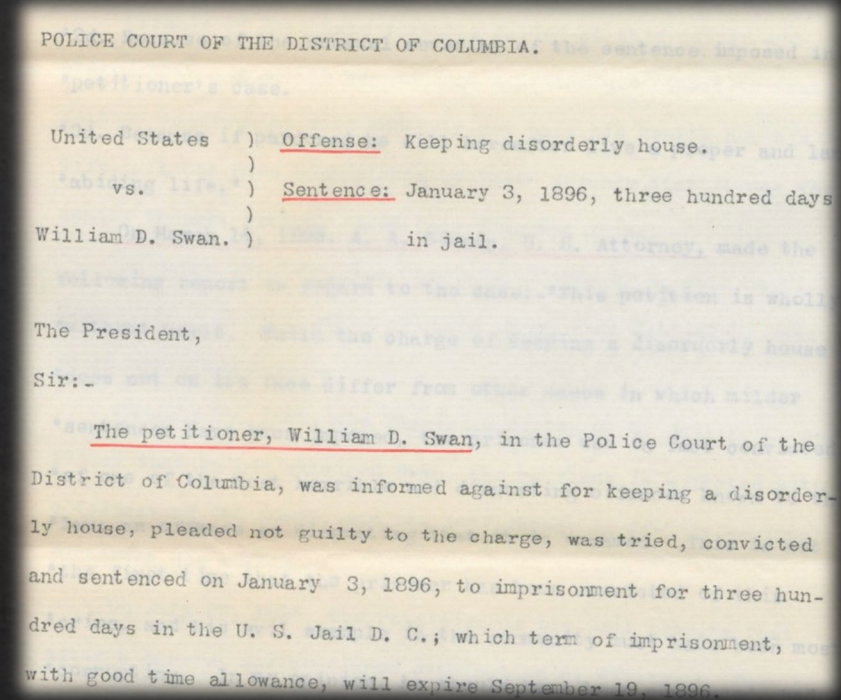


NARA BLACK HISTORY BASIC TRAINING

Feb 19 – William Dorsey Swann

[William Dorsey Swann](#) was the first person to self identify as a queen of drag and early queer activist. They were born into slavery in Maryland in 1860, and lived as a freedperson after the abolishment of slavery. Living in Washington, DC, Swann may have attended school and worked for an educational system. In their personal and social life, Swann was known as “The Queen” and held “drags” in their home where men of different races danced and drank. One of the drags was raided and Swann was arrested and charged with keeping a disorderly house (parlance for running a brothel). Swann and members of the community filed for a pardon from President Grover Cleveland – marking the first time an American took legal action to defend the right of the queer community to gather peaceably.



Records:

- ✓ [Pardon File of William Swann for keeping a disorderly house](#), NAID 165128484
- ✓ [Pardon File of William Swann for petty larceny](#), NAID 165128485

Reading:

- ✓ [William Dorsey Swann, the Queen of Drag](#), Rediscovering Black History
- ✓ A Queer History of the United States (Beacon Press), 2011
- ✓ We Are Everywhere: Protest, Power, and Pride in the History of Queer Liberation (Ten Speed Press), 2019