

LGBTQ+ Resistance in the United States

In February 2025, the National Park Service erased the word ‘transgender’ from its web page in reference to the Stonewall National Monument.¹ Mentions of ‘LGB’ civil rights miss the usual ‘T’ and exemplify recent efforts for the erasure of transgender people in the United States.² Queer activism has existed for decades in the United States. The Society for Human Rights founded in 1924 is the oldest documented LGBTQ+ rights organization in the US.³ In the years following World War II and before Stonewall, LGBTQ+ activism was often referred to as the “Homophile Movement.” Significant groups included the Mattachine Society, The Daughters of Bilitis (a lesbian rights group), and One, Inc.; all of which published informational or political magazines or newsletters, to educate and foster stronger connections within LGBTQ+ communities.⁴

The Stonewall Uprising in June 1969 was a multiple-day rebellion by LGBTQ+ protestors against the police, motivated by the criminalization of homosexuality and years of police raids on gay bars in New York City like the Stonewall Inn. Stonewall is often considered to be a turning point for LGBTQ+ equality in the US: in the years before Stonewall, there were around 60 operating ‘homophile’ groups, but this number leapt to approximately 1500-2000 just one year after Stonewall. The first Pride March also occurred on the one-year anniversary of Stonewall, in 1970, and received fundraising support from the Queens Liberation Front (QLF). Founded in 1969, the QLF also produced the Drag Magazine, which published perspectives of drag queens, and trans and gender-nonconforming people. In 1970 activists Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson founded the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), whose community-focused approach strove to support the most vulnerable members of the queer community (such as providing food, clothing, and shelter to trans youth experiencing homelessness).⁵

Initiatives to strengthen LGBTQ+ connections like the magazines are efforts to resist the major legal and social barriers to queer thriving, which existed in some cases until very recently. From 1952 to 1973, the American Psychiatric Association listed homosexuality as a mental illness. Moreover, in 1953, President Eisenhower banned “homosexuals” from working for the federal government, and as late as 1996, President Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act into law, which reinforced that the only legal marriage is between a man and a woman. It was not until June 2003 that homosexuality was decriminalized on a federal level by the Supreme Court.

¹ “Stonewall,” National Park Service, last modified February 15, 2025, <https://www.nps.gov/ston/index.htm>.

² Juliana Kim, “Park Service erases ‘transgender’ on Stonewall website, uses the term ‘LGB’ movement,” *National Public Radio*, February 14, 2025.

³ “Milestones in the American Gay Rights Movement,” American Experience, Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americalexperience/features/stonewall-milestones-american-gay-rights-movement/>.

⁴ “LGBTQIA+ Studies: A Resource Guide,” Library of Congress, last modified July 14, 2022, <https://guides.loc.gov/lgbtq-studies>.

⁵ Library of Congress, “LGBTQIA+ Studies: A Resource Guide.”

Throughout the early 2000s, more and more states legalized same-sex marriage-- which eventually came into federal law in June 2015.⁶

Despite progress made during the last few decades, LGBTQ+ civil rights are still threatened today. The American Civil Liberties Union is currently tracking 527 anti-LGBTQ bills in the US, a number that is constantly increasing. These bills limit healthcare and sports access for transgender youth, ban LGBTQ+ books and drag, and much more.⁷ President Trump's recent actions to target diversity, equity, and inclusion language and programs further perpetuate the systemic silencing of LGBTQ+ individuals.⁸ With rising threats to queer belonging, the question emerges: what does resistance look like today?

⁶ PBS, "Milestones in the American Gay Rights Movement."

⁷ "Mapping Attacks on LGBTQ Rights in U.S. State Legislatures in 2025," American Civil Liberties Union, last modified March 14, 2025, <https://www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights-2025>.

⁸ Trey Walk, "Anti-DEI Crusade in US Allows Discrimination," *Human Rights Watch*, January 29, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/01/29/anti-dei-crusade-us-allows-discrimination>.