Chron | Autos | Jobs | Real Estate | 87° eNewspaper | Subscribe | Sign In

HOUS CHRONICLE

GRAY MATTERS

Pride parades started as protests. Houston's should be again.

Andrew Edmonson, for the H

Updated: June 6, 2017 9:22am

4

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

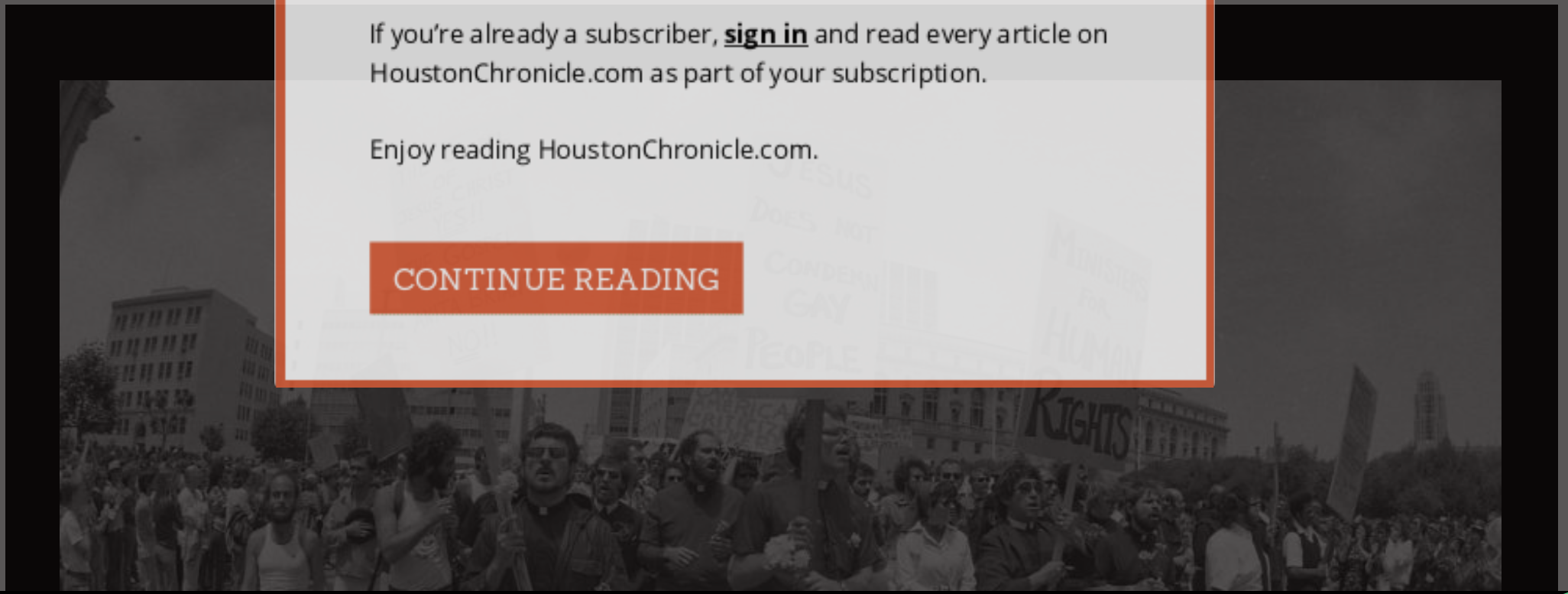
GREAT NEWS

You can now sample 3 free articles this month

If you're already a subscriber, sign in and read every article on HoustonChronicle.com as part of your subscription.

Enjoy reading HoustonChronicle.com.

CONTINUE READING



PDFmyURL lets you convert a complete website to PDF automatically!

PDFmyURL



Photo: ONLINE_YES

IMAGE 1 OF 10
Some 3,000 people marched in downtown Houston in 1977 to protest Anita Bryant's performance.

When the theme for the 2017 Pride Parade was announced on February 9, gay eyebrows arched across the city.

"This year's theme for the Houston LGBT Pride Celebration® is Wonderland. Inspired by Lewis Carroll's quirky fantasy world, this year's theme is primed for your imagination," the email declared. "Escape the craziness of today's real world and step through the looking glass to ... WONDERLAND!"

The response on social media was swift. "The world is going to Hell, and Pride's theme this year is WONDERLAND!" declared one veteran activist aghast at the committee's seeming obliviousness to the tsunami of anti-gay animus roaring out of Austin and Washington, D.C.

PDFmyURL lets you convert a **complete website to PDF** automatically!

Parade organizers seemed unabashed. In another email, they asserted, "Pride Houston always promises to be a party, so registering to participate should not be a chore."

PRIDE MARCHES, like the gay pride movement, didn't start as a party. The first gay pride march took place in New York City on June 28, 1970 — a direct result of the Stonewall Rebellion, which launched the modern gay rights movement in 1969, and unleashed tremendous political energy.

As activist Fred Sargent recalled in a 2010 essay for The Village Voice, "We had no idea how it would turn out. We weren't even certain we would be granted a permit ... ."

"I stayed at the head of the march the entire way, and at one point, I climbed onto the base of a light pole and looked back. I was astonished; we stretched out as far as I could see, thousands of us. There were no floats, no music, no boys in briefs. The cops turned their backs on us to convey their disdain, but the masses of people kept carrying signs and banners, chanting and waving to surprised onlookers."

Veteran LGBT activist Ray Hill recalls the first formal gay pride march in Houston was held in 1976, and attracted around 120 participants.

GRAY MATTERS: *How Montrose became gay*

"Then came Anita," he says — referring to the Houston visit, a year later, by anti-gay crusader Anita Bryant. Bryant galvanized thousands of protesters to take to the streets of downtown Houston.



PDFmyURL lets you convert a complete website to PDF automatically!
PDFmyURL

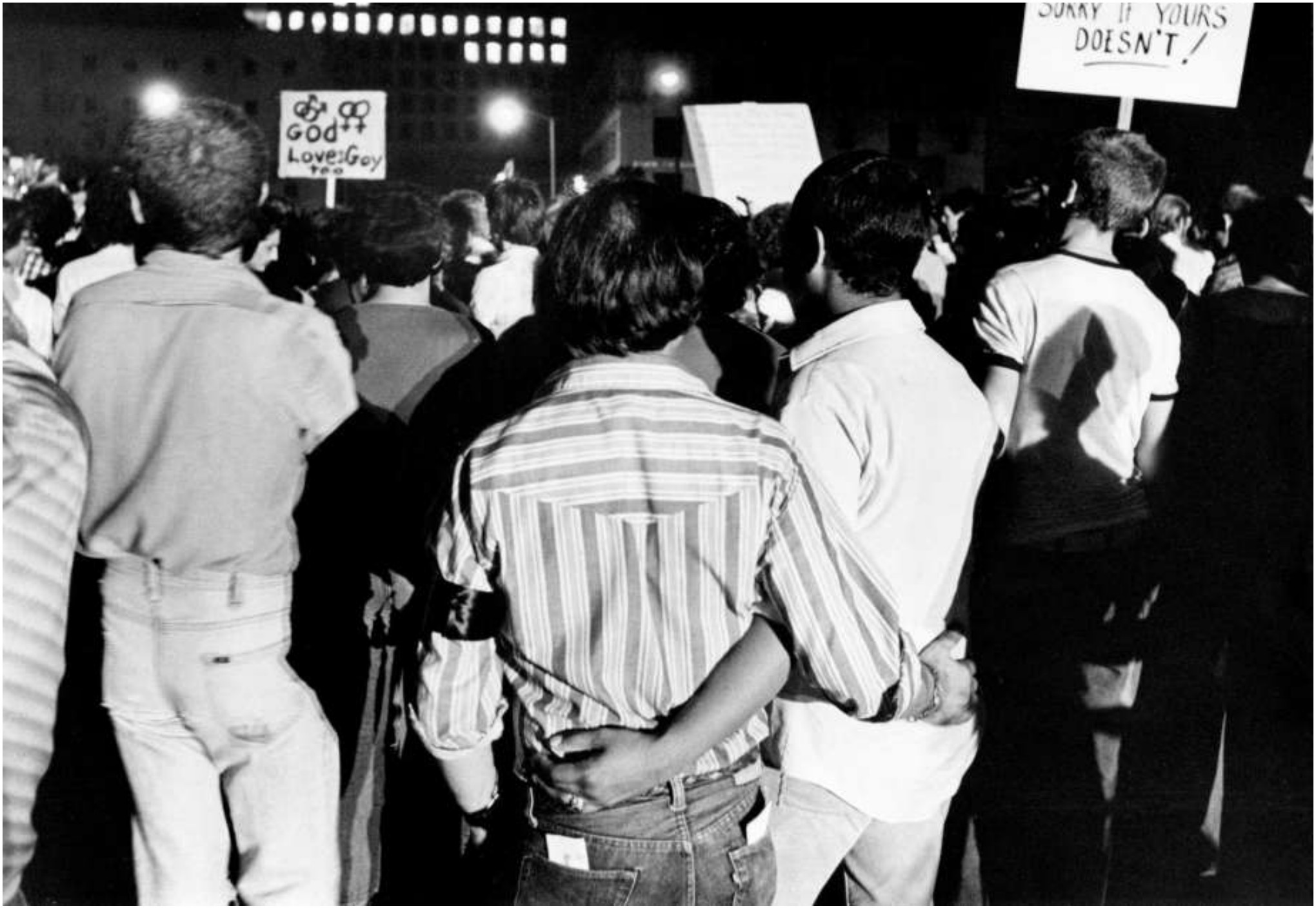


Photo: Othell O. Owensby Jr., Houston Chronicle

PDFmyURL lets you convert a **complete website to PDF** automatically!

PDFmyURL

In this photo: About 3,000 people, including members and supporters of Houston's gay community, march to the Houston Public Library plaza in protest of singer Anita Bryant.

Even so, the pride parade was not yet the mainstream institution that it is today, attracting hundreds of thousands of Houstonians, gay and straight. It was hedonistic, but with a political edge. In those early decades, simply existing as a gay person was a defiant political statement

"In the 1980s, we used to beg the politicians to be in the parade," recalled Jack Valinski, who served as the executive director of Pride and famously led it to becoming a nighttime march in 1997.

Those days seemed long gone recently, while Annise Parker, an out lesbian, served as Houston's mayor, and when the parade moved from Montrose, traditionally the city's LGBT neighborhood, to downtown. Churches, corporations and families marched in the parade. Pride Week had begun to seem like uncontroversial fun — the LGBT version of St. Patrick's Day.

Donald Trump's election changed all that.

OTHER CITIES are not in a mood to party. Most notably, Los Angeles has decided to jettison the floats, and ditch the glitz and the glam of its venerable pride parade in favor of an old-fashioned protest march.

"We're getting back to our roots," Brian Pendleton, a board member of Christopher Street West, which organizes the LA Pride Parade, told The Los Angeles Times. "We will be resisting forces that want to roll back our rights, and politicians who want to make us second-class citizens."

Resistance is in the air. On Sunday, June 11, tens of thousands of LGBT Americans and their straight friends will descend on Washington, D.C., for the National Equality March for Unity and Pride, a protest organized in response to

PDFmyURL lets you convert a **complete website to PDF** automatically!

the policies of the current presidential administration. From Austin to Seattle, a series of satellite marches across the nation is planned to coincide with the main event in Washington.

GRAY MATTERS: *Attacks on LGBT Texans are everywhere. Here's what you can do.*

Like so many marches in The Age of Trump, this one emerged organically on Facebook, the brainchild of an otherwise anonymous citizen: David Bruinooge, 42, of Brooklyn, who was moved by the hundreds of thousands of Americans who turned out for the Women's March on January 21.

"I was watching the events unfold on TV, and I was very proud and inspired by all the women, the strong women in our country who were kind of taking this to the street and getting their voices heard," he told the Washington Blade. "And in the back of my mind as an openly gay man I thought the gay community should be doing something like this to follow up on the momentum."

IN HOUSTON, New York, and across America, pride parades were forged and flourished in the crucible of anti-gay oppression and political struggle. Now is no time for them to abandon that proud history of political resistance.



PDFmyURL lets you convert a **complete website to PDF** automatically!



Photo: Jerry Click, HP Staff

Pride parades haven't always been parties. The 1979 Pride Parade heads down Westheimer.

Enraged by the Supreme Court's decision in favor of marriage equality in 2015, Republicans in the Texas legislature declared war on LGBT people in the last legislative session, introducing 24 pieces bills designed to discriminate against LGBT Texans, ranging from allowing adoption agencies to block loving LGBT families from serving as foster parents to sanctioning lawyers, pharmacists and nurses to refuse to provide services to queer citizens.

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Senator Lois Kolkhorst have lead a vicious jihad against transgender Texans with Senate Bill 6, which, in essence, seeks to bar transgender people from public spaces.

PDFmyURL lets you convert a **complete website to PDF** automatically!

Pride Houston is making history in 2017 by honoring Houston activist Lou Weaver as the parade's first transgender male grand marshal. Over the last five months, Lou has spent weeks in Austin, battling indefatigably against waves of bad legislation that would relegate transgender Texans to second-class citizenship.

I urge the Pride Committee to pay homage to Lou's activism and embrace the parade's rich history of political struggle. Jettison the escapist theme. Rally Houston Pride marchers under a new theme that responds to this particular political moment in the Lone Star State: "Standing Tall with Transgender Texans."

Andrew Edmonson *has served as chairman of the Houston Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, and on the board of the Houston chapter of the American Marketing Association.*

Bookmark Gray Matters. Get back to your roots.

TRANSLATOR

To read this article in one of Houston's most-spoken languages, click on the button below.

Select Language

GRAY MATTERS



What's a prairie doing in the middle of the Medical Center?



To deal with North Korea, Trump should look to George H. W. Bush

PDFmyURL lets you convert a **complete website to PDF** automatically!

PDFmyURL



Adding lanes doesn't reduce congestion. So what is TxDOT doing?



Why don't we respect mothers more?



Me, too. My story of sexual assault.

You must be signed in to comment

SIGN IN

HOUSTON POLITICS & POLICY



Council rebuffs mayor, trims tax rate to comply with revenue cap

HOUSTON



Devoted fan not giving up hope after Astros' 3rd straight loss

JENNY DIAL CREECH



Time running out on Astros if no solution found to team slump

BUSINESS



United's last 747 comes to Houston once more before retirement

PDFmyURL lets you convert a **complete website to PDF** automatically!

PDFmyURL

with revenue cap | straight loss | to team slump | before retirement

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Return to Top

HEARST newspapers

© 2017 Hearst Newspapers, LLC.

PDFmyURL lets you convert a **complete website to PDF** automatically!