GAY LIBERATION

POLITICS

DECRIMINALIZATION AND DISCRIMINATION

STUDENTS

PRESS

MEDICINE
They knew we were gay. We knew they knew it. They knew we knew they knew it. The game was on."

MAYBELLE AND BEE’S BAR was outside the San Antonio, Texas, city limits and harder to regulate for the police, sheriff, military police, and liquor control boards. Therefore, we could dance there. It’s not that we were doing anything illegal. In 1963, we ourselves were illegal. If we got caught dancing with someone of the
same sex, that would mean we were homosexual, and since it was against the law to be homosexual, we were subject to arrest.

Maybelle would leave the bar and come stand in the doorway between the bar in front and dance floor in back. If her red bandana was sticking out of her front pocket instead of tied around her neck, this was The Sign. Police coming. Police here. We would be dancing gayly, men with men and women with women, and in the time it took to say “Bossa Nova Cha-Cha- Twist,” we switched partners in mid-beat, and seconds before the police appeared in the doorway, were dancing in male/female couples.
The police slowly circled the room, peering for a man touching another man’s hand under the table, a woman’s knee pressed against another woman’s. They circled the room twice. They knew we were gay. We knew they knew it. They knew we knew they knew it. The game was on. When they caught someone being illegal, that is, being themselves, off that person went to jail. When they could catch a bunch of us dancing, they’d get a big catch for their paddy wagon. This time, we won the game, and they left grudgingly. They would be back. But for tonight, we turned the jukebox back on and commenced dancing gayly.

– Carolyn Weathers
DURING THE 1960S, POLICE departments across the nation enforced state bans on serving alcohol to LGBTQ people by raiding bars suspected of serving LGBTQ patrons. So when New York City police entered the LGBTQ-serving Stonewall Inn in the early hours of June 28, 1969, they expected the typical routine of shutting down the bar and arresting selected patrons. But when arrested patrons resisted and a threatening crowd gathered, police retreated back into the bar for protection. By the time that police reinforcements arrived, a riot had erupted in the streets that would continue for nights to follow. The moment would come to symbolize the beginning of the gay liberation movement.

The next year, commemorative marches and “gay-ins” were organized in San Francisco, New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles to coincide with the anniversary of the riot. New York’s march, which started small with tens of people, grew to hundreds then to thousands as it entered Central Park. A Los Angeles contingent enlisted the help of the American Civil Liberties Union to acquire a city permit; it became the first LGBTQ march sanctioned by a city government. These marches developed into an annual event, grew in size and participation, and soon spread across the nation and the world in cities small and large as a reminder and celebration of the Stonewall Riots of 1969.

IN 1970, MINNEAPOLIS RESIDENTS Jack Baker and Mike McConnell became the first national media celebrities of the LGBTQ rights movement when they held a press conference to announce their application for a marriage license. Not only were they denied the license, but the University of Minnesota withdrew McConnell’s job offer. Baker and McConnell sued on both accounts. The Minnesota Supreme Court, in the first state ruling of its kind, denied Baker and McConnell the right to marry; and a federal appeals court upheld the University of Minnesota’s right to deny McConnell a job due to his homosexuality.
The month after the 1969 Stonewall Riots, LGBTQ activists in New York City formed the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). The group capitalized on a newly energized community to introduce a radical activism into the gay rights movement. At its height, GLF had over 50 chapters across the United States, each initiating boycotts and protests against the discriminatory policies of local police, universities, businesses, and city governments. Although its unstructured organization and conflicting goals would quickly doom the group, GLF forever changed the LGBTQ movement. GLF members were responsible for launching gay pride marches, community service centers, and many of the era’s leading LGBTQ activist organizations.

The Gay Activists Alliance, a splinter group from the GLF in New York, introduced “zaps,” a non-violent, direct-action protest in which activists directly and publicly confronted politicians, celebrities, and businesses. These in-your-face protests forced their targets to address the issues of the LGBTQ community or risk continued public attacks. As more activist organizations adopted these increasing aggressive tactics, some elected officials and candidates for office at the local, state, and federal level began to publicly address the topic of gay and lesbian rights for the first time.

In San Francisco in 1971, Jim Foster founded the Alice B. Toklas Memorial Democratic Club, the first registered LGBTQ political club in the nation. Soon LGBTQ political organizations could be found in most major United States cities, forcing politicians to address the LGBTQ community in local, state, and national elections. In 1977, the Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles (MECLA) became the first openly LGBTQ political action committee in the nation. Although initially founded to influence city politics, MECLA’s fundraising power expanded its influence into state and...
WHEN ELAINE NOBLE CAME OUT, her lover left her, she lost her job as an advertising executive, her tires were slashed, and she got obscene phone calls. So what did she do? She ran for a seat in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. Winning 59% of the vote, she was the first openly LGBTQ person elected to state office. Not only that, she was reelected two years later. In this photograph, she talks with future United States Congressman Barney Frank, who came out himself in 1987.

Midge Costanza with glasses) arranged this first meeting of gay and lesbian leaders at the White House. Named the National Gay Task Force White House Conference, the meeting included Troy Perry (far left), Myra Riddel (third from right), Charlotte Spitzer (second from right), and George Raya (far right).

Elaine Noble (1944–)

With increasing political clout, gay and lesbian politicians and delegates began vying for political positions and offices. The 1972 Democratic Convention boasted the first openly gay and lesbian delegates. Two of the delegates, Jim Foster and Madeline Davis, spoke at the podium, the first LGBTQ people to do so at a major political function. By the 1980 Democratic Convention, the gay and lesbian contingent had grown to seventy-seven delegates. At that convention, the Democratic Party officially endorsed its first ever gay rights plank.

In 1974, Kathy Kozachenko became the first openly LGBTQ person elected to a government office when she won a seat on the Ann Arbor City Council in Michigan. Elaine Noble won a seat in the Massachusetts state legislature later national politics. The organization quickly became the most powerful LGBTQ political group of its time.
One gay, one lesbian, and one straight couple turned themselves in at the Los Angeles Police Department for transgressing the state’s sodomy law. The police refused to arrest the activists.

MELVIN BOOZER WAS A SOCIOLOGY PROFESSOR at the University of Maryland and president of Washington’s Gay Activists Alliance. He was little known outside of Washington, D.C. when he approached the podium to deliver one of the most powerful speeches of the 1980 Democratic Convention. “Would you ask me how I dare to compare the civil rights struggle with the struggle for gay and lesbian rights? I can compare them and I do compare them, because I know what it means to be called a nigger and I know what it means to be called a faggot, and I understand the difference, in the marrow of my bones. And I can sum up that difference in one word: None.”
in the year, becoming the first openly LGBTQ state representative. Minnesota State Senator Allan Spear came out as gay at the end of 1974 and then won his re-election bid in 1976, becoming the first openly gay man to be elected to government office.

In 1977, the National Gay Task Force (NGTF) collaborated with Midge Costanza, Assistant to the President for Public Liaison, on a meeting of gay and lesbian activist leaders at the White House. President Carter had not been informed of the meeting, and LGBTQ leaders would not meet with a sitting president until 1993. However, the event implied federal recognition of the gay rights movement and opened the door for future NGTF meetings with federal government agencies. By 1977, gay and lesbian activists had begun meeting with representatives of the American Civil Liberties Union and various women’s rights groups to discuss common strategy. However, prejudice against LGBTQ people still trumped the promise of a broader collaboration; the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights rejected NGTF’s application for membership.

In 1966, Ivy Bottini became a founding member of the National Organization for Women (NOW), and soon after, the New York chapter’s second president. When she divorced her husband in 1968 and news of her being a lesbian became public knowledge, some NOW members spoke out against her, using the term “lavender menace” to describe the danger of lesbians in the women's movement. Bottini left NOW and relocated to Los Angeles, where she became a leader in the gay and lesbian rights movement. She helped lead the No on Briggs Proposition 6 campaign (the proposition intended to fire gay and lesbian educators from public schools), the Stonewall Democratic Club, and the Los Angeles Police Department’s first Gay and Lesbian Police Task Force. She responded to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s by founding the Los Angeles AIDS Network and becoming a founding member of AIDS Project Los Angeles.
SODOMY LAWS HAVE BEEN active in the United States since colonial times and have been used to prosecute all types of non-procreative sexual activity. Although state sodomy laws often spell out no distinction between heterosexual and homosexual acts, in post-World War II America, the laws were disproportionately used to harass and arrest gay men. Because same-sex sexual activity was fundamentally not procreative, sodomy laws made presumptive criminals of all gay and lesbian people and justified the denial of their civil rights.

Illinois decriminalized sodomy in 1961. By 1975, only six more states had followed suit, and in 1976, the United States Supreme Court rebuffed a challenge to sodomy laws. However, the growing political clout of the gay rights movement forced increasingly rapid change in the second half of the decade. By 1979, twenty-one states had decriminalized sodomy, with another fourteen reducing the charge to a misdemeanor. By the end of the decade, 90% of the population lived under substantially decriminalized sodomy laws.

Although states resisted anti-discrimination legislation for LGBTQ people, activists at the local and federal level had more success. In 1972, San Francisco, East Lansing, and Ann Arbor, Michigan, enacted local anti-discrimination measures to protect gay and lesbian people in employment and housing. By 1977, more than forty cities and counties had implemented LGBTQ rights protections. In 1975, lawsuits such as Norton v. Macy forced the United States Civil Service Commission to drop its policy against the hiring of gay and lesbian people (except in the FBI and intelligence agencies). In 1980, the United States Office of Personnel Management banned discrimination against gay and lesbian people in all federal service jobs.
THE STUDENT HOMOPHILE LEAGUE, under the leadership of Bob Martin, emerged at Columbia University in 1967 as the first officially-recognized LGBTQ student group. LGBTQ student groups gradually took root at New York University, Cornell, Stanford, and the University of Minnesota, but after the 1969 Stonewall riots, LGBTQ student groups spread more rapidly. By 1971, LGBTQ student groups had been recognized at sixty universities, while numerous others existed without official recognition.

LGBTQ student groups often had to overcome fierce opposition by university administrators for the right to be recognized. The Gay Students Organization (GSO), at the University of New Hampshire, scored the first victory in court in 1973 when judges ruled that the university could not deny the GSO rights that it provided to other student groups. Throughout the 1970s, LGBTQ student groups fought challenges to their funding, use of facilities, and university recognition. Not until state and United States Supreme Court rulings in the 1980s and 1990s would LGBTQ student groups overcome the last challenges to their constitutional rights of free speech and assembly.

"COMING OUT IN A PICKET LINE in 1965 was downright revolutionary. We were just at the start of cracking that cocoon of invisibility." Born in 1932, Barbara Gittings was a young college student when she decided to learn everything she could about homosexuality. The dearth of information made her haunt libraries, and the lack of community made her form her own. A self-proclaimed joiner and instigator, she began the New York chapter of the first lesbian organization in the United States, the Daughters of Bilitis, and later edited its national magazine The Ladder. In the mid-1960s, risking physical harm and loss of employment, she and a small band of protesters picketed Independence Hall in her hometown of Philadelphia, and continued to do so every Fourth of July for five years. After Stonewall emboldened "my people," she successfully joined with other activists to lobby the American Psychiatric Association to rescind its definition of homosexuality as a mental disorder. An advocate for LGBTQ literature, she founded the American Library Association's Gay Task Force, the first professional LGBTQ organization. She died in 2007, survived by her partner of 46 years, Kay Tobin Lahusen.
PRESS

THE *ADVOCATE*, *LADDER*, *HOMOSEXUAL CITIZEN*, *DRUM*, AND *VECTOR* reflected an increasingly strident demand for gay and lesbian rights in the mid-to-late 1960s. This trend exploded in the period following the 1969 Stonewall Riots, unleashing a tidal wave of unapologetic LGBTQ journalism. *GAY* in New York, *Gay Sunshine* in San Francisco, *Gay Liberator* in Detroit, *Killer Dyke* in Chicago, and *Washington Blade* in Washington, D.C., were just a few of the 150 publications being produced by 1972 with an aggregate circulation surpassing 100,000. The publications influenced and reflected a liberated community with their frank language, outrage over LGBTQ discrimination, and celebration of self-expression and open sexuality.

IN 1966, JEANNE CÓRDOVA ENTERED THE Immaculate Heart of Mary convent in Santa Barbara, California, but began questioning her sexual orientation and the church’s anti-lesbian stance. She left the convent and committed herself to the Los Angeles gay rights and feminist movements. She became president of the Los Angeles chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis, founded the lesbian-feminist publication *The Lesbian Tide*, and became a columnist and human rights editor for the *Los Angeles Free Press*. In 1973, she was a key organizer of what became the largest lesbian conference of the time, and in 1981, founded the *Community Yellow Pages*, the nation’s largest and most comprehensive LGBTQ directory.
In 1967, Craig Rodwell opened the first LGBTQ bookstore, The Oscar Wilde Bookshop in New York, to promote the rich and millennial-old heritage of LGBTQ culture and identities. The bookstore soon became an alternative to the bar as a center for LGBTQ gatherings and for the exchange of information. New York’s first gay pride march in 1970 was organized out of Rodwell’s bookstore.

An LGBTQ literary movement blossomed in the 1970s. Among the great books of the era, Jonathan Ned Katz’s *Gay American History* published in 1976 led to a cavalcade of LGBTQ historical texts. Although the LGBTQ bookstore was often the only place to find LGBTQ literature, a few lesbian and gay books crossed over to mainstream booksellers. Patricia Nell Warren’s *The Front Runner*, Rita Mae Brown’s *Rubyfruit Jungle*, Armistead Maupin’s *Tales of the City*, and Andrew Holleran’s *Dancer from the Dance* proved that gay and lesbian literature could have success with mainstream audiences.

**Audre Lorde** 1934 – 1992

**POET AUDRE LORDE WAS A PIONEER** of intersectionality. She insisted on recognition of herself as black, feminist, and lesbian. After completing a degree in library science, Lorde went on to lecture at several universities, write volumes of poetry, and co-founded the feminist Kitchen Table: Woman of Color Press. From 1991 until her death, she was New York State’s Poet Laureate. From her essay "The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House": “Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference -- those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older -- know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths.”
Since the emergence of psychology as a discipline in the late 1800s, psychologists have debated whether to view homosexuality and gender nonconformity as mental illnesses. In 1952, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) listed homosexuality in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, giving official sanction to efforts among many mental health professionals to find a cure. In 1957, psychologist Evelyn Hooker published “The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual” which postulated that homosexuality was not an illness but a variant in sexual pattern well within the normal range of human behavior.

Activist Frank Kameny ignited the movement to remove the APA’s listing of homosexuality as a mental illness in the mid-1960s. By the late 1960s, radical activists had taken up the fight and were coordinating zaps and protests at APA meetings and against prominent psychiatrists and psychologists across the United States. The combination of these protests with behind-the-scenes negotiations, culminated in the landmark 1973 removal of homosexuality as a mental illness from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

The LGBTQ community’s long history of mistreatment at the hands of medical and mental health establishments led to the development of LGBTQ-controlled health service providers. The Homophile Community Health Services Center in Boston opened in 1971 as the first legally incorporated, LGBTQ-staffed medical group to cater to LGBTQ people. The Los Angeles Gay Community Services Center opened later in the year, providing social programs as well as medical and mental health services. As the community center template spread, over 130 LGBTQ community-services institutions emerged across the nation. The centers provide a variety of local services, including legal, social, cultural, and educational services with programs for homeless people, youth, families, and seniors.