



Stonewall National Museum & Archives LGBTQ Literature Timeline

Introduction

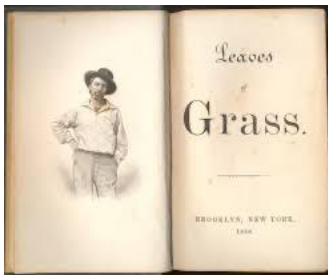
The United States has had a long-standing discomfort with the transgression of sexual and gender norms. Influenced by religious ideals, society viewed people who had same-sex desires and engaged in same-sex practices to be immoral and sinful. As such, the US has long enacted laws to control and condemn 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.

Here are some milestones in LGBTQ American literature. Learn more about each entry by clicking on the "More" button. All of these books are available at the Stonewall library. Many will be available at your local library.

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

Many thanks to Jackson Davidow for his research on this project.



1855 Walt Whitman published the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, a pioneering book of poetry that contained homoerotic imagery. [More](#)



1870 Bayard Taylor published *Joseph and His Friend: A Story of Pennsylvania*, which is sometimes called the first gay American novel. [More](#)



1880 Henry James published *The Portrait of the Lady*, one of his most celebrated novels. [More](#)



1882 British writer Oscar Wilde, who would go on to write *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), traveled to America for a legendary lecture tour. [More](#)



1913 Willa Cather published *O Pioneers!*, the first novel of her Great Plains trilogy. [More](#)



1923 Edna St. Vincent Millay was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for her poetry collection, *The Ballad of the Harp-Weaver*. [More](#)



1926 Langston Hughes published his landmark essay “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” a key text regarding the Harlem Renaissance. [More](#)



1926 Poet Hart Crane’s romantic poem “Voyages” appeared in his debut collection *White Buildings*. It was inspired by his relationship with a Danish sailor, Emil Opffer. [More](#)



1928 To much controversy, John Radclyffe Hall’s lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* was published in the US, prompting fiery debates on homosexuality in literature. [More](#)



1932 Lincoln Kirstein published *Flesh is Heir: An Historical Romance*. [More](#)



1933 In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Gertrude Stein presented an unforgettable portrait of her real-life lover. [More](#)



1934 The diaries of Alice James, the sister of Henry and William James, were published posthumously for the first time. [More](#)



1936 *Nightwood* by Djuna Barnes became one of the first novels to depict lesbianism. [More](#)



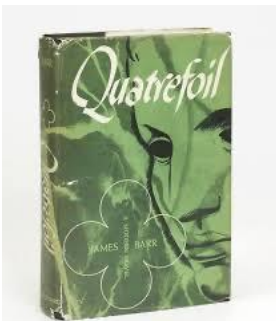
1940 Carson McCullers published her debut novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, at age 23. [More](#)



1948 Gore Vidal published *The City and the Pillar*, portraying homosexuality in positive terms. [More](#)



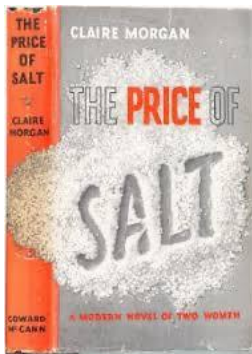
1948 Truman Capote's semi-autobiographical novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms* was met with critical acclaim. [More](#)



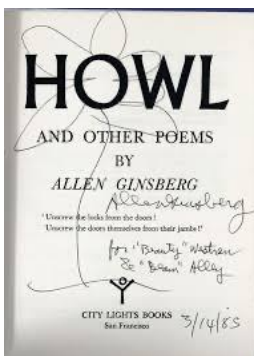
1950 James Fugate wrote *Quatrefoil: A Modern Novel*, which represented homosexuality in a positive light. [More](#)



1952 Under the pseudonym of Vin Packer, Marijane Meaker published *Spring Fire*, the first lesbian paperback novel, and in so doing, launched the genre of lesbian pulp fiction. [More](#)



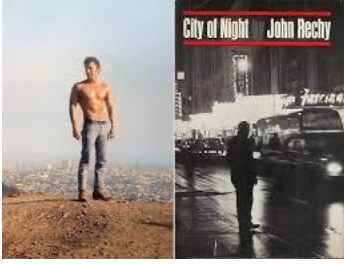
1952 Using the pen name of Claire Morgan, Patricia Highsmith published *The Price of Salt*, a lesbian novel with a predominantly happy ending. [More](#)



1955 Allen Ginsberg wrote “Howl,” an epic sexually explicit poem that reflected the countercultural anxieties of the era. [More](#)



1956 James Baldwin’s novel *Giovanni’s Room* broke ground with its nuanced portrayal of homosexuality and bisexuality. [More](#)



1963 John Rechy's *City of the Night* depicted a vivid world of gay hustling. [More](#)



1964 Frank O'Hara's celebrated book *Lunch Poems* featured poems written during his lunch hour at the Museum of Modern Art. [More](#)



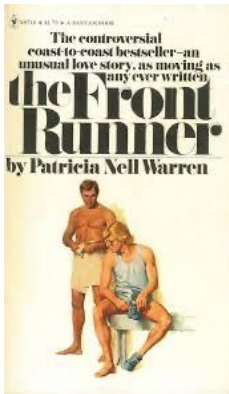
1969 June Jordan published her first book of poetry, *Who Look at Me*, which investigated paintings of African American life. [More](#)



1973 Rita Mae Brown published *Rubyfruit Jungle*, a coming-of-age lesbian novel. [More](#)



1973 Naiad Press, one of the first publishing companies committed to furthering the project of lesbian literature, was founded. [More](#)



1974 Patricia Nell Warren's *The Front Runner*, a novel about a gay love affair, became a bestseller. [More](#)



1976 Christopher Isherwood, an Anglo-American writer living in California, published his memoir *Christopher and His Kind*, which embellished his 1939 book *Goodbye to Berlin* (the basis of the musical and film *Cabaret*) with its fuller and freer details of his gay life during the 1930s. [More](#)



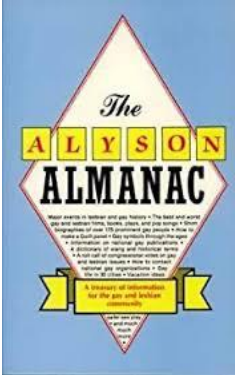
1978 Larry Kramer's *Faggots*, a satirical novel about gay culture and promiscuity, sparked a debate on the representation of contemporary gay life. [More](#)



1978 In the novel *Dancer from the Dance*, Andrew Holleran captured the zeitgeist of gay liberation. [More](#)



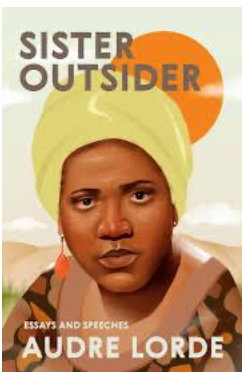
1978 Armistead Maupin commenced his *Tales of the City* series, which amounted to nine novels and culminated in 2014. [More](#)



1979 Alyson Publications was founded to develop the field of LGBT literature. [More](#)



1980 Poet and scholar Adrienne Rich published her essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience.” [More](#)



1982 In *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Audre Lorde drew on her life experience as a “black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet” to write a pioneering “biomythography.” [More](#)



1982 Alice Walker won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for her novel *The Color Purple*. [More](#)



1982 Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story* started off his trilogy of acclaimed semi-autobiographical novels. [More](#)



1983 Barbara Smith, Audre Lorde, and Cherríe Moraga founded Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. [More](#)



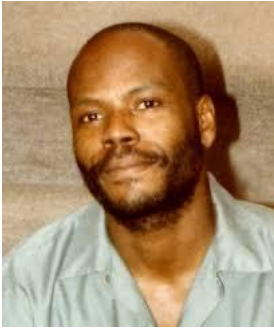
1984 Michelle Cliff published her first novel, *Abeng*. [More](#)



1985 Though written in the early 1950s, *Queer* by William S. Burroughs was finally published. [More](#)



1985 Felice Picano's semi-autobiographical novel *Ambidextrous: The Secret Lives of Children* charted his experience of growing up gay in the 1950s. [More](#)



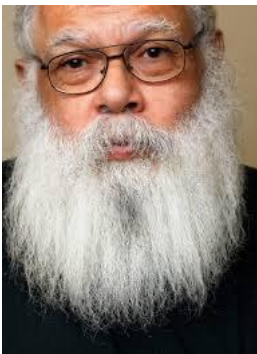
1986 Joseph Beam published his collection of writings, *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology*. [More](#)



1987 Drawing on her personal experience as a Chicana on the Mexico-Texas border, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* became an essential text of cultural theory. [More](#)



1988 Sarah Schulman published *After Dolores*, a novel about lesbian subcultures on the Lower East Side. [More](#)



1988 Samuel R. Delany's memoir *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village* detailed his experience as an gay African American man in an open marriage with fellow writer Marilyn Hacker. [More](#)



1988 Dorothy Allison's short story collection *Trash* received critical acclaim. [More](#)



1988 Paul Monette's memoir *Borrowed Time* chronicled his experience of living with HIV/AIDS. [More](#)



1989 Randall Kenan's first novel, *A Visitation of the Spirits*, explored the gay black experience in the American South. [More](#)



1989 Kevin Killian published his first novel, *Shy*. [More](#)



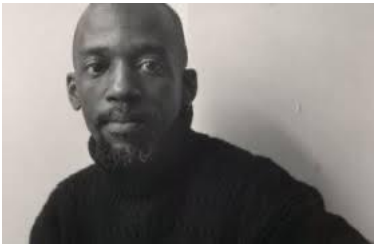
1990 Cookie Mueller's short story collection *Walking Through Clear Water in a Pool Painted Black* was published a year after her AIDS-related death. [More](#)



1991 Eileen Myles published their book, *Not Me*, which contained their famous poem, “An American Poem.” [More](#)



1991 Ibis Gómez-Vega’s novel *Send My Roots Rain* foregrounded a Latina lesbian narrative. [More](#)



1992 Tackling themes of identity, race, sexuality, and HIV/AIDS, Essex Hemphill’s first full-length collection, *Ceremonies: Prose and Poetry*, became a touchstone in queer literature. [More](#)



1993 Leslie Feinberg’s novel *Stone Butch Blues* instantly became a classic of genderqueer literature. [More](#)



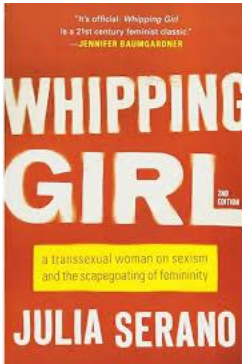
1998 Michael Cunningham received the Pulitzer Prize and the PEN/Faulkner Award for his novel *The Hours*—a retelling of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). [More](#)



1998 Dodie Bellamy's novel *The Letters of Mina Harker* depicted the AIDS crisis in 1980s San Francisco. [More](#)



2006 Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* became a popular and critical success, as well as the inspiration for a hit Broadway musical. [More](#)



2007 Julia Serano's *Whipping Girl* offered a transfeminist manifesto. [More](#)



2015 Hanya Yanagihara wrote her best-selling novel *A Little Life*. [More](#)



2017 Danez Smith's poetry book *Don't Call Us Dead* became a finalist for the National Book Award. [More](#)



2018 Jordy Rosenberg's novel *Confessions of the Fox* brought to life a trans-centered historical fictional narrative. [More](#)



2019 Poet and novelist Ocean Vuong was named a MacArthur Fellow. [More](#)



2019 Carmen Maria Machado's *In the Dreamhouse* poignantly navigated the topic of queer domestic abuse. [More](#)

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