Film star Rock Hudson publicly acknowledged he had AIDS, an announcement that led to increased public awareness about the then-mysterious disease, about being HIV-positive or having AIDS, and about homosexuality in general. AIDS would no longer be a silent epidemic.

Locale: Los Angeles, California; Paris, France
Categories: HIV-AIDS; health and medicine; arts

Key Figures
Rock Hudson (1925-1985), American actor, died from AIDS-related complications
Tom Clark (b. 1930), Hudson’s partner for seventeen years
Marc Christian (b. 1953), Hudson’s companion and sometime partner in his later years
Letantia Bussell, Hudson’s dermatologist, first confirmed that Hudson had AIDS

Summary of Event
Rock Hudson was considered a remarkably able, dedicated, and gifted actor. Many actors assume roles completely counter to their personalities off-screen or offstage, but Hudson had difficulty doing that. He was versatile, and he could perform both comic and dramatic roles. In addition to film, he adapted well to acting in television dramas and to the stage.

Hudson also was an intensely private person, and had been closeted about his sexuality throughout his career. By rushing into a marriage of convenience in 1955 with his agent’s secretary, Phyllis Gates, he quashed rumors, which were probably untrue, that he was having an affair with fellow actor Jim Nabors. His union with Gates lasted slightly more than two years. Hudson and Gates separated and then were divorced in August, 1958.

A heartthrob whose pictures adorned the bedroom walls of many, Hudson was often seen in public with women, and rumors regarding his imminent matrimonial plans circulated for years. Hudson had no intention of remarrying, and he remained noncommittal when reporters fired personal questions at him during interviews.

In 1968, Tom Clark moved into Hudson’s house in Beverly Hills and became his lover. Marc Christian became Hudson’s lover as well, toward the end of Hudson’s life, and Christian remained with him until Hudson’s death. After his death, Christian filed a suit against Hudson’s estate and was initially awarded $14 million in damages, having alleged that Hudson had had sex with him when he knew he was suffering from AIDS. The Hudson estate contested the jury award and finally reached an out-of-court settlement with Christian.

Hudson was born Roy Harold Scherer, Jr., in Winnetka, Illinois, on November 17, 1925. His parents separated when he was four years old and eventually divorced. His mother married Wallace Fitzgerald in 1932, after which Hudson changed his last name to Fitzgerald, the name he used until he went to Hollywood seeking an acting career. His agent, Henry Willson, insisted that he change his name to something more arresting than Roy Fitzgerald. Ultimately Roy Fitzgerald became Roc Hudson. Then, at Hudson’s insistence, he changed his name, again, to Rock Hudson.

An early indication that Hudson was suffering from AIDS was his rapid weight loss, which he first attributed to anemia. He shed some fifty pounds unwillingly. Also, a large, persistent pimple appeared on his neck. Finally, his dermatologist, Letantia Bussell, performed a needle biopsy on the pimple. On June 2, 1984, she informed Hudson that the pimple was a manifestation of Kaposi’s sarcoma, a rare cancer and a complication of AIDS.

Three days later, on June 5, Hudson had the pimple excised by a plastic surgeon. The surgeon performed further biopsies on the specimen and on a nearby lymph node. These biopsies, along with Hudson’s rapid weight loss, confirmed Bussell’s initial diagnosis. Hudson was initially in a state of
denial, and he insisted on telling those who asked that he was suffering from anemia. Knowing that AIDS was universally construed as an affliction associated with gays only, Hudson declined to reveal publicly that he had AIDS. The only people with whom he shared his diagnosis were close friends Mark Miller and George Nader, whom he swore to secrecy. He did not share the diagnosis with Marc Christian, who was living with him at the time.

In the fall of 1984, Hudson was to begin filming six episodes of the television drama *Dynasty*, a show to which he had agreed to act in during a trip to France in August. Esther Shapiro, co-creator and executive producer of *Dynasty*, talked with Hudson at the Deauville Film Festival in France and urged him to make this commitment. He accepted her offer, thinking that it would take his mind off his physical problems. During his visit to France, he had participated in experimental treatments being conducted in Paris with HPA-23, a new antiviral drug that offered some hope of eliminating or, at minimum, suppressing HIV-AIDS.

Dominique Dormont, a leading expert in experimental HIV-AIDS treatments, working at the famed Pasteur Institute, began Hudson on a treatment of HPA-23. In the fourth week of treatment, extensive tests showed no trace of the AIDS virus in Hudson’s blood, but Dormont warned that the virus had merely been suppressed, not eliminated. Dormont told Hudson how important it was to continue treatment, but Hudson said that the filming of *Dynasty* would prevent him from returning before February. It turned out that he did not see Dormont again until July, after he collapsed in Paris. By then it was too late to resume the HPA-23 treatment.

By late October, 1984, after the filming of the *Dynasty* episodes had begun, Hudson had lost another ten pounds, suggesting that the HPA-23 treatment was losing its effect. His friends urged him to bow out of his acting commitment, but he was determined to stay with the show. His early performances in *Dynasty* were so strong that the producers exercised their option to film four episodes beyond the six to which they had been committed.

Episode six of the series involved a scene in which Hudson was to kiss actor Linda Evans. Hudson had reservations about the kissing scene but he also knew that refusing to perform might have forced him to reveal his condition. He went through with the scene and was later severely criticized for putting Evans at risk. At this early point in the AIDS crisis, little was known about the virus and how it was transmitted. People feared casual contact with those who were HIV-positive or with those who had been suffering from the disease. Hudson, however, reduced the risk of passing the virus to Evans by kissing Evans with his lips wiped clean of saliva and tightly pursed.

On July 15, 1985, Hudson flew to Carmel, California, to appear on Doris Day’s new show called *Doris Day’s Best Friends*. He was in such dire physical condition that Day offered to release him from his commitment, but Hudson insisted on proceeding with the show. Day, realizing that Hudson was
near death, was devastated. Hudson, his health de-
teriorating, flew to Paris on July 21 to seek addi-
tional treatment. A liver scan revealed that his liver
was badly compromised and word circulated that he
was suffering from liver cancer. On July 25, a
French publicist, Yanou Collart, held a press con-
terence sanctioned by Hudson and his friend Mark
Miller to announce that the actor had AIDS. Hudson
had become the first high-profile American to ac-
tnowledge he had the disease.

So quiet had Hudson been about his condition
that when the media released the news, even those
closest to him—Clark, Elizabeth Taylor, Martha
Raye, Carol Burnett—had not been informed and
were learning about it for the first time. With this
story came news that Hudson was gay. As late as the
end of May, 1985, he had categorically denied to
Christian that he had AIDS or cancer.

Following his collapse in Paris and after finding
out the futility of further treatment with HPA-23,
Hudson knew that he was dying, but he wanted to
die at home. Severely weakened, he chartered an
aircraft for $250,000 and, on July 30, 1985, re-
turned to Los Angeles and was taken by helicopter
to the University of California, Los Angeles, Medi-
cal Center. He remained hospitalized until August
25, the day that Clark and other friends insisted he
be permitted to return to his home in nearby Beverly
Hills. At his home, he had a private nurse, house-
hold staff, and friends. Many friends visited him
during his last month of life. He died quietly on the
morning of October 2 after having coffee with
Clark, who had supported Hudson by staying with
him for more than one month.

Significance
Media coverage of Rock Hudson’s illness and
death, like the media coverage of his life, was exten-
sive. Because he was the first well-known celebrity
to die of AIDS, public interest in the disease grew,
and with that interest came information about the
realities of the virus and how it is passed between
people, about being HIV-positive, and the disease
itself. HIV is transmitted in three ways: through the
exchange of body fluids, usually during unpro-
tected sex; by means of blood transfusions; or by
sharing hypodermic needles used to inject sub-
stances into the blood stream. Information had been
reaching the public through the media that neither
HIV, nor AIDS, was communicable through casual
contact.

After Hudson’s “coming out,” many people be-
egan to reassess their views about homosexuality.
Some categorically condemned Hudson for his sex-
ual orientation but others developed a more chari-
table attitude, realizing that he had made a notable
contribution to popular culture through his acting
and that his homosexuality, although it ran counter
to the convictions of many Americans, was a pri-
ivate matter.

Following his death, many of Hudson’s friends
in the film industry called for increased AIDS re-
search and assistance for those who had the disease.
Prominent supporters included Hudson’s close
friends Taylor, Burnett, and Raye. The studios, al-
though still wanting discretion from actors, began
asserting less pressure on gay and lesbian actors to
appear heterosexual outside their work by dating or
marrying members of the opposite gender.

—R. Baird Shuman

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1986

**Bowers v. Hardwick Upholds State Sodomy Laws**

*The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in Bowers v. Hardwick upheld the state of Georgia's power to criminalize private, consensual, adult sexual relations between men.*

**Locale:** Atlanta, Georgia

**Categories:** Laws, acts, and legal history; civil rights; crime

**Key Figures**

- **Michael J. Bowers,** attorney general of Georgia, 1981-1997
- **Michael Hardwick** (1954-1991), bartender
- **Lewis F. Powell** (1907-1998), associate justice of the United States, 1972-1987
- **John Paul Stevens** (b. 1920), associate justice of the United States from 1975

**Summary of Event**

In August, 1982, Atlanta police arrived at the home of a twenty-eight-year-old gay bartender, Michael Hardwick. They were lawfully admitted into the apartment by a roommate of the respondent for the purpose of serving Hardwick with an arrest warrant for failure to appear in court on an unrelated charge (drinking in public). The arrest warrant was later found to have been invalid. While attempting to serve the warrant, the police officers entered Hardwick's bedroom and found him engaged in oral sex with another man. The law enforcement officials arrested both men under Georgia's sodomy statute.

The district attorney for the county of Fulton, Georgia, declined to prosecute. However, Hardwick was issued a warning that the sodomy charges would be brought in the future if the respondent did not stay out of trouble for a period of seven years. Hardwick, in turn, filed suit against Michael Bowers, attorney general of the state of Georgia, charging that Georgia's sodomy statute was unconstitutional. A sodomy conviction in Georgia carried a maximum punishment of twenty years in prison.

After hearings in the Federal District Court for the District of Northern Georgia and the U.S. Court of Appeals, the case moved to the U.S. Supreme Court on a writ of certiorari.

The closely divided Court ruled 5-4 against the respondent, Hardwick, and for the petitioner, Michael J. Bowers, attorney general of Georgia. Five opinions were filed in this case: the majority ruling (Justice Byron White), two minority concurring decisions (Chief Justice Warren E. Burger and Justice Lewis F. Powell), and two dissenting opinions (one by Justice Harry A. Blackmun, the other by Justice John Paul Stevens).

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marital relations. Any law, regulation, ruling, or statute that conflicted with this right to privacy was unconstitutional.

In the 1973 Supreme Court ruling in Roe v. Wade, the justices expanded the foundation of the right to privacy by adding the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to those already cited in Griswold. The right to privacy, the Court said, was educed from the guarantees of the Fifth Amendment and the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Abortion, therefore, fell under the penumbra of the right to privacy implied in the Bill of Rights and extended those protections to apply to the states as well as the federal government.

In Bowers v. Hardwick the majority ruled that the right to privacy did not extend to private, consen-
ual adult same-gender sodomy. Justice White, writing for the majority, held that “[t]he Constitution does not confer a fundamental right upon homosexuals to engage in sodomy.” The Court further ruled that it was disinclined to discover new rights within the embrace of the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. That the behavior in question (sodomy) occurred in the privacy of the home did not matter to the Court. Finally, the Court determined that the opinion that a majority of Georgians disapproved of homosexual sodomy as immoral and unacceptable was a rational basis in law for Georgia’s sodomy statute.

In his concurring decision, Chief Justice Burger noted that the Constitution guarantees no fundamental right to practice homosexual sodomy. The real question, according to Burger, concerned the scope of the state’s police powers and whether that authority enabled the state to regulate private, consensual, adult homosexual relations. He argued it did.

Justice Powell, also concurring, ruled that there was, indeed, no substantive right at issue in the case that was protected by due process under the Fourteenth Amendment. He worried that there may be a violation of the guarantee against cruel and unusual punishment, observing that violation of Georgia’s sodomy statute carried a maximum penalty of twenty years in prison. However, Powell concluded that no breach of the Eighth Amendment existed in this particular case because Hardwick had been neither convicted nor sentenced under the statute.

In his dissent, Justice Blackmun held that the case had nothing to do with a fundamental right to practice homosexual sodomy. Rather, the statute impinged upon an even more basic privilege: the right of an individual to be let alone. Essentially, Georgia’s sodomy law prohibited individuals from making their own choices about what adult consensual sexual activity they may or may not engage in within the privacy of their own homes. This, Blackmun ruled, was an unconscionable infringement of individual rights.

Justice Stevens disagreed with the ruling opinion, noting that a majority governing interest cannot be construed to deny the minority of their rights. Moreover, the Georgia statute was a violation of the liberty that the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment protected. The penumbral zone created by the Fourteenth Amendment included homosexual sodomy.

**Significance**

The legacy of *Bowers v. Hardwick* was twofold. First, the 5-4 ruling reflected the divisive nature of American attitudes toward homosexuality in the last decades of the twentieth century. Second, the decision set back the movement toward legal equality and gay and lesbian rights for almost two decades. Legal parity between gay and lesbian Americans and their heterosexual counterparts would not be achieved until the Supreme Court decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003).

Michael Hardwick did not live to see his case overturned. He reportedly died on June 13, 1991, in Gainesville, Florida, after battling AIDS. Michael J. Bowers, the Georgia attorney general, became embroiled in another gay rights litigation matter when he was sued by Robin Shahar in 1991 for illegally withdrawing a job offer after he had learned the lawyer was a lesbian and was planning a commitment ceremony with her partner. Eventually, the Supreme Court refused to hear her case. In 1997, Bowers was exposed for being in an adulterous affair with a secretary while running for governor. He lost his gubernatorial bid.

—Keith Carson

**Further Reading**


Paula Gunn Allen, a specialist in American Indian/Native American studies, published The Sacred Hoop as a challenge to the Anglo-European erasure of indigenous American beliefs about gender and sexuality.

**Locale:** United States

**Categories:** Publications; race and ethnicity; feminism; literature; transgender/transsexuality

**Key Figure**

Paula Gunn Allen (Paula Marie Francis; b. 1939), Laguna Pueblo scholar of Native American sexuality and gender history and women’s studies

**Summary of Event**

In 1986, Native American scholar and lesbian Paula Gunn Allen published *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, the first collection of essays in which gender issues and sexuality are examined from an American Indian perspective. The book combines autobiography with historical narrative, poetry, literary

Paula Gunn Allen Publishes *The Sacred Hoop* 435

Paula Gunn Allen. (© Tama Rothschild)
analysis, and myth, and explores how homophobia, sexism, and racism have significantly distorted how American Indian cultures are perceived and interpreted. The Sacred Hoop is of added significance to lesbian, gay, and transgender history because Allen comes out as lesbian in the book’s introduction.

Allen, born Paula Marie Francis in 1939 in Cubero, New Mexico, has a Laguna Pueblo-Lakota Sioux-Scottish mother and a Lebanese American father. She is a member of the Laguna Pueblo tribe. She spent much of her childhood absorbing the stories and beliefs of the female-centered Pueblo culture from her mother and grandmother. As a result, Allen’s thinking has been deeply influenced by the Native American experience. Allen, who received her bachelor’s degree in English in 1966 and a master of fine arts degree in creative writing in 1968, both from the University of Oregon, also earned a doctorate in American studies with an emphasis in Native American studies from the University of New Mexico in 1976. She retired as a professor of English and American Indian Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1999. In both nonfiction and fiction, Allen has addressed Native American lesbian and gay ways of life. Along with The Sacred Hoop, she has written poetry and novels and has edited several collections.

The Sacred Hoop journeys to the roots of American Indian cultures to find ways to challenge patriarchal constructions of gender identity. Native American cultures once celebrated people who were “two-spirited,” that is, individuals, found in most tribes, who would now be called lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. The Kaska culture would designate as a boy one girl in a family of only girls. The new “son” would dress in male clothing and then would function in the Kaska male role for the rest of his life. The Yuma culture had a tradition of gender designation based on dreams; a female who dreamed of weapons would become a male for all practical purposes. A Cocopah girl who chose to play with boys or with boys’ objects such as a bow and arrow would become a male functionary. Among the Mohave, the hwame, or lesbian, took a male name and was in all respects subject to ritual male taboos such as avoidance of contact with a menstruating wife. The hwame’s wife was considered not a hwame but simply a woman. The Navajo considered lesbians an asset to their culture, and the Mohave, Quinault, Apache, Ojibwa, and Eskimo all viewed homosexuals as a natural and necessary part of society.

This fluid definition and understanding of “gender” had been quickly dismissed and forgotten by European settlers. Allen reports that in the centuries following European colonization of the New World, American Indian tribes have seen a progressive shift from gynocentric, egalitarian, ritual-based social systems to secularized systems closely imitative of the European patriarchal system. Patriarchy is harmful to gender-bending and rule-breaking gays and lesbians, whereas female-centered social systems, also called matriarchies, accord honor to a diversity of people, including gays, lesbians, and those who are transgender; patriarchy, on the other hand, values masculinity and sameness. Female-centered societies and cultures are focused on social responsibility rather than on privilege. To the pre-Columbian American Indians who originated this female-centered system, it was a way of life to recognize and respect diversity rather than enforce conformity and sameness. Allen’s notion of gynocentrism is not the same as the idea of a matriarchy, however, in which females dominate males. To Allen, the genders operate in the context of balance and mutual respect.

European colonizers of the Americas also had been threatened by Native American culture because it was a culture of decisive, self-directing females and nurturing, pacifist males. To achieve total conquest, the Europeans needed to establish and practice a patriarchal social and cultural system. Along with the devaluation of women in patriarchy comes the devaluation of traditional spiritual leaders, and, largely because of their ritual power and status, the devaluation of lesbian and gay tribal members as leaders, shamans, healers, or ritual participants. Virtually all sexual customs among the tribes had been changed by colonialism, including marital, premarital, homosexual, and ritual sexual practices. Allen argues that this loss of tradition and memory, in particular the erasure of tribal gyno-
centric belief systems, represents the root of oppression.

**Significance**
Paula Gunn Allen was one of the most prominent American Indian intellectuals and writers of the twentieth century. Her scholarship on Native American understandings of “two-spirits” represents some of the most significant work on the subject, laying the groundwork for more research in this area. Despite increased scholarly interest in women of color, Allen’s feminist writings have not attracted the attention they deserve. Scholars such as AnaLouise Keating have attributed this lack of attention to what many believe is the extreme nature of Allen’s views.

Reflecting Allen’s background as a feminist of color who came of age politically in the 1960’s, Allen takes a separatist stance grounded in a rigidly gynocentric American Indian life perspective. She has been criticized for taking what some consider to be a monolithic, essentializing view of spiritual forces and the feminine in American Indian traditions. In addition, because she conceives of an inner self that often receives guidance from the supernatural, Allen has been further challenged for perpetuating romantic images of a mythic tribal universe to which Euro-America can securely escape in a desire to find an exotic, authentic Native Other.

Allen nevertheless has made visible the lives of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people from the past. She has written these individuals into Native American history. In doing so, she has helped to undermine the notion that homosexuality is an “unnatural” concept.

—*Caryn E. Neumann*

**Further Reading**


