



## Los Angeles

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The modern gay civil rights movement may be said to have been born in Los Angeles with the formation of the Mattachine Society and ONE, Inc. in the early 1950s. The glbtq history of the city, now the U.S.'s second largest metropolis, is replete with other cultural, social, and political firsts, with the largest, the best-funded, the longest-lived, and at times the most visible and influential of publications, protests, legal accomplishments, cultural influences, and social and religious organizations.

Los Angeles, along with San Francisco and New York, has been at the very center of the American glbtq movement for equality. Currently, groups are attempting to increase the involvement of racial and ethnic minorities within the city's glbtq communities.

### Maturing of a City

Until the late twentieth century Los Angeles was often satirized as a place of indolent sunshine, home to a second-rate art form and cult religions. It received scant serious attention when cultural histories were written about U.S. cities. All of this changed when motion pictures became perhaps the most influential art form internationally, when alternative religions came to the forefront, and when it no longer seemed merely hedonistic and mind numbing to enjoy living and working in the beneficent southern California climate.

Los Angeles has been famously described as a hundred suburbs in search of a city. While this description is often used to deplore the urban sprawl that characterizes southern California, it can be read more positively as highlighting the great variety of lifestyles and urban spaces available in the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

Los Angeles is the largest urban center among the numerous towns and cities of southern California, many of them contiguous to Los Angeles or each other, and many of them with their own glbtq histories and communities. These include San Diego and San Pedro with naval bases, past and present, and Oceanside and Twentynine Palms with Marine Corps bases. Members of the armed services, often young men away from home for the first time and available for at least limited homosexual relationships, frequently played a role in the Los Angeles cruising scene and in the sexual lives of Los Angeles residents.

The largely resort towns of Palm Springs, Laguna Beach, Long Beach, and Santa Monica have also had significant cultural lives of their own, particularly Laguna and its artists' community and beach and bars. The Santa Monica Canyon area (partly in Los Angeles) has always held an enclave of gay and lesbian creative persons such as Austrian émigré screenwriter Salka Viertel, the British émigré philosopher Gerald Heard, the British émigré writers Christopher Isherwood and Gavin Lambert, Isherwood's artist lover Don Bachardy, and many others involved in motion pictures and other arts.



Two photographs by Angela Brinskele:  
**Top:** Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa marching in the 2006 Los Angeles Gay Pride Parade.  
**Above:** The McDonald/Wright Building of the Gay and Lesbian Center in Los Angeles.  
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As Los Angeles has grown into the nation's second largest metropolis, it has become one of the most racially and ethnically diverse cities in the world. It has also matured socially and politically, and has become home to vibrant glbtq communities.

### **Earliest "Gay Marriage": 1781--1850**

Los Angeles was founded on September 4, 1781 by *pobladores* (townspeople) of various ethnic and racial mixtures sent from Mexico, including twenty-six persons of African descent. The beginning of southern California glbtq history is mixed in--and often hidden within--the histories of the dominant communities.

For example, Francisco Palóu's *Life of Father Serra* (who spread Catholicism to California in the eighteenth century by establishing missions), published in Mexico in 1787, recounts an instance of Native Americans near Mission Santa Barbara "caught in the act of committing the nefarious sin."

Palóu termed a male cross dresser a *joya* (jewel) and noted that when *joyas* were caught having sex with a man, "they were duly punished for this crime, but not with the severity it properly deserved. When they were rebuked for such an enormous crime, the layman answered that the *Joya* was his wife!" Although Palóu records this report with amazement bordering on incredulity, the same-sex pairing of the Native Americans might be said to constitute the earliest gay marriages in California.

Life of the social elites during the Mexican period revolved around ranchos and town houses maintained in Los Angeles by rancho owners. Some of these owners were bachelors who gave lavish parties, wore elaborate finery, and, in several cases, were said not to be interested in the attentions of women.

### **Ride 'em, Cowboy: 1850-1910**

Horsemen of the Mexican period were termed *vaqueros*, and cowboys in the early American period, 1850 to 1910, continued their traditions of homosociality. Along with holdover Californios, Anglo settlers, and itinerant business persons, Los Angeles life in this period included a mix of cowboys and prostitutes. The homosociality that characterized frontier life was also true of much Los Angeles life as well. Walt Whitman knowingly declared himself a "comrade of the Californians."

Los Angeles's downtown park, established in 1866 as La Plaza Abaja, was renamed Central Park in the early 1890s. Undoubtedly the park vagrants and speakers, known as windjammers, included more than a few men who came there looking for same-sex sexual activity at the turn of the twentieth century. At the end of World War I in 1918, the park was renamed Pershing Square and was for decades a notorious cruising area.

### **Modern Los Angeles Gay Life Begins: 1910-1939**

The crucial period for the development of gay life in Los Angeles is that from 1910 to 1939. Pockets of glbtq life can be documented during this period in many neighborhoods, but mostly in downtown Los Angeles (particularly the bars and Pershing Square), Echo Park and neighboring Silver Lake, Los Feliz, Hollywood, West Hollywood, Venice Beach, and certain parts of the San Fernando Valley. Most of these areas still contain prominent glbtq communities.

Gay and lesbian life was constructed differently from today's social and sexual networks. The pursuit of working-class "trade" (or men who identified as heterosexual but participated in same-sex sexual encounters on a limited basis), "military trade," or even "rough trade" was a preoccupation of many gay men. These patterns of desire often determined locations of meeting places and, eventually, bars where sexual rendezvous could be made.

Women who might today be termed lesbian were frequently referred to simply as "spinsters." These women, who often lived with their families, formed fewer visible communities than their male counterparts, relying mostly on informal social networks, though a number of them entered into "Boston Marriages" and other romantic relationships.

Men and women who cross dressed professionally, such as the female impersonator Julian Eltinge at the beginning of the twentieth century, attained a degree of mainstream acceptance. He and other men and women appeared photographed in drag on dozens of sheet music covers, which would have appeared on pianos in parlors across the U.S.

With the burgeoning of the city at the beginning of the twentieth century, the contributions to its culture by single men and women can be discerned. While most of these individuals never publicly (or perhaps even privately) identified as gay or lesbian, it is likely that many participated in same-sex sexual activities.

The spinster Olive Percival, for example, was a cultural force in the Arts and Crafts period. She hosted at the home she shared with her mother in South Pasadena such persons as the British writer Vita Sackville-West, whose sexual identity is now well known.

One founder of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra was the philanthropist William Andrews Clark, Jr., unmarried heir to a Montana copper mining fortune. He commissioned for his elegant private library (its building, grounds, and collections later bequeathed to UCLA) murals that included nude young males. His collections consisted of sixteenth-century English Literature, Montaniana (in deference to his roots and his father and his livelihood), and, more of interest here, the works of and about Oscar Wilde. The Clark Library Wilde collection as continued today is the largest and most complete in the world.

Beginning in the late teens and 1920s, some of the earliest impressions or glimpses of Los Angeles gay bar life come from the letters of gay poet Hart Crane and from the daybooks of heterosexual Los Angeles photographer Edward Weston, whose notations of sailors and effeminate gay men mingling together are surprisingly nonjudgmental. Crane wrote that he was "here where the evenings are made lustful and odorous with the scent of lemon flowers and acacias on the sea-salt air." He revealed his habits of cruising for military trade in Los Angeles's port city some miles from the center of town.

A significant part of Los Angeles glbtq history is intertwined with the best known of Los Angeles's cultural and commercial enterprises, the motion picture studios. They were first located close to downtown before they moved to Hollywood and, later, to Culver City and the San Fernando Valley. The studios not only hired many creative gay men and lesbians, including directors and stars, but as the national dream factory they also created for Los Angeles an air of glamour and possibility that attracted many glbtq people from around the country.

The section of Los Angeles where the studios first established themselves was then called Edendale (now roughly Echo Park and Silver Lake). This area was an early center of the arts and bohemian life in Los Angeles. Its bath house and Echo Park itself were noted for clandestine gay male sexual activities.

Hollywood entertainers included lesbians and gay men and gender-bending cross dressers from the very beginning. In Edendale Eltinge built a house "too beautiful for a bachelor." He was among the first glbtq actors and actresses to be scrutinized by fan magazines and tabloids, with Louella Parsons envisioning "a beautiful lady" (other than Eltinge in drag) in his home.

Early actors Ramon Navarro (who would later be murdered by two male hustler brothers) and Gilbert Roland appear together in an engaging photograph of the period, both of them looking vibrant and sensual. Lesbian actress and director Alla Nazimova created her hotel, the Garden of Allah, at Sunset Boulevard and

Crescent Heights. It became the most chic place for visiting east coast entertainment elites to stay. It was at the Garden of Allah that Robert Benchley exclaimed, after he fell into the pool, "It's time to get out of these wet clothes and into a dry martini."

Hart Crane wrote to a gay friend, "Just walk down Hollywood Boulevard some day--if you must find something out of uniform." The famous writer Mercedes de Acosta also came to Hollywood Boulevard. "I wished that I would meet Greta Garbo in Hollywood," she declared. She did, and she had an affair with Garbo and then with Marlene Dietrich. De Acosta felt Hollywood was "mad night life, riotous living, orgies."

The craze for drag entertainment reached Hollywood at least as early as 1929, during what has been termed the "pansy" period, with motion picture stars attending drag entertainments in bars such as Jimmy's Back Yard on Ivar in Hollywood. In the same year, however, the 1929 Motion Picture Production Code was adopted. The atmosphere it promoted soon put a lid on this lifestyle. Los Angeles police raided the drag bars, and night life changed.

Through the 1930s some actors, such as Randolph Scott, hid their gay lives out in the open. He and Cary Grant were photographed together as roommates for the fan magazines. In 1935 George Cukor directed Grant and Katharine Hepburn in her cross-dressing flop, *Sylvia Scarlett*, now studied extensively for its gender bending. Within the studio system, lesbian director Dorothy Arzner created several movies, some with playwright and screenwriter Zoë Akins.

In the 1930s a style of architecture and decoration in Los Angeles came to be particularly associated with a gay male aesthetic. William Haines, who quit his career as a motion picture actor because he wanted to live openly with his lover, became an influential interior decorator and contractor. He pioneered the style that came to be known as Hollywood Regency, which may be seen in his 1935 renovation of Cukor's house on Cordell Drive above the Sunset Strip in West Hollywood. Cukor's landscape architect was Florence Yoch, often photographed at homes she shared with her business partner Lucile Council.

John ("Jack") Wolf also worked in the Hollywood Regency style, which is characterized by the use of classical motifs such as broken pediments. These were applied to the facades of buildings, so that critic and historian John Chase termed the style "exterior decoration." Wolf's designs were ridiculed by the more macho modernist architects, but his work has had a lasting influence.

In the late 1930s, many glbtq creative persons migrated to Santa Monica Canyon. Among them were Salka Viertel, who wrote screenplays for Garbo and was her lover; and Viertel's husband, Berthold, who had taught screen writing to Isherwood. Isherwood himself moved to the Canyon in 1939, following his mentor, the gay British expatriate philosopher and mystic Gerald Heard.

Heard is a bridge from that international community to another world thriving in Los Angeles, that of alternative religions, often derided as "wacko," but now seen as distinctive contributions to the thinking of the city. There were many roots for the growth of alternative religions in Los Angeles, but the gay connection is little known.

By 1939 Heard had met in Los Angeles the Vedanta leader Swami Prabhavananda, himself heterosexual but accepting of homosexuality when it did not interfere with religious growth. Isherwood came to Los Angeles to discuss pacifism with Heard at the beginning of World War II in Europe and became a disciple of Prabhavananda. Both Heard and Isherwood became significant figures in the intellectual and gay life of Los Angeles in subsequent years.

## **Gay Culture and Community: 1940-1946**

Developments in literature, photography, the fine arts, architecture, and popular music, including jazz and cabaret, may also have helped bring into being the conditions that made feasible the creation of a gay community and later a gay movement in Los Angeles.

During World War II Los Angeles expanded greatly. As a center of wartime industry and military activity, the city attracted people from around the country, either as workers or as members of the military. The wartime dislocations gave individuals opportunities to begin lives less encumbered by family ties and associated inhibitions. The people who came to the city as a result of the war contributed to the growth of the Los Angeles gay and lesbian scene and its glbtq population because many of them settled in southern California permanently.

During the war diarist Donald Vining wrote of cruising Pershing Square for soldiers on leave, a not uncommon practice among gay men of the time. Lesbians worked with other women at defense plants in the San Fernando Valley, and many of them remained after the war to create pockets of communities in the Valley, where they also opened and owned lesbian bars, such as Club Laurel and Joani Presents.

Gay men and lesbians were also part of the world of Los Angeles musicians and night club entertainers during the war. The contributions of African-American jazz musicians in the area of Los Angeles known as Central Avenue have been well documented, but less is known about the rich gay and lesbian life in Central Avenue. When giving oral histories of this era, jazz musicians have cited a number of gay and lesbian bars. One woman performer noted a lesbian bar called Ebb's on Vermont Avenue, where she saw women kissing in the booths, and she was afraid to use the rest rooms.

Brothers, located near 38th Street and Central Avenue, opened in the late 1930s. Run by women known as "he-shes," it was probably the first black gay bar in Los Angeles. It was an after-hours establishment with pillows on the floor and incense, music, and soft lights. It lasted until after the heyday of Central Avenue itself.

Gladys Bentley, a self-styled "bull dagger" lesbian, for many years lived in a home just four blocks off Central Avenue, famous to African Americans as "the most exciting street outside of Harlem." Ethel Waters, Louise Beaver, and Oscar-winner Hattie McDaniel all lived near each other on Harvard Boulevard.

Another significant bar of the 1940s was Café Gala on the Sunset Strip. Created outside the "pansy" model, it survived the frequent crackdowns to stand out large in the nightclub and cabaret history of Los Angeles. Owned by the Baroness Catherine d'Erlanger and featuring gay singer Johnny Walsh, the nightclub attracted gay and lesbian stars and other Hollywood notables, who could drop in without fear of being caught up in a raid. Cole Porter and Judy Garland were among its patrons.

Tennessee Williams lived briefly in Santa Monica when (mainly not) working for MGM as a screenwriter during the war. His stories and memoirs note the rewards of riding on streetcars with servicemen during blackouts, and his short story "The Mattress in the Tomato Patch" gives a joyous description of Muscle Beach (then in Santa Monica) in 1943, as well as of the glorious California weather, "the great white and blue afternoons of California."

While physique photography was not unique to Los Angeles, the city became one of the most important producers of the new homoerotic art. Among the significant physique photographers located in Los Angeles were Bruce Bellas (Bruce of Los Angeles) and Bob Mizer, who created his Athletic Model Guild in 1945. Mizer's photography featured military trade and young men of the streets. It had a great influence on later gay artists such as Mel Roberts, David Hockney, John Sonsini, and others.

However stylized and camp they may now seem, the physique photographs met a need for gay erotic images, and their popularity around the country made clear that there was a homosexual market that could be tapped for commercial and, ultimately, political purposes. Magazines publishing these works also had

ads for gay men's clothing, such as posing straps and bikinis.

Some of the most important explicitly gay novels were written soon after World War II and some of them were set in Los Angeles. For example, some scenes of Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* (1948) are set in Los Angeles. In several later novels, particularly Isherwood's *A Single Man* (1964, dedicated to Vidal), scenes of gay life in the 1940s and the 1950s are recreated nostalgically, including bar life in Santa Monica Canyon and the relations of gay men with military men during World War II. Joseph Hansen in *Living Upstairs* (1993) also looked back to the Hollywood gay bar scene of the 1940s.

### **The Modern Gay Movement Is Born in Los Angeles: 1947-1959**

After the war, Hollywood gay entertainment venues continued to thrive despite an increasingly conservative political climate. The Café Gala was sold and after 1948 featured the African-American cabaret star Bobby Short, among many others. Later in the 1950s on the Strip, lesbian singer Frances Faye appeared with close-cropped hair always dyed a different color. To the delight of her fans, she riffed her famous intro, "Frances Faye gay gay gay."

While Los Angeles's entertainment industries afforded the possibility of living, if only vicariously, a flamboyant gay life, after World War II many gay men and lesbians in more mundane circumstances sought to communicate with each other and to explore the particular issues and problems they faced in an increasingly homophobic society. Fortunately, by the late 1940s glbtq people had the opportunity for much more contact with others like themselves.

Indeed, the modern glbtq civil rights movement was born in Los Angeles during the 1950s with the establishment of the first lasting U.S. glbtq publications and organizations. The formation of these organizations made possible the emergence of the homophile movement in the United States.

In 1947, *Vice Versa*, a newsletter featuring reviews, articles, and editorials on lesbian life, was created in Los Angeles by a secretary who still prefers not to use her real name. The name she later chose was Lisa Ben, an anagram of lesbian. She called her writing for women "America's gayest magazine," the first written by lesbians and for lesbians. She produced only nine issues of *Vice Versa*, typing two originals of each with carbons. She learned that she could not mail them and even had difficulty distributing them by hand in lesbian bars such as the If Club.

The first lasting U.S. gay organization was the Mattachine Foundation (later Society), which met in secret in 1950. It was the concept in 1948 of actor, lecturer, and Communist Party member Harry Hay. His ideas had a long gestation and derived from his education, his experiences with lovers such as actor Will Geer, Los Angeles-born composer John Cage, and other Echo Park and Silver Lake leftists and bohemians.

Hay's founding of the Mattachine was supported by his lover, then dancer and later fashion designer Rudi Gernreich (not identified in early histories of the Society), an émigré from Austria. The two are depicted in a now famous photograph along with founders and early members Dale Jennings, Stan Witt, Bob Hull, Chuck Rowland, and Paul Bernard. Hay felt that homosexuals were a minority deserving of the same consideration and respect accorded other minorities in a nation of minorities.

At the October 15, 1952 Los Angeles Mattachine meeting at the home of Dorr Legg, some members met as a caucus to discuss creating a magazine. Martin Block was a Jewish activist who had also worked for Marcel Rodd, a gay Hollywood publisher who had reissued a work by Isherwood among other books. On November 29, 1952, at Block's Studio Bookshop in Hollywood, the caucus voted to incorporate as a California non-profit body.

Block was elected president of ONE, Inc., Dale Jennings, vice president, Don Slater, secretary, and Dorr Legg, business manager. Those signing the articles of incorporation were Block, Jennings, and Antonio Reyes. Also in this first group were the African Americans Merton Bird and Bailey Whitaker, using the name Guy Rousseau. Whitaker supplied the organization's title from a sentence in British essayist Thomas Carlyle's essay on Goethe, "A mystic bond of brotherhood makes all men one."

ONE, the Mattachine, and the Los Angeles chapter of the lesbian homophile group, the Daughters of Bilitis (founded in San Francisco in 1955, with a Los Angeles chapter formed in 1958), together constituted an attempt to create an organized gay and lesbian community that could seek redress to the discrimination and humiliation faced by homosexuals throughout the United States.

William Lambert Dorr Legg would become the driving force behind ONE. He and Merton Bird, an interracial couple, had founded Knights of the Clock in 1950, a co-sexual and interracial group that never had many members. ONE was the first U.S. gay organization to open a public office, which it did in downtown Los Angeles in November 1953, and Legg as business manager was the first paid (\$25 a week) employee of the nascent civil rights movement.

ONE's office became a de facto glbtq community center, the first in the U.S. The organization later added education, tours, and lectures to its programming and moved two times. In 1956 Legg, Jim Kepner, and Merritt M. Thompson, a retired University of Southern California professor, founded the ONE Institute of Homophile Studies, and after that the organization was most often termed ONE Institute.

In its heyday ONE attracted a mix of gay, lesbian, and straight allies, including such luminaries as Isherwood, Heard, novelist Ann Bannon, sexologist Vern Bullough, psychologists Blanche Baker and Evelyn Hooker, as well as the drag queen "Miss Destiny," the original of John Rechy's character of that name in *City of Night* (1963).

ONE magazine published its first issue in January 1953 and continued publishing until 1968 (with a brief revival in 1972). ONE was arguably more extensive in its cultural influence than *Mattachine Review*, founded later in San Francisco. From the beginning ONE included women contributors and graphic designers, such as Joan Corbin (working as Eve Elloree) and Stella Rush (Sten Russell). It had a long roster of fiction and poetry writers, essayists, and reviewers.

Among the reviewers was Barbara Grier (writing as Gene Damon) and among the writers were James Barr (Fugat ), Joseph Hansen (writing as James Colton), and Jim Kepner (writing under several pseudonyms). Kepner wrote a popular column entitled "tangents" (usually not capitalized), gathering "gay" news from around the country and around the world, most of it at that time not good news.

Kepner holds a unique place in Los Angeles and American glbtq history, as he was the first collector of publications and ephemera of all things glbtq. Beginning in 1942 and until his death in 1997, he spent most of his money and time building and maintaining this collection, which he opened to scholars in the early 1970s. He gave the collection various names until the final one, International Gay and Lesbian Archives (IGLA).

In the 1950s glbtq people were frequently harassed and entrapped by members of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). The first issue of ONE reported the trial of Mattachine member and ONE co-editor Dale Jennings, who protested his arrest on solicitation charges as entrapment. (The jury deadlocked but the district attorney chose not to retry the case.) Jennings's lawyer was George Shibley, who in the 1940s was one of the defense attorneys in the Sleepy Lagoon trial, one of the most famous in Los Angeles dealing with discrimination against Mexican Americans. The language of Jennings's article in the first issue, calling for homosexuals to "unite militantly," was ahead of its time.

In 1954 the United States Post Office confiscated copies of *ONE* on the grounds that any discussion of homosexuality was obscene and unfit to be mailed. *ONE* sued the postmaster for the right to mail its magazine. After losing the first two rounds, Legg and heterosexual lawyer Eric Julber finally prevailed in the United States Supreme Court, which decided *ONE v. Olesen* in the organization's favor. This ruling--the only Supreme Court ruling favorable to homosexuals in the 1950s--was of inestimable significance, for without it there could have been no gay and lesbian civil rights movement.

In 1957 UCLA research psychologist Evelyn Hooker, who characterized herself as "hopelessly straight," became the first psychologist to publish a study proving that gay men were as well adjusted as the general population. She was also one of the first to publish a study of homosexuals that was not a study of prison inmates or psychiatric patients. She identified five areas of Los Angeles where there were clusters of gay bars.

### **Protest and Progress: The 1960s**

Perhaps better than any other writer of the period, John Rechy captured a particular segment of gay life--the world of hustlers and cruising and anonymous sex--in Los Angeles in the 1960s, especially in his novels *City of Night*, *Numbers* (1967), and *This Day's Death* (1969). *City of Night* offers vivid pictures of several gay areas in Los Angeles, from Pershing Square cruising spots to seedy downtown bars to more domestic sites near MacArthur Park (no longer a gay area) and even the home of George Cukor. Griffith Park, which had become a notorious cruising area in the 1960s, features in *Numbers* and *This Day's Death*, the latter of which tells the story of a man caught in a police vice raid. He treated the drag queen world of Los Angeles in "Miss Destiny: The Fabulous Wedding," a section of *City of Night*.

In the 1960s Los Angeles art became noted nationally with the successes of artists (mostly heterosexual) associated with the Pop Art movement. Art centers of the time included the corridors along Wilshire Boulevard near Westlake / MacArthur Park and the opulent Art Deco Bullock's department store, while art galleries clustered on La Cienega Boulevard in West Hollywood.

When British gay artist David Hockney came to Los Angeles in 1964, he first looked for the Pershing Square gay life celebrated in Rechy's *City of Night*. Hockney's lush imagery of Los Angeles palm trees, manicured lawns, and swimming pools with male nudes in them has been disseminated around the world. In Los Angeles he also created portraits of gay male couples, including most famously Isherwood and Bachardy.

Artists during the 1960s whose male figurative works can be seen as homoerotic images include Don Bachardy, Morris Broderson, Louis Fox, and John Lincoln. Among the 1960s lesbian artists was Sheila Ross, who with Bachardy, Fox, and Lincoln showed at the elegant Rex Evans Gallery on La Cienega, operated by Evans, a character actor and friend of Cukor, and Jim Weatherford.

Police harassment on New Year's 1967 sparked the largest protest by glbtq citizens anywhere in the decade. In a raid of the Black Cat Bar, at Sunset Junction in Silver Lake, police brutalized numerous patrons and staff. In response activists organized a large demonstration, collected money to fight the charges in court, and alerted media to the problem of police harassment. The placards at the Black Cat protest were surprisingly modern: "No more abuse of our rights and dignity"; "Blue fascism must go"; and, "Stop illegal search and seizure."

Before this, in 1966, the Los Angeles organization PRIDE (Personal Rights in Defense and Education) had organized to promote awareness of LAPD harassment of homosexuals and published a newsletter. PRIDE supported the Black Cat protest, and Dick Michaels (a pseudonym) and friends expanded the newsletter to chronicle the protest and its aftermath. Printed by mimeograph in the basement mailroom of ABC

Television's Los Angeles headquarters, the first issue of *The Los Angeles Advocate* was published in September 1967. In 1970 it became bi-weekly and national and as *The Advocate* has been the glbtq newsmagazine of record for almost forty years.

Organizing activities in Los Angeles outside the political arena included the first specifically gay and lesbian Christian denomination to be founded anywhere. In October 1967, in a paid advertisement in *The Advocate*, Los Angeles pastor Troy Perry announced a planning meeting for what would become the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC).

The congregation that formed soon outgrew Perry's living room, and Sunday services moved to the Encore Theater in Hollywood and then, in 1971, to a dilapidated building dubbed the budding denomination's "Mother Church," which burned down as a result of arson in 1973.

### **Liberation Era Results in the World's Largest glbtq Organization: The 1970s**

In the 1970s glbtq individuals and groups in Los Angeles built on the work done in the post-World War II decades. They borrowed the protest tactics of the African-American civil rights, anti-war, and women's movements of the late 1960s and created lasting cultural, social, religious, and political organizations.

The first "gay-ins" in Los Angeles were held in 1968 by drag queens in Griffith Park and were attended by "about two hundred wild fairies." After the Stonewall Rebellion in New York City in 1969, Los Angeles, like other cities around the nation, formed a chapter of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), an organization meant to be more in tune with the times and more militant than the homophile groups.

Harry Hay, who, as a former Communist, had been ostracized from even the organization he founded, the Mattachine Society, was welcomed into the new liberation movement. He became president of the Los Angeles GLF. Morris Kight, an anti-war activist, was also prominent in the GLF.

In 1964 Los Angeles was featured in a *Life* magazine "exposé" of homosexuality, "Homosexuality in America." The article included a photograph of Barney's Beanery in West Hollywood, which prominently displayed a sign reading "Fagots [sic] Stay Out." The offensive sign was the subject of a protest led by Kight and the GLF in 1970, although it was not removed permanently until much later.

Kight and others in the GLF, along with Troy Perry, then formed Christopher Street West (CSW), the first Los Angeles gay pride parade, to commemorate New York's Stonewall Riots of 1969. At first police sought to block the parade with exorbitant security fees, but eventually Hollywood Boulevard, a site of gay Los Angeles, was closed off to traffic and the first parade was held June 28, 1970, with 1,200 marching and 30,000 in attendance.

CSW's first president was Sharon Cornelison and the longest-serving board member Sharon Tobin. After risqué floats appeared in the 1971 and 1972 events, no parade was held in 1973. Hollywood became less friendly to the glbtq community, and in 1979 the parade moved to West Hollywood. A festival, the idea of erotic filmmaker Pat Rocco, was added in 1974. The organization now operates on a million dollar budget with major corporate support and draws well in excess of 100,000 people to the Pride events.

As in other cities, the GLF soon dissolved, but unlike in other places, the leaders of the Los Angeles chapter moved quickly to make lasting contributions to the glbtq social fabric of the city. In 1971 John Platania wrote the plan for and Kight and Don Kilhefner and others established the Gay Community Services Center in two declining Victorian houses in an area between downtown and MacArthur Park.

In 1974 the Center (now usually called only that) became the nation's first organization with the word "gay"

incorporated in its name to be awarded federal 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. It continued to grow, move, and adapt until it has become the largest gay and lesbian organization in the world. Now with an annual budget of \$33 million, the Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center offers--in three major locations--the widest array of services to glbtq persons available anywhere.

The Center did not, however, incorporate the word "lesbian" in its title until 1980. Because they felt excluded, in the 1970s women organized separately in Los Angeles. The Gay Women's Service Center, located on Glendale Boulevard (the old Edendale area) was founded in 1971 by Del Whan from the GLF. It was probably the first lesbian community center anywhere. A flyer notes it was "established to meet a variety of social and personal needs of gay women, particularly women who are young or hesitant about their gayness."

At the same time Jeanne Córdova established *The Lesbian Tide*, a journal that united the interests of feminists and lesbians. For African-American women and others, Jewel Thais-Williams founded Jewel's Catch One disco in 1973, a venue that still serves as a meeting, organizing, and fundraising space for women of color and others, such as for Carl Bean's Unity Fellowship Church (established 1985). In 1976 Jinx Beers established *Lesbian News (LN)*, a magazine that is still published and is now the longest-running national lesbian publication.

Unique to Los Angeles was the Woman's Building, also first established near MacArthur Park in 1973; it moved later to an industrial building north of downtown and Chinatown. Founded by three women, one a lesbian, art historian Arlene Raven, the Woman's Building provided education and a place for women to create apart from men and institutions controlled by the patriarchy. In the period from 1973 to 1991, it sponsored classes and produced performance pieces, art exhibitions, and a journal, *Chrysalis*. Many lesbians felt free to explore their identities in this supportive space.

Psychologist and Human Potential Movement leader Betty Berzon was on the board of the Center when it experienced its greatest schism, between more conservative members and younger radicals, and helped heal the rift. In the later 1970s Berzon founded what would become Southern California Women for Understanding, a group of middle-class professional lesbians that still exists.

In the 1970s California and Los Angeles became increasingly liberal. In 1973 Los Angeles elected its first African-American mayor, Tom Bradley, a moderate-to-liberal politician even though he emerged from the LAPD.

In 1975 California's sodomy laws were repealed, largely through the influence of assemblyman (later Speaker) Willie Brown of San Francisco.

In May 1976 the Los Angeles City Council banned discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in civic employment.

Other political gains were made in Los Angeles when in 1977 affluent members of the gay and lesbian community formed the Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles (MECLA), the nation's first gay political action committee. Activist members included lobbyist David Mixner and realtor Gayle Wilson.

Not all went well in the 1970s. Although Mayor Bradley declared a gay pride week in 1976, police attacked the Christopher Street West parade that same year.

In 1978 a citizens' initiative known as the Briggs Amendment, which sought to ban gay men and lesbians from teaching in the public schools, made it to a state-wide ballot as Proposition 6. This was a dubious first, the first time American voters faced a statewide gay rights issue. The discriminatory initiative was fought strongly by gay and lesbian groups across the state and was one of the first occasions that gay men and lesbians came together politically after the period of separatism. Shortly before the election, the

Union of Lesbians and Gay Men was formed in Los Angeles. The initiative was broadly defeated.

Pioneer leaders in the gay civil rights movement continued their work in the 1970s. Evelyn Hooker, in a 1971 speech at ONE Institute, blamed President Richard Nixon's attitudes toward homosexuality for the lack of federal gay law reform. Hooker also pressed the American Psychiatric Association to remove the classification of homosexuality as an illness, which was accomplished through her and others' work in 1973. The American Psychological Association then followed in 1975.

The world's first glbtq Jewish temple, Beth Chayim Chadashim, was founded in 1972. Other religions with particular outreaches to glbtq people also flourished in Los Angeles.

Christopher Isherwood, who had long been a Vedantist and widely presumed to be gay, came out explicitly in print in 1971 and became active in the gay movement, frequently speaking to glbtq groups. In 1974 John Rechy extended his depictions of Los Angeles glbtq life in his documentary nonfiction work, *The Sexual Outlaw*. Writer and Episcopal priest Malcolm Boyd publicly acknowledged his homosexuality in 1977.

The landmark Sisterhood Bookstore in Westwood (near UCLA) was established in 1972. It remained in operation until 1999, when competition from a large chain bookstore across the street became too much for the small business.

Other firsts in the 1970s include the founding of the radio show IMRU in 1975; still broadcast on KPFK, Los Angeles's Pacifica radio station, it is one of the country's longest-running glbtq radio shows. The Los Angeles Gay Men's Chorus was founded in 1979 and later became the first such group to perform for a sitting President of the United States.

In the late 1970s the Sunset Junction area of Silver Lake (where Santa Monica and Sunset Boulevards come together--a former trolley intersection) was revitalized, primarily by gay-owned businesses. This was the area of the Black Cat Bar. At its site a gay bar catering to Latinos was established.

In 1979 A Different Light Bookstore opened at Sunset Junction. It became a cultural center for glbtq Los Angeles, selling new and judicious selections of used books and also holding art exhibits and readings. It hosted the Lesbian Writers Series of Ann Bradley, which celebrated its 25th anniversary at ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives in March 2004. The series included writers other than those residing in Los Angeles, but featured local poets Eloise Klein Healy and Terry Wolverton, novelists Terri de la Peña and Carla Tomaso, journalist and essayist Robin Podolsky, and writers Carolyn Weathers and Ayofemi Folayan.

A Different Light also hosted open Sunday night readings for gay male writers. In 1996 Rondo Mieczkowski finished the work of the late James Carroll Pickett in selecting and editing these readings for an anthology, *Sundays at Seven*. The book includes a diverse group of Los Angeles writers such as African-American novelist Larry Duplechan, African-American poet and essayist Mark Haile, mystery writer Michael Nava, novelist and memoirist Paul Monette, writer on spirituality and the leather community Mark Thompson, activist and priest Malcolm Boyd, and playwright Eric Gutierrez.

### **Acceptance / Devastation: The 1980s**

By the late 1970s and the early 1980s glbtq Los Angeles was poised to reap the benefits of its long activism. Instead, AIDS devastated the community. Nevertheless, the hard times brought men and women together when lesbians became caregivers for infected, sick, and dying gay men.

The previous decade's social and cultural boom resulted in political gains extending into the 1980s. Democratic governor Edmund G. ("Jerry") Brown made a series of appointments of gay men to high office.

In late 1979 he appointed Stephen Lachs the first openly gay judge anywhere, and in 1980 Brown appointed Rand Schrader to the Municipal Court. In 1981 Brown appointed bathhouse and restaurant owner Sheldon Andelson (half-brother to Paul Monette's lover Roger Horwitz) a Regent of the University of California. Andelson also formed a bank in West Hollywood.

In 1981 ONE Institute was granted recognition as a Graduate School of Homophile Studies, able to grant masters and doctoral degrees. In 1982 the first studio movie to depict a gay relationship sympathetically, *Making Love*--written by Barry Sandler, starring Michael Ontkean, Harry Hamlin, and Kate Jackson, and set in Los Angeles--was released. Familiar West Hollywood restaurants, bars, and shops appear in the backgrounds. Another studio movie from 1982, *Personal Best*, tells the story of three women athletes, including a character played by Mariel Hemingway who has affairs both with her male coach and her female competitor and mentor.

In 1982 a film festival--later to become OutFest--began with screenings at UCLA. It now presents the only weekly glbtq screenings in the country, as well as the only glbtq people of color festival. That same year Celebration Theatre opened as a community-based professional theater with the mission of accurately representing the gay and lesbian community to itself and to the community at large. It continues today in a small venue of its own.

In 1983 the Long Beach Lesbian & Gay Pride, Inc. (LBLGP, Inc.) was established and produced the first annual Long Beach Lesbian & Gay Pride Festival & Parade in June of 1984. The establishment of the parade and festival in Long Beach recognized the growth of a large and active glbtq community there. The Long Beach parade now attracts over 75,000 participants and features more than 200 marching groups and floats.

Minorities began to form organizations within the glbtq communities. While some broke away from groups in which they felt they were not represented, others were formed specifically to fight AIDS, and all promoted a broad variety of social benefits and visibility for minority communities. Several of these groups continue today.

Unidos, a Los Angeles organization for gay Chicanas / Chicanos, had formed in 1970 and Lesbians of Color in 1978, but many more groups of glbtq minorities emerged in the 1980s. Asian/Pacific Lesbians and Gays (A/PLG) formed in late 1980, at the impetus of Morris Kight. A Lesbians of Color conference was held in Malibu in 1983. Lesbianas Unidas was formed in 1984, Asian Pacific Lesbians and Friends in 1985, the Black Gay & Lesbian Leadership Forum in 1988, Uloah (United Lesbians of African Heritage) in 1989, and Bienestar, a Latino AIDS support organization, that same year.

Difficulties between heterosexual Latinos and the gay population and businesses in Silver Lake led to the formation of the Sunset Junction Neighborhood Alliance, which held its first fair in 1980. As writer Garland Richard Kyle has noted, the annual shutting down of the streets in the old location of the Black Cat Bar has been one of the "most concerted organizational attempts in the nation to integrate the gay and lesbian community into the larger urban landscape."

## **West Hollywood**

The biggest accomplishment of the 1980s was realized when in 1984 the residents of West Hollywood voted for incorporation and elected a majority of openly gay city council members, making the district previously known primarily for its entertainment venues America's first gay-controlled city.

The area had long hosted glbtq persons and businesses catering to them. First known as Sherman, it had been the home of the trolley barns for Los Angeles and was known for a concentration of working-class

trade and a hotel where gay men could take their pickups.

After World War II, and particularly in the 1960s, gay men began to buy up the working-class cottages. They remodeled them with flair, using styles derived from Jack Wolf. The result was a community in the slopes down from Sunset called the "Swish Alps." Noted residents included photographer George Hoyningen-Huene and Dorothy Parker and her husband Alan Campbell (sometimes identified as gay).

Since it was unincorporated, West Hollywood featured nightclubs and other adult entertainment that operated with less police scrutiny than those in Los Angeles proper. It was known for its bars on Santa Monica Boulevard primarily for gay men and as the location of the Sunset Strip, a mixed entertainment venue, which became home to the Los Angeles hippie counterculture.

Also in the late 1960s the nightclub *Ciro's* on Sunset offered Sunday nights for gay men to dance together, which was then illegal, but the law was not enforced in the unincorporated area. There was one longstanding lesbian bar, *The Palms*, owned by gay men.

As well as for its bars, West Hollywood was also known for clothing stores catering to gay men, such as *Ah Men*, which opened in 1958, and an outlet for *Parr of Arizona*. Their clothing ads were featured in the physique magazines. Also appealing to gay men were gift and decorative item and craft shops, such as the one owned by the gay African-American actor Brock Peters.

Restaurants on Santa Monica Boulevard, such as *Por Favor*, also created a community more layered than just a strip of bars. But like the bars, the restaurants often had no windows facing on the street and a front door that allowed almost secret access. West Hollywood also had a large market, called *Shermart*, which served as "gay central" until it was torn down to build a sheriff's station.

Shortly after incorporation, the new city of West Hollywood made great strides. The first mayor was lesbian Valerie Terrigno, who resigned after she was convicted of embezzlement that occurred before her election. Other glbtq persons continued to be elected to the council, which promptly adopted a landmark anti-discrimination policy, provided domestic partnership benefits for city employees, established a civil union registry, and improved local law enforcement's relations with glbtq citizens. These policies have been described by Los Angeles cultural geographer Moira Rachel Kenney as "models for other cities and states."

Still, lesbians had less presence in West Hollywood than gay men, although *Connexus*, a lesbian social services center, operated in the city from 1984 to 1990. This center sought to extend its services when it opened the *Centro de Mujeres* in East Los Angeles, where it could serve lesbian Latinas. At the end of the 1980s *Connexus* brought the *West Coast Lesbian Collections* from Oakland, eventually to be housed in West Hollywood and renamed the *June L. Mazer Lesbian Collection*, an archives of books, papers, sound recordings, and objects such as tee shirts and softball uniforms. It remains open for lesbians as a center for research and a source of community.

Gains in glbtq youth services were made in the 1980s. *Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays* (PFLAG) opened its first national office in Los Angeles in 1981; the Los Angeles chapter is one of the organization's most active chapters. In 1984 Virginia Uribe at Fairfax High School created *Project 10* to counsel glbtq youth, and in 1985 Teresa de Crescenzo, partner of Betty Berzon, founded *Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services* (GLASS).

### **Advent of AIDS**

A description of symptoms first termed GRID (Gay Related Immunodeficiency Disease) was first published by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) on June 5, 1981, based on information and research provided by

UCLA medical professor Dr. Michael Gottlieb and Los Angeles gay physician Dr. Joel Weisman. The report was authored by Gottlieb and CDC Los Angeles staff member Wayne Shandera. In 1982 Los Angeles researcher and activist Dr. Bruce Voeller suggested the term AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome).

In response to the overwhelming toll exacted by AIDS in Los Angeles, numerous groups mobilized to raise awareness of the disease and to care for those who suffered from the virus. AIDS Project LA (APLA) was formed in 1982, with services beginning in 1983 as a telephone hotline. APLA grew to include client services, educational services, advertising campaigns (including the now-famous "LA Cares" ads), and government affairs programs. In August 1985 APLA coordinated testimony to the Los Angeles City Council, and the city became the first in the nation to ban discrimination against people with AIDS. Project Angel Food began in 1989 and now serves more than 1,000 meals daily, including a second meal to the neediest clients.

The announcement in 1985 that actor Rock Hudson had contracted the virus and his death months later made the world aware of the disease and helped facilitate fundraising. Elizabeth Taylor and other Hollywood figures assumed leadership roles in the fight against AIDS. The American Foundation for AIDS Research (AmFAR) was founded in Los Angeles in that year. In July 1985 actress Ann-Margret and Mayor Bradley headed the first AIDS walk sponsored by APLA.

Among other Los Angeles writers and filmmakers who documented the ravages of AIDS, Paul Monette wrote extensively about how he and his lover Roger Horwitz coped with the disease. Monette's *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir* (1988) remains one of the most moving works about the epidemic.

As of 2004, about 80,000 persons had died of AIDS in Los Angeles, while over 56,000 persons were living with HIV.

### **The Third Wave of Gay Liberation: 1990-2000**

As if a decade of the rigors of AIDS were not enough, in September 1991 Governor Pete Wilson, thought to be a moderate Republican and a friend of the glbtq community, vetoed AB 101, a bill that would have banned discrimination in private employment in California. In Los Angeles the night the veto was announced, the leading glbtq activists were out of the city, but a spontaneous street demonstration began and continued for two weeks.

More than 50,000 persons marched to various locations around the city to protest and to promote awareness of this injustice. These demonstrations were an outgrowth of ACT UP, Queer Nation (both founded elsewhere), and the other protest movements that formed during the years of government inactivity on issues surrounding AIDS and its treatment.

Wilson himself was zapped--a protest method harking back to the times of the GLF--when he spoke at UCLA. The cover of the university's glbtq student newspaper showed the helmeted and riot-batoned police summoned to keep order, a sight not seen on campus since the anti-war protests of the 1970s.

*The Advocate* described these actions and the year 1991 as the beginning of a third wave of queer activism.

More conventional political gains were made when in 1993 Jackie Goldberg (not yet out to her electorate) won a seat on the Los Angeles city council. Sheila Kuehl, the beloved star of television's *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* (1959-1963) became the first openly gay member of the California legislature when she was elected in 1994; she is currently serving as state senator.

Through the late 1980s and 1990s performance art was again in the forefront with a diverse group of

artists, such as Luis Alfaro, Monica Palacio, and Tim Miller, often appearing in Santa Monica at the performance space Highways.

Beginning in 1989 and continuing into a few years into the 1990s, a group of Los Angeles writers--at the behest of Mark Thompson and Betty Berzon--met at Berzon's home to form the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Writers Circle, perhaps the most mixed and diverse group of glbtq writers to meet formally anywhere. Attending these meetings or associated with the group were, among others, Boyd, Duplechan, Healy, Gutierrez, Monette, Nava, Podolsky, Sandler, and Wolverton, as well as Bernard Cooper, Gil Cuadros, Jacqueline De Angelis, Lillian Faderman, Katherine V. Forrest, Bia Lowe, and Elisabeth Nonas.

With the death of Dorr Legg in 1994 and the declining health of Jim Kepner, ONE Institute and IGLA were officially merged in 1994. Now named ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, it is housed but not funded by the University of Southern California. An invaluable repository of history, ONE is now the largest U.S. glbtq archives as well as the longest-lived glbtq organization in the U.S.

Vox Femina LA, a women's choral ensemble dedicated to performing choral literature by women composers, was founded in 1997, and is directed by Dr. Iris S. Levine. The performers comprise a diverse family, who are lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual.

### **A New Century and a New Commitment: 2000 to the Present**

In the face of broad national hostility to glbtq issues in the early years of the twenty-first century, California and Los Angeles are success stories in the movement for equality. Politicians elected in the 1990s and since continue to make strides in prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in Los Angeles and West Hollywood, as well as the entire state of California.

West Hollywood continued to elect glbtq persons to the city council. John Heilman, elected to the first council, still serves, and has been mayor six times. Jeffrey Prang, first elected in 1997, and John Duran, elected in 2001, have also served as mayor.

In the early 2000s, several significant pieces of legislation affecting glbtq concerns were passed into law in California, including bills on hate crimes, discrimination in hiring and public accommodations, healthcare for people with HIV, equal benefits in state contracting, and a comprehensive domestic partnership bill. California affords the greatest amount of legal protection to glbtq citizens of any state in the country, and many of these gains were spearheaded by Los Angeles's representatives in the legislature.

Both Goldberg, who now serves in the state assembly, and Kuehl, in the senate, have made landmark contributions, such as adding transgender as a category of protection against hate crimes. Shirley Bushnell and other transgender activists in Transgender Menace have worked to promote awareness and legislation.

In 2003 Democratic governor Gray Davis signed into law a bill that made California only the fourth state in the U.S. to protect transgendered individuals from discrimination. The California legislature is the only state legislature to pass a bill legalizing same-sex marriage, though it was vetoed by Republican governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Kuehl's most recent legislation was meant to require teaching glbtq history, but it was watered down for passage when Governor Schwarzenegger threatened to veto it. Even the watered-down version was vetoed by Schwarzenegger.

In May 2005, Bill Rosendahl became the first openly gay person elected to the Los Angeles city council. The glbtq community has worked successfully to enlist allies, so that both the county Board of Supervisors and the City Council offered symbolic resolutions against President George W. Bush's proposed constitutional amendment prohibiting same-sex marriages.

Demographic changes are occurring in southern California and the high cost of living has affected the glbtq communities. West Hollywood now has a smaller percentage of glbtq residents than it did several years ago. Bob Gentry, a former mayor of Laguna Beach, has noted that the high cost of living in Laguna has kept younger glbtq people from locating there. Hence, Laguna Beach's landmark gay bar, the Boom Boom Room, may face closure soon.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the glbtq communities and organizations in Los Angeles share the difficulties of those elsewhere, particularly in obtaining funding. Both public and private funding for community organizations has diminished in the new millennium. Foundations and corporations are not dispensing the money they did in the past. Still, fundraising remains high for places such as the Center and continues in earnest for the many smaller and diverse organizations throughout the city.

If activities associated with Los Angeles and even its climate were for decades denigrated by the eastern establishment, by the end of the twentieth century the city had earned grudging respect for its cultural and spiritual offerings, which are as various as Vedanta and Self-Realization, Hollywood imagery and noir literature, to say nothing of educational institutions as impressive as the Getty Art Center, the Huntington Library, USC, and UCLA.

Glbtc people in Los Angeles have contributed mightily to the vibrancy of the city. The recent political and social progress made by the glbtq communities in Los Angeles can only improve the quality of life for everyone.

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Dan Luckenbill was a senior manuscripts processor in the Department of Special Collections, UCLA Library. He curated numerous exhibits and wrote catalogs on lesbian and gay studies at UCLA and on the work of Stathis Orphanos and Ralph Sylvester. He also published essays and gay fiction, as well as a memoir entitled "Isherwood in Los Angeles." He died on March 25, 2012.