Stonewall National Museum & Archives
LGBTQ Film and Television Timeline

The United States has had a long-standing discomfort with the transgression of sexual and gender norms. Influenced by religious ideals, society viewed people who had same-sex desires and engaged in same-sex practices to be immoral and sinful. As such, the US has long enacted laws to control and condemn those who betray sexual and gender norms. Since the nation’s earliest days, federal, state and local laws punished those who betrayed sexual and gender norms, often as a capital offense.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, commerce and industry flourished, causing people to move from rural communities to more developed urban areas. As a result of these social transformations, same-sex practices increased, as did organized efforts to suppress them. Accordingly, our examination of LGBTQ history in the United States begins after the Civil War and the growth of industrialization and urbanization. Despite insistent homophobia and transphobia in politics, culture, and society over the past 170 years, LGBTQ people have remained resilient, creative, and dedicated to the fight for rights and visibility. Rather than a comprehensive overview, this timeline is intended to provide a snapshot of significant moments in LGBTQ history so as to encourage further engagement and exploration.

Check out other LGBTQ history timeline selections that specifically explore visual art, music, theatre and dance, literature, AIDS, sports, and more in this series.

A timeline of important LGBTQ actors, films and television productions. Many thanks to Jackson Davidow for his research on this project.

1917 Ramon Novarro, a Mexican-American actor, appeared in his first silent film. More

1933 William Haines was forced out of acting by MGM studios due to his homosexual identity. He subsequently became an influential interior designer. [More]

1944 Vincente Minnelli directed *Meet Me in St. Louis*, which starred his soon-to-be wife Judy Garland (who herself was a gay icon). [More]

1951 Montgomery Clift appeared opposite Elizabeth Taylor in George Stevens’ *A Place in the Sun*. [More]
1948   Farley Granger starred in Alfred Hitchcock’s thriller *Rope*. [More](#)

1955   James Dean, Sal Mineo, and Natalie Wood starred in the epochal film *Rebel Without a Cause*. [More](#)

1957   Child actor Tommy Kirk starred in the popular Disney film *Old Yeller*. [More](#)

1957   Featuring Raymond Burr in the title role, *Perry Mason* premiered on CBS. [More](#)

1959   With a screenplay by Gore Vidal and Tennessee Williams (who also wrote the original play), *Suddenly, Last Summer* addressed the topic of homosexuality. The film also featured lead performances from queer icons Elizabeth Taylor, Katherine Hepburn, and Montgomery Clift. [More](#)
1960  Anthony Perkins had his career-defining role, Norman Bates, in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho*.  

1961  Richard Chamberlain became a teen idol in the TV medical drama *Dr. Kildare*.  

1962  Jim Nabors developed the role of naive auto mechanic Gomer Pyle on *The Andy Griffith Show*.  

1964  Paul Lynde appeared as Uncle Arthur on the sitcom *Bewitched*.  

1965  Cesar Romero portrayed the villain of Joker in the influential television series *Batman*.  

1965  George Takei originated the role of Hikaru Sulu in the TV series *Star Trek*.  

1966  Sandy Dennis won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for her role in the Hollywood adaptation of Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. [More](#)

1968  The black comedy *The Killing of Sister George* revolved around an aging lesbian television actress. [More](#)

1968  *The Queen* documented drag queens planning and participating in the 1967 Miss All-America Camp Beauty Contest in New York City. [More](#)

1969  Directed by John Schlesinger, *Midnight Cowboy*—the story of a friendship between two hustlers—won Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Adapted Screenplay at the Academy Awards. [More](#)

1969  Robert Reed played the role of the father, Mike Brady, in the hit TV show *The Brady Bunch*. [More](#)
1970  Based on the Mart Crowley’s off-Broadway play, and featuring the same cast, *The Boys in the Band* captured the complexity of contemporary gay life and relationships. [More](#)

1970  Adapted from Gore Vidal’s novel, *Myra Breckinridge* was about the journey of a transgender woman. [More](#)

1971  James Bidgood released his dreamy queer arthouse film *Pink Narcissus*. [More](#)

1972  Joel Grey starred as the Master of Ceremonies in the screen version of *Cabaret*—a role for which he won an Academy Award the following year. [More](#)

1972  John Waters directed *Pink Flamingos*, which starred Divine, and it instantly became a cult classic. [More](#)
1972  Meredith Baxter appeared in the CBS sitcom *Bridget Loves Bernie*. [More](#)

1972  Directed by Lamont Johnson, *That Certain Summer* was a made-for-television film that framed homosexuality in positive terms. [More](#)

1973  On the pioneering reality TV show *An American Family*, Lance Loud boldly came out to his family—and to millions of viewers. [More](#)

1973  Arthur Laurents wrote the screenplay for *The Way We Were*, the Barbra Streisand vehicle based on his own experiences at Cornell University. [More](#)

1975  Tim Curry gave an iconic performance as Dr. Frank-N-Furter in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. [More](#)
1976  Jodie Foster had her breakthrough performance in Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver*. More

1978  Allan Carr produced the film version of the musical hit *Grease*. More

1980  Gay activists protested and boycotted the psycho-thriller *Cruising*, which they believed depicted homosexuality in a negative light. More

1980  Lily Tomlin starred in *9 to 5* alongside Jane Fonda and Dolly Parton. More

1982  The queer punk science fiction movie *Liquid Sky* became the most commercially successful independent film of the year. More
1985  Greta Schiller’s *Before Stonewall* was the first major documentary project to chronicle gay and lesbian life in the years before 1969. [More]

1985  *Desert Hearts*, a wide-release romantic drama, positively portrayed lesbian sexuality. [More]

1985  Arthur J. Bressan, Jr.’s *Buddies* movingly depicted the relationship between a man dying of AIDS and his “buddy”—a volunteer friend. [More]

1985  Closeted Hollywood star Rock Hudson died of AIDS at the age of 59. His death was reported widely and sensationally in the media, bringing the virus into public consciousness like never before. [More]

1986  Directed by Bill Sherwood, *Parting Glances* became one of the first fairly mainstream films to confront HIV/AIDS. [More]
1987  Amanda Bearse starred in the sitcom *Married... with Children*. More

1989  Marlon Riggs’ experimental documentary *Tongues Untied* broke ground in its lyrical portrayal of Black gay identity. More

1989  Neil Patrick Harris starred as the title character on *Doogie Howser, M.D.* More

1990  Directed by Jennie Livingston, *Paris is Burning* offered a window on ball culture in New York City. More

1991  A creative retelling of Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*, *My Own Private Idaho* brought to life a gritty world of street hustlers. More

1993  Harvey Fierstein appeared as the gay brother of Robin Williams’ character in *Mrs. Doubtfire.* [More]


1993  David Hyde Pierce gave an unforgettable performance as Dr. Niles Crane on the popular NBC sitcom *Frasier.* [More]

1994  *Go Fish,* an independent drama, told the story of a lesbian relationship. [More]
1994  Margaret Cho rose to prominence after her lead role in the ABC sitcom *All-American Girl*. [More](#)


1995  *Jeffrey* was a gay romantic comedy against a backdrop of the AIDS crisis in New York City. [More](#)

1996  Cheryl Dunye’s landmark *The Watermelon Woman* wove together the history of African American women in film and contemporary lesbian interracial relationships. [More](#)

1996  *The Rosie O’Donnell Show* premiered on television. [More](#)
1996  Nathan Lane starred in *The Birdcage*—the American remake of the Franco-Italian play and film *La Cage aux Folles*. More

1997  Ellen DeGeneres famously came out on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. More

1997  An adaptation of Terrence McNally’s play, *Love! Valor! Compassion!* represented gay friendship in the era of HIV/AIDS. More

1997  Alan Cumming starred in *Romy and Michele’s High School Reunion*. More

1998  Cynthia Nixon rose to prominence with her portrayal of Miranda Hobbes in *Sex and the City*. More
1998 Centering on a friendship between a gay man and a straight woman, *Will & Grace* became one of the most mainstream television shows to broach LGBT issues. [More](#) 

1999 Kimberly Peirce’s *Boys Don’t Cry* was about the life and horrific murder of trans man Brandon Teena—a role for which Hilary Swank received an Academy Award. [More](#) 

1999 BD Wong gained recognition for his role on *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*. [More](#) 

2000 The American-Canadian version of *Queer as Folk* became the first hour-long TV show to focus on gay lives. [More](#) 

2001 Based on the stage musical of the same name, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* charted the experience of a genderqueer East German rock singer. [More](#)
2002  *Frida* brought the life story of Frida Kahlo, a bisexual modern artist, to the big screen. More

2003  *Angels in America*, the multi-parted screen adaptation of Tony Kushner’s play, captured the AIDS epidemic in mid-1980s New York City. More

2003  The reality TV show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* premiered on Bravo. More

2004  A series about West Hollywood lesbian life, *The L Word* was a milestone in the history of LGBTQ representation on television. More

2005  Portraying the queer lives of two cowboys in the American West, *Brokeback Mountain* became one of the most critically successful films of the year, garnering multiple awards and nominations. More
2007  Jim Parsons portrayed the character of Sheldon Cooper on the CBS sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*. More

2008  *Milk*, Gus Van Sant’s biopic about gay activist Harvey Milk, received numerous accolades, including Best Actor (Sean Penn) and Best Original Screenplay (Dustin Lance Black) at the Oscars. More

2009  The first season of the immensely popular TV show *RuPaul’s Drag Race* aired. More

2009  The sitcom *Modern Family* progressively featured a family with gay parents. More

2011  Dee Rees’ *Pariah* told a coming-of-age Black lesbian story. More
2012  Ira Sachs’ *Keep the Lights On* focused on a gay relationship and its addiction-related unraveling. [More](#)

2013  *Orange Is the New Black*—Netflix’s most watched original series—foregrounded queer and trans narratives in prison. [More](#)

2014  *Looking* painted a bleak picture of contemporary gay life in San Francisco. [More](#)

2014  Created by Joey Soloway, the TV series *Transparent* explored the interconnections of transgender and Jewish identity. [More](#)

2015  Directed by Todd Haynes, *Carol* brought Patricia Highsmith’s novel *The Price of Salt* to the silver screen. [More](#)
2015  Vincent Rodriguez III starred in the TV series *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. [More](#)

2015  Shot on an iPhone, *Tangerine* centered on transgender sex workers in Los Angeles. [More](#)

2016  A nuanced Black, queer coming-of-age drama, *Moonlight* won an Oscar for Best Picture at the Academy Awards. [More](#)

2017  *Call Me by Your Name* represented a gay romance in the lush Italian countryside in the 1980s. [More](#)

2018  Featuring a fresh cast, the reboot of *Queer Eye* was released on Netflix. [More](#)
2018 Hari Nef starred in the mainstream film *Assassination Nation*. [More](#)

2018 Celebrating the ballroom scene of 1980s New York City, the TV show *Pose* made a mark with its unprecedented casting of many talented trans and queer actors of color. [More](#)

2020 Directed by Sam Feder and produced by Laverne Cox, *Disclosure* critically investigated the history of transgender representation in Hollywood cinema. [More](#)

2020 Featuring an all-gay cast, the colorful remake of the 1970 film *The Boys in the Band* was released on Netflix. [More](#)