EPILOGUE

BATTLEFRONTS

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
TRANSGENDER
EQUAL RIGHTS
VISIBILITY
In 2015, the Obama administration, supported by a pentagon-commission study, lifted a ban on transgender people from serving in the armed forces. In 2017, President Trump issued a series of tweets to reinstate that ban, but lawsuits brought against the administration denied the re-implementation of the ban and allowed transgender people to enlist. However, by 2019, the Department of Defense had implemented policies to effectively restrict transgender service members from enlisting or serving in the military.

From 2015 to 2017, multiple states introduced bills to restrict male or female bathroom choice to the sex identified on a person's birth certificates. In 2016, North Carolina became the first state to pass such a bill, although the next year, the state repealed the portion of the bill relating to choice of bathrooms. As multiple states continued to debate bathroom bills in 2017, the Justice Department and Education department rescinded Department of Education and Justice Department guidances that transgender students were protected by Title IX, a statue that protects against sex discrimination.

Following a trend in court cases protecting transgender employees against discrimination, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ruled in Macy v. Holder that Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act protected transgender employees from discrimination. The Department of Justice followed suit in 2014, supporting Title VII in application to gender identity discrimination claims. However, in

The Religious Freedom Restoration Act was signed into federal law in 1993 to protect diverse religious freedoms from government intrusion. By 2014, states had started introducing similar laws in an attempt to curtail freedoms provided to gay and lesbian people through federal recognition of same-sex marriages. In 2014, the Arizona legislature passed a religious freedom bill that was ultimately vetoed amid a wave of protest.

From 2015 to 2017, over 20 state legislatures introduced religious freedom bills. Two states passed religious freedom bills that permitted discrimination against gay and lesbian couples in fostering or adopting children, while two others addressed religious freedom in schools and counseling. Mississippi and Indiana passed broader versions of the bill, but Indiana, in reaction to protests, added an amendment protecting LGBTQ people from discrimination. In 2019, Texas passed SB1978 which protects companies that donate to anti-LGBTQ groups from any adverse action from the state government.
2017, the Department of Justice reversed their stance on Title VII and gender identity protection. In 2017, 2018 and 2019, the Department of Justice filed briefs to the United States Supreme Court that federal law does not prohibit discrimination against transgender people. Federal departments such as the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education have each done away with protections for transgender people.

In 2020, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia* that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects LGBTQ employees against discrimination. The court decided that the Title VII prohibition against discrimination based on sex included discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and that henceforth it would be illegal to fire someone on that basis. At the time of the decision, the majority of states had no law prohibiting the firing of a LGBTQ employee because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

As of 2018, 28 states and the District of Columbia had enacted protections for transgender people. By 2017, 111 cities offered employee healthcare plans that explicitly covered transgender-related healthcare services. In a rare setback in 2015, Houston voters repealed the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance.
which protected LGBTQ people from discrimination, in part because it included protections for transgender people to choose the bathroom of their choice. Nonetheless by the end of 2016, over 225 cities and counties had enacted laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender identity.

IN CITIES AND TOWNS ACROSS the world, yearly LGBTQ pride parades and festivals draw millions of participants. The parades and festivals benefit from extensive corporate sponsorship and the support of politicians and celebrities. March on Washington events in 1979, 1987, 1993, 2000, and 2009 collectively drew nearly two million participants. Unlike the media blackout of the 1979 and 1987 marches, each subsequent march has received national media coverage.

National Coming Out Day, established for LGBTQ people to declare their sexual orientation or gender identity, is celebrated on October 11 within LGBTQ history month. The day honors the empowerment of coming out to yourself, family, friends, and co-workers, and promotes the simple truth that people are more likely to support equality if they know someone who is LGBTQ. World AIDS Day, first held in 1988 to unite the fight against HIV and commemorate those who have died, is honored in hundreds of events around the world.

As of 2013, more than 500 openly LGBTQ people served at all levels of government. In 2016, Oregon elected Kate Brown as the nation’s first openly gay governor; and in 2017, Virginia elected Danica Roem as the nation’s first openly transgender state representative. In 2019, Pete Buttigieg became the...
most visible LGBTQ person to seek the presidential nomination. The economic clout and organizational skills of the LGBTQ community have worked to discourage discriminatory policies aimed at LGBTQ employees, patrons, and students. Most large companies today have anti-discrimination policies and provide equal benefits to all employees.

In 2011, The Williams Institute, a national LGBTQ think tank, estimated that roughly 9 million Americans identify as LGBTQ. They occupy every aspect of life, are visible in every culture and society, and can trace their history to the beginnings of human civilization. As religious freedom bills and discriminatory transgender policies demonstrate, full equality has yet to be achieved. Discrimination and hate crimes continue to proliferate. However as of 2020, the LGBTQ community has never been as well-positioned to meet those challenges and to seek equality for all in the community. As the militant activist group Queer Nation said in their famous rallying cry: “We’re here. We’re queer. Get used to it.”