The ACLU is a non-profit and non-partisan organization. We do not receive any government funding. Member dues and contributions and grants from private foundations and individuals pay for the work we do. The ACLU, with headquarters in New York City, Litigates across the nation and all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. One Washington, D.C., legislative office lobbies the U.S. Congress. We use strategic communications to educate the public about issues. And the ACLU has expanded its reach by applying international human rights standards to our complex Post-9/11 world. A number of national projects address specific civil liberties issues: AIDS, capital punishment, immigration, rights, prisoners’ rights, reproductive freedom, voting rights, women’s rights and workplace rights.

And how we do it

We have grown into one of the nation’s three largest member organizations with over 500,000 members. The ACLU today is the nation’s largest public interest law firm, with a 50 state network of 71 staff attorneys. We appear before the United States Supreme Court more than any other organization except the U.S. Department of Justice. About 150 ACLU staff attorneys collaborate with about 250 volunteer attorneys in handling cases to 7,500 cases annually.

The ACLU fights for individual rights and fundamental freedoms for all. We FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHTS!

American Civil Liberties Union

179 East 64th Street
New York, NY 10021-6400

(212) 320-2200

www.aclu.org

President
Susan Herman

Executive Director
Norma Chavez-Peterson

Local Contact Information:

ACLUs of San Diego & Imperial Counties

P.O. Box 87131
San Diego, CA 92138-7131

(619) 232-2121

www.aclusandiego.org

info@aclusandiego.org

Executive Director
Norma Chavez-Peterson

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The official count at 1,150,000 at April 2001’s March for Women’s Lives was the largest crowd ever for a women’s rights rally in the nation’s capital. Among other important messages, participants told war activists that they should stop interfering with women’s access to legal reproductive health services.

The U.S. Supreme Court had yet to uphold a single free speech claim when Roger Baldwin, Crystal Eastman, Albert B. Beveridge and others formed the ACLU in 1920. Activists languished in jail for distributing anti-war literature. Stained-glass violence against African Americans was rare. Women won this right to vote only in August of that year. Constitutional rights for lesbians and gays, bisexual and transgender people in those days were nonexistent.

So the ACLU was founded to defend and ensure these rights and to extend them to people who have been excluded from their protection—Native Americans and other people of color; lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people; women; mental patients; prisoners; people with disabilities; and the poor.

In our first year, we fought the harassment and deportation of immigrants whose activism put them at odds with the authorities. In 1920, we won in the U.S. Supreme Court the right for unions to organize. We stood at the door in 1942 in denouncing our government’s round-up and internment of conscientious objectors. In 1943, we presented 100,000 Japanese Americans. And at times in our history when frightened civilians have been writing to us in fear of the authorities, a face of the freedom and freedom for a measure of security, the ACLU has been the back.

We continue to fight the threat to the American basics that threaten our nation—emotional, sexist, religious intolerance, and censorship. The ACLU’s litigation network maintains the promise of the Bill of Rights for all and expanding the reach of its guarantees to new areas.

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Francisco, New York and Portland, searching debate on this issue across the nation will never be the same. ACLU brought lawsuits in Oregon and New York and joined a case in California to fight for marriage equality for gay men and lesbians. When Massachusetts became the first state to allow same-sex couples to marry, voters in 2006, the first day of the second marriage.

American citizens deemed “enemy combatants” in military prison were killed by their own soldiers. The ACLU argued that the practice violates the Constitution’s guarantee that its actions “in the war on terror” are beyond the control of law and unreviewable by American courts.

Today: Staying the Course

As Americans confront age-old problems of racism, sexism, homophobia, religious intolerance, and censorship of unpopular speech, new threats to civil liberties are emerging. Many of our leaders are responding to this threat by erecting laws keeping us from discussing our rights and ignoring the privacy of all Americans.

American citizens without being charged, tried, or given access to a lawyer are being killed and called “enemy combatants.”

Immigrants are being targeted and detained without due process. And the Internet, as it blazes unpolished paths to freedom of expression, also paves the way to new perils for privacy rights. The ACLU’s mission remains realizing the promise of the Bill of Rights for all and expanding the reach of its guarantees to new areas.

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ACLU Founder Arthur Garfield Hays delivers Jersey City Mayor Hague’s ban on unсанctioned public speaking, 1938.

Still Passed: Section 8, Anti-Thank for More and Related Administration consent potential to be a transformative force in the lives and thoughts of a few people,” the court said in the opinion.
The U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights trumpet our aspirations for the kind of society that we want to be.

2003: Abortion Under Fire . . . Again Congress passed and the president signed into law the "Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003," the first-ever federal ban on abortion practice. The ACLU, on behalf of the National Abortion Federation and several individual plaintiffs, challenged this ban that would prohibit abortions as early as 13 weeks in pregnancy. Abortions that doctors say are safe and necessary to protect a woman's health. This ban raises no exceptions for women's health or for cases involving serious fetal anomalies.

Recognizing the danger this law poses to women's health, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York blocked enforcement of the ban as the case proceeded.

2004: Marriage for same-sex couples The year began with same-sex couples marrying in San Francisco.

Susan Highlights.

1928: The Palmer Raids In its first year, the ACLU fought the campaign of harassment and deportation carried on by U.S. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. The ACLU challenged each Palmer attack as an illegal conspiracy and supported the right of individual workers, members of the Women's Trade Union League, and other trade unionists to hold meetings and circulate. The ACLU also secured the release of hundreds of activists imprisoned for their anti-war views and activities.

1929: The Scopes' Case When biology teacher John T. Scopes was charged with violating a Tennessee law on the teaching of evolution, the ACLU assumed the services of celebrated attorney Clarence Darrow for the defense. Scopes was convicted and fined, but an appeal to the United States Supreme Court upheld the statute while reversing Scopes' conviction.

1988: The Ulysses Case After a long anti-censorship battle supported by the ACLU, a New York federal court ruled in favor of James Joyce's novel, Ulysses, in the United States.

1992: "Bros" Begins The ACLU argued successfully before the U.S. Supreme Court that a ban on unions' political meetings, imposed by the racially anti-labor mayor of Jersey City, Frank "the Law" Hague, was unconstitutional. The court ruled that the ban violated the First Amendment right to freedom of assembly.


1960s Loyalty Oaths For a decade, the ACLU fought running court battles against loyalty oaths, which a government agency of the Cold War feared demanded from federal workers. Many state legislatures also passed laws requiring public school employees, especially teachers, to become members of the Communist Party or to pay "subversive" organization fees.

1981: Creationism in Arizona The ACLU, 58 years after the Scopes trial, challenged an Arizona statute requiring that the biblical story of creation be taught as a "scientific alternative" to the theory of evolution. A federal court found the statute, which fundamentallists saw as a model for other states, unconstitutional. "Creationism," said the court, was not science, but was actually religion.
1969: Flag Burning The U.S. Supreme Court invalidated a Texas statute punishing flag desecration, which had been drafted as a form of political speech protected by the First Amendment. The state had argued that the flag is a symbol of the Constitution and to burn it is to “desecrate” it. The ACLU fought back, warning Congress that such an amendment would trample the very principles for which the flag stands. We prevailed in the Senate.

1995: Gay Rights Milestone In Romer v. Evans the Supreme Court recognized for the first time the civil rights of lesbians and gay men by invalidating a state constitutional amendment, passed by public referen- dums in Colorado, that prohibited the state and its municipalities from enacting gay rights laws.

1997: Internet Free Speech In ACLU v. Reno, the court struck down the 1996 Communications Decency Act, which criminalized the Internet by banning “indecent” speech. Although this was a major First Amendment victory for the information age, the battle continues: the ACLU often finds itself defending online free speech from further attacks.

1998: Refocusing the Americans with Disabilities Act In Bragdon v. Abbott, the Supreme Court established that the anti-discrimination provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act apply to people in the early stages of HIV infection, even if they did not have any overt symptoms of AIDS.

1999: Broadcasting Workplace Harassment In Casada v. Sandhomer Orvis, the court ruled Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace, applies to same-sex as well as opposite-sex harassment.

1999: Racism Profiling In Chicago v. Morales, the court struck down Chicago’s profiling law that disproportionately targeted African American and Latino youth and resulted in the arrest of 45,000 innocent people. The ACLU, with its Campaign Against Race Profiling, pressured law enforcement officials across the nation to acknowledge the systemic practice of racial profiling. Through lawsuits, literature, and community outreach, the ACLU encouraged the police to end all forms of racial profiling, from “driving white settlers or whites” to the government targeting residents of Arabs, Muslims and South Asians in Post 9/11 America.

1999: Rights of the Four-Seat on. Roe invalidated California’s 12-month residency requirement for welfare applicants who wish to travel outside the state as a violation of the constitutional right to travel, and reaffirmed the principles that citizens select states; states do not select citizens.

2000: Reproductive Freedom In Stanback v. Carhart, the ACLU filed a friend-of-the-court brief urging the Nebraska Supreme Court to overturn the state’s ban on “partial-birth” abortions. The court struck down the ban as unconstitutional, writing that it did not adequately protect women’s health and because its broad wording threatened to outlaw many common methods of abortion.

2000: Voting Rights Crisis The U.S. Supreme Court adopted itself in Bush v. Gore an unprecedented role. Tallying votes in Florida for the presidential race had become a debacle, plagued by well-chronicled inaccuracies and irregularities. The ACLU participated in a national campaign to end election disfranchisement rule “right to vote,” and other civil rights groups filed lawsuits in Florida and elsewhere challenging the reliance on flawed electoral systems that not only failed to count every vote equally, but were often operated in a racially discriminatory manner. The ultimate fact of the court’s result was that the votes in the state had hung in balance for weeks. Yet the court chose to halt the court and validate the result as it stood.

2000: Separation of Church and State In Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe, the court ruled that a school district policy permitting its student body to vote at the beginning of each school year whether to have prayers before football games violated the Establishment Clause, which prohibits the government from supporting religious beliefs or activities.

2001: Death Penalty In Atkins v. Virginia, reversing its 1989 decision, the court ruled that execution of the mentally retarded is unconstitutional under the Eighth Amendment, which prohibits cruel and unusual punishment.

2001: America Under Attack Terrorists piloted passenger-filled jets into the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. The government responded by rounding up innocent women of racial and ethnic pro- file, and by suspending new policies and practices that stifle the heart of what American democracy is all about. The ACLU, with its Keep America Safe and Free campaign, led the resistance, employing law suits, testimony in Congress, and direct appeals to citizens who may not realize that their way of life is endangered. The ACLU fought efforts to roll back fundamental protections and jeopardize basic freedoms, such as the USA PATRIOT Act that was rushed through Congress to give the government expanded power to invade privacy, imprison people without due process, and punish dissent.

2003: Affirmative Action Upheld In Grutter v. Bollinger/Citriz v. Bollinger, the Supreme Court strongly endorsed affirmative action in higher education, ruling that public universities have a compelling interest in creating a diverse student body and that race may be treated as a “plus” fac-