

MAGNUS HIRSCHFELD

b. May 14, 1868

d. May 14, 1935

“Soon the day will come when science will win victory over error, justice a victory over injustice, and human love a victory over human hatred and ignorance.”

Pioneering sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld devoted his life to the scientific validation and political liberation of homosexuals. He helped lay the groundwork for the modern GLBT civil rights movement.

Born in 1868 in Kolberg, Germany (now Kolbrzeg, Poland), to a highly renowned physician, Hirschfeld followed his father into medicine. Practicing in Berlin, he soon turned his efforts to the study of human sexuality.

In 1896, Hirschfeld, under a pseudonym, distributed a pamphlet titled “Sappho and Socrates.” This became the basis for his later research, which includes the 23-volume Yearbook for the Sexual Intermediates, the first periodical dedicated to homosexual studies.

The next year, Hirschfeld founded the Scientific Humanitarian Committee to enlighten the public about homosexuality and to encourage homosexuals to fight for their liberation. The Scientific Humanitarian Committee aimed to repeal Paragraph 175, the law criminalizing homosexuality.

In his tireless—and lengthy—campaign to raise awareness and repeal Paragraph 175, Hirschfeld became a well-known public figure and earned the moniker “The Einstein of Sex.” With over 5,000 signatures of prominent Germans collected, the bill eventually made progress in the Reichstag.

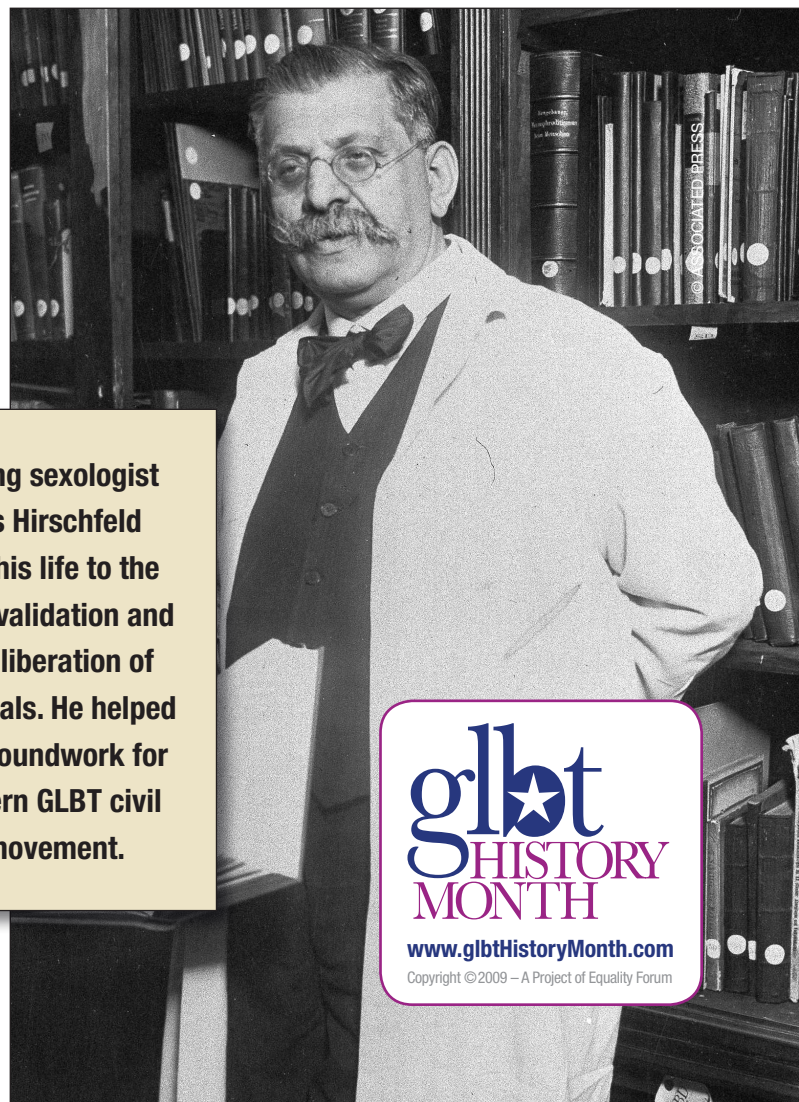
In 1919, Hirschfeld founded the Institute for Sexual Research, which housed a vast library on sexuality and the Museum of Sex, provided educational services and resources, and offered medical consultations. The same year, he produced the film “Different From the Others,” likely the first gay film.

In 1921, Hirschfeld organized the First Congress for Sexual Reform, during which the World League for Sexual Reform (WLSR) was formed. Touring internationally, he promoted the WLSR and its goals. At its peak, the WLSR boasted 130,000 members worldwide.

With the rise of the Nazi Party, Hirschfeld came under attack both politically and personally. On May 6, 1933, while Hirschfeld was abroad, a mob of students and storm troopers raided the Institute for Sexual Research. They burned books, journals and other materials in a bonfire to cleanse the city of “un-German” materials.

Exiled, Hirschfeld settled in Nice, France, and died two years later. He left a legacy of innovative research and advocacy.

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