



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](#)



1929 Dorothy Arzner directed *The Wild Party*, Paramount's first sound 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*. [More](#)



1961 Richard Chamberlain became a teen idol in the TV medical drama *Dr. Kildare*. [More](#)



1962 Jim Nabors developed the role of naive auto mechanic Gomer Pyle on *The Andy Griffith Show*. [More](#)



1964 Paul Lynde appeared as Uncle Arthur on the sitcom *Bewitched*. [More](#)



1965 Cesar Romero portrayed the villain of Joker in the influential television series *Batman*. [More](#)



1965 George Takei originated the role of Hikaru Sulu in the TV series *Star Trek*. [More](#)



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](#)



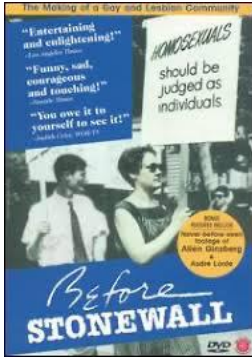
1980 Gay activists protested and boycotted the psycho-thriller *Cruising*, which they believed depicted homosexuality in a negative light. [More](#)



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](#)



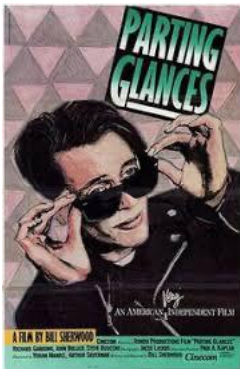
1985 *Desert Hearts*, a wide-release romantic drama, positively portrayed lesbian sexuality. [More](#)



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](#)



1992 Kathy Najimy starred alongside Whoopi Goldberg in the musical comedy film *Sister Act*. [More](#)



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



1993 A mainstream Hollywood film starring Tom Hanks, *Philadelphia* confronted HIV/AIDS and homophobia. [More](#)



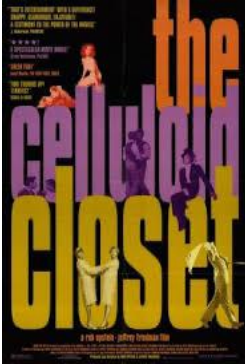
1993 David Hyde Pierce gave an unforgettable performance as Dr. Niles Crane on the popular NBC sitcom *Frasier*. [More](#)



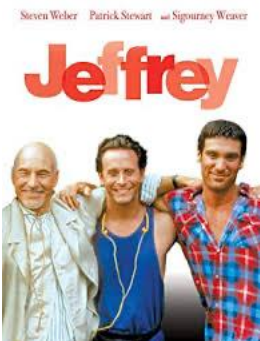
1994 *Go Fish*, an independent drama, told the story of a lesbian relationship. [More](#)



1994 Margaret Cho rose to prominence after her lead role in the ABC sitcom *All-American Girl*. [More](#)



1995 Based on Vito Russo's classic 1981 book, *The Celluloid Closet* delved into LGBTQ representation in the history of motion pictures. [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](#)



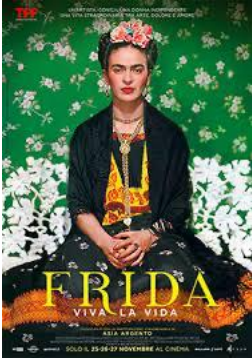
1999 BD Wong gained recognition for his role on *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*. [More](#)



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-partied 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](#)



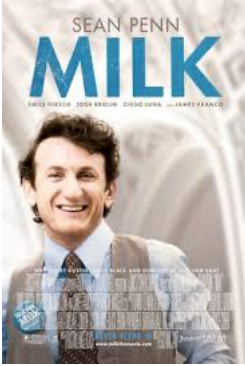
2004 A series about West Hollywood lesbian life, *The L Word* was a milestone in the history of LGBTQ representation on television. [More](#)



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](#)