Stonewall National Museum & Archives
An LGBTQ History

Introduction

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, film and television, AIDS, sports, and more in this series.

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Timeline

1850 Most states had strict laws against same-sex actions with penalties including banishment, castration, imprisonment, and death. Same-sex action was often considered “abominable” or “unmentionable,” similar to bestiality and incest. More
1873  The US government passed the Comstock Act which prohibited sending “obscene” materials through the mail, including books or magazines that featured same-sex attraction and practices. More

1901  An author using the pseudonym Claude Hartland published *The Story of a Life*, the first known American book about being gay. More

1917  The US government banned immigrants with “abnormal” sexual instincts from entering the US. More

1920  LGBTQ subcultures and institutions such as bars and clubs started to flourish in urban areas. More

1924  Henry Gerber founded the Society for Human Rights in Chicago, the first American gay rights organization. Its publication, *Friendship and Freedom*, was also the country’s first gay newsletter. More
1926  The City of New York shut down *The Captive*, a Broadway play, because of a gay theme, subsequently passing a law that criminalized any play depicting “sexual perversion.” More

1932  Molly Dewson was appointed head of the Democratic National Committee’s Women’s Division. More

1934  As Prohibition ended, many cities enacted laws banning bars from serving alcohol to LGBTQ persons. Homosexuals were thus deemed to be “disorderly.” More

1934  The established medical community considered homosexuality a disease that could be cured. “Treatments” included lobotomies, electroshock therapy and castration. More

1934  Encouraged by the Catholic Church, Hollywood adopted the Hays Code to instill “morality” in the motion picture industry. One of its indirect effects was the prohibition of representations of homosexuality, save for villainous gay characters. More
1942 The US military prohibited gays from serving in all branches of the service. More

1947 The US State Department fired and refused to hire anyone who practiced same-sex behavior. More

1947 Edythe D. Eyde (Lisa Ben) began publishing *Vice Versa*. More

1948 Alfred Kinsey published *Sexual Behavior of the Human Male*, empirically establishing that same-sex behavior was more widespread than previously believed. More

1951 Harry Hay, Dale Jennings and others founded the Mattachine Society, a groundbreaking gay rights group, in Los Angeles. More
1951  Bob Mizer published *Physique Pictorial*, a pioneering gay beefcake magazine. [More](#)

1952  Christine Jorgensen became the first widely known transgender woman to have sex reassignment surgery. [More](#)

1952  The American Psychiatric Association listed homosexuality as a mental disorder. [More](#)

1953  President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed an executive order banning employment for homosexuals anywhere in the United States government because they were guilty of “sexual perversion.” [More](#)

1953  The homophile organization *ONE, Inc.* started to publish *ONE Magazine*. [More](#)
1954  Led by Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy, the Senate conducted hearings on the personal lives of Americans suspected of being gay in an effort to remove communists and homosexuals from government employment. More

1955  Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin formed the Daughters of Bilitis, a lesbian rights organization. More

1955  The first issue of Mattachine Review, a homophile periodical, was published. More

1955  Police in Boise, Idaho, conducted massive raids, questioning 1,500 individuals about their same-sex behavior. Many men were given sentences that ranged from probation to life imprisonment. More

1956  The first issue of The Ladder, a lesbian magazine, was published by the Daughters of Bilitis. More

1957  Contrary to dominant beliefs in the medical profession, Dr. Evelyn Hooker told the American Psychological Association that no connection exists between homosexuality and mental abnormality. More
1958  The Supreme Court allows *One* to publish articles about homosexuality in the landmark decision *One, Inc. v. Olesen*. [More]

1959  Patrons objected to police harassment at Cooper Do-nuts in Los Angeles. [More]

1959  As gay bars flourished, the City of New York renewed their effort to close them. [More]

1959  The Hays Commission soften its prohibition against the mention of homosexuality in films as long as it was with “care, discretion and restraint.” [More]

1960  José Sarria became first openly gay candidate to seek public office in his unsuccessful run for the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. [More]
1961 Illinois became the first state to repeal its sodomy law, decriminalizing homosexual contact between consenting adults. More

1962 The US Supreme Court upheld the right of gay male magazines to be sent through the US mail in the decision Manual Enterprises v. Day. More

1962 The East Coast Homophile Organizations (ECHO) was founded in Philadelphia. More

1964 Under the direction of the Florida Legislature, the Johns Committee published Homosexuality and Citizenship in Florida, also known as the Purple Pamphlet. This booklet asserted that homosexual behavior was widespread Florida’s public education and colleges and that gays were attempting to molest and corrupt male youths. More

1964 American Civil Liberties Union called for the end of criminalizing homosexual conduct. More

1964 In front of the US Army Building in NYC, activists demonstrated in the first gay rights protest in the country. The cause of their protest was the military’s discrimination against gay men and lesbians. More
1965  Frank Kameny, Jack Nichols, Lilli Vincenz and Barbara Gittings picketed the White House to protest discrimination against lesbians and gay men. More

1966  Three members of the Mattachine Society ordered alcoholic beverages at Julius, a bar in NYC, intentionally violating the rules against serving alcohol to homosexuals. Shortly thereafter, the anti-gay prohibition was lifted. More

1966  In the tenderloin district of San Francisco, transgender women and drag queens fought back against police harassment in what is now known as the Compton Cafeteria Riot. More

1967  Homosexual Behavior Among Males, a scientific study by clinical psychologist Wainwright Churchill, concluded that homosexuality is part of human behavior. More
1967  Craig Rodwell opened the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop in NYC, the first gay bookstore in the US. More

1967  A local gay newspaper, renamed The Advocate two years later, began publication. More

1968  The Metropolitan Community Church, the first church group geared towards LGBTQ people, began in Los Angeles. More

1969  Marsha P. Johnson and other patrons objected to police raid at the Stonewall Inn in NYC, leading to several days of civil unrest. More

1970  Christopher Street Liberation Day, the first gay pride march, took place in NYC. More
Var. Television networks aired programs, and national magazines ran stories about the gay liberation movement. More

1970 The Unitarian Universalist Church openly accepted gay clergy. More

1970 National Organization for Women accepted lesbians. More

1970 Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson founded the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, a political collective offering housing and support to homeless LGBT youth and sex workers. More

1971 Frank Kameny became the first openly gay candidate for US Congress. More
1972  Madeline Davis and Jim Foster, two openly gay delegates, spoke at the Democratic National Convention, urging the political party to endorse a gay rights agenda. More

1972  Hawaii legalized homosexuality. More

1972  East Lansing, Ann Arbor and San Francisco adopted gay rights ordinances, protecting gay and lesbian employees against discrimination. More

1973  The American Psychiatric Association de-pathologized homosexuality by removing it from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. More

1974  Allan Spear, state senator from Minnesota, announced he was gay, becoming the first male legislator to come out. More
1974  Kathy Kozachenko became the first openly lesbian or gay candidate to be elected to a public office and served on the Ann Arbor City Council for two years. More

1975  US Civil Service ended its ban on employment of gay men and lesbians. More

1975  Leonard Matlovich openly discussed his discharge from the US Air Force for being a homosexual. In so doing, he became the first gay service member to combat the military’s ban on gays by purposefully coming out. More

1976  US Congresswoman Barbara Jordan gave a keynote address to the Democratic National Convention. She was the first African American and the first woman to deliver this speech—and she was also, in private, a lesbian. More

1977  In response to efforts to lessen civil rights restrictions on the lesbian and gay community, Christian singer Anita Bryant established the anti-gay organization Save Our Children. More

1977  Harvey Milk was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, becoming the first openly gay person to service in public office in California. More
1978  Harvey Milk was murdered by fellow city supervisor Dan White. More

1978  The Gay Men’s Chorus formed in San Francisco, becoming the world’s first openly gay chorus. More

1979  Founded by Harry Hay and Don Kilhefner, the Radical Faeries, a countercultural gay spiritual and political movement, held its first gathering. More

1979  More than 100,000 people attended the First March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. More

1980  David McReynolds was the first openly gay candidate for president atop the ticket of the Socialist Party USA. More
1980  The Human Rights Campaign Fund was established as a political action committee in the fight for lesbian and gay civil rights. More

1980  The Democratic National Committee adopted a gay and lesbian rights plank. More

1981  Fundamentalist Christians, dubbed the “Moral Majority,” organized to convince governments to repeal rights given to homosexuals. More

1982  The Gay Games, a sports event for LGBT athletes modeled after the Olympics, was launched in San Francisco. More

1982  Larry Kramer and other activists formed the Gay Men’s Health Crisis in response to the developing AIDS crisis. More
1983  Gerry Studefinition became the first US Congressman to come out publicly as gay.  

More

1986  The US Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of a Georgia sodomy law in the landmark decision Bowers v. Hardwick.  

More

1987  Activists in NYC founded the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) to fight the government’s inaction regarding the HIV/AIDS pandemic.  

More

1988  Chicago banned discrimination based on sexual orientation.  

More

1988  The first Gay-Straight Alliance, a student-led LGBTQ high school group, formed at Concord Academy in Concord, Massachusetts.  

More
1989  US Senators Jesse Helms and Alphonse D’Amato successfully shut down art exhibitions and banned funding from the National Endowment for the Arts based on sexual content. More

1990  US Congress passed the Hate Crime Statistics Act, criminalizing violence against gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. More

1990  Queer Nation, a radical LGBT activist group, was founded in NYC, leading to other chapters across the country. More

1990  San Francisco approved an ordinance that recognized same-sex domestic partnerships, affording legal protections to unmarried gay and lesbian couples. More

1992  Colorado banned rights for gay people with the approval of Amendment 2, a ballot initiative that disallowed the state from passing antidiscrimination protections for gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals. More

1993  With the adoption of the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, the US Congress allowed gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals to serve in the US Military—as long as they did not disclose their sexual orientation. More
1993  One million individuals join the third March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation—one of the largest protests in American history. [More]

1995  President Bill Clinton named the first liaison to the lesbian and gay community and put an end to a ban on security clearance for lesbian and gay workers in the federal government. [More]

1995  With President Clinton’s support, US Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act, allowing states to ban marriages between same-sex individuals. [More]

1997  New Jersey allowed same-sex couples the right to adopt children. [More]

1997  Hawaii permitted same-sex couples to have reciprocal beneficiary relations, affording them similar domestic partnership rights as straight couples. [More]

1998  Matthew Shepard, a gay student at the University of Wyoming, was beaten and subsequently died of severe head injuries. His murder led to hate crime legislation at the state and federal level. [More]
1998  Tammy Baldwin became the first open lesbian to be elected to the US Congress. More

1999  California eliminated all anti-gay laws in the state and created domestic partnerships. More

1999  The Stonewall Inn was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. More

2003  US Supreme Court eliminated anti-sodomy laws in fourteen states in their landmark decision Lawrence v. Texas. More

2008  California passed Proposition 8, an anti-gay state constitutional amendment stipulating that marriage was only valid between a man and a woman. More

2004  Massachusetts became the first state to legalize same-sex marriage. More
2006  After her election to Hawaii’s Board of Education, Kim Coco Iwamoto became the first transgender woman to hold a state-level office. More

2009  President Barack Obama passed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, declaring that federal hate-crime law must apply to crimes stemming from a victim’s actual or perceived gender, sexuality, and disability. More

2010  California repealed Proposition 8, upholding same-sex marriages. More

2011  US Congress repealed the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, enabling gay, lesbian, and bisexual service members to serve openly. More

2014  President Barack Obama overturned all federal hiring restrictions on LGBTQ individuals. More

2013  The US Supreme Court ruled that the Defense of Marriage Act was unconstitutional in their landmark decision United States v. Windsor. More
2015  US Supreme Court declared that same-sex couples could get married in all fifty states in their landmark decision Obergefell v. Hodges. [More]

2016  A gunman opened fire in Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, killing 49 people and wounding 53 more. [More]

2019  President Donald Trump banned transgender people from serving in the US Military. [More]

2020  Pete Buttigieg, the Mayor of South Bend, Indiana, became the first openly gay man to win a Democratic state primary (Iowa) in his presidential run. [More]

2020  US Supreme Court prohibited all employment discrimination against LGBTQ people in Bostock v. Clayton County. [More]

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