

Black & Gay in Black and White: Boston's LGBT African American History

- 1782 Deborah Sampson disguises herself as a male and enlists in the Continental forces under the name of Robert Shurtleff. Sampson's gender is discovered when she is hospitalized for wounds suffered in battle near Tarrytown, NY. Some historians believe that Deborah Sampson was African American.
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- 1790 George Middleton, leader of The Bucks of America, an all-black Revolutionary War regiment, and Louis Clapion, a French mulatto hairdresser build and live together in the oldest standing house on Beacon Hill, at 5 Pinckney St.
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- 1860 Edmonia Lewis, African American/Native American sculptor, known for her masculine dress, studies and works in Boston. It was in Boston that she meets the group of feminists and artists, headed by actress Charlotte Cushman, with whom she is to live for several years in Rome.
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- 1880 Angelina Weld Grimke, (often confused with her famous aunt, the white abolitionist Angelina Grimke Weld), is born in Boston into a distinguished biracial family. Grimke becomes a teacher and a poet of the Harlem Renaissance. Her love poems are written to women. "...Oh Mamie, if you only knew how my heart beats when I think of you, and it yearns and pants to gaze-- if only for one second-- upon your lovely face."
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- 1920 An artistic movement in New York that becomes known as the Harlem Renaissance establishes the reputation of such writers, artists, and musicians as Gladys Bentley, Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Ethel Waters, and Langston Hughes.
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- 1926 Publication of *Smoke, Lilies, and Jade in Fire!!!* makes Richard Bruce Nugent the father of African American gay male literature.
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- 1938 Playland, Boston's oldest continually operating gay bar, serves a more diverse clientele than any other bar in Boston. It closes in 1999 when the owner takes advantage of the skyrocketing property values in the neighborhood.
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- 1938 The first issue of *Midtown Journal*, a weekly South End scandal sheet, is published. Although not a gay paper, it is the primary source of information for gay men and lesbians about gay life in Boston. The uniquely descriptive paper includes information about the working class, bohemian, and racially mixed South End neighborhood. The paper ceases publication in 1966.

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- 1939 From October 1939 to April 1940 doctors at Worcester State Hospital administers experimental sex hormones to "treat" a black gay man.
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- 1950 The Napoleon Club, Boston's second oldest gay club, regularly features Sidney, an African American piano player and singer. His favorite song was "Stranger in Paradise."
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- 1950 Knights of the Clock, an interracial group of heterosexual and homosexual men and women, incorporates in Los Angeles.
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- 1953 James Baldwin publishes his first novel, *Go Tell It On the Mountain*. During the 60s Baldwin is a leading spokesman for the civil rights movement.
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- 1959 Lorraine Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun* opens on Broadway. Hansberry, is the youngest American and first black playwright to win the New York Drama Critics Award for the Best Play of the Year.
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- 1960 Cavana's, a racially mixed lesbian bar on Tremont St. has a reputation for being one of the roughest bars in town. For a short time the St. Moritz, housing another lesbian bar, is two doors away. Cavana's is torn down during urban renewal.
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- 1963 Bayard Rustin, the prime architect of the 1963 March on Washington and aide to Martin Luther King, Jr. from 1955 to 1960, helps organize the Montgomery bus boycott in response to the refusal of Rosa Parks to ride in the back of the bus.
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- 1966 The North American Conference of Homophile Organizations adopts the slogan "Gay is Good" after "Black is Beautiful."
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- 1969 Rioting between patrons and police at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, NYC marks the unofficial beginning of the gay civil rights movement.
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- 1970 Megorah Kennedy, black activist and minister, speaks out with the Homophile Union of Boston on radio shows and at public forums concerning homosexuality. In 1971, she is a keynote speaker at the first Pride march in Boston.
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- 1974 Combahee River Collective is founded to work on African-American women's issues. During its six years of existence, this group works on issues including violence against women, racism, sexism and heterosexism and reproductive rights.
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- 1974 Black lesbians are active in the formation of the National Black Feminist Organization.
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- 1975 The first black men's group in New England forms in Boston. The Black Men's Caucus is organized to support non-white gay and bisexual males "aiding the black gay individual to assert his own identity and develop a sense of acceptance among gay and bisexual men in the black community."
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- 1976 Barbara Jordan, a congressional representative from 1972-1978, delivers the keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention. She is one of fourteen people Jimmy Carter considers for Vice President.
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- 1978 National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gay Men is formed.
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- 1979 Bessie Smith Memorial Collective, a coalition of Black, Third World, and White Women host over 200 people at a Boston forum on racism. Varied Voices of Black Women: an Evening of Words and Music with Linda Tillery, Mary Watkins, Gwen Avery, and Pat Parker is held.
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- 1979 The First National Third World Lesbian and Gay Conference, organized by the National Coalition of Black Gays, is held during the first annual March on Washington in October.
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- 1979 Mel King announces candidacy for Boston's mayoralty. He expresses commitment to the "entire diversity of the city -- and that includes gays." The Gay Caucus for Mel King is formed.
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- 1980 Boston branch of Black and White Men Together is founded to provide support to black men in interracial relationships. The organization is now called Men of All Colors Together.
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- 1980 A contingent of Third World women organize to march in Boston's Pride celebration.
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- 1981 *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* is published by Persephone Press, a lesbian feminist publisher in Watertown, Massachusetts.
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- 1982 African American poet, writer, and activist Audre Lorde publishes her biomythography *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*.
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- 1983 Barbara Smith's *Home Girls* is published by Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.
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- 1984 Black and White Men Together distribute "Boston Bar Study," a survey of discrimination in Boston's gay bars.
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- 1985 *Breaking the Chains-Making the Link*, sponsored by the Boston Rainbow Coalition, holds a meeting at the Harriet Tubman House to encourage solidarity among Third World and gay activists.
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- 1985 *Dialogue*, the second gathering of black, Asian, and Latino lesbian and gay groups in Boston is held at the office of the League of Women for Community Service, a black women's service organization. The meeting is attended by members of El Comite, Black and White Men Together of Boston, the Black Men's Association, and the Lesbian/Gay Council of the Rainbow Coalition. The meeting lays the groundwork for future meetings and coalitions of people of color.
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- 1985 The Lesbian and Gay Council of the Rainbow, Black and White Men Together, and El Comite co-sponsor a meeting with candidates running for the Boston City Council and School Committee.
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- 1989 LESLA (Latinas lesbianas) organizes *Salsa Meets Soul*, a Gay Pride dance at the 1270 bar. More than 200 lesbians and gay men turn out for the first-time event. Organizers note that the music at traditional Gay Pride events alienates gay and lesbian Latinos.
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- 1992 Ken Reeves, the first openly gay African American City Council member, is elected mayor of Cambridge by his fellow City Councilors.
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- 1992 Shortly before her death in 1992 to breast cancer, poet Audre Lorde is honored in an event organized by Boston lesbians. Her work in the struggle for civil rights of lesbians and women of color is celebrated at this event. Shortly thereafter, the OutWrite Conference initiates its annual Audre Lorde lecture, awarded to a writer whose work advances Lorde's art and activism. Recipients include Boston native Jewelle Gomez, and Cherie Morgana.
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***Would you like to contribute to this timeline of Boston's LGBT Latina/o history? Any questions or comments about this timeline?
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