



SHEFFIELD DOC/FEST 2021

My Name Is Pauli Murray

+ Pre-recorded Q&A

Pauli Murray knew intimately what it meant to live a life that was out of sync – when even language wasn't sufficient to define or describe a journey.

Lawyer, professor, poet, and Episcopal priest, Murray was an iconoclast who pushed against the limits – both the conventional and strict legislation and the narrow thinking around issues of race and gender equity. The struggle wasn't abstract: Murray's own life – as an African American intellectual whose gender identity felt fluid – personified it.

A visionary, Pauli understood that the same arguments employed to assail Jim Crow laws and other forms of racial discrimination could be made to attack gender inequity – and, consequently, these pivotal insights became a professional signature. Confidante to Eleanor Roosevelt and inspiration to Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg (who cites Murray in her first Supreme Court brief regarding the Equal Protection Clause), Pauli frequently stood in close proximity to power. Yet the story of Pauli's ground-breaking activism and influential legacy has largely been untold.

Directed by Julie Cohen and Betsy West, *My Name is Pauli Murray* pulls back that veil. This new documentary vividly maps Pauli's journey – from a segregated childhood in North Carolina to integrating classrooms, courtrooms and conferences to sit alongside with the world's most influential powerbrokers. Pauli's course was not unencumbered nor unchallenged, yet Pauli used the barriers to inform the work, sharpen the arguments and steel convictions.

Born 1910, in Baltimore, Maryland, Pauli was taken in at three-years old by the maternal wing of the family following the sudden death of Pauli's mother. Embraced by loving grandparents and two aunts – Pauline and Sarah – Pauli exhibited a proficiency in reading and critical thinking, assessing, early on, the vast discrepancies in conditions African-American families lived in as compared to their white counterparts. That gulf of injustice settled deep inside. As a child, Pauli was reconfiguring boundaries of personal expression: eschewing dresses and typical 'girl' play. Instead of admonishing Pauli, Aunt Pauline accommodated those wishes, accepting Pauli as 'my little boy-girl.'

My Name is Pauli Murray holds close to Murray's extraordinary journey toward self – the long months of Depression-era vagabonding across America as an androgynous youth; the tumultuous college and post-graduate years, as an ambitious intellectual absorbed in books and armed with a fiery typewriter that allowed words to travel to quarters beyond physical reach.

Rejected by the University of North Carolina for being black, and arrested for refusing to move to the back of a bus, Pauli didn't dodge conflict, even if there was no precedent or model. Yet, there's often an excruciating price paid for being 'ahead of one's time.' Pauli might have lived the first part of life in the margins, but that would not mean that those narrow passageways had to be accepted.

Richly recounted in Pauli's own voice – with archival audio drawn from intimate oral histories and interviews dating back to the 1970s – Pauli's timely story is augmented by testimonies from a beloved grandniece, scholars, activists and students, who place Pauli's influence in contemporary context. Pauli's clarity and prescience predicted what would continue to be at the heart of this country's vital struggle toward gender and racial equity. *My Name Is Pauli Murray* is a multidimensional portrait of an evolving figure who wouldn't accept the status quo, a human who knew that like people, solutions aren't fixed, but fluid.

In the Name of Pauli Murray: Pauli's Legacy

Of late, given the daily urgent scroll of news headlines and the politically tumultuous social climate, there might not be a better time to tell Pauli's story. 'Pauli fought for equal rights for everybody. Pauli knew how it felt to be different and to struggle,' says Peggy Drexler, executive producer. 'All of Pauli's work is currently relevant, in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement and the on-going march for gender equity. All these decades later, we're still fighting these same fights.' Executive producer Weyermann agrees, given the backdrop of our lives currently: 'It couldn't be more timely.'

From the outset, the crew knew that the difference making a film about a high-profile and much-vaunted figure like Justice Ginsburg, in contrast to the shadow of Pauli Murray would be stark. In Pauli's case the journey was an exploration, yes, but also reclamation of not just a figure but also a wider struggle. 'In some ways, when you told people all these things that Pauli accomplished and did,' says co-director Betsy West, 'it made it more urgent. Why have we not heard about Pauli Murray? I think that the not knowing helped pique interest.' 'So many of the rights that are in the forefront now – women's rights and civil rights Pauli battled for,' says co-director Julie Cohen. Pauli pushed the conversation and demanded that even what seemed impossible or wildly controversial needed to be squarely addressed. Just as important in this moment is Pauli's story of persistence in a world that didn't make a place for a person who had no use for its limiting categories and language. 'Pauli has become a beacon for the LGBTQ community,' says West. 'Always thinking ahead, standing ground and looking for the next opportunity.' Pauli's story is always 'timely,' in that these rights and freedoms are always at the center of collective discourse and come up for challenge.

Progress isn't linear. Activism is ongoing. And while in recent years the many gains that activists, community organizers and in-the-trenches warriors like Justice Ginsburg and Pauli Murray fought for have been threatened if not impaired; we've seen, however, with the push has come a powerful push back. 'We are having conversations we have never had before,' says Bridges McMahon, 'And the biggest change is language about gender identity and thinking about it in a more expansive and empathetic way. 'Pauli was always agitating. Sometimes simply by being in the room, a powerful presence with whom to reckon. Pauli didn't stop believing in what was right,' says Weyermann. 'And that immense and extraordinary drive and commitment is quite stunning.' In a time when society is rethinking the historical figures we choose to venerate, questioning whose names and visages that are to be put up on buildings or in public squares, the United States is moving into wider and necessary discussions about the past.

'Simply put, Pauli was a patriot,' says Weyermann. Pauli was always pressing and questioning. Taking the unexplored route. That steadfastness and resilience sent a message that has compelling resonance now: 'We have to progress. We have to come along.' This is the critical inheritance of Pauli's legacy. Thirty-years gone, 'Pauli is still bringing us along,' says Weyermann. In this sense, *My Name is Pauli Murray* provides a template. Pauli is forcing us to grapple with what's uncomfortable: what's in the shadows or in the margins. What shouldn't be forgotten. All the wrongs that have to be made right. 'Absent the historical accounts, other than a piece in *The New Yorker*, there really isn't much out there about Pauli's story.' Weyermann reflects. 'We have to change this. Pauli gave so much. This wrong has to be made right. We have to do this as storytellers. We have to bring Pauli to light.'

Production notes

MY NAME IS PAULI MURRAY

Directed by: Julie Cohen, Betsy West
Executive Producers: Jeff Skoll, Diane Weyermann, Elise Pearlstein
Executive Producer: Peggy Drexler
Co-Executive Producers: Eve Plank, Dana DiCarlo
Produced by: Talleah Bridges McMahon
Associate Producer: Claudia Lopez
Consulting Producer: Patricia Bell-Scott
Archival Producer: Claudia Lopez
Additional Archival Researchers: Emily Cofrancesco, Hillary Dann, Nicole London, Nadine Natour
Written by: Talleah Bridges McMahon, Julie Cohen, Cinque Northern, Betsy West
Director of Photography: Claudia Raschke
Camera Operators: Wayne Arnold, Hugh Boyle, Alan Hostetter, Lucas Millard, Peter Nicoll, Mike Wilson
Editor: Cinque Northern
Associate Editor: Hilary Crowe
Post Production Supervisor: Jim McMahon
Original Art by: Diana Ejaita
Director of Design and Animation: Molly Schwartz
Animation Producer: Rennie Elliot
Original Music by: Jongnic Bontemps
Additional Composer: Derek Baird

Sound Mixer: Sean O'Neil
Additional Sound: Hugh Boyle, Jim Gilchrist, Geoff Gann, John O'Connor
With the generous support of: George H. Cohen, Shelley Krause

With (in alphabetical order)

Patricia Bell-Scott
Dolores Chandler
Brittney Cooper
Sonia Pressman Fuentes
Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg
Tina Lu
Marghretta McBean
Ernest Myers and Reggie Sapp
Mary Norris
Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton
Hon. Inez Smith Reid
Rosalind Rosenberg
Karen Ross Rouse
Chase Strangio
Raquel Willis

USA 2021
91 mins

SHEFFIELD DOC/FEST 2021

Opening Night: European Premiere: Summer of Soul (...Or, When the Revolution Could Not Be Televised) + pre-recorded Q&A

Fri 4 Jun 20:15

UK Premiere: Lift like a Girl + pre-recorded Q&A

Sat 5 Jun 20:15

International Premiere: My Name Is Pauli Murray + pre-recorded Q&A

Sun 6 Jun 18:30

UK Premiere: The First 54 Years: An Abbreviated Manual for Military Occupation + pre-recorded Q&A

Fri 11 Jun 20:20

Closing Night: World Premiere: The Story of Looking + pre-recorded Q&A

Sat 12 Jun 20:50

EVENTS & STRANDS

Preview: In the Earth + Q&A with director Ben Wheatley

Thu 10 Jun 19:00

Preview: Doctor Who: Dragonfire

Sat 12 Jun 12:00

Relaxed Screenings: The Reason I Jump

Fri 18 Jun 14:30; Tue 22 Jun 18:10

Woman with a Movie Camera: Wildfire

Sun 20 Jun 18:40 (+ Q&A with director Cathy Brady); Mon 21 Jun 18:10; Tue 22 Jun 14:40; Wed 23 Jun 20:50; Thu 24 Jun 14:45

BAGRI FOUNDATION LONDON INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL

LIFF Opening Night: WOMB (Women of My Billion) + on stage Q&A with Srishti Bakshi and film critic Anna Smith

Thu 17 Jun 17:20

My Beautiful Laundrette

Fri 18 Jun 20:20

The Warrior + on-stage career interview with writer-director Asif Kapadia

Sat 19 Jun 20:30

Ahimsa: Gandhi the Power of the Powerless

Sun 20 Jun 15:00

Searching for Happiness...

Tue 22 Jun 20:50

Nazarband Captive

Wed 23 Jun 20:45

A'hr Kayattam

Thu 24 Jun 18:00

The Salt in Our Waters Nonajoler Kabbo

Sun 27 Jun 15:00

NEW RELEASES & RE-RELEASES

First Cow

From Fri 28 May

Surge

From Fri 28 May

After Love

From Fri 4 Jun (Q&A with director Aleem Khan on Fri 4 Jun 17:30; Q&A with director Aleem Khan and actor Joanna Scanlan on Sun 13 Jun 18:40)

Gunda

From Fri 4 Jun

Fargo

From Fri 11 Jun

The Reason I Jump

From Fri 18 Jun

Nashville

From Fri 25 Jun

Ultraviolence

From Sat 26 Jun

Sat 26 June 14:20 + Q&A with director Ken Fero and contributor Janet Alder

Supernova

From Fri 2 Jul

Another Round

From Fri 9 Jul

Jumbo

From Fri 9 Jul

Deerskin

From Fri 16 Jul

Girlfriends

From Fri 23 Jul

Mandabi

From Fri 23 Jul

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