

April 2020



An ACT UP demonstration
in San Francisco, 1989.

Not Our First Time at the Rodeo: Looking to LGBTQ History for Guidance in a Pandemic

by Terry Beswick

A big part of our job here at the GLBT Historical Society is to explain why history matters. Rarely are we presented with a clearer illustration than the COVID-19 pandemic.

Much virtual ink has already been spilled about the similarities and differences between the AIDS and COVID-19 pandemics, and while these are interesting thought experiments, I don't want to indulge too deeply in disease Olympics.

We had a lot of that in the 1980s and 1990s when conservatives would

attempt to diminish the significance of AIDS mortality rates by comparing them to other diseases such as cancer, heart disease, tuberculosis or malaria. Research advocates for other diseases would occasionally grow alarmed at the amount of funding directed to HIV/AIDS. In my role as an advocate for AIDS research, I recall countering with arguments about Years of Potential Life Lost (YPLL), a measure of a disease's human and economic toll. It was a grim exercise.

Hard-Won Lessons

So maybe let's not compare too much. But at the same time, let's not forget the hard-won lessons of the AIDS pandemic that many of us witnessed from the front lines. Starting tonight, we are bringing back our "[Fighting Back](#)" forums. Initiated three years ago, the series brings together historians and other expert panelists to discuss a contemporary issue in an historical context. We hope to stimulate an intergenerational and intersectional exchange of experiences and ideas that will inform the most pressing issues of the day. For the foreseeable future, the topic will be COVID-19 and HIV/AIDS. The series will take place online weekly.

Each forum will focus on just one of the many areas where the fight against COVID-19 might benefit from a look back at the lessons learned in the fight against HIV. As with our in-person forums, audience members will be invited to comment or ask questions after the panel discussion. Tonight, veterans of ACT UP groups in San Francisco, including Gerard Koskovich, Brenda Lein, Lito Sandoval and Matt Sharp, will examine the issues of direct action and government response to COVID-19. Next week, we'll talk about artistic responses to HIV/AIDS and COVID-19.

A New Paradigm

Like many nonprofit organizations and businesses, the GLBT Historical Society is working quickly to adapt to the new paradigm of remote work, learning and communication during this historic moment. And yet, this is not our first time at the rodeo. We are a strong and resilient people and, if nothing else, we know how to adapt to new circumstances. Our amazing staff has been working hard to move our exhibitions, events and archival research programs online, and I am so proud of the progress we have made in two short weeks.

Thank you to everyone who visited our [35th anniversary party page](#) on our website, and especially to everyone who made a donation to keep our work going in this moment of crisis. Be assured that your support sustains us, and helps ensure that our community's greatest treasure, our archives, will be protected and preserved.

There is so much more in the works as we focus on sharing our history and keeping you connected as we all shelter in place. If you have ideas or resources that you would like to share, please [write to me](#). In the meantime, please be safe and watch this [newsletter](#) and our social-media channels (below) for the latest developments, as we continue working to bridge the gap between our knowledge of the past and the challenges of the present.



From the Staff

Harvey Milk, A Messenger of Hope



by Ramón Silvestre

In 2018 the San Francisco Board of Supervisors renamed San Francisco International Airport Terminal 1, which has been undergoing a major expansion and renovation project since 2016, after gay-rights pioneer and former city supervisor Harvey Milk (1930–1978). We're proud that our hometown airport has the world's first airport terminal named after a leader of the LGBTQ community.

As part of this initiative, the SFO Airport Museum Galleries has created a new art installation for the terminal documenting Milk's life and work. Entitled "[Harvey Milk: Messenger of Hope](#)," the installation features numerous photographs drawn from the GLBT Historical Society's archival holdings. The airport has now unveiled an [online version](#), so while we may all be sheltering in place for the foreseeable future, there's no need to wait for the pandemic to pass to enjoy the exhibition.

As the GLBT Historical Society's collections and exhibitions registrar, I worked closely with the SFO Airport Museum Galleries' curators, who made community input a priority. Given the society's longstanding community-centered approach, I'm especially pleased that our archival images are being displayed with photographs both from other institutions — including the Bancroft Library at the University of California at Berkeley and the James C. Hormel Center at the San Francisco Public Library — as well as examples contributed by members of the public.

Rarely Seen Images

I'm also thrilled by the selection of photographs. Some come from popular collections, including the [Crawford Wayne Barton Papers](#) and the [Marie Ueda Collection](#). But the exhibition showcases a number of rarely seen images from less-well known but nevertheless rich collections, including the Efen Convento Ramirez Photographs, a 2010 acquisition. My hope is that viewers will be inspired by these and, once we reopen, will visit the archives to learn more.

The first phase of "Harvey Milk: Messenger of Hope" opened in July 2019 on a temporary 400-foot wall in the post-security area of the terminal that will be in place until 2021. The airport has postponed the opening of the permanent installation, originally scheduled for March 24, but it should open later this year. Since it is situated prior to the security

screening area, the permanent installation will be accessible to all, and its placement in the country's seventh-busiest airport will enable it to be seen by travelers from around the world.

May you draw inspiration and comfort from Milk's message: Hope is one resource that will see us through this time.

Ramón Silvestre is the GLBT Historical Society's registrar.

[Go to Exhibition](#)

In the Archives

Digging for the Edges of Life



By Isaac Fellman

Some archival collections, while technically separate, produce more meaning when viewed in tandem. Although they are housed on opposite ends of the vault, I have always felt this way about the papers of [Arion Stone](#) and his friend [Beowulf Thorne](#), who until his 1999 death was an editor of the AIDS humor zine *Diseased Pariah News*.

Thorne's sense of humor is hard to describe, except that it's large and it has a certain gleeful eagerness to dig for the edges of life. We've [digitized the full run of *Diseased Pariah News*](#), so you can see for yourself: AIDS-themed parodies of Barbie ads, a food column called "Get Fat, Don't Die," a superhero called Captain Condom and a bitter sting even to the most personal material. In fact, Thorne's co-editors paid tribute to his style by headlining his obituary "Dang! Our Founder and Guiding Light Died."

Avoiding Bland Advice

Interspersed with the gags are incisive and practical articles about life with AIDS. In a crisis, it's easy to dispense bland advice — like "have safer sex" — and harder to figure out how to fit that advice into a life already full of complication and trauma. *DPN* handles all of this with care. It doesn't just blandly encourage safer sex; it reviews different lubes, features centerfolds who are openly HIV-positive, and reviews erotica (via Thorne's column "Porn Potato").

It's funny because it's honest. It's honest because it knows that, in order to laugh while everything is falling apart, we need more than a sunny disposition. We need clarity and tools, preferably delivered with camp and bravado.

Thorne's papers, many of them also digitized, give insight into how *DPN* was made — but Stone's collection gives insight into who Thorne was as

a person. Stone kept mementos, like a hand-drawn coupon that could be redeemed for Thorne to roast him a chicken. Stone also kept a folder of materials from Thorne's funeral, with loving notes from friends about the man who encouraged, intimidated and thrilled them.

Through these links between collections, we can glimpse the shape of communities like the one that grew up around *DPN*. And by remembering *DPN* itself and its understanding of what its readers really needed, we can see one way of learning to live in crisis.

Isaac Fellman is the society's reference archivist.

[Go to Thorne Papers](#)

Upcoming Events

Note: All of our events this month will take place online. The events are free, but you will need to register so that we can provide you with the Zoom link to participate in the event.

[Fighting Back](#)

AIDS and COVID-19: Direct Action & Govt. Response



Wednesday, April 1

6:00–7:00 p.m.

Online forum

[Free](#) | \$5.00 suggested donation

Responding to the upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic, the GLBT Historical Society is relaunching its “Fighting Back” series as “[Fighting Back: Lessons From AIDS for COVID-19](#),” a weekly, online virtual forum. Introduced

as a program series three years ago, “Fighting Back” is an intergenerational discussion that brings together veteran and younger LGBTQ activists to discuss how the struggles of the past inform our present. The new series focuses on identifying what lessons and strategies from the darkest days of the AIDS epidemic may help us understand and respond to COVID-19. The intention is to find ways to transform our feelings of anxiety, despair or anger into action, and to identify models for building community and solidarity.

This first program in this series brings together San Francisco ACT UP veterans to discuss what direct-action protest strategies were effective during the 1980s and 1990s and consider how these might be adapted during an epidemic that requires us to shelter in place. The panel will be moderated by GLBT Historical Society Executive Director Terry Beswick, and panelists include Gerard Koskovich, Brenda Lein, Lito Sandoval and Matt Sharp. The event is organized by the ACT UP Oral History Project, a GLBT Historical Society initiative made possible by California Humanities,

a nonprofit partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Register online [here](#).

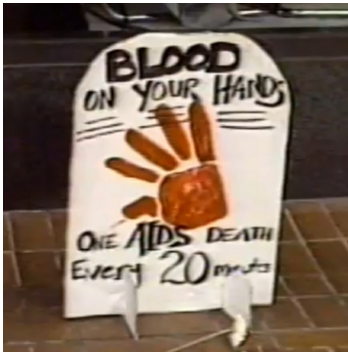
[Panel Discussion](#) Tales From the OUTWORDS Archive



Thursday, April 2
7:00–8:45 p.m.
Online forum
[Free](#) | \$5.00 suggested donation

The Outwords Archive (also known as OUTWORDS), based in Los Angeles, is the first national effort to capture in-depth, professional-quality, on-camera interviews with the full spectrum of LGBTQ pioneers and elders. So far, OUTWORDS has conducted more than 140 interviews in 26 states, including a robust cohort of subjects in the Bay Area. Some interviewees are better known to the public than others, but all played important roles in the struggle for queer rights and representation. Join OUTWORDS founder and Executive Director Mason Funk and a panel of OUTWORDS supporters and participants for a fascinating evening, featuring clips from the completed interviews and a lively discussion of the enduring meaning and importance of these stories. Register online [here](#).

[Fighting Back](#) The Role of Art & Artists in a Pandemic



Wednesday, April 8
6:00–7:00 p.m.
Online forum
[Free](#) | \$5.00 suggested donation

This program in the GLBT Historical Society's "Fighting Back" series brings together Bay Area artists to discuss how artists responded to the AIDS epidemic. The panelists will explore what artistic endeavors might help us navigate COVID-19. The panel will be moderated by GLBT Historical Society Executive Director Terry Beswick. Register online [here](#).

[Fighting Back](#) Building Community in a Pandemic

Wednesday, April 15
6:00–7:00 p.m.
Online forum
[Free](#)

Join Bay Area community leaders, mental-health specialists and historians for this event in



the "Fighting Back" series discussing the opportunities for and challenges facing community-building during the ever-growing COVID-19 crisis. What lessons have members of our community learned from the HIV/AIDS crisis that we can apply to our current health emergency? How do we prioritize self-care in the midst of a pandemic? Let's channel our feelings of anxiety, fear and anger into productive action as we discuss ways to build

community while in isolation. This program is co-organized and co-hosted by the East Bay Stonewall Democratic Club and the GLBT Historical Society. Register online [here](#).

[Fighting Back](#) Healthcare Workers on the Front Lines



Wednesday, April 22
6:00–7:00 p.m.
Online forum
Free | \$5.00 suggested donation

This program is still in development; a full description will be available and registration will open soon. For more information, click [here](#).

[Fighting Back](#) Fighting the Stigma of Disease



Wednesday, April 29
6:00–7:00 p.m.
Online forum
Free | \$5.00 suggested donation

This program is still in development; a full description will be available and registration will open soon. For more information, click [here](#).

Visit Us & Online Resources

The museum and archives are closed until at least May 3 due to San Francisco's shelter-in-place order. The archives staff is still available to work with researchers; please contact us at reference@glbthistory.org.

We have expanded our resources on our website:

Exhibitions: An overview of our exhibitions is available [here](#).

Online exhibitions: Two of our past exhibitions can be explored online.

Past exhibitions: Learn about our past exhibitions here.

Catalog search: The archives search engine remains available.

Online collections: Browse over a dozen digital collections.

Upcoming events: More information about all of our online events.

Fighting Back series: More information about this online event series.

Past events: Footage of a large number of our past programs.

THE GLBT HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM

Exhibitions & Programs

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CREDITS. FEATURE: Still from a video of an ACT UP San Francisco demonstration in San Francisco, 1989; footage by Charles Cyberski, Charles Cyberski Videotapes (1994-03), GLBT Historical Society. FROM THE STAFF: Anti-Proposition 6 rally on the steps of San Francisco's City Hall, May 1, 1978; photograph by Efren Convento Ramirez, Efren Convento Ramirez Photographs (2010-05), GLBT Historical Society. IN THE ARCHIVES: A display of *Diseased Pariah News* zines at the GLBT Historical Society's archives; photograph by Mark Sawchuk, used with permission. UPCOMING EVENTS: Fighting Back, 4/1: Same credit as feature. Panel Discussion: Still of interviewee Mary Morten; courtesy of the Outwords Archive. Fighting Back, 4/8: Same credit as feature. Fighting Back, 4/15: Illustration courtesy of the East Bay Stonewall Democratic Club. Fighting Back, 4/22: ARC AIDS vigil at the Federal Building in San Francisco, 1988; photographer unknown, Collection of AIDS-Related Photographic Negatives (1999-50), GLBT Historical Society. Fighting Back, 4/29: Bobbi Campbell, the "AIDS poster boy," ca. 1983; photograph by Marie Ueda, Marie Ueda Collection (2006-12), GLBT Historical Society.

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