

Activity Idea

History of LGBTQ+ Rights in Los Angeles

Recommended for Adults

The LGBTQ+ community has a long history in Los Angeles. This new Learning Pathway will help you explore events, places, and accomplishments that commemorate the varied culture of a community that helped shape Los Angeles, and the world.

While New York and San Francisco are central to the history of LGBTQ+ rights, Los Angeles is truly a city of firsts! While the Stonewall Uprising can be considered the beginning of collective action for LGBTQ+ rights, Los Angeles was the home of the first recorded incident of protest against police actions towards the LGBTQ+ community (Coopers Do-Nuts, May 1959), as well as one of the first demonstrations against police raids of bars, such as the one at the Black Cat Tavern on New Year's Eve, 1966. Following that event, a civil demonstration was organized by PRIDE (Personal Rights in Defense and Education) on February 11th, 1967. Even prior to that, Los Angeles had the first organized LGBTQ+ rights organization (the Mattachine Society) in 1950, the first LGBTQ+ magazine (*The Advocate*, founded in 1967)¹, the first "gay motorcade," organized in 1966 to protest discrimination against gay men in the military. Finally, the first use of the word Pride to refer to LGBTQ+ rights has been attributed to (PRIDE), founded in 1966.

The first Pride march in Los Angeles took place on June 28th, 1970, organized by the Christopher Street West Association, who still facilitate it to this day. While the first parade was attended by a scarce 1,000 people, the LA Pride parade is now a two-day festival, that draws tens of thousands of people every year. While the few paragraphs above cannot do justice to the progress of LGBTQ+ rights in Los Angeles, hopefully it gives a vital snapshot of the importance of the City of Angels in LGBTQ+ history. Below is a compilation of resources that develop a much deeper picture of the role Los Angeles played in LGBTQ+ rights.

¹ Los Angeles was also place of the first lesbian magazine, *Vice Versa*, in 1947. Interestingly, both *The Advocate* and *Vice Versa* were initially printed, in secret, out of Hollywood studios: ABC Television Studios West and RKO Studio, respectively, the workplaces of the founders.

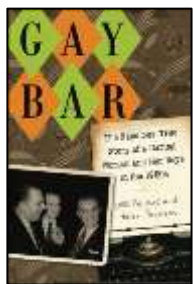
Books



City of Night by John Rechy

“When John Rechy's explosive first novel appeared in 1963, it marked a radical departure in fiction, and gave voice to a subculture that had never before been revealed with such acuity. It earned comparisons to Genet and Kerouac, even as Rechy was personally attacked by scandalized reviewers. Nevertheless, the book became an international bestseller, and fifty years later, it has become a classic.”

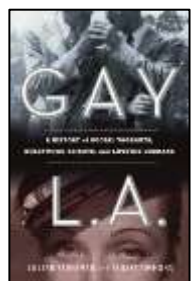
Catalog Link: <https://tinyurl.com/y6oah6fq>



Gay Bar: The Fabulous, True Story of a Daring Woman and Her Boys in the 1950s by Will Fellows and Helen Branson

“Vivacious, unconventional, candid, and straight, Helen Branson operated a gay bar in Los Angeles in the 1950s--America's most anti-gay decade...In 1957 she published her extraordinary memoir *Gay Bar*, the first book by a heterosexual to depict the lives of homosexuals with admiration, respect, and love...In this new edition of *Gay Bar*, Will Fellows interweaves Branson's chapters with historical perspective provided through his own insightful commentary and excerpts gleaned from letters and essays appearing in gay publications of the period.”

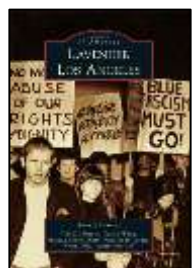
Catalog Link: <https://tinyurl.com/y3asc3ks>



Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians by Lillian Faberman and Stuart Timmons

“The exhortation to “Go West!” has always had a strong hold on the American imagination. But for the gays, lesbians, and transgendered people who have moved to L.A. over the past two centuries, the City of Angels has offered a special home--which, in turn, gave rise to one of the most influential gay cultures in the world. Drawing upon untouched archives of documents and photographs and over 200 new interviews, Lillian Faberman and Stuart Timmons chart L.A.'s unique gay history...”

Catalog Link: <https://tinyurl.com/y5rhvvdC>



Lavender Los Angeles by Roots of Equality (a grassroots LGBT organization)

Born out of the “Lavender Los Angeles” exhibit, *Lavender Los Angeles*, uses images (mostly from the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives) to document the birth and progress of the LGBTQ+ movement in Los Angeles from its beginnings.

Catalog Link: <https://tinyurl.com/yvr3e8xi>



Pre-Gay L.A.: A Social History of the Movement for Homosexual Rights by C. Todd White

“This book explores the origins and history of the modern American movement for homosexual rights, which originated in Los Angeles in the late 1940s and continues today. Part ethnography and part social history, it is a detailed account of the history of the movement as manifested through the emergence of four related organizations: Mattachine, ONE Incorporated, the Homosexual Information Center (HIC), and the Institute for the Study of Human Resources (ISHR)...”

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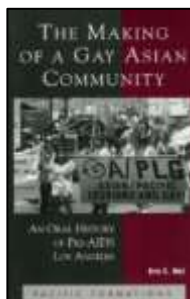


Set the Night on Fire: LA in the Sixties by Mike Davis and Jon Wiener

A substantial (800+pages) general history of various movements in 1960s Los Angeles, including a chapter called “Before Stonewall: Gay L.A (1964-1970). While the other books on this list focus specifically on LGBTQ+ right history in Los Angeles, this book helps to put that activism in context of a particular place and time.

Overdrive: <https://tinyurl.com/y7wa4lmw>

Catalog Link: <https://tinyurl.com/y3jxcph>



The Making of a Gay Asian Community: An Oral History of Pre-AIDS Los Angeles by Eric C. Wat

“In this unique oral history, gay Asian Americans talk frankly about their struggle for self-determination and independence. For the first time, in their own words, pioneers in the Los Angeles movement discuss the gay scene in Southern California and the development of a distinctly Asian American identity.”

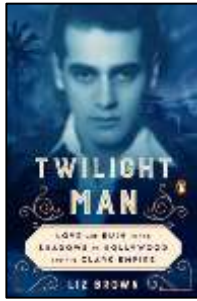
Catalog link: <https://tinyurl.com/yp463vmd>



The Storm: One Voice from the AIDS Generation by Christopher Zyda

Christopher Zyda confronts the long-buried and painful memories of his harrowing fifteen-year journey...A heart-wrenching love story and coming-of-age tale during the early years of the AIDS crisis in Los Angeles.

Catalog link: <https://tinyurl.com/4rf3yfay>



Twilight Man: Love and Ruin in the Shadows of Hollywood and the Clark Empire by Liz Brown

"The unbelievable true story of Harrison Post--the enigmatic lover of one of the richest men in 1920s Hollywood--and the battle for a family fortune."

Catalog link: <https://tinyurl.com/myt5d2a7>

For more books and other items, it is highly recommended that you visit the special LGBT Collection at the West Hollywood Library.

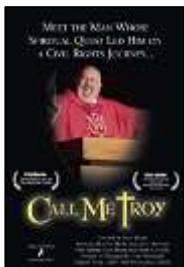
Video



Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community

"Traces the social, political and cultural history of homosexuality in America from the 1920s to 1969; the beginning of the Gay Liberation Movement after a police raid on Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City; and the three-day riot that followed."

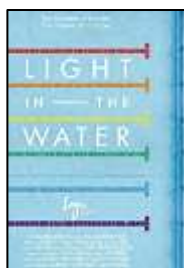
Catalog Link: <https://tinyurl.com/y5prng62>



Call Me Troy

"Profiling the life and times of one of the gay community's most visible and tenacious advocates for change, Rev. Troy Perry, *Call Me Troy* is a truly inspirational story about a remarkable and dynamic individual whose activism was decades ahead of its time."

Kanopy Link: <https://tinyurl.com/ybkhhxyu>



Light in the Water: The Story of the First Openly Gay Masters Swim Team

"In 1982 soon after the first Gay Games, West Hollywood Aquatics registered as the first openly gay masters swim team in the world. This athletic powerhouse fought injustice in the world of competitive sports, and ultimately became a family."

Kanopy Link: <https://tinyurl.com/y9psyp7y>



The Other Side: A Queer History's Last Call: A Documentary

This film documents the history of gay Los Angeles set against the backdrop of The Other Side, a venerable piano bar in the Silver Lake neighborhood.

Catalog Link: <https://tinyurl.com/yymodrwh>



Political Animals: Pioneering Women Who Paved the Way for LGBT Equality

Winner of multiple awards, including Best Documentary at the Los Angeles Film Festival, *Political Animals* follows the first four members of the California LGBT Legislative Caucus, including former Los Angeles City Councilmember (and now member of the LAUSD Board), Jackie Goldberg, and Sheila Kuehl, current member of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (3rd District), as they as they fight for equality.

Kanopy Link: <https://tinyurl.com/ycna7rhx>

Websites

“Before Stonewall, the Queer Revolution Started Right Here in Los Angeles” by Jason McGahan – This engaging article from the *Los Angeles Magazine* provides an ideal introduction to the historical struggle for LGBTQ+ rights in Los Angeles, covering both the events at Coopers Do-Nuts, the Black Cat Tavern, and more. <https://tinyurl.com/y5wrty92>

Curating the City: LGBTQ Historic Places in L.A. – A project the LA Conservancy to highlight landmarks of LGBTQ+ history in Los Angeles, including short films about The Black Cat (mentioned in the introduction), The Woman’s Building, and the Great/Long Hall at Plummer Park. <https://www.laconservancy.org/lgbtq>

"Mapping Los Angeles's groundbreaking role in LGBT history" by Bianaca Barragan – A selection of places important to LGBTQ+ history in Los Angeles with short descriptions images, and a map, published at *Curbed LA*. <https://tinyurl.com/yaj65ssx>

SurveyLA: LGBT Historic Context Statement – Not a website, but a 101-page pdf document containing informative sections on topics such as the gay liberation movement, LGBT community and the media, and others on literature and art. <https://tinyurl.com/y9cdw97e>

“Black California history and LGBTQ+ rights” by Susan D. Anderson – “...California African American Museum History Curator and Program Manager, looks at the interconnected—and sometimes separate—legacies of Black and LGBTQ+ activism.” <https://tinyurl.com/29rymb3k>

Queer Maps – “A rich map of published addresses of active LGBTQ bars, nightclubs, organizations, etc. from 1871 -> today” This ongoing project offers an alternative inroad to exploring LGBTQ+ history in the greater Los Angeles area. <https://queermaps.org/>

“My archive: 20 years of Los Angeles’ LGBTQ+ movement” – Article describing the archival collection of “brown and queer activist” Lydia Otero, who spent two decades as member of the Gay and Lesbian Latinos Unidos (GLLU). Includes many touchpoints for further exploration. <https://tinyurl.com/bdpvjym>