

L.A.'s Top 10 LGBT Historical 'Firsts'

By Karen Ocamb

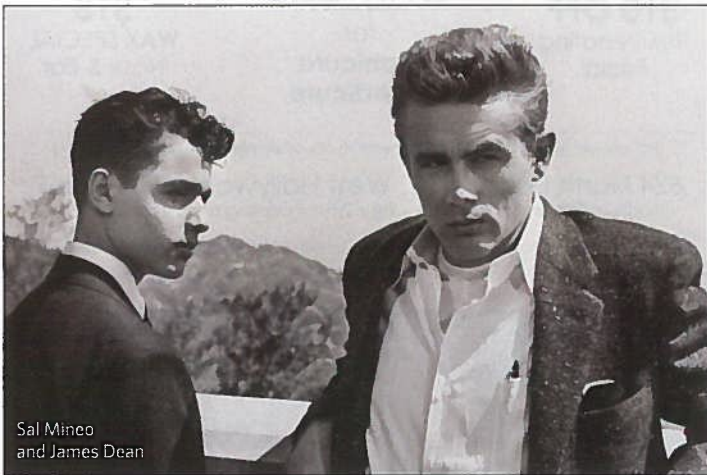


Two years ago, the Oxford English Dictionary added "La-La Land" as a term referring to Los Angeles and "a state of being out of touch with reality—and sometimes to both simultaneously."

Despite being the second-largest city in America, contributing billions to the world economy and serving as a font of creativity, L.A. is too often considered vacuous and insignificant compared to New York or San Francisco. And yet L.A. is the real birthplace of the modern American LGBT movement—just scan the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives Institute (onearchives.org) or C. Todd White's history of ONE, Inc. at the Homosexual Information Center (tangentgroup.org) for proof.

Vacuous L.A. ain't. Consider, for instance, that the first LGBT publication, a newsletter called *Vice Versa* by "Lisa Ben," was mimeographed at RKO Studios in 1947.

To commemorate L.A.'s place in LGBT history, here is list of the top 10 achievements launched in L.A., culled from a rich 65-year history:



Sal Mineo
and James Dean

1.

The Mattachine Society

In 1948, Harry Hay first got the idea for the Mattachine Society—officially founded two years later in Hay's Silver Lake home with his designer lover Rudy Gernreich, Chuck Rowland, Dale Jennings and Bob Hull—just as McCarthyism was witch-hunting homosexuals and Communists.

In 1952, Mattachine's Dorr Legg proposed *ONE* magazine, devoted to homophile issues, including marriage. In 1954, the L.A. Postmaster refused to distribute *ONE*, declaring it "obscene." *ONE*, Inc. fought back, and in January 1958, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that *ONE* is not obscene, paving the way for *Playboy* to be distributed through the mail, igniting the '60s sexual revolution.

2.

Sexual and Psychological Politics

In 1948, sex researcher Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* was read aloud as a political act in gay cruising spot Pershing Square across from the 'closeted-gay friendly' Biltmore Hotel. Also during this time period, UCLA psychologist Evelyn Hooker started her four-year study of the differences between homosexual and heterosexual men—she found both are equally well-adjusted.

The 1957 published report provided the impetus for protests against homosexuality's designation as an officially listed psychological mental illness, which the American Psychiatric Association voted to remove in December 1973.

Meanwhile, the Beat movement had its gay poets William Burroughs and Alan Ginsberg (Jack Kerouac was bisexual), but Hollywood had "gender-benders" like Katherine Hepburn and vulnerable sex idols like James Dean embracing gay Sal Mineo on film.

3.

The Black Cat Riots

New Year's Eve, 1967—the LAPD raided the Black Cat Tavern in Silver Lake, leading to 16 arrests (including two men "caught" kissing) and subsequent protest rallies—two years before Stonewall. An organizational newsletter noting anti-police protests became *The L.A. Advocate*.

On Nov. 8, 2008, the L.A. City Council declared the Black Cat to be a historic landmark. In 2012, the LAPD announced positive guidelines for interaction with transgender individuals.

Meanwhile, Jewel's Catch One Disco, the world's first gay black disco, also had run-ins with the LAPD but has outlasted Studio One (later The Factory) and has been running strong in the mid-Wilshire District since 1972.

4.

Metropolitan Community Church

In 1968, Rev. Troy Perry started the Metropolitan Community Church with 12 people in his living room, based on a commitment to worship and social justice, including protests, fasts, opposing Anita Bryant and the Briggs Initiative, marrying gay couples and ordaining women.

In 1977, Perry was part of a small contingent invited to the White House by Midge Costanza. He helped plan the 1979 March on Washington with Robin Tyler, with whom he protested on behalf of marriage equality for years after his own marriage to Phillip Ray De Blicek in Canada, leading to the original marriage equality case in 2004. By 2007, MCC had more than 300 congregations in 18 countries.

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5.

The Center

In 1971, a handful of activists—including June Herrle, Jim Kepner, Gay Liberation/L.A. Co-Founders Morris Kight and Don Kilhefner and LGF/L.A. activist John Platania—opened the Gay Community Services Center in an old Victorian house at 1614 Wilshire Boulevard.

In 1974, the Center became the first openly gay organization to receive tax-exempt status from the IRS, though with a condition: the Center must not “advocate the practice of homosexuality or contend that homosexuality is normal” and no “avowed homosexuals” could serve on its board. That’s fine—they were *gay*, not *homosexual*, which was deemed a government term.

Today, the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center offers legal, social, cultural and educational services, with unique programs for seniors, families and youth.



City of West Hollywood
California 1984

8.

The Birth of West Hollywood

In 1984, voters created the city of West Hollywood, electing the first-ever city council with a gay majority, which quickly enacted antidiscrimination laws based on sexual orientation and HIV status. City co-founder Councilmember John Heilman also established the first domestic partnership registry for city employees and residents in 1985.

Also in 1984, Fairfax High School science teacher Virginia Uribe launched Project 10, the nation’s first anti-dropout program for LGBT kids. The program would become the model for GLSEN and Gay/Straight Alliances around the country.

In 1985, AIDS ousted Hollywood glamour boy Rock Hudson, prompting Elizabeth Taylor and Dr. Gottlieb to create an AIDS foundation, which soon merged with one led by Dr. Michael Gottlieb to become amFAR.



9.

The First-Ever Gay Voting Bloc

In 1991, Democratic presidential candidate and Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton sought and received the endorsement of ANGLE, led by his friend David Mixner, after which the L.A.-based group raised a historic \$1.3 million in early money and created the first-ever gay voting bloc. Clinton told the *L.A. Times* he would have signed the gay rights bill AB 101, and he later became the first presidential candidate to speak to a gay audience with HIV/AIDS at an ANGLE/Human Rights Campaign event at the Palace Theatre in Hollywood (tinyurl.com/ckqmh2k). Once elected, Clinton couldn’t keep his big promises, enacting “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and the Defense of Marriage Act.

6.

State Government Support

In 1979, Gov. Jerry Brown was the keynote speaker at the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Community Services Center’s first big fundraiser—a roast for rich businessman Sheldon Andelson, with Lily Tomlin as emcee. Many L.A. elected officials attended, several of whom had accepted contributions from the nation’s first gay political action committee, MECLA.

In 1979, Brown appointed longtime MECLA and Center board member Steve Lachs as the nation’s first openly gay judge and named Andelson the first openly gay member of the University of California Board of Regents in 1980. Many members of MECLA, such as David Mixner and Diane Abbitt, were SoCal activists against the anti-gay Briggs Initiative—as were grassroots activists such as lesbian feminist Ivy Bottini—while San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk led the successful campaign in Northern California.

Former Gov. Ronald Reagan wrote an impactful op-ed opposing the Briggs Initiative after a private visit with some gays, but when he became president in 1980, many of the Religious Right backing the Briggs Initiative wound up in his cabinet and drastically influenced the administration’s non-action on AIDS.



7.

Reports on a Mysterious New Disease

On July 3, 1981, the *New York Times* published the first story of a mysterious disease found in 41 gay men in New York and California. The report came from a CDC report written by L.A.’s Dr. Michael Gottlieb with input from gay doctor Joel Weisman on their gay patients.

It turns out the L.A. Gay Community Services Center, which moved to 1213 N. Highland Avenue in Hollywood in 1975, had been seeing people with what the CDC called GRID (Gay Related Immune Deficiency Disorder) at the popular STD clinic since 1979.



10.

Spotlight on California

On Aug. 9, 2007, the Human Rights Campaign and Logo TV sponsored the first presidential forum focusing on LGBT issues, in which six Democrats participated, including Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. On Nov. 4, 2008, Obama became America’s first black president—but California voters passed Proposition 8.

On May, 27, 2009, after the California Supreme Court upheld Prop. 8 on a technicality, the L.A.-based American Foundation for Equal Rights (afef.org) announced a federal Equal Protection challenge to the proposition. On Aug. 4, 2010, gay District Court Judge Vaughn Walker ruled Prop. 8 was unconstitutional.

Just over one month later, on Sept. 9, 2010, District Court Judge Virginia A. Phillips ruled DADT is unconstitutional in a case brought by the Log Cabin Republicans. The ruling created chaos in the Pentagon, which eventually led to the repeal of DADT.

Meanwhile, the challenges to Prop. 8 and DOMA reached the U.S. Supreme Court in March 2013—the first time the high court has weighed marriage equality—with the outcome still unknown.