

**Queer Newark Oral History Project**

**Interviewee: Czezre Adams**

**Interviewed by: Naomi Extra**

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**Location: Rutgers University-Newark, NJ**

*Naomi Extra:* Today is May 28, 2017.\* (\*Interview date was April 28, 2017.)  
My name is Naomi Extra. I'm interviewing Czezre Adams at Rutgers, Newark for the Queer Newark Oral History Project. First, thank you for doing this.

*Czezre Adams:* Thank you for having me.

*Naomi Extra:* My first question, just a very general one, when and where were you born? Can you tell me a little bit about your early life?

*Czezre Adams:* Yes, again, my name is Czezre *[Spelling: Tua? 00:00:26]* Adams. I was born here in the City of Newark on August 8, 1989. I was raised, well they call it Martin Luther King Boulevard now, but back in the day it was called High Street.  
I grew up in what you would call a community-oriented street made up of our elders, who looked after everyone in the community. Headed by my grandmother. My Momma, Miss Lill, Miss Rone, Miss *[Spelling: Minnie? 00:01:01]*, and the whole host of other people. That was one of the best experiences, living in Newark, was my childhood.

*Naomi Extra:* Can you tell me, maybe, an early memory from your childhood? Living on that street, on High Street at the time.

*Czezre Adams:* High Street. At the time, it's High Street. So many memories. From the many birthdays, birthday parties we had, from the summer cookouts, to our giveaways, to our summer camps, recreational summer camps that we had there. The list goes on.

From pool parties to different games that we played in the field, such as football, basketball, baseball, tag. The list can just go on, how much—as far as childhood memories are concerned. Us forming our own little singing group, growin’ up [*laughter*]. Going to church, actually, they introduced to church as somebody within the community. At one point, because of it, I wanted to become a pastor and a lawyer, because of it, at one point. The memories for me, it’s endless. I still dwell on it to this day. Even though I wound up moving out of Newark, around fifth or sixth grade.

*Naomi Extra:* Born and raised in Newark?

*Czezre Adams:* Half my life.

*Naomi Extra:* Partially.

*Czezre Adams:* Yes.

*Naomi Extra:* Are your parents from Newark?

*Czezre Adams:* Yes. Yes, my family’s from—my family was actually all over. I’ve lived in the Central Ward. I lived in the West Ward, in Georgia King Village, North Mon. I lived in the South Ward, Miller Street, that was actually the last street I lived on before my mom got married and actually moved out of Newark, but my home is the Central Ward on High Street, that’s home.

*Naomi Extra:* So many questions for you. Tell me about, where did you go to school when you lived in Newark?

*Czezre Adams:* Where I went to school? I started off at *[Inaudible, 00:03:18]* Preschool, which is now closed. It's right across the street from McDonald's and a—what else they have down there? Laundrymat, and they have, I think it's Family Dollar down there, but it's closed now.

From there, I went to kindergarten at Quitman Street Community School. Then I wound up transferring over to Louise A. Spencer, where I attended school there from first grade to fifth grade, 'cause I was in the gifted and talented program. Then from there, that's when I moved out of Newark after that.

*Naomi Extra:* Which grade did you say it was?

*Czezre Adams:* I went to Louise A. Spencer from first grade to fifth grade. Sixth grade, I wound up moving to Franklin.

*Naomi Extra:* From fifth grade onward, you weren't in Newark?

*Czezre Adams:* No, no, but I did commute back and forth *[laughter]*.

*Naomi Extra:* Interesting.

*Czezre Adams:* For, you know, just a visit on like on weekends and stuff like that.

*Naomi Extra:* Do you still have family in Newark?

*Czezre Adams:* Yes. There are family here. The only people who've really moved out of Newark at the time, as far as my childhood's concerned, is my mom. That's because she got married, so she took the family somewhere else.

*Naomi Extra:* What were some of the places you used to go to to hang out, when you were a kid, or even a little bit older, in Newark?

*Czezre Adams:* As a child, like said, our community was so tight. You really didn't have to leave outside of that community, 'cause we did so much together. We're practically family. We called each other family, no matter what, no matter who I see; they're either my aunt or my uncle. Or I call them grandma.

That's just how it is, but outside of that, I went to the Boys and Girls Club. Which is the only one standing in the City of Newark.

**[00:05:00]** That was something that I always—my mom actually always got her kids into. My brother, my oldest brother, and myself, into it, all the time. I went to their Life Camps, I was on the Double-Dutch team there, I was on the basketball team there, the floor hockey, roller hockey team there.

Anything you can think of, it happened at the Boys and Girls Club, I was a part of. It wasn't in my community, if it wasn't in townhomes that I was in, I was always at the Boys and Girls Club. Something I went to after school, or I was at Louise A. Spencer or at the Boys and Girls Club.

*Naomi Extra:* Interesting. When you say community, can you talk a little bit more about who was a part of this community?

*Czezre Adams:* Well they definitely said it takes a village to raise a child. As I said, I grew up, we had on High Street, I don't know if you know a former Councilwoman, she's now the Essex County Registrar, Dana Rone?

*Naomi Extra:* I know the name. I don't know her personally.

*Czezre Adams:* Aunt Dana, she was part of that community, along with her mom, Momma Rone. We had Miss Lill, we had my grandmother, we had Cynthia Harper, which is the family my mom wanted to marry into, the Harper family. We had the Harris Family. We had Miss Minnie, we had Miss *[Spelling: Delores? 00:06:09]*. My auntie *[Spelling: Shantay? 00:06:12]* lived there. The list could just go on and on and on.

*Naomi Extra:* These were all people who lived—

*Czezre Adams:* In the community.

*Naomi Extra:* - in the community, and not necessarily on your street, though?

*Czezre Adams:* No, they were all on the street.

*Naomi Extra:* They were all on the street.

*Czezre Adams:* All on the street. High Street is actually a vacant—it's actually the vacant lot across from Lily of the Valley Church. If you ever drive down—I keep saying High Street—Martin Luther King Boulevard, going' towards Clinton Avenue, you would see Lily of the Valley Church is on your left-hand side. Then you'll see a big, vacant lot on your right, which is fulla grass and gated down. That's where the townhomes were at.

Everybody came there. Everybody came there, and still to this day, when people see my grandmother, they still call her mom. Even though the townhomes were knocked down, the familyness, the community is still there when we see each other, no matter what.

*Naomi Extra:* Wow. All those people in the same street is really amazing.

*Czeze Adams:* Yeah, Miss Bledsoe, the Bledsoe Family. Yeah, the list just is, it goes on, and the things that we accomplish in life, it's just, it's unheard of. Like I said, that community, what we built together was what started it.

*Naomi Extra:* I want to ask—so you mentioned wanting to become a pastor, but did you grow up religious?

*Czeze Adams:* Yes, I was religious then, but now I just call my—I say I'm spiritual now. I actually got introduced to church by my aunt Cynthia Harris. Went to Metropolitan Baptist Church. I went there in the early '90s, got baptized in 1996. I sung in a youth choir there. I played basketball there, of course. We sung in the McDonald's Gospelfest.

When I got introduced, it was like something new. I was actually fascinated, like, "Oh my God, there's a Higher Power. You're going through this to get to this place. You're getting yourself out of some situation, because there's somebody who actually believes in you, and died on the cross for your sins." You know how the whole story goes.

I just saw the impact that preachers in the church had on people's lives, and I was like, "Oh my God. This is something that I wanna do to grow up." Not to mention I wanted to be a lawyer, and I looked up to people like Malcolm X. Even though he was part of the Nation of Islam.

I looked up to people like Thurgood Marshall. When it came to history projects in school, that was like my ideal project was Malcolm X or Thurgood Marshall [*laughter*]. It was something

that always followed me, until I kinda wanted to get into college, and I got tied up at school. Then I went to a whole different path.

*Naomi Extra:* Was there something that made you less into wanting to become a pastor?

*Czezre Adams:* I think over the years, from the time that I started going to the church, to me actually getting older, and finding who I was as a person, I think it became a disconnect between church and community. Kinda like how it is now with police officer and community. It was a disconnect.

Along with that disconnect, I grew away from the church. Some people can point out the fact that I possibly grew in a sense, out of Newark. That could have been part of the disconnect, but as I look back, you don't see as many churches in the community anymore. Actually, you don't see pastors leave that wall, and actually come into the community and talk to the community.

Are they starting to do it now? Yes, but what led me away from the church was that. Not to mention, their views on homosexuality.

**[00:10:00]** Especially a person who identifies himself as homosexual. That really weaned me away from the Church, especially when I came out at 15 years old.

*Naomi Extra:* What do you remember about the Boys and Girls Club in Newark?

*Czezre Adams:* Man, it's so funny. One of my counsellors at the Boys and Girls Club, he now runs the Boys and Girls Club. I had a counsellor there. Her name was Miss *[Spelling: Cole 00:10:29]*, when I wound up becoming a Per Diem for the Newark Public School System,

She was working at Quitman Street School, and one day she saw me, and she was like, “Czeze? This is Czeze? Porkchop?” That’s my nickname, Porkchop. “Is that you?” I’m lookin’. I’m like, “Who calling me like this?” If you call me by my nickname, I know you know me, for sure. I turn around, and I was like, “Miss *[Spelling: Cole?]*?” She’s like, “Oh my God. I can’t believe it. Wow. One of my own from the Boys and Girls Club is here, successful, doin’ something.” My memory’s just is endless. Like I said, when my mom was around, when she had to work, the Boys and Girls Club nurtured me. They made sure that I was safe. They made sure that I was out of trouble. They led me to see things that I would never have imagined seeing. The trips that they took us on, the life lessons that they taught me. The various communities that they took me to, and actually let me explore. Like probably, if it wasn’t for the Boys and Girls Club, probably would never been to the North Side of Newark, and experienced a whole different culture and different set of people. If it wasn’t for the Boys and Girls Club, ‘cause one of the things that the Boys and Girls Club did, it was a Boys and Girls Club in each ward. South, the North, the West, the Central, and the East. One of the things that we did, all those Boys and Girls Clubs interacted with each other. We had different tournaments, where we played against each other. That’s one of my biggest, biggest memories, was the experiences that the Boys and Girls Club led me to, and the different people that it led me to actually meet and experience.

*Naomi Extra:*

What was the ages that you were at the Boys and Girls Club [*cross talk 00:12:15*]



*Czezre Adams:* From first grade to fifth grade, so I would say from about, maybe, six or seven, to about eleven, twelve, about eleven years old.

*Naomi Extra:* That's a good chunk of time.

*Czezre Adams:* Yeah.

*Naomi Extra:* It sounds like you have really positive memories of Newark, which is amazing.

*Czezre Adams:* Yes, yes.

*Naomi Extra:* I'm wondering if there's anything, any challenging memories that you have.

*Czezre Adams:* Challenging memories in Newark? Honestly speaking, I wouldn't say there was really—I had a wonderful, wonderful childhood. I must say that with all the things that surround Newark, and the stigma that's put on Newark, I always tell people, "Unless you lived here, and experienced what I experienced, you wouldn't understand why I love Newark so much."  
I can honestly say I never wanted for anything. I never needed anything. Whatever I needed, it was provided. Whether it was from my grandmother, my mom, the community, my aunts, uncles. Whatever it was, if it was what I needed, I had. If I did good in school, if I wanted something, I got it as well. I'm one of those kids who, even though I come from a large family, we were spoiled. As long as we did the right thing, we were spoiled. Even though we were spoiled, we knew what it meant to—we know what it meant, as far as hard work is concerned. We knew what it meant to work for what you want in life. We knew what it

meant to do chores, and clean, and represent your family name well.

Anything negative about my child—as far as living in Newark? No. Like I said, you had the crime. Then you had the poverty, of course. Everybody in their family has that person who went down the wrong road, but overall, as far as my family's concerned, my experience with Newark was wonderful. On a scale of one to ten, it's an eleven. It was that good for me.

*Naomi Extra:* Wow, that's so great to hear. What did your mom do for a living?

*Czezre Adams:* My mom works for the Newark Public School system. She's a security guard. My family's kinda in the whole Newark Public School system, security guard, teachers, custodial workers, secretaries.

*Naomi Extra:* So you couldn't get away with anything?

*Czezre Adams:* Couldn't really get away with anything. If you wasn't family by blood—which that really doesn't mean anything in a black community, 'cause if you're family, you're family—they were watching me. I always had eyes on me. 'Cause my family was so well known in the City of Newark. To this day, we're so well known, so it didn't matter where I went. **[00:15:00]** There was an eye watching me, who, at any moment, would snatch me or my siblings up, or anybody in my family up, and would easily make a phone call to my mom. My aunt, especially, when we were little, "Please don't let it get to my grandmother." *[Laughter]* and I would just, it was the ballgame.

*Naomi Extra:* That's funny

*Czezre Adams:* Yeah.

*Naomi Extra:* How many siblings did you say that you have? Where do you fall?

*Czezre Adams:* I have two older brothers, and two younger sisters. Then I have a younger brother on my dad's side. I'm the middle child. I'm the third oldest out of everybody, so right there. The middle child's always—yeah [*laughter*].

*Naomi Extra:* What was it like being the middle child?

*Czezre Adams:* For me, the middle child—one thing my mom told me, she said she always knew I was gonna be something special, because I came out feet-first. I was the only out of her kids who came out feet-first. She knew I was gonna be somethin' special, from the moment I was born.

Being the middle child, it had a lotta ups. It had its down, but it had a lotta ups. Either I was looked at as the baby, or I was looked at as the leader. I was either going to take the fall for something, or I was able to wean my way out of somethin'. Being a middle child, I was always able to play both sides to everything. I was always looked at as somebody that everybody could come to.

I'm a natural-born leader. I'm a Leo, so I'm easy to get along with, along as you don't cross me. I'm easy to get along with, so being a middle child, for me, was—it is what it is. I was third in line to be in control of the house. I was always the ears for everybody, because naturally, people gravitate to the middle child, in any family.

I had a lot of responsibilities that I took advantage of [*laughter*]. I probably didn't take advantage of, but being a middle child was—I

wouldn't take it back, I'll tell you that *[laughter]*. I don't wanna tell too many secrets that went on with me and my siblings and the community, but I wouldn't take it back.

*Naomi Extra:* Did your siblings go the Boys and Girls Club too?

*Cezre Adams:* Yes. Yes, we all did. Probably, except for my sisters. Because my sister was born in '94, and the other one was born in—oh my God, it was '88. It was '86, '88, '89. Oh my God. '91, and '94. From my mom's side.

By the time my sisters actually got up their age, we were already out of Newark. We were in Franklin by then. My brothers, as far as my older brothers, two older brothers, we all went to the Boys and Girls Club, but my younger siblings didn't.

*Naomi Extra:* It's interesting. Was your father from Newark as well?

*Cezre Adams:* Yes. Yes.

*Naomi Extra:* You left Newark in the fifth grade?

*Cezre Adams:* Mm-hmm, yes.

*Naomi Extra:* Where did you go?

*Cezre Adams:* One move was Somerset County, specifically, Franklin Township, and that's where I finished the duration of my public education.

*Naomi Extra:* Where did you go to school there?

*Cezre Adams:*

It was one school, it was one, well it was a host of elementary schools, but it was one middle school, one high school. When I moved to Franklin, I wound up going to Elizabeth Avenue School. I went there for sixth grade. Then after that, I went to Sampson G. Smith Middle School. That's where everybody in Franklin went to for our seventh and eighth grade.

Then of course, like I said, we had one high school where everybody went to, and that was called Franklin High School, and that's where I went from ninth to twelfth grade.

*Naomi Extra:*

What was the same or different about your experience after fifth grade, versus before, when you were in Newark?

*Cezre Adams:*

Franklin was a whole—it was a whole, new lifestyle. You actually saw more of middle-class, African-American people. I wound up seeing more diverse people, different cultures. That's when I was actually started being able to see a culture such as the Muslim culture and the Indian culture.

You have the Hispanic culture, you had the Caucasian culture.

Then you had, of course, the African-American culture. All mixed in one. The vast majority of Franklin Township was middle-class and up. Of course, you had your lower middle class, but it was a very small percentage of it. But that community as a whole was definitely middle-class and up.

For me, that was the first time that I saw such a vast majority, especially African-Americans, who were like middle-class. I was experiencing that life as an African-American male [00:20:00] myself, who was a part of a family who was African-American who actually had one of the biggest homes on the street at the time. It was something new. I wouldn't take that back for anything in the world, because that experience definitely opened my eyes to a lot

of things, and a lot of new experiences. Made me appreciate the value of community even more. Even though I already had that appreciation because of what I had in Newark.

It definitely showed me that there's more people connected within the community, as far as race is concerned, who cares about what you care about as a person and as a culture. Franklin was wonderful. Actually, this year is my tenth year anniversary out of high school, so *[laughter]* time has flown by. To this day, I still keep in contact with a lotta people from high school.

*Naomi Extra:*

When you were living in Franklin Township, did you still—I'm curious about your relationship to Newark when you weren't living there anymore.

*Cezre Adams:*

My relationship was still there, 'cause like I said, my family was still in Newark. The only people who moved out of Newark was my mom. She took her family out of Newark. As far as my grandmother and her brothers and sisters, and my mom, and her brothers and sisters, my cousins, and stuff like that, were in Newark.

Even though I was out of Newark, my family was still there, so we would still go and visit on weekends. Every weekend we will go to Newark and visit my grandmother and my aunts and uncles or cousins and stuff like that. Because we were—my cousins, we were all close in age, anyway. We still had that connection with each other, no matter what. My grandmother, she was—at the time I'm at Franklin, she was still working, and stuff like that.

She made sure the family was still together, no matter what. My connection from Newark never, ever left. As you can see, I'm back in Newark now, but as far as my ties in Newark, I'm always

Newark, no matter where I'll wait. I was always Newark. That was no problem.

*Naomi Extra:* Fifth grade onward, I'm thinking about high school in particular. What kinds of things did you do for fun? What was high school like for you?

*Cezre Adams:* It's funny, because now when I see kids, and I see how everybody just swarms to Jersey Garden Mall, I laugh about it. Because it's like, "Why do they wanna come to this mall?" That was me, growing up, because in Franklin it was, if you wasn't playing sports, it was kinda like you went to the movies. Or you went with your friends and asked your parents, "Hey, can I go to Menlo Park Mall or Woolbridge Mall?" You were there all day. All day with each other, just—I'm just trying to think. Like, what the heck were we doing? It would just be walking around. Looking at some—window-shopping. If we had money at the time, or if my parents gave us money, we would shop for the little things here and there. It was bowling. Going to the movies, and going to each other houses. Just stuff that I laugh at kids now when I see them here in the City of Newark [*laughter*]. It was the same that we did in Franklin. It was no big difference that they do here in Newark, like I said, but I was heavily involved in sports. In Franklin. Especially football. That's when football, for me, took off. It was football for me, all year round. If it wasn't football, it was track, but definitely, football. When football season was over, it was something you was anticipating for the next season to come around. Like, "Oh my God. Where am I gonna play at? Who I'm gonna play for? Who I'm gonna play with? What are my teammates, what are my

coaches gonna be?” By the end of the day, you knew that you were gonna be on a good team. Then, yeah, that was for us. That was Franklin. Home of the Warriors.

*Naomi Extra:* Which question first?

*Czezre Adams:* [Laughter]

*Naomi Extra:* Do you remember what some of your – ‘cause you mentioned sports, what some of your dreams were in high school?

*Czezre Adams:* I actually wanted to go to the NFL. I actually did. I could say I wanted to go. I could say I was one of those who was naturally gifted in football. I was never a person who was extremely big, but I naturally grasped the game of football. It was just something that I was natural—I was naturally fast. I was naturally able to pick up on different things. My IQ for the game of football, it was just natural for me.

My dream, it was like, “I’m in—they making millions of dollars in the NFL, especially going the first round, and your contract is guaranteed, you make this endless amount of money.” I was like, “Screw this, I’m gonna be a football player.” [00:25:00]

Even though I still, at the back of my mind, was like, “Okay, I still wanna be, I still wanna go to college. I still wanna complete my four years, and still get that degree. When my career is over in the NFL, okay, I’m going to law school. Okay, I’m going to get something as far as the degree in theology and blah, blah, blah, blah.”

Still had that in the back of my mind, but football was definitely on my radar. Now that I look back on it now, it’s like I didn’t take it as serious as somebody who made it and played football in college,



who went to the NFL combine. Who was doing the workouts on the side, or who was going to football camps.

Even though I was going to football camps, I wasn't going to camps to the extreme that others were going to, because I was like, "That sounds natural. Like the hell with it. I don't need to do what everybody else is doing." Now that I look at it, look back on it now, it's like, "Okay, I did need to do those things, if I really wanted to make it to the NFL."

To me, probably when it hit, my senior year in high school, so I was like, "I am not going to the NFL." [*Laughter*]. I was like, "I'm not going to the NFL. That's just it for me. I enjoyed my time playing football." Like I said, I played up until my freshman year in college. I was like, "This, for me, is, yeah, this is it."

*Naomi Extra:*

Interesting. Then at that point, what did you decide? What direction did you decide you wanted to go in?

*Cezre Adams:*

It's funny, because like I said, once, even if I played football or not, my dream of being a lawyer never changed. I already knew I was going to school for law. I already knew I was going to school for my undergrad for political science, so that never changed for me. One thing my family stressed was education.

If you wanna make it in this world, you have to be educated. You have to be educated. You have to be educated, because nobody can never take that piece of paper away from you, no matter—they can say whatever they want about you. They can put a cloud over you, your race, whatever, your sexuality, whatever. As long as you have that piece of paper in your hand, they can never, ever take that from you.

That was something that always stuck in the back of my mind, whether I went in the sports direction or not. That make sure you

get that piece of paper, no matter what direction you went to. When I went to college, it was like, for me it was like, “Political science. That’s it. That’s ballgame for me.” I got a degree in political science and social sciences, I got my degrees in, but I wasn’t stopping. *[Laughter]*

*Naomi Extra:* Where did you go to college?

*Cezre Adams:* Virginia Union University. Home of the Panthers. Then once I finished there, I wound up coming back to Newark. Wound up getting a degree at Essex County College. Then I wound up going to Thomas Edison, doing online classes, but then I stopped because, like I said, I wound up becoming a per diem in the Newark Public School system. Then I wound up becoming a police officer.

But I am going to go back to school. I’m four classes away from obtaining another degree, so I am gonna eventually go back. I was thinking about transferring to Rutgers, but then I was like, “No. Why do that when you’re only four classes away on my Thomas Edison State College Online? Just do it there, just get it over with.”

*Naomi Extra:* You taught in the Newark Public School System?

*Cezre Adams:* Yes. I went from a per diem, teacher’s aide. Then I wound up going to—oh my God, Speedway 00:28:30 Elementary School where I taught—it was this new program that they were implementing, called the “Teach the One” program. It was like a math program.

I don’t know why I did it. Because I despise math *[laughter]*. I despise math greatly, but I wound up, I looked at it as an

opportunity for me. I took it on, and it was a great experience for me. It was a great experience.

Again, like I said, I don't know if I probably woulda gotten the opportunity if my family wasn't so connected with the Newark Public School system. It just so happened that my first ever job with the Newark Public School system was as a teacher's aide at Quitman Street School, a school that I went to. The principal, he was the principal there, he's now an assistant superintendent now—was Mr. Glover.

He was my elementary school teacher. He was my elementary school basketball coach. It was so weird that when I actually started working in that field, that the person who taught me as a child was the person who gave me my first job in the educational field.

It's just the way that things just connected in my life, was just—people look at it and say, "Wow, that's just crazy." People wouldn't even believe it. It's almost like a fairy tale to people, but for me, it happened. It happened. Like I said, I went into the school system. I wound up from Speedway, [00:30:00] teaching.

I had to teach the one program. I wound up, to me, which is one of the best jobs I've had in the Newark Public School system, was I taught autistic kids at Central High School.

*Naomi Extra:* When was this? When are we talking?

*Czezre Adams:* Right before I went to the police academy.

*Naomi Extra:* Ok, so then what year? [*cross talk 00:30:16*]

*Czezre Adams:* I did that for a year. I went to the police academy 2015, so it was the 2014-2015 school year I taught autistic kids. That was, to me,

if I can stay there, if I could stay, I probably would a stayed there and done that, and like I said, got licensed to—because I probably would have went on and got my license to become a special needs teacher. I probably would a stayed there. That was one of the most enjoyable experiences.

Probably, probably—I put that in my top three. That would be in my top three. I really, really—like I said, I’ve never taught special needs kids before, autistic kids before. To actually walk into that, and just to see them as people, and what they go through, and what they accomplish, and their intellect.

Their memory, the memory that they have, and just the stuff that they’re able to do with the disadvantage that they have, that was just so enjoy—I had a smile on my face every single day. Even though it was stressful at times, but I always left there and came there with a smile, every single day. Yeah.

*Naomi Extra:* Wow. You mentioned that around the age of 15, you came out.

*Czezre Adams:* Yes.

*Naomi Extra:* What was that like? What was that coming out process like?

*Czezre Adams:* My coming out process, I’ve always had that feeling. Especially when I moved to Franklin. I probably first started getting that feeling maybe, around eighth grade, going to ninth grade-ish. I never explored it. On my own will, I never explored it. It was explored, of course, through other avenues, but as far as me personally wanting to experience it, I really didn’t get that urge until maybe like around ninth grade.  
Still, to that point, I was fighting it. Like I said, I didn’t officially really, really fully come out—and I didn’t personally come out by

myself. It was my mom wound up finding out, and it was kinda like almost boom. “You might as well come out now, ‘cause she knows,” until the tenth grade.

Yeah, I was watching shows like *Queer as Folk*, which really, it didn’t have a lot of African-American people. I’m pretty sure you know about it. Really, it didn’t have a lotta African-Americans in it, but it was something I was able to watch on TV late at night.

*Naomi Extra:* Was there *Noah’s Ark*?

*Cezre Adams:* *Noah’s Ark*, yes, it was *Noah’s Ark*. I was able to watch that. That was actually one of my—once that came on, it was like, “Okay, screw *Queer as Folk*. Now I have something I can relate to, as far as that is concerned.”

There was things like that, that I watched, and it was like, “Okay, maybe this is who I am and I need to stop fighting it.” Once I came out, it was the response that I expected, but not the response that I wanted, if I could say that. Then at the end of the day, it was still the stigma of homosexuality. It was still that cloud over homosexuality, as far as cross-dressing, and disease, and rapist and hate.

That’s what kinda scared my mom. I don’t necessarily think she was disgusted by it. I think she was more so afraid the backlash that I will receive from it. I think that’s why she reacted the way that she did. She was angry about it.

Like I said, when I look back on it, I don’t think it’s because of—I think it was because of the stigma. I think mostly because I was her youngest son. I was her baby boy. I think she was afraid of what people may do to me, what people may say to me. The backlash, the attacks, whether it’s verbally or physically.

I don't think she wanted that to happen. Being that she feared that, her reaction was hateful. I think she probably thought—I can't speak for her; this is what I'm thinking—that [00:35:00] if she looked down upon it, it would wean me away from it, and be back into the heterosexual life.

Like I said, I don't know if she was thinking that, but looking back on it, I feel as though that's how she felt. Then from there, things kinda went downhill from me from there. Especially when I came out.

Something I advocate and fight with to this day, when I speak to parents, and I go in different discussion panels, and I travel the country, and I speak to people in different communities about homosexuality, one thing I try to stress to people is, "it's bad enough that I'm African-American."

I'm young. Still 27 years old, going on 28, so I still consider myself young, but now, I'm homosexual. Now I have three things stacked against me. If you wanna say the fact that I'm from Newark, you could say that's four things. I'm from Newark, okay, there's that stigma. Black, there's that stigma. I'm young, there's that stigma. Now, I'm gay. There's that stigma.

I try to tell people, "You may not like it. You may not accept it, but you would be that person's biggest support, as far as family is concerned. Because the world is very cruel, even though we have made big strides to this moment, in 2017, from where we started. The world is still cruel."

"The world still frown upon, and they turn their backs on homosexuals. Especially if you're African-American. Especially if you're trans. Especially if you're trans. The world turn their back and look down upon people who identify themselves as LGBTQ." A lot of the times, like when I'm on different discussion panel, and I have these discussions with people, when you wonder why those

who identify themselves LGBTQ are running away, and are easily able to express themselves and connect with those who identify themselves as they are, it's because a lotta the times—I don't know the statistics, so don't quote me on this, I'm just saying—more than 90 percent of the time it's because their family don't accept them for who they are.

They're turning their backs on 'em. Or they're kicking them out their homes. Or they're trying to throw the Bible at them.

Whatever they're trying to do. That's was weaning them away from their family, and that's why to this day people are so connected to the outside world As far as those who identify themselves the same as them. Then they over their family.

I tell people, and I'm grateful for it. I'm grateful for it, 'cause eventually, my family did come around to it. Especially my mom. Faster than what I thought. If you would have somebody in your family, whether your cousin, uncle, grandmother, grandfather, father, whatever, child. Especially a child. They come out to you, don't lash out.

Don't turn your back on them. Because I can bet my last dollar in my bank account, if you take them and you accept them, and you protect them, the outcome in the future would be something you could never imagine. A relationship, the trust that you could get from that person would be out of this world.

A perfect example is, look at Magic Johnson and his son *[laughter]*. He just went on the *Ellen DeGeneres Show* not too long ago, and he said the biggest thing that I had to do was accept my son. I had to accept him for who he was, and for who he is, no matter what.”

My job, like he said, his job as a father, was to protect him, and to make sure that his family loved him, and knew that whatever he

wanted to do in life, that he had his biggest support. Look at him now.

That's what we have to understand as a community. As an African-American community, is who I'm hardest on the most, because we're the ones who are so evil towards our kids and our communities, as far as LGBTQ is concerned. We have to, no matter what, love our own, and be there for our own.

Yeah. That's kind of what I experience-wise, and, to continue on that, I think the turning point for me, like I said, if I can just piggyback off of it, was like I said, it was rough. I became a runaway. I became suicidal. My relationship with my mom was real—that was the lowest point, as far as the relationship with my mom, was when I first came out.

Then it trickled down from my mom to my stepfather, who I look at as my—that's my father. To my siblings. Then it trickled down to school, [00:40:00] because I was getting in trouble in school. I wound up being kicked out of high school at one point. I wound up moving out of my house and living with friends. That one moment in time made a world of difference for the rest of my high school career.

Before I went away for college, I gave my mom an alternative. "You're gonna accept me for who I am, or the moment that I pack my bags and officially go away for college, that's it. That's completely it. You will never see your child again."

That kind of became the turning point, as far as me and my mom's relationship. Now, to this day, 12 years later, from me coming out, from 15 to now, 27 going on 28, be 13 years, we have the best, one of the best, if not the best, one of the best mother-son relationships. The best. Even though I dread it sometimes, but I can go to—I can honestly say I can go to my mom about anything.



Absolutely anything. Anybody in my family I can go to about anything. Mother's side of the family, dad's side of the family, stepfather's side of the family. Go to them about anything. Yeah, I'm here, I'm queer, and *[laughter]* I love it. I love it.

*Naomi Extra:*

Wow. I'm wondering about the communities that supported you during that time. I'm wondering if you found any community in Newark? Or if most of your community was in Franklin Township?

*Cezre Adams:*

Very small in Franklin Township. The crazy thing about it is, before I even came out to mom, I came out to two people in high school, who were actually gay themselves. I can still call him my best friends to this day. His name is *[Spelling: Darron? 00:42:03]*. Like I said, I can still call him my best friend, even though we're miles apart, *[Spelling: Shaneeka? 00:42:08]*. I came out to them first.

We were like the three token gay kids in high school. We were like the gay crew of Franklin *[laughter]*. It was two males and one female in Franklin who was overly gay. Everybody knew it. We were the cool gays. We were the Three Musketeers. They were actually the ones who I came out to first. Then Newark is always part of my life.

I wound up slowly by surely, coming back to Newark. I wound up being involved into the ballroom community. That's when I really saw a whole different lifestyle, in respect of, far as LGBTQ is concerned. That's when I wound up seeing drags and trans and butch and trans-men and men in heels and thugs, and feminine boys and masculine men, and those in-between.

All that led that to Newark. Everything always leads back to Newark for me, no matter what. Everything leads back to Newark.

I had my small group of friends, and that small community in Franklin that I was able to go to. But, Newark was where it's at. Newark, for me, was where it's at. It was where it's at.

I wound up finding a boyfriend, and he wound up taking me out of Newark, and showed me places in Baltimore and DC and Atlanta. I was doing things at 15 to 16 years old, that probably, the average 15-, 16-year-old wasn't doing. I was going into 21-years-and-older clubs *[laughter]* at 15 to 16 years old. On the weekend thing. I was going to Gay Prides in DC and Maryland and Atlanta. I was doing so much.

*Naomi Extra:* Did you walk in any of the categories?

*Czezsre Adams:* I really didn't start walking. Walking, like fully getting into it, until 2008, and that's when I was a freshman in college. That's when I really got involved, but I was in Virginia by that time. As far as the experience is concerned, already had that experience. I already knew what ballroom was about, because like I said, I was involved in it at 15 years old, with the House of Jourdan and St. Clair and stuff like that.

Already had that experience with it, but my full involvement, and being consistent when it happened, when I went away for college in 2008.

*Naomi Extra:* Okay, so were you a member of the House of Jourdan?

*Czezsre Adams:* When I was in Newark.

*Naomi Extra:* When you were in Newark, okay.

*Czezsre Adams:* Yes.

*Naomi Extra:* Do you remember who the housemother was?

*Cezre Adams:* Morgan. [00:45:00] Morgan, yes. Morgan, and to this day, I still call her my mom, to this day. We still have a tight bond and relationship.

*Naomi Extra:* Morgan Roy 'El?

*Cezre Adams:* Yes, Morgan Roy 'El, just so we get it out there, and be specific. Morgan Roy 'El. To this day, still have that tightknit relationship. I actually spoke to her on the phone couple days ago. My family knew who she is. She's been to my college graduations. She's been to my—anything significant in my life, Morgan has been there. She has been there every step of the way. My grandmother asks about her all the time. My grandmother says she wants to have go to the Lips one day and watch Morgan perform. It was a good—Morgan was a key part of my life. Key part of my life in ballroom, and personal life.

*Naomi Extra:* That's amazing. Morgan's very special.

*Cezre Adams:* Yes, yes.

*Naomi Extra:* You said you became active in the ballroom scene in Virginia.

*Cezre Adams:* Yes.

*Naomi Extra:* Tell me about that.

*Czezre Adams:*

People think, if you wanna say my ballroom career, as far as I was really walking is concerned, started in Virginia, you can say that. It's funny how I really got involved in that. I was in college, freshman. Freshman year, Richmond, Virginia. Virginia Union University. I went to this club called Godfrey's.

With any person, when you're a new face, everybody gravitates to you. Everybody is all over you. It was like, "Yeah, you're involved in the community. You know about ballroom?" Yeah, I know about ballroom. It was big in Newark. I know about it."

"You should start walkin'. You should walk balls." I'm like, "Okay. What am I gonna walk? 'Cause I'm not really doing anything." They was like, "You should walk Realness, walk Pretty Boy, and walk Face." I'm like, "Okay. That sounds like a plan. Sure. "

I got brought to a meeting, end of 2007 going into 2008. It was terrifying. It's like I've never met these people before. The only person that I knew was the person who brought me to the meeting. When I walked in there, it was a panel [*laughter*] of about maybe, five to seven people, who ran that specific chapter of the House of St. Clair.

I would never forget this. Rows on this side of seats, and rows of seats on this side. Going back towards the room. It was like an imaginary runway that they made. I will never forget this guy, who I'll call my father, Amp, who was sitting in the middle on the panel. He was sitting right in the middle. It had to be five, because he was in the middle. There was two on his left and two on his right.

He had on dark shades, so you couldn't see his eyes. Couldn't see his facial expressions. He's just stone cold. I walked down the aisle, came to him. He said, "What's your name?" I said, "My name's Czezre." Whatever. He's like, "What's your ballroom

name?” I already had a ballroom name by then. My ballroom name was Kash. With a K.

I’m like, “People call me Kash over there, ‘cause maybe—” He like, “What do you know about the House of St. Clair? Why do you wanna be part of the House of St. Clair? What do you wanna walk? Why do you wanna walk? What outfit do you have on? Do you know the name brand of the outfit that you have—“

I’m just looking like, “Oh my God. What the hell? Is this a job? What the hell’s going on here?” All these host of question, I’m sweating bullets. I’m just sweating inside. I’m like, “Oh my God, I’m so nervous. I hope I answer these questions right. I hope they like me. I hope they like my look, my appearance, what I can bring to the table. I hope I answer the—“

Everything that you can go through your mind, it was going through my mind. It was like, “Okay, wait outside.” [*Laughter*] so I’m sitting outside. I’m just like, “Damn.” It just took me about ten, fifteen minutes. They brought me back in. Sat me in the front. They first asked the majority the house, like “Who see it for him? Who see it for him for Pretty Boy and Face? Who see that for him?”

Everybody raised their hand. Of course, you had maybe one or two people in the audience who didn’t raise their hand, but majority raised their hand. Then the panel, which was the house leaders, those were the ones who sat on the panel; they went down, they voted.

I got a yes across the board, so I wound up getting in the House of St. Clair. I was a part of the House of—and actually, the first ball that I walked as a St. Clair, I actually won the category.

*Naomi Extra:*

What was it?

*Czezre Adams:* Pretty Boy, Face. I won. Then from there, I kinda took Pretty Boy by storm. I consistently walked Pretty Boy. That's my main category. I dabbled and dabbled with Face and Pretty Boy and Runway and [00:50:00] stuff like that, but my main category, that I'm known for, is Pretty Boy. I've been walking that since 2008. It'll be ten years for that next year.

I lost battles that I thought I should a never lost. I lost battles that I looked, and I said, "Damn. I did deserve to lose," and I've won a lotta balls. Won a lotta balls, been "of the year" a couple times. That was my experience, as far as getting involved in ballroom. Actually consistently starting walking, starting in 2008.

*Naomi Extra:* The House of St. Clair, was that like a mixed-race house, or was it a predominantly black—

*Czezre Adams:* Right in Virginia, it was predominant— that chapter in Virginia was predominantly black, but it was mixed. Like I said, 'cause it was in Richmond, Virginia, which is a predominantly black neighborhood. I should say, city, I should say.

A lotta the members there were African-American, but we had our mixtures of white and Spanish and Indian or what-have-you-not, and that was a part of the chapter. Overall, the house was predominantly African-American.

*Naomi Extra:* Where did you go? What were the spots in Newark that you hung out as far as clubs?

*Czezre Adams:* The Globe [laughter]. It was the Globe for me, 'cause like I said, the Globe was a teen club/adult club. I'm pretty sure anybody you speak to, the Globe was it. Especially for my age bracket. It was

the Globe. That was one of the main places that I went to. For me, if it wasn't the Globe, I wasn't going anywhere else.

'Cause, like I said, I was going to clubs in different states, at my age, at a young age in high school, with 21-year-olds. That was only it for me, was the Globe. *[Laughter]*

*Naomi Extra:* I guess I'll ask a little bit about your journey to becoming a police officer.

*Cezre Adams:* Yes.

*Naomi Extra:* In Newark.

*Cezre Adams:* Yes.

*Naomi Extra:* How did that happen?

*Cezre Adams:* Back in Newark again. I wind up, the test wind up coming out in 2012 or 2013, one of those years. I was like, "Hell, I just—" I didn't even think about it. I was like, "Hell. I might as well just take it. Sign up for it, application for—\$35.00 application fee, go take the test." Now, I did have family members who were already at Newark Police Department. "Take the test, and just see where it goes." Like I said, when I got called for it in 2015, I hadn't even thought about it. Like I said, I wind up already be involved in the school system. I wound up running for public office. I'm already, at the, time, so it was like—

*Naomi Extra:* Public office?

*Cezre Adams:*

Yes. Yes. *[Laughter]* *[cross talk 00:53:13]* yeah, so I wanted there, so like I said, like I said, when I did it, I did the application; I wound up forgetting about it. Honestly, but like I said, everything early back in my life, my early years, I always wanted to be a lawyer. Always wanted to be in the law enforcement field, and any aspect.

Long as I wasn't a criminal *[laughter]* I wanted to be involved in the criminal justice system, and make change. One thing I know, everybody who gets involved in something that's so impactful, their main objective is—their main key word in everything, is change. "I wanna make change. I wanna be the change."

That's what I wanted. I wanted to change the criminal justice system, so that it was equal for everyone. Now, what I see now, as a police officer, I kinda understand a little—I kinda understand certain things that I didn't understand back then, because I wasn't a police officer. I wasn't walking in those shoes.

Still, change is needed. To this day, change is needed for the better, on both sides. But, like I said before, I was doing other things before I became a police officer. Like I said, I was in the public educational system. I was an advocate. I was a lobbyist. I was doing speeches. I wound up running for office in 2014.

*Naomi Extra:*

Let's pause. Can we talk about that a little bit?

*Cezre Adams:*

Yes. **[00:55:00]** It's so funny, because my grandmother told me one time. She remembered, back when I was a little kid, I told her I wanted to be the first black President. When I got into public office—my idea was so crazy when I announced that I was running for office, but she remembers. Pastor, lawyer, criminal justice system, President.



That was it. I wanted to be the first black President. It wasn't even be the first black gay President. It was I wanted to be the first black President, 'cause at the time, there were no black presidents. That's what I wanted to be, so when I announced that I wanted to be—I was running for office, it wasn't a shock, but it was a shock.

Because it happened at my little cousin's birthday party. It was January 2014. I already started gearing up for it. I already started meeting different people to be on my staff. We already started coming up with rhetoric, and slogans. We already were taking pictures. We was in all these things. Nobody had a clue about—nobody had a clue that I was doing this.

I had a poster—I came, and I told a few people in my family, like a few of my cousins and my aunt. One of my aunts. "I'm running for office." I said, "Since the family's here, I don't wanna take the shine from my little cousin, 'cause it's his birthday, but this is the perfect opportunity, 'cause the family's here."

"This is it, for me to get them together, before I just take this campaign by storm." We're January, 2014. I made my announcement. I didn't even say I'm running for office. I just told my—the people I told, my aunt, my one aunt and few of my cousins, said, "Y'all come up here." Reveal my poster. They said— They just looking like, "What the hell is this?" *[Laughter]* They're just looking at me like, "What?" "Everybody, I have an announcement. Can I get everybody attention?" Then boom, they reveal the poster. So everybody's holding the poster. They're looking like, "What the hell is this?"

I'm like, "I'm running for public office. I'm running for Central Ward Councilman." Everybody just looked at me like, "What? Are you sure this is what you wanna do?" I'm like, "Yeah." They're like, "Okay. Go for it. Go, go, go for it. Do what you gotta do."

Then I ran for office. I went, picked up the petitions, and I needed 300-some-odd votes, and I wound up getting 485. To be certified on the ballot. When I got certified, officially in March—‘cause my campaign was kinda slow. I didn’t have the backing of the political machine. I wasn’t on anybody’s ticket. Like I said, I kinda, even though I told my family early, I announced late.

I was all by my – I was like, by my lonesome as far as that is concerned. Like I said, I became—I was tied with Mayor Ras J. Baraka as the youngest to ever be verified on a municipal ballot—or any ballot in the City of Newark and the State of New Jersey. I was the youngest LGBTQ to actually do that, at 2014 I was 24. I was 24 at the time.

I was 24 going on 25, so I was the youngest at that time. Then I wound up getting beat out by Rashawn Davis, who, I think, at the time was 21. He became the youngest ever to be verified on a municipal ballot or any major ballot in the State of New Jersey, in the City of Newark. I think he was 21 years old at the time. Believe so.

But, I’m still, I think I am—haven’t done any research, I’m still the youngest LGBT to be verified on a municipal ballot in the City of Newark, and in the State of New Jersey. Yeah.

*Naomi Extra:* That’s impressive.

*Cezre Adams:* *[Laughter]* Thank you, so 400-and-something people believed in my message, and signed my petition and got me on the ballot. That was a wonderful experience. That opened a lotta doors for me too, as well, ‘cause again, I wasn’t somebody who waited for somebody to tell me when it was my turn.

I told them, “This was my time.” I believed in a better Newark, like you do. I’m tired of seeing poverty. I’m tired of seeing my

people struggle. I'm tired of the state running our school systems. I'm tired of the backdoor deals. I'm tired of the crime. [01:00:00] I'm tired of my community being taken advantage of, and not giving it opportunity that the community I grew up in, from sixth grade on in Franklin, was not given.

Newark being the biggest city in the State of New Jersey, the third-oldest city in this country, there's no reason why we're going through what we're going through. Even fifty some-odd years after the riots in the '60's. At some point, no knock to anybody on the City Council, I felt as though we needed a new voice. We needed new, fresh ideas. Because the world was changing.

There world changes every day. Something new happens, every single day, something new happens. Something new is being invented or discovered. I felt as though for people to be in office for such a extended amount of time, and to see what my city was still at, I felt as though it was time for change.

I felt as though, how can you sleep at night, knowing—and I have great relationships with these people, across the board—how can you sleep at night knowing your city's going through this? The struggle your people's going through, and you had a chance to change that.

Bein' on the council, some, they're longer than almost I've been alive, and your city is still suffering. Poverty; abandoned homes; jobs that are not here, that are given to other people; not having a livable wage; school system's that's still being ran by the State.

I'm one of those people who was educated while the State not only ran the school, but I worked for the school system, while the State still was running our school systems, and there's no change. There is no reason why that—before the riots, Newark was considered the fifth-best place to live in in this country, and now it's considered one of the worst, 50 years later, even after the riots.

For me, it was all about change, change, change. Obama inspired that change in 2007 and 2008 when—backtrack a little bit. When I was the first president of the Young Democrats Association for my university, that black man, and Obama, and what he embodied and what he went through, and what he was trying to bring forth to this country, as far as change. We believe in, “Yes, we can.”

Rooted everything in me to want to go about making the change when I left Virginia, came back home, for my community. Like I said, with my family being a part of the Newark Public Educational system, and Dana Rone, she was my aunt. She was a councilwoman for Newark. It’s almost kinda like *[laughter]* it’s in me.

Everybody needs that extra oomph or that inspiration or that motivation that pushed ‘em. Obama was the last kick-in-the-butt that was like “Do it. Do it.”

*Naomi Extra:* Right. You were very clearly invested in community.

*Cezre Adams:* Yes.

*Naomi Extra:* Can you tell me a little bit about your experience as a police officer with community, with the queer community in Newark?

*Cezre Adams:* Oh my God, that was a shock *[laughter]*. Politics was a shocker. They always say you never let your right hand know what your left hand is doing. Or your left foot know what your right foot is doing. I think it’s your right hand know what your left hand is doing. For me, I’m not one of those people who—I’m rarely social. I do talk a lot on social media, but I don’t put everything out there. I like the element of surprise.

Along with the political thing being a surprise to everybody, the police thing was really a surprise. I'm not gonna lie, I was Black Lives Matter. I was marching. I made speeches. I protested. I advocated. I did everything. Everything in the world you can think of, I did it, against police officers, but at the same time, I also advocated for police officers, against my community.

Let them know, "You just can't point the fingers at them. You have to point the fingers at yourselves as well." For people, it was a shock, [01:05:00] but when people see me and I was no facial hair, no hair on my head, people thought I had cancer. People thought I was on my deathbed.

People just was thinking the worst, but I never told them, "This is me probably going—this is part of the police academy. This is a paramilitary operation, so I have to cut my hair. You think I wanted to cut my hair off?" *[Laughter]*

I had facial hair—I just dyed my hair. I had highlights, like brown. Almost like this color, as far as the seats are concerned, my tips were. Do you think I wanna cut that off? I just did it for my birthday, and I was always getting designs in my hair, and this is—I thought, "No, no." But I didn't tell anybody. Element of surprise. Then probably about three or four months in the academy, I wound up telling people. No guise. No matter what, I had my academy shirt on, 'cause I had a number one on my shirt, 'cause as you know, my last name Adams, so I was the first seat, first person in line. I even be taking pictures of my academy gear on, and this and that. People were still just could not connect the dots.

Posted videos. "Gear bag is heavy", gear bag in my hand, "Going to the car," "Going to the academy." Videos. I was doing it all, and people just could not connect the dots. Until I came out and said, "Y'all. In the police academy. I'm not dying. No, I don't have cancer or anything. I'm in the police academy. Yes, I look like a

bald chicken, like a newborn, honestly, but I'm in the police academy."

When I finally graduated, people was like, "Oh, this is a reality." It is crazy, because I graduated in March. That was my grandmother's birthday gift. 'Cause she actually funded my way into the academy. She fully paid for my uniform. Anything that I needed, my grandmother paid for. She let me use her car. She woke me up in the morning, to make sure I got in the shower, and got dressed, and she made my lunch.

To the point where my grandmother made my lunch every, single day, that the academy knew who she was. When she came to the graduation, my training officers at the academy was like dying to meet my grandmother. They were dying to meet my—they called my grandmother the "silent lady," or the "peanut butter and jelly lady," because all I ate was peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. She chopped up my fruit.

I had my salad. Every, single day. It was consistent. Every day, and I was no shame. I have no shame of it. My instructors would make fun of me. "Who made your lunch today, your grandma?" "Sir, yes, sir." *[Laughter]*. "Sir, yes, sir." "You're a grandma's boy?" "Sir, yes, sir. I'm a grandma's boy, sir." Everything was, "Sir, yes, sir." I had no shame. "You spoiled by your grandma? Your grandma change your diapers. She wipes your butt." "Sir, yes, sir." Everything was, "Sir, yes, sir." There was no shame. It was no shame in it. I loved every bit of it. Me being a police officer, that was a shock. A shocker.

Now I have to think, I was heavily involved in ballroom community. I threw the one bone with the political thing. Now I'm a police officer. For people who know me closely, they're never shocked at things that I accomplish. Because I'm so driven and

determined about what I want in life, what I want to do in life.

What I've set my mind to something, I accomplish it.

I was always raised to never be a quitter. You fight until your last breath. It was shock, but when I let people know I was doing it—they was like, "Okay, he got this. He got this." Me being a police officer, it was easy. It was easy, because, like I said, I'm a community person.

To this day, I can remember police officers coming into my schools in Newark, with the DARE program and everything, and talking to the community. Teaching you about crime and guns and fire. Handing out gifts and stuff like that. I remembers those things, so me being a police officer, a community police officer, was just natural.

Because I love people. I love socializing with people. I love interacting with people. I love being around people. I love seeing my people. I love the people at Newark, so it was something that came natural for me. Something that came, actually, natural for me.

Now, don't get me wrong .I hit some bumps in the road, because I am—at the end of the—I am a police officer, so at some point, people no longer see you for who you are. They now see that uniform. They now see you in that uniform, and what's associated, that stigma. Even though there's truth to it. They put that on you now.

Have I been called Uncle Tom? Yes. Have I been called a traitor? Yes. Have I been called a loser? Yes. Have I been called a snitch? Yes. Anything you can think of, I've been called in the book, **[01:10:00]** but do I also get a standing ovation? Do I also get a thank you? Do I also get people who smile at me every single day? Do I get thank-yous? Do I get DM's? Yes. Every, single day I get it.

With this bad, comes a lotta good, and I don't regret it. At the end of the day, I treat people the way I wanna be treated. I treat people the way I want them to treat my mom or my grandmother or my brothers or sisters or father. That's the way I treat them.

Even when you disrespect me. I think we're all hotheaded, so we all have our moments, but I would never break the law. I would never abuse my power, or abuse my authority against anybody. At the end of the day, it's hard to make me mad. I smile every day, and I'm forever grateful for where I stand today.

Even with the rough patches that I've been through. I'm forever thankful, because I know there's somebody—plenty of people out there, who would die to have a second, a minute, an hour, a day, a lifetime in my shoes.

I'm mindful, since—me being in the police department's kinda like another comin' out [*laughter*] situation. I had a few coming outs in my life. One with my family. Two, you can tie in school and my family together, 'cause once I came out to my family; I kinda came out with school and sports. Then I came out when I ran for political office. Then again, I came out, I became a police officer.

The response, the positive response, that I've received from my department, has been outstanding. People are probably saying, "You're just saying this because you're a cop, and you don't wanna get in trouble, and blah, blah, blah, blah." Absolutely not. Anybody who eventually listens to this interview, know I have no problem telling the truth.

My department has been behind me 110 percent. They have been, like I said, instead of looking—frowning upon me, they accepted me for who I was. Because before they knew I was gay, even though there was whispers, blah, blah, blah, blah. Before I came out and told them I was gay, I showed my body of work. I showed



them who I was as a person. I showed them who I was as a worker. I showed them that I wore my badge proudly.

That I respected the department and what it stood for, and where they were trying to go, as far as the police department. When I already built that rapport with them, me coming out as homosexual, it's just like, "Okay, that's fine." [Laughter] "That's fine. That don't mean anything. Because we already know your body of work. We already know Cezre Adams. You're just homosexual. [Laughter] That's it. You're just gay."

At first, I thought I was the first openly gay cop in the Newark Police Department, 'cause I did another interview with the advocate in *Out Magazine*. I did state that I was the only openly gay cop, as far as males are concerned, but come to find out that I wasn't. There was somebody before me, who's still on the job, who's been a great mentor to me.

Yeah, and he's just taking me under his wing. Then he's shown me the right way. He's definitely shown me the right way. I guess my captain. 'Cause I could start from the top, from the director, the chief of police, to the captain, the many, many different departments, as far as community affairs, and stuff like that. My captain, in my precinct, on Clinton and Bergen, which is considered the fifth precinct the South Ward, has been a big support system, big support of mine, and my XO, who's a lieutenant in the precinct. Been a huge supporter of mine. All, from the top to the little guy, the regular patrol person has been very supportive of me. They make jokes. They make jokes. "Oh, Adams, why didn't you tell me that you was—" when I did my interview for the advocate in *Out Magazine*. "Why didn't you tell me you were doing the interview? I could have been your bodyguard. [Inaudible 01:14:40] could have pretended to be your boyfriend. [Inaudible 01:14:43]"

The response to me has been great. Like I said, I don't—even when they make gay jokes, or I hear somebody say the word “fag,” in my presence. Don't get mad. I don't get mad, but at the end of the day, they were doing it before [01:15:00] I came out, so I don't expect them to change.

Now, if they get—you'd know when somebody's trying to use that word “fag” to try to demean somebody, but I haven't experienced that. I haven't experienced that. Like I said, my job, they made jokes [laughter] and I make jokes right back at 'em. As long as somebody don't get disrespectful to me, I'm perfectly fine. I can say, to this day, it has not happened yet.

*Naomi Extra:* That's great. I think that's probably it.

*Cezre Adams:* Yes.

*Naomi Extra:* Is there anything else that you'd wanna share? You're fascinating.

*Cezre Adams:* Thank you. Thank you. [Laughter] I think I've—everything you asked me, I've experienced. That's my life. What the future holds for me, I don't know. I don't know what the future holds for me but —

*Naomi Extra:* Do you see yourself staying on the police force?

*Cezre Adams:* I do. How long? I don't know, but for the time being, I'm here to stay. Do I wanna get back into public office? Yes, I do. But I'm not gonna — [laughter]. There's no secret. There's no time soon. Obviously, don't nobody expect me to run in 2018, even though people already want me to run in—don't expect that. That's not gonna happen.

I'm not one of those people who, "Oh no, I'm not running. I'm not considering it," but then boom I pop in and do it. No. You got my word, 2018 is not the year that Czezre will be runnin' for office. It's something I do want to get back into down the line, but being in the police department, I love it. I love it.

*Naomi Extra:* Police work for the Newark Police Department.

*Czezre Adams:* Yes.

*Naomi Extra:* Live?

*Czezre Adams:* In Newark.

*Naomi Extra:* In Newark.

*Czezre Adams:* I stay in Newark. Even though my one-year probation is up, and I can move out of the City of Newark, I stay

*Naomi Extra:* Where do you live in Newark?

*Czezre Adams:* I live in Quitman Street in High Park Gardens with my grandmother. I am currently looking for an apartment of my own in Newark.

*Naomi Extra:* In Newark.

*Czezre Adams:* In Newark. I'm staying in Newark. Hopefully, I can find something. Like I said, I don't wanna leave Newark. I don't wanna leave my community at all. I wanna stay here. I wanna be that cop. I wanna be that person who people can say, "You know what? He

didn't just take the money and run. He took our money, took taxpayer's dollars, but he stayed here, and he's trying to make a difference here. He wants to be a part of the change."

I want people to remember me as that. Whether it's a politician—I would never consider myself a politician, but whether it's somebody who's in a public sector, as far as being a mayor or council person, a president, a governor, wherever it is, or police officer, or an advocate or a lobbyist. Or whatever it is. I want people to say that, "He never left this community. He never turned his back on his community. He stood by whatever he believed in," and I was a man of my word.

That's what I want people to remember me. I want people to remember me as somebody who was always happy, who always smiled, who always was willing to give his last. Was always ready to help, help people with—like I said, coming down a lot. I wanna start my own scholarship fund.

There's just so many things I wanna do before my time is up, before the higher power says, "Your time is up." That's what I wanna be remembered as. Like I said, I don't need the lights and cameras [*laughter*] for me to do what I'm doing. 'Cause I'm gonna do it regardless. At the end of the day, the people who need to recognize it, will see it. I will be glorified for it when the time comes.

Like I said, I've already been—already got countless accomplishments and awards for what I've done so far. I expect more, and I'm pretty sure I will get more, but that's not why I'm doing what I'm doing. I'm doing what I'm doing because I love people. I love my community, and I want to see my community thrive.

I wanna see people accept the way that I identify myself. I want people to accept them as well. I just want people to love.

*[Laughter]* just be able to live amongst each other. Love is love, no matter what background you come from. I want people to really understand that. [01:20:00]

We're all human, we all make mistakes. I still make mistakes to this day, but we have to understand that we must learn from those mistakes and grow, and know that we're all that we have as people. At the end of the day, your time is gonna be up, and you're gonna be called, and have to answer to that one person up above. You don't wanna be looked at—somebody who did the opposite what you should have been doing.

*Naomi Extra:* I have one last question for you. Are there any ways in which you feel like its helped being black and queer and a cop in Newark?

*Cezre Adams:* It has. It helped a lot. It's just crazy that society still put things as the first black "this," or the first gay "this," or the first black, gay, "this." It sucks that society still does that to this day, but it happens. It happens and *[laughter]* it sucks that we still do that, but that may be, it's opened doors for me. Me being the—at the time, being the youngest person to ever be verified on a municipal ballot has opened doors.

Me being considered the—me being the youngest LGBT person be verified on a municipal ballot, has opened doors. Me being a part of ballroom, and what I've done outside of ballroom, has opened doors for me. Me being a cop, a black, gay cop.

*Naomi Extra:* How has that helped you to connect to the community?

*Cezre Adams:* One of my big messages, and this is, don't nobody steal my idea, but this is part of the scholarship fund that I wanna start, called Bridging the Divide. It is also a campaign that I wanna launch. I

have to just find the time to actually sit down with the right people, and get the wording correct, but it's not even about resources. It's just getting connected to the right people.

With everything that has been going on, with the police brutality that—if people wanna look at it that way, I, for the start, I can say that I've been a help in easing that hurt, and that guilt, and that pain, and that anger, and frustration. On both sides.

Because I have people to the left—f you wanna look at the community who I'm a part of, who I've been a part of, still a part of—who see me as the same guy that they remember before I had that uniform on. When I take the uniform off, I'm still that same guy.

If they can see that one cop who's still like them at the end of the day, that makes a world of difference. Just like on my right side, you have cops. With everything that I did with the protests and the rallying and Black Lives Matter, and “Screw cops,” and dah, dah, dah, dah, I could put on that uniform like them, and still stand my ground. Still honor and be proud of that badge and that uniform, I've done my job. I've done my job.

Now, they see that what they did, coming into the community when I was a young child, and the DARE program, and stuff like that, they see, “Okay, we touched somebody. We found somebody who, even though he was rallying, Black Lives Matter, marching on City Hall steps, ad going to DC, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, he gave us a chance. With giving us a chance, he took a chance on us, just like they took a chance on me, and became one of us, but never lost value in community. Just like I never lost my value in brotherhood with the police department.

I'm bringing those two together. I'm bringing those two together, and I'm trying my hardest to mend things. 'Cause just whenever I go do interviews or do speeches or whatever, sit on panels,

whatever it may be, everything I do is free. I don't want anybody's money, for me to do what I'm doing. 'Cause I'm doing this out of the kindness of my heart.

I always tell people, especially when it comes to police officer and community, how we gonna fix this problem? I always tell people, somebody has to stop pointing a finger. Somebody has to be willing to take that first step, and say, "Give me your hand. Let's work this out."

I've done it [01:25:00] as a civilian. I've done it as a police officer. I've done it as a young male. I've done it as an African-American young male. I've done it as a LGBTQ young African-American male. "Give me your hand. Let's walk through this together."

If we want this, it just takes a conversation. It just takes understanding, for me to know what you're thinking, for you to know what I'm thinking. For you to understand why am I approaching a certain situation this way. And for you – vice versa. It takes conversation. Not a shouting match, but a conversation. When that conversation happens, we actually have to listen to each other. We may not agree on everything, because we're human, and if people agreed on everything, it'd be a boring world, but we must listen. We must come to some commune ground, to where we can move forward, and better the police department and the community, and have a relationship and each other.

I am not changing this for the world. Like I said, the sky's the limit for me. I'm definitely anxious to see what the future holds for me as a young, black, gay police officer *[laughter]*.

*Naomi Extra:* Thank you so much for this interview.

*Cezre Adams:* Thank you. Thank you for having me.

*Naomi Extra:* This is Naomi Extra here, April 28, 2017 at Rutgers, Newark.  
Interviewing Czezre Adams.

*Czezre Adams:* Thank you.

*[End of Audio, 01:26:37]*