

LGBT Rights Timeline

The Gay Rights Movement is a civil rights movement that advocates equal rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual individuals. The timeline listed below contains some of the most pivotal events in this movement throughout U.S. and world history.

1924: Henry Gerber founds the Society for Human Rights, the first documented gay rights organization in the United States. The society was chartered by the State of Illinois and published *Friendship and Freedom*, the first U.S. publication for homosexuals. The Society soon disbands due to political pressures and what Gerber later describes as being “up against a solid wall of ignorance, hypocrisy, meanness, and corruption” (quoted in Williams & Reter, 2003, p. 54).

1928: Radclyffe Hall’s lesbian novel, *The Well of Loneliness* is published. As a result, homosexuality becomes a topic of public conversation in both the United States and England.

1945: Homosexuals remain interned in Nazi concentration camps after liberation by the Allied forces. This is because Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code declared homosexual relations between males to be illegal along with acts such as underage sex abuse and bestiality.

1948: Alfred Kinsey’s landmark book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, is published. Kinsey reports that 37% of men he interviewed had participated in homosexual behavior at least once. Based on his research, Kinsey proposes that sexual orientation lies on a continuum from exclusively homosexual to exclusively heterosexual.

1950: Activist Harry Hay founds the Mattachine Society, one of the earliest homophile/homosexual organizations in the United States. Their goal is to organize and advocate for homosexual rights and to reduce the feelings of isolation that many gays and lesbians of the time are experiencing.

1953: Executive Order 10450 is signed by President Dwight Eisenhower, ordering the dismissal of government workers who engage in “sexual perversion” and other immoral acts. Although the Order does not explicitly mention homosexuality, hundreds of gays and lesbians lose their job as a result.

1955: In San Francisco, activists Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon found the Daughters of Bilitis, a lesbian civil and political rights organization. The group eventually publishes a magazine, the first lesbian publication of any kind.

1956: At the meeting of the American Psychological Association, Evelyn Hooker presents research comparing the psychological health of homosexual and heterosexual

men. Her results show that even skilled research experts find no differences in the mental health of these two groups.

1962: Illinois becomes the first state to decriminalize homosexual acts between two consenting adults in private.

1966: The oldest collegiate student organization for gays, the Student Homophile League, is founded at Columbia University.

1969: The Stonewall Riots, named after the historically gay-frequented bar, The Stonewall Inn, take place in Greenwich Village in New York City. Police forces had unjustly raided the establishment in the past, but on this occasion, gays protest the raids and the event becomes a pivotal, defining moment in the movement for LGBT rights.

1970: The first gay pride marches are held in multiple cities in the United States on the first anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. These are the first of many pride marches that will take place across the globe in years to come.

1973: The American Psychiatric Association removes homosexuality from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders II*, concluding that it is not a mental illness. Evelyn Hooker's pioneering research on homosexuality plays a crucial role in this decision.

1974: Elaine Noble becomes the first openly gay person to be elected as a state legislator; she serves in the Massachusetts State House of Representatives for two terms.

1975: The Bisexual Forum is founded in New York City and the Gay American Indians Organization is founded in San Francisco.

1977: Harvey Milk is elected city-county supervisor in San Francisco and becomes the third "out" elected public official in the United States. Quebec, Canada passes laws to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in both private and public sectors.

1978: Shortly after assuming his elected role as Supervisor, Harvey Milk is assassinated along with San Francisco's Mayor Greg Moscone. Supervisor Dan White is convicted of voluntary manslaughter and is sentenced to seven years in prison. In San Francisco, the Rainbow Flag is first flown; the flag becomes a symbol of gay and lesbian pride.

1979: Over 100,000 people participate in the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. Chapters of the national organization of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) are founded across the United States.

1980: David McReynolds appears on the Socialist Party ballot, becoming the first openly gay individual to run for President of the United States.

1981: A lethal virus is noticed spreading through the gay community. It is first reported in the *New York Times* as a rare pneumonia and skin cancer and is initially referred to by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as gay related immunodeficiency [disease] (GRID). When it is recognized that the virus is found in other populations, it is renamed the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

1982: The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force initiates a project aimed to counter the rise in violence related to homophobia in the United States.

1983: The first National Lesbians of Color Conference is organized in Los Angeles.

1984: After an eight-year legal battle Duncan Donovan, a Los Angeles gay activist, wins the right to receive the death benefits of his life partner.

1986: The United States Supreme Court ruling in *Bowers v. Hardwick* upholds the right of each state to criminalize private same-sex acts.

1987: ACT UP is formed in order to protest inaction in response to the AIDS epidemic in the U.S. The Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC) is founded with the goal of fighting against ageism and for lesbian rights.

1988: The brochure *Understanding AIDS* is mailed by the CDC to every American household. The World Health Organization organizes the first World AIDS Day in attempts to spread awareness of the disease.

1992: Homosexuality is removed from the International Statistical Classification of Diseases by the World Health Organization.

1993: The Department of Defense issues the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” policy; under this policy, applicants to the U.S. Armed Forces would not be asked about nor required to disclose their sexual orientation.

1996: In the case of *Romer v. Evans*, the United States Supreme Court rules that Colorado's second amendment, which denies gays and lesbians protections against discrimination, is unconstitutional. President Clinton signs the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) into law, which defines marriage as a union between one man and one woman.

1998: Widow of the late Martin Luther King Jr., Coretta Scott King, speaks out against homophobia in America, despite receiving criticism for comparing Black civil rights to gay rights.

1999: California adopts a domestic partner law, allowing same-sex couples equal rights, responsibilities, benefits, and protections as married couples.

2000: Vermont becomes the first state to legalize civil unions, a unity similar to domestic partnerships. Israel begins recognizing same-sex relationships for foreign partners of Israeli residents.

2004: Massachusetts legalizes same-sex marriage and New Jersey legalizes domestic partnerships; eleven other states ban such legal recognitions. Same-sex marriage is also banned in Australia, although the neighboring nation of New Zealand passes legislation recognizing gay civil unions.

2006: Discrimination based on sexual orientation is banned in Illinois and the State of Washington State adds sexual orientation to its existing anti-discrimination laws. **2008:** Proposition 8, an amendment banning same-sex marriage in California, is passed into law. This inspires the NOH8 campaign, a social project featuring celebrities who promote marriage equality.

2009: President Obama signs the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act which expands the Federal Hate Crime Law to include crimes motivated by a victim's actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.

2010: The “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” policy is repealed following a U.S. Senate vote; gays and lesbians can now serve openly in the U.S. Armed Forces.

2011: The Obama administration states they will no longer support the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) which banned the recognition of same-sex marriages in the United States.

2013: The United States Supreme Court rules that the key parts of DOMA are unconstitutional and that gay couples are entitled to federal benefits such as Social Security survivor benefits and family leave. The Court's ruling on California's Proposition 8 results *in gay marriages being resumed in that state.*

2015: The United States Supreme Court rules that state bans of same-sex marriage are unconstitutional. In this famous “#LoveWins” decision, same-sex marriage was made legal in all states and territories of the U.S.

2016: In Orlando, Florida, an antigay activist kills 49 patrons at Pulse, a gay nightclub. Fifty others are left wounded before police arrived.

2017: President Trump signs into law a ban prohibiting transgender people from serving in the military.

2021: Within his first month in office, President Biden repealed the military ban imposed by the Trump administration.

Sources

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