

# NANCY CÁRDENAS

b. May 29, 1934

d. March 22, 1994

## MEXICAN WRITER & ACTIVIST

*“Of course, if we change the future,  
we change the past.”*

**She was the first  
publicly out lesbian in  
Mexico and the founder  
of Mexico's first LGBTQ  
civil rights organization.**

Nancy Cárdenas was the first publicly out lesbian in Mexico. Her activism, poetry and playwriting were instrumental to the country's LGBTQ civil rights movement.

Cárdenas was born in Mexico in the small town of Parras de la Fuente, Coahuila. Her passion for writing, particularly of plays, began early. She earned a Ph.D. from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, where she advanced her left-leaning views. She went on to study theater at Yale University and Polish culture and literature in Łódź, Poland. As a well-educated, politically outspoken young woman, Cárdenas captured attention, particularly from the LGBTQ community abroad.

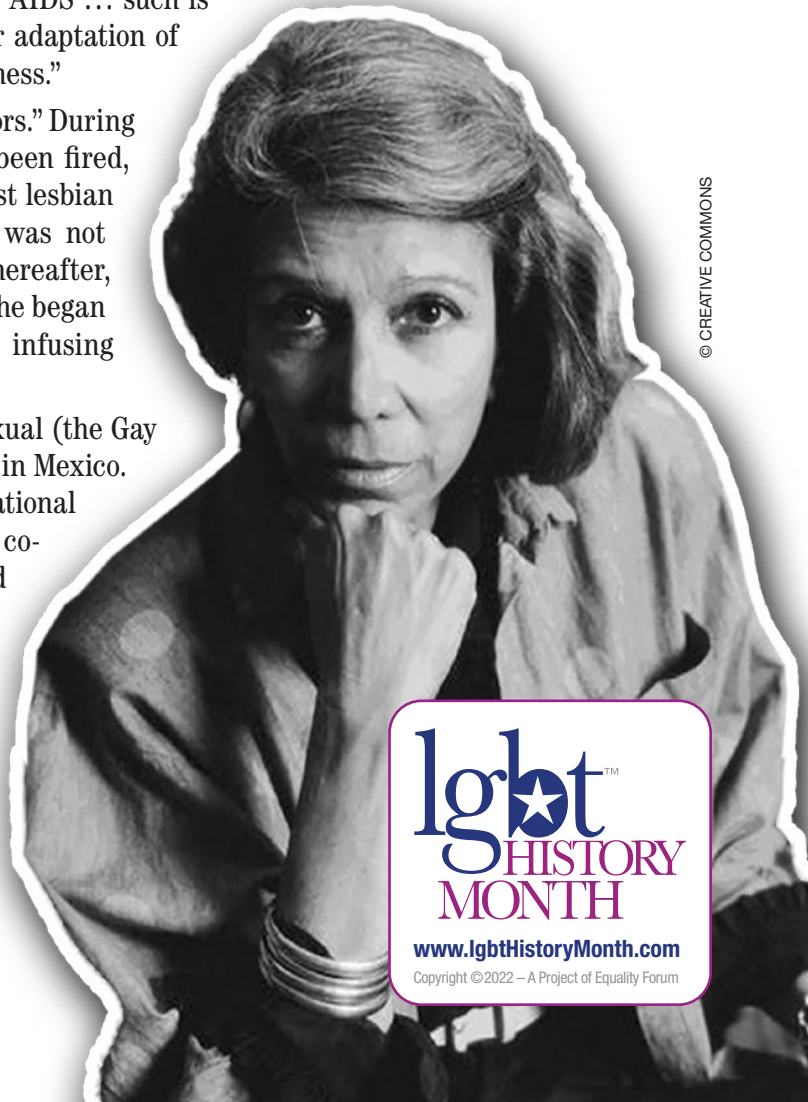
In the 1950s, when Cárdenas was 20, she started a career in entertainment — first as a radio announcer and then as an actor, participating in “Poetry Out Loud,” a program directed by Héctor Mendoza. During this period, she developed a reputation for her activism, including fighting for feminism and protesting police violence.

Cárdenas's writing soon gained recognition. She began working as a journalist, while pursuing her own projects. Her creative work frequently reflected her progressive views and focused on LGBTQ issues, as represented in her play “Sida ... así es la vida” (“AIDS ... such is life”) and in “El pozo de la soledad de Radclyffe Hall,” her adaptation of Radclyffe Hall's 1928 lesbian love story, “The Well of Loneliness.”

In 1973, at age 39, Cárdenas made history on the show “24 Hors.” During an interview about gay rights and an employee who had been fired, she disclosed her own sexual orientation, becoming the first lesbian in Mexico to come out on live television. Although she was not punished or attacked, her ability to find work suffered. Thereafter, she threw herself into fighting for Mexican LGBTQ rights. She began interviewing and collecting stories about LGBTQ people, infusing this material into her projects.

In 1974 Cárdenas founded el Frente de Liberación Homosexual (the Gay Liberation Front), the first LGBTQ civil rights organization in Mexico. As a feminist and sexologist, she lectured, made international television appearances and held conferences. In 1975 she co-authored the Manifesto in Defense of Homosexuals, and in 1978 she led the country's first gay pride march in Las Plazas de las Tres Culturas.

Cárdenas fought for LGBTQ rights until she died of breast cancer in 1994. The Nancy Cárdenas Latin American and Mexican Lesbian Documentation and Historical Archives Center was named in her honor.



© CREATIVE COMMONS

**lgbt**<sup>™</sup>  
HISTORY  
MONTH

[www.lgbtHistoryMonth.com](http://www.lgbtHistoryMonth.com)

Copyright © 2022 – A Project of Equality Forum