

Timeline: LGBTQ+ History in the US

1649

Sara Norman and Mary Hammon of Yarmouth, Plymouth Colony, were taken to court for lewd behavior, the first and only record of American colonial women tried for lesbianism.

1867

“Father of the LGBTQ+ Movement” Karl Heinrich Ulrichs is considered the first person to speak out for gay rights when he testified before the Congress of German Jurists to repeal anti-homosexual laws.

1903

The Ariston Bathhouse Raid: the first recorded police raid on a gay bathhouse took place in New York City. Thirty-four men were arrested and 16 men were charged with “sodomy.”

1924

The Society for Human Rights, the first gay rights organization in the United States, was founded in Chicago by Henry Gerber. Police shut it down within a few months.

1941

The term “transsexuality” was coined.

1945

The Veterans Benevolent Association (VBA), the first organization for LGBTQ+ veterans of the U.S. armed forces, was formed by four honorably discharged gay veterans.

1952

Transgender actress Christine Jorgensen became the first American to have sex reassignment surgery.

1953

U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed an executive order banning homosexuals from working for the federal government.

1955

The Daughters of Bilitis was founded as the first lesbian rights group.

1958

One, Inc. v. Olesen: In the first case regarding LGBTQ+ rights, the Supreme Court protected the First Amendment rights of ONE: The Homosexual Magazine, the first widely distributed publication for gay and lesbian readers.

1962

Illinois became the first U.S. state to remove criminal penalties for consensual sodomy from its criminal code.

1969

The Stonewall Riots: Patrons at the Stonewall Inn in New York City fought back against a police raid of the famed gay bar. These riots gained mainstream national attention for gay rights. A Black transgender woman, Marsha P. Johnson is widely credited as being the event catalyst who threw the first brick at Stonewall.



1970

The first Gay Liberation Day March was held in New York City. Similar events took place in Los Angeles and San Francisco.

1973

The American Psychiatric Association removed the label classifying “homosexuality” as a mental disorder.

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Joel Grey became the first gay man to win the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor for his role in "Cabaret."

1975

Minneapolis became the first city to pass a law protecting transgender people from discrimination.

1978

Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in California, was assassinated. He served on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors beginning in 1977 and sponsored a bill banning discrimination in public accommodations, housing and employment based on sexual orientation. He served in the U.S. Navy in the Korean War.

The rainbow flag, designed by artist Gilbert Baker, was first used as a symbol of gay pride in San Francisco. The original version of the flag included eight stripes of varying colors. Pink and light blue were eventually removed, creating the six-color version of the flag we recognize today.

1980

The CDC was alerted to the case of San Francisco resident Ken Horne, who developed a type of cancer known as Kaposi's sarcoma. In 1981, the CDC retroactively classified Horne as the first patient of the AIDS epidemic in the U.S.

1983

U.S. Representative Gerry Studds of Massachusetts' 10th District became the first openly gay member of Congress.

1985

Ronald Reagan was the first U.S. President to publicly mention the AIDS epidemic. Despite this, his commission on the HIV epidemic was far too late and research into the virus was slow and underfunded.

1987

ACT UP was formed at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center in New York City to bring attention to AIDS-related issues. The red ribbon was first used as a symbol of the campaign against HIV/AIDS in 1991.

1993

"Don't Ask, Don't Tell" allowed gays/lesbians to serve in the military if they remain closeted.

1994

Deborah Batts became the first openly LGBTQ+ federal judge.

1996

President Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) into law. It defined marriage as existing exclusively between one man and one woman.

1997

The controversial "coming out" episode of the television sitcom "Ellen" aired. Ellen DeGeneres herself came out later that year on the cover of Time magazine saying, "Yep, I'm Gay."

1999

California became the first state to legalize domestic partnerships for same-gender couples. The Transgender Day of Remembrance is founded.



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2000

Vermont became the first state to legalize civil unions for same-gender couples while the Netherlands became the first country to legalize same-sex marriage.

President Bill Clinton declared the month of June as Gay and Lesbian Pride Month.

2002

For the first time in Oscar history, three gay men were nominated for Best Director: Pedro Almodóvar for “Talk to Her,” Stephen Daldry for “The Hours” and Rob Marshall (who won) for “Chicago.”

2004

Massachusetts became the first state to legalize same-sex marriage.



2005

“Brokeback Mountain,” a film starring Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal as two cowboys in a gay relationship, was released. The film received rave reviews and won numerous awards, including three Oscars.

2008

Diego Sanchez became the first openly transgender staffer on Capitol Hill.

Kate Brown of Oregon became the first LGBTQ+ person elected governor.

Rachel Maddow became the first openly gay or lesbian host of a primetime news program in the U.S. Maddow was also the first openly lesbian Rhodes Scholar.

2009

President Barack Obama expanded existing hate crime laws, making it a federal crime to assault someone because of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Drag queen RuPaul started hosting “RuPaul’s Drag Race.” The reality competition television show has won numerous awards and helped bring drag performance into the mainstream.

Lee Daniels became the first Black gay man nominated for Best Director, directing the critically acclaimed “Precious.”

2010

President Obama repealed “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” allowing LGBTQ+ people to serve openly in the military.

The federal census allowed people in the same household to mark themselves as same-sex partners or spouses for the first time, but it still didn’t capture the number of gender non-binary individuals in the U.S.

2012

At the Democratic National Convention, the Democratic Party became the first major U.S. political party in history to publicly support same-sex marriage on a national platform.

2013

In *United States v. Windsor*, the Supreme Court struck down the section of DOMA that denied federal benefits to legally married same-gender couples. The U.S. Department of the Treasury announced that legal same-gender marriages would be recognized for federal tax purposes.

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2014

NBA player Jason Collins became the first gay athlete to play in one of the U.S.'s four major sports leagues.

Michael Sam became the first openly gay player drafted in the NFL, playing for the St. Louis Rams.

2015

In *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Supreme Court legalized marriage equality nationwide.



President Obama appointed Raffi Freedman-Gurspan as a staffer, the first openly transgender person to work in the White House.

2016

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) no longer required transgender athletes to undergo reassignment surgery to compete.

Eric Fanning was confirmed as secretary of the Army, becoming the first openly gay person to head a U.S. military branch.

President Obama designated the first-ever monument dedicated to LGBTQ+ rights, the Stonewall National Monument at the Stonewall Inn in New York City.

2017

The District of Columbia became the first place in the U.S. where residents could choose gender "X" on their driver's license.

For the first time, a U.S. appeals court ruled that a federal civil rights law protected LGBTQ+ employees from discrimination in the workplace.

Danica Roem was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates, becoming the first openly transgender person to be elected and serve in any U.S. state legislature.

"Moonlight" made history as the first LGBTQ+ movie to win Best Picture at the Oscars.

2018

The Pentagon confirmed the first openly transgender person signed a contract to join the military.

U.S. Representative Jared Polis won the Colorado governor's race, becoming the nation's first openly gay man elected governor.

Designer Daniel Quasar released a new version of a flag that merged features from the Philadelphia Pride flag and the trans Pride flag to highlight the significance of inclusivity and advancement in the LGBTQ+ community. The design, known as the Progress Pride Flag, gained rapid popularity on social media and received global attention from news sources.



2019

Ten openly LGBTQ+ people were sworn in as members of the 116th Congress.

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The governors of New York, Michigan, Wisconsin, Colorado and California flew the Pride Flag from their state capitols and government office buildings for the first time during Pride Month.

Billy Porter became the first openly gay Black man to win an Emmy for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series for his role in "Pose."

2020

RuPaul entered the Guinness World Records as the most Emmy Award-winning Host for a Reality or Competition Program. "RuPaul's Drag Race" received 39 nominations and won 19 Emmys.

Singer, actor, record producer and model Janelle Monáe came out as nonbinary. Monáe, known for challenging gender norms, also came out as bisexual/pansexual in 2018. Elliot Page, famous for his Oscar-nominated role in "Juno," came out as a transgender man.

2021

President Biden signed an executive order directing agencies to interpret federal laws prohibiting sex discrimination to include sexual orientation and gender identity.

Arkansas lawmakers enacted a bill prohibiting access to gender-affirming care for transgender youth. The bill specifically forbade trans youth aged 13-17 from accessing gender-affirming care in the state.

The U.S. State Department announced a policy allowing "X" gender markers on passports and eliminating medical requirements for gender marker changes.

2022

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed the controversial Parental Rights in Education bill, labeled by critics as the "Don't Say Gay" bill. The law banned public school

teachers from holding classroom instruction about sexual orientation or gender identity.

The country elected the first openly lesbian governors during midterm elections: Massachusetts' Maura Healey and Oregon's Tina Kotek.



2023

Data from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) showed that over 400 anti-LGBTQ+ bills had been introduced in state legislatures across the country since the start of the year. These bills included efforts to prohibit transgender youth from accessing gender-affirming healthcare and to regulate curriculum around discussions of gender identity and sexuality. An NBC analysis of the ACLU's data showed that 75 anti-LGBTQ+ bills were passed into law in 2023 across 23 states.

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue released a report documenting over 200 instances of anti-drag mobilization in the U.S. between June 1, 2022 and May 20, 2023. The report highlighted an increase in such instances in the first five months of 2023 compared to the last seven months of 2022. It also noted a rise in online hate speech manifesting in offline activities, such as real-life vandalization using popular online slurs.

In the 12-month period ending in October 2023, LGBTQ+ fiction sales surged, reaching 4.4 million units, which marked a 7% increase from the previous year and a staggering 200% rise from the same period in 2019, as reported by exclusive data from Circana BookScan to NBC News.