

PRIDE MONTH

Did you know?

Before the 1970s, the LGBTQ community faced unimaginable discrimination at the federal and local level across the United States.

In 1947, the U.S. Park Police launched a “Pervert Elimination Campaign” with the purpose of arresting, investigating, and prosecuting gay men cruising in city parks. In 1948, Congress passed an act in D.C. that facilitated the arrest and punishment of people who acted on same-sex desire and labeled them mentally ill. Known as the sodomy law, it established a penalty of up to 10 years in prison or a fine up to \$1,000. This law remained in effect until it was appealed in 1995.

That same year, Alfred Kinsey published, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. The book became a best-seller. While it raised awareness that same-sex experiences were common, it failed to make it socially acceptable. Americans, already fearing communism after the end of WWII, saw homosexuality as another threat.

In 1949, the Senate’s Special Subcommittee on Investigations, began conducting a year-long investigation of gay and lesbian employees in the federal workforce. Their report, *Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government*, identified over 5,000 workers in the military and civilian government. The report would go on to state that all government intelligence agencies agreed that these workers constituted security risks. It allowed for job discrimination and denial of security clearances. As a result of this report, over 10,000 people lost their jobs.

The period between 1950 and 1961 was known as the “Lavender Scare” because of the panic and persecution of the LGBTQ community.

In the 1960s, LGBTQ activism moved to the forefront alongside other human and social rights movements of the era. The Mattachine Society of Washington was formed during this time to aid federal employees and residents who were targeted for their sexuality. The *Washington Blade*, which is now America’s oldest LGBTQ newspaper, was founded in 1969. The Washington Free Clinic became the first place to provide STD counseling to gay men and would eventually lead to what is now the Whitman-Walker clinic.

By the 1970s, things began to change. In 1972, the D.C. School Board extended the first civil rights protection to the LGBTQ community. D.C. City Council passed Title 34, which made D.C. one of the first major cities in the country to provide LGBTQ protections. The D.C. Human Rights Act of 1977 is nearly identical in language to Title 34.

The 1970s also saw the first gay pride celebration in May 1972, organized by the Gay Liberation Front-DC. In 1975, Gay Pride Day was founded as a one-day block party and street festival. The name changed again in 1981 to Gay and Lesbian Pride Day in 1981. The celebration is now known as Capitol Pride, and this year marks the 47th anniversary.

We celebrate Pride in the June, to honor the Stonewall Uprising of 1969, which laid the foundation for modern day pride. However, the Stonewall was not the first uprising. Events such as the Cooper Do-nuts Riot in Los Angeles May 1959 and the Compton’s Cafeteria Riot in San Francisco in August, 1966 saw transgender and queer folks stand up against police invading this spaces and arresting those in attendance.

Everyone has the right to feel valued, welcomed, and respected regardless of their gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. If we stand together, we can fight to end discrimination.

(Reference: DC Office of Human Rights)