

# RODNEY WILSON

b. January 1965

## GAY HISTORY MONTH FOUNDER

**Rodney Wilson  
is a high school  
teacher who founded  
Gay History Month.**

*“The greatest act of advocacy for civil rights for  
LGBT Americans is the act of coming out.”*

Rodney Wilson is a high school teacher credited with creating Gay History Month. October was selected because schools are in session, and it is the month in which the first national march for lesbian and gay rights occurred and National Coming Out Day is celebrated.

Born in Missouri, Wilson grew up watching “Jerry Falwell’s Old Time Gospel Hour” on television. Until his 20s, he was a fundamentalist Christian. When he developed an interest in history, he found his calling as a teacher. He wrestled with his sexuality and read everything he could find about gay history. He said, “LGBT history gave me self-confidence as a gay person and strengthened my resolve to live, as best I could, an honest, open and integrated life.”

In 1994, as a teacher at Mehlville High School in suburban St. Louis, Wilson came out to his history class during a lesson about the Holocaust. If he had lived in Germany during World War II, he explained, he likely would have been imprisoned and murdered by the Nazis for being gay.

When he came out, Wilson was a graduate student at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. He became the first openly gay K-12 teacher in the state. What began as a lesson evolved into a much broader mission to teach young people about gay history. Inspired by Women’s History Month and Black History Month, he worked with national organizations to develop a gay-friendly curriculum for educators.

In 1994 Wilson wrote the first article about gay history published by the Missouri Historical Society. University of Missouri-St. Louis became the first college in the country to hold a Gay History Month function, and Wilson helped organize a gay film festival on campus to launch the festivities. In 1995 Gay History Month received its first mainstream media coverage in Newsweek.

As Wilson and partners sought endorsements from educational groups, they faced backlash from conservatives who feared that teaching gay history would endanger youth. Gay History Month continued into the late '90s, but lost momentum when no organization would take responsibility for its observance and financial resources grew scarce. In 2006 Equality Forum created [LGBTHistoryMonth.com](http://LGBTHistoryMonth.com).

Wilson holds master’s degrees from University of Missouri-St. Louis and Harvard University’s extension school. He founded GLSEN-St. Louis (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network), the first GLSEN chapter outside of Massachusetts. He teaches history, government and comparative religion.



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