibility, there’s also been more Black trans women killed last year than, I think, ever in my lifetime. How do you explain that? What do you think is going on?

WADE: We allowed our enemies to know where we at. We have allowed our enemies to know where we’re at.

BEAM: This answer was so compelling that I wanted to back up and learn more. How did we arrive at a place where some trans people--especially white trans folks, people like me--think of things as getting better, but life is actually getting a lot more dangerous for Black trans women like LaSaia?

JENKINS: To answer that question, we talked to so many different people, and we want you to hear their stories directly from them. You’ll hear folks describing the barriers that they face, but you’ll also hear what they are doing to change things.

BEAM: That decision to try to change things, to devote your life to a larger struggle, it isn’t always an easy choice. Activism wasn’t exactly LaSaia’s plan A. For a long time, she was just trying to live her life.

WADE: I was director of communications in Tennessee, Nashville, Tennessee, at BellSouth when it was slowly switching over to AT&T.

(SOUNDBITE FROM BELLSOUTH ADVERTISEMENT)

WADE: Good job, after I graduated college! I was like, ooh, nailed one. BEAM: She wasn’t out as trans at work.

WADE: As a trans feminine person, it's easier to live as a stealth person. And especially trying to live a healthy life or also live a wealthy life. And what I mean by wealthy, going through school, getting a thriving job, not just a surviving job, but a thriving job, a good career.

JENKINS: But about a year into the job, she rolled into work after she’d been out the night before, at the club.

WADE: You know, I'm still young. I'm still vivacious. I wanted to have fun.

(SOUNDBITE OF “VILLAIN,” BY JUPITER GRAY)

So I came back to work that following Monday with my stuff on my desk packed up.

BEAM: One of LaSaia’s cis gay coworkers had seen her at the club, and from there, he figured out she was trans. Then he outed her to the rest of the office.

WADE: The coworker that wanted my job told my boss at that time that I was a trans person and it was multiple layers to that, right. I was a Black person in a high position at a company that is not really known for a Black person to be that high in a position that I was in. And also I was a trans person. And then they fired me for non-disclosure of my transness.

JENKINS: LaSaia was fired for being Black, trans, and powerful. And there was nothing she could do. She was in Tennessee, where there aren’t many protections for workers.

WADE: They could fire you because your hair is purple and they don't like the color of your hair. So in the moment, I was depressed, I was like, what am I gonna do, how dare they treat me this way, I was a good worker…

Then I was just like, how can I take my language and my education and take it to the next level for communities, my community, that is not seen.

So I joined Black Lives Matter. And ever since then [CLAP] I took off.

JENKINS: Joining Black Lives Matter was how LaSaia found activism. And that transformation--from being fired to becoming an activist--that’s a familiar story for the trans folks we spoke with.

DIAMOND STYLZ: I'm just literally coming to work doing my job and I don't know if I'm going to be fired or not.

BEAM: That’s Diamond Stylz. By the time she was fired from her job, her life was already shaped by racism and discrimination.

STYLZ: My mother had been caught up in the prison industrial complex as a Black woman. She was one of those “super predators.”

BEAM: We should probably explain “super predator,” for folks who weren’t around in 1992.

JENKINS: Ok, yes. “Super predator” refers to a now discredited theory from the 1990s. The idea that some people were just naturally violent and lacked empathy. Most of those supposed “super predators” were Black.

BEAM: The concept was made popular to the nation by the Clinton administration. They used that terminology in campaigns, ultimately passing a racist “tough on crime bill” in 1994.

(SOUNDBITE OF FORMER FIRST LADY HILLARY CLINTON)

JENKINS: That fake science was part of a trend of mass incarceration of Black and brown people-- people like Diamond’s mom.

STYLZ: And so she got caught up in that and I got custody of my brother. And so I'm at home, a single trans woman with an 11 year old.

BEAM: As a Black ​trans w​oman, Diamond knew she had even more stacked against her.

STYLZ: When I went to college--first trans person to go to Jackson State University--I didn't plan to go there. I didn't know what the history was. I was just trying to get out, I was stuck in Walnut Grove, Mississippi with my mom who was going through an addiction and I wanted to get out of this country, rural town because this is not fun for me. And so the only way I could go is to go to college.

BEAM: But living in a male dorm wasn’t safe for Diamond either.

STYLZ: People were trying to throw scalding hot water on me in the dorm trying to burn me. I'm sitting here, I have no power in the situation, I'm just reacting to everything that's happening to me.

JENKINS: She hoped that leaving college, and moving out of a male dorm, things would get better. But…

STYLZ: I worked for Hewlett Packard and when my transness came out, one of my family members worked there, like a distant cousin, and she told people that I was trans.

JENKINS: Her coworkers started harassing her.

STYLZ: One of the supervisors lost their keys and they gave me the keys to give it to the supervisor so they can take pictures of us interacting with each other and make fun of him.

I didn’t have any political recourse, I didn’t have any legal recourse because of the state that I lived in. We didn’t have the protection for trans people. And so I, I was forced in to survival sex work at the time. And, you know, it just changed the trajectory of my life.

JENKINS: Sex work is something that some trans women do to make money. But it wasn’t that Diamond wanted to. She felt isolated. But then she found something that changed her life: YouTube.

STYLZ: And I wasn't trying to be an activist, but because of those situations and because of technology, I started to be a YouTuber.

(MIX OF SOUNDBITES FROM DIAMOND STYLZ’S YOUTUBE CHANNEL)

And because I was a little bit older in my transition--I was 26 at the time, but I had been living my truth since 13, 14. And so at time, a lot of people, their videos were about, I was on T for three months, I was on T for six months, these are my surgery results, these are my top surgery results, this is my FFS result.

It was more about the physical, but because I had already physically transitioned years ago, my narratives were about just relationships and stories…

And everybody was like wow, this is, they just kind of related to it. So that's how it started... Got like 4.5 million views and it just grew from that…

People started to say I was an activist and I really wasn't for sure if that hat fit because at the time I was still in sex work, I was doing all the non-respectable stuff. And I was like, I'm not no activist, that's for the goody two shoes, that's not me.

BEAM: But the more Diamond worked in activism, the more she realized: it actually ​was​ her.

(SOUNDBITE FROM DIAMOND STYLZ’S PODCAST, MARSHA’S TABLE)

STYLZ: And so, what this last five years has taught me and being in this work is you have the power to build community to keep you safe, you have the power to build community to give you the support that you need so you can do the things you want to do. And if you build that infrastructure in that family and that community, that can be a part of your support system to be able to fight when you need to fight, to give you the power to change your own trajectory in your life.

And so that's literally what activism had done for me. You want to be that structure for somebody else and you want the people in your life to be that structure for you.

BEAM: Rikke Mananzala is another person who’s been that support structure for others. He was inspired to build community power by watching his mom, an immigrant domestic worker, struggle with xenophobia and racism on the job.

RIKKE MANANZALA: I definitely remember her coming home from work tired, exhausted, angry, frustrated, and hearing that things just weren't right.

BEAM: When he got older his queerness became yet another challenge that his family had to face.

MANANZALA: When I was a teenager I came out as queer and that was something that was really important to me, and it's a part of my identity, and although it was challenging to come to that conclusion, what was more challenging was that my parents didn't accept that and so I lost their support.

And that set me on a different path. As a teenager I had to quickly figure out life, as a ward of the state, as someone that needed to finish high school and hopefully move on to other ways of taking care of myself.

And so that fire in my belly, I think, attached to my personal experience to set me on this path of believing that if there are challenges, not only in my personal life but in the world, that they’re our responsibility to challenge them and to make change.

BEAM: But what does that change look like? When I asked her how things had changed in the last few decades, LaSaia had a pretty frank answer.

WADE: It’s a lot of assimilating politics. And what I mean by assimilating politics is--as a Black revolutionary, as a Black person, to deal with Black politics and Black power and Black liberation--we think that if we want to be a part of society, we're still using our master's tools to be a part of society that deem us not normal.

BEAM: In the U.S., being in a quote normal society means being in ​white s​ ociety. A lot of trans people have this idea that if we get more visibility, we’ll do better. And some of that has worked for people like me.

JENKINS: But we heard very different stories from the folks working on the front lines of Black and trans people of color led movements.

STYLZ: You have to understand that visibility does not change the heart and minds of the people. It doesn't give anybody any survival mechanisms.

So ​Pose​, amazingly brilliant for sharing narratives and being in people's homes week after week. They're doing an amazing job. Love them.

(SOUNDBITE FROM THE TV SHOW ​POSE​)

BEAM: ​Pose i​ s an FX show about the African American and Latinx ballroom scene in the 1980s. It’s got trans producers like Janet Mock and Our Lady J, and a lot of people like it, including trans people.

STYLZ: But if I’m still in Texas or Indiana and I’m getting fired and I don't have the legal recourse to protect myself against workforce discrimination, it doesn't matter if everybody's seen us on the TV because I don't have the protections in policy.

The normal, typical, social safety nets that a cis person has access to that we literally don't have access to. So say you're down on your luck and you, you're unsheltered. Okay? A cis person can go to the shelters in the city.

When I was homeless, I couldn't go to the cisgender women's shelter because they’re uncomfortable and whatever rules that they have. I couldn't go to the male shelter because that's a liability for them. Like they literally asked me on the phone, can you take your breast off? On the phone. Well, if you can't take them off then you can't come here.

Went to the LGBT--​LGBT-​ -went to them and they said, well, our funding only covers people with HIV. Are you positive? No. We can't help you.

So the cisgender ones and the LGBT ones couldn’t help me. Now, because of the work that we’ve done, the LGBT one now is open for all. But in the time that I needed it, the normal social safety net that I could go to, that a cis person could go to, I didn't have access to them. And they weren't safe places for me.

[Gender Revealtheme song begins]

**Tuck:** Hey, how’s everyone liking the show so far? There’s another more than 20 minutes of this episode. You can listen by subscribing to *Transcripts* wherever you get your podcasts to hear how all the activists you just heard from are now fighting back. There’s another *Transcripts* episode in the works right now, so please do subscribe, tell your friends, and hey also tell your friends about *Gender Reveal* if you haven’t already. Season 6 is going to be very good, I have decided. So, you’re wonderful, thanks for being here, we miss you, we love you, thank you for supporting the show, thank you for supporting it on patreon.com, thank you for supporting it by telling your friends. Just thank you for being here, I just appreciate you. Alright, we’ll be back real soon, with more feelings about gender.

[Gender Revealtheme song ends]