



## ***We Wanted the Booth!* - Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato**

### Introduction

In 1984, when lesbian couple Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato were denied seating at Papa Choux, a Los Angeles restaurant, they filed a suit for unlawful discrimination. This lesson explores the story behind the lawsuit and addresses themes of intersectionality, oppression, civil rights, and the LGBTQ+ social justice movement. It is a story of agency and action not included in traditional history books.

**This lesson was created as part of the Making Gay History / National Education Association Teaching Fellowship.** Each lesson specifically uses a podcast episode and related resources from the Making Gay History podcast. These lessons have been created so that teachers across the country have the context and tools to bring archival audio from the Making Gay History podcast into middle and high school classrooms.

The Making Gay History podcast brings LGBTQ+ history to life through the voices of the people who lived it. We strive to create a world where everyone understands, respects, and honors the experiences and histories of LGBTQ+ people by providing engaging and accessible entry points to its largely hidden history. The podcast is hosted by historian and journalist Eric Marcus, who has been documenting LGBTQ+ history for more than 35 years.

### Grade Level

High school (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade)

### Disciplines / Unit Recommendations

This lesson was created for an Intersectional Ethnic Studies elective course or a U.S. History course. It was taught during a unit on intersectionality and women's roles in social justice movements throughout U.S. history.

It is also suitable for U.S. History and American Literature courses. It was piloted in an AP American Language course as preparation for a unit of intersectional readings to increase student understanding of essential ideas of privilege, domination, and oppression. It has also been taught in a college course on Women, Gender, and Sexuality.

### Estimated Time

This lesson was created to be taught in 3 class periods of 50 minutes each.

### Preparation

It is recommended that teachers double-check all links as some may shift since they are not hosted by Making Gay History directly.

- ☐ Listen to **Making Gay History Season 3, Episode 5: Deborah Johnson & Zandra Rolón Amato.**

<https://bit.ly/mgh-johnson-rolon>

*As the teacher, you know your students and teaching situation best. It is always advised to listen to the full podcast individually before playing for or assigning to your students, just as you would review any text for classroom use.*

Optional: Make the podcast [episode transcript](#) available for students to read/reference when listening to the podcast.

- ☐ Read the transcript of Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato's Making Gay History episode (Season 3, Episode 5) for any words that might be inappropriate for your students.
- ☐ Review and/or become familiar with the concept of Intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Link to the video, [Intersectionality 101](#), that can also be used with students.
- ☐ Review and/or become familiar with the [Intersectionality Wheel of Privilege, Domination, and Oppression](#)
- ☐ Review and/or become familiar with the concept of oppression and the four I's (ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized) of oppression: Link to video, [4 I's of Oppression](#), that is included in the lesson for students.

- ☐ Review [Lesson Presentation](#).
- ☐ Make copies for students of the following:
  - ☐ Episode Transcript [part 1](#) and [part 2](#), to correspond specifically with this lesson (Teachers may want to cover any words that might be inappropriate for their student group):
    - ☐ [Part 1 Worksheet](#)
    - ☐ [Part 2 Worksheet](#)
    - ☐ [Part 3 Worksheet](#)
    - ☐ [Part 3 Documents](#)
    - ☐ [Part 3 One-Pager](#) Template (or students can recreate on a blank sheet of paper)

## Background

In the early 1980s, the LGBTQ+ community in Los Angeles was increasing in visibility and activity. There were a growing number of events, clubs, and bars that provided safe spaces for members of the LGBTQ+ community. For example, AIDS Project LA was founded in 1983 to mobilize grassroots responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. At the same time, there was ongoing harassment and discrimination.

This lesson focuses on Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato, a Black and Latina couple who went out to dinner at Papa Choux, a restaurant known for its romantic dining experience. In the podcast episode, students will hear about their personal connections to other civil rights movements, and their direct experience of discrimination when the restaurant refused to seat them in one of its romantic booths (despite their reservation).

In their case against the restaurant manager, Deborah and Zandra were represented at the California Court of Appeals by Gloria Allred, who later became famous for taking on and winning high-profile and often controversial cases, particularly those involving feminist causes. They sued Papa Choux for violation of the Unruh Civil Rights Act, a California civil code enacted in 1959 that provides protection from discrimination by all business establishments in California. Though they won the case and brought visibility to a discriminatory practice, the restaurant ultimately removed the booths rather than follow the court ruling that it was unlawful to discriminate against same-sex couples.

For more information on Gloria Allred, see [Gloria Allred](#).

A [Factsheet of the Unruh Civil Rights Act](#) is available from the State of California Civil Rights Department. It is available in multiple languages (English, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese) at [Posters: Business](#).

## Procedure

### ***Lesson - Part 1:***

1. Distribute the transcript and worksheet for part 1 of the lesson.
2. **Task #1**- Project the image of Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato (Slide 2) and give students time to answer the See ~ Think ~ Wonder questions:
  - a. What do you see in the image? (3-4 things you see)
  - b. When do you think this image was taken? Why do you think this image was taken?
  - c. What are 2 questions you have about this image?
3. After students answer the See ~ Think ~ Wonder questions independently, the teacher can have students Think-Pair-Share their answers and/or allow time for a few students to share their answers with the whole class.

*From the author: If students are unfamiliar with the wheel of Intersecting Axes of Privilege, Domination, and Oppression, it will be important to review this with students first before moving on to Task #2: [Image](#)*

4. **Task #2**- Pass out copies of the episode transcript for students to annotate as they are listening to Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato introducing themselves and setting the stage for the remainder of their story.
5. Play the episode from the beginning and stop at 9:05.
6. Have students CIRCLE unfamiliar words, HIGHLIGHT social identity descriptors (referencing the wheel of Intersecting Axes of Privilege, Domination, and Oppression for examples), and UNDERLINE what stands out the MOST about their stories.
7. **Task #3**- Students can work independently, with a partner, or the teacher can lead discussion to highlight and label the Intersectionality Wheel based on what they learned about Deborah and Zandra from the first part of the episode.  
Example: Highlight LGBTQ+, label BOTH or write both names.

8. **Task #4-** Project the image of Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato from Task #1 again (Slide 5). Students write a 2-3 sentences prediction on what might have happened to them when they went to have dinner at the Papa Choux Restaurant and how it might connect back to the image.

**Lesson - Part 2:**

1. Distribute the transcript and worksheet for part 2 of the lesson.
2. If students are unfamiliar with the concept of the 4 I's of Oppression, show students the short video (Slide 6) that explains each of the terms and provides a definition of each form of oppression.  
OR  
provide students with each of the definitions of the 4 I's of Oppression (ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized, on Slide 7) for students to reference while completing Task #1. (Space is included on the handout.)
  - a. Ideological Oppression is the idea that one social identity group is better than another.
  - b. Institutional Oppression is the way that systems and institutions manifest the dominant ideology.
  - c. Interpersonal Oppression is the way that people play out discrimination and violence on each other.
  - d. Internalized Oppression is the way that people with marginalized identities internalize narratives of their own inferiority.
3. **Task #1-** Students will annotate as they are listening to Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato tell the story of their experience at the Papa Choux.
4. Play the episode, starting at 9:05 and continuing to the end of the episode.
5. Students will CIRCLE unfamiliar words, HIGHLIGHT oppression experienced by Deborah and Zandra, and UNDERLINE what stands out the MOST about their stories.
6. **Task #2-** Students can work independently, with a partner, or the teacher can lead discussion for writing down examples of oppression (*ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized*) that Deborah and Zandra experienced, as told in the episode.

Examples: *Institutional Oppression* = not allowed to sit at the booths at the Papa Choux; *Interpersonal Oppression* = staff at the Papa Choux were lying about their job roles.

7. **Task #3-** Students can work independently, with a partner, or the teacher can lead class in reading the two primary sources, the *Los Angeles Times* articles from Friday, June 10, 1983 and Friday, June 24, 1983.
8. After reading the two primary sources students will answer the Head, Heart, Conscience questions.
9. Depending on time, teachers can have students Think-Pair-Share their answers with a partner and/or allow time for a few students to share their answers with the whole class.

### **Lesson - Part 3:**

1. Distribute the documents and worksheet for part 3 of the lesson.

Before beginning Task #1 students can summarize (recall) with a partner and/or with the whole class what they have learned about Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato and their experience at the Papa Choux Restaurant.

2. **Task #1-** Students can work independently, with a partner, in a small group, or the teacher can lead the class in reading the five primary sources (three new sources; two are the same as in Part #2).
  - a. After reading each of the primary sources, students will complete the following on the worksheet:
    - Sourcing: Type of source, Author(s), Date.
    - Identify a WORD that captured your attention or was powerful.
    - Identify a PHRASE that was meaningful or significant to you.
    - Identify a SENTENCE that connects to the main idea or helps you gain a better understanding of Deborah and Zandra's story.
3. **Task #2 –** Students will create a One-Pager using quotes and/or evidence from the podcast episode and the primary source documents to answer the following questions:
  - What qualities did Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato display that make them activists?

- What small steps did Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato take to fight oppression?
- How were Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato seen by others?
- Who were the allies of Deborah Johnson and Zandra Rolón Amato?

One-Pagers can be created individually, in pairs, or in small groups on a larger piece of poster paper.

Variation: Students can be given the option of creating their own format for a one-pager, using images and words to respond to the four questions in a more visual format.

### Additional Resources

This case is included in [5 Fun Facts That You May Not Know About Pride](#) by Adreayn Torrez.

### About the Author: Christine Sardo

Christine Sardo has been teaching History-Social Science classes in southern California for the last 17 years. She is currently part of the district team to implement Intersectional Ethnic Studies courses and lessons TK-12. Christine has taught the high school Intersectional Ethnic Studies elective course for the last two years. She is also one of the advisors to her school's GSA (Genders & Sexualities Alliance) Club.