

For the Mexican government's Magón archive, see www.archivomagon.net.

For *Regeneración* articles in English, see http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bright/magon/home.html.

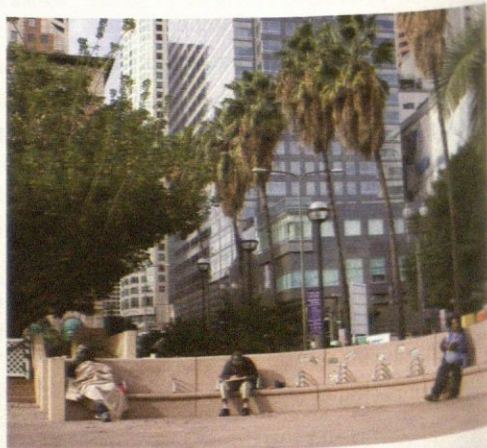
1.28 Pershing Square

532 S. Olive St., Los Angeles 90013 (between W. 5th St. and W. 6th St.) (213) 847-4970
(www.laparks.org/pershingsquare/)

DOWNTOWN

Constructed in 1866 as La Plaza Abaja, Pershing Square is the largest park in downtown Los Angeles. At the turn of the twentieth century, it became an important site for leftist political activism because of its central location and proximity to North L.A.'s working-class, ethnically mixed neighborhoods. The Socialist Party, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and the Communist Party gave frequent speeches here to mobilize people who were excluded from traditional political structures because of their race, gender, age, or citizenship status. However, progressive and radical groups faced a climate of intensive repression from law enforcement and the Los Angeles City Council. In 1901, the city council passed an ordinance requiring street speakers to obtain police permits for the right to speak in public parks. In 1903, the ordinance was extended to cover all public streets. In response, the Socialist Party and the nascent IWW

initiated a Free Speech League that purposefully violated the ordinance and flooded the city's courts and jails. In August 1908, they struck a compromise with the city council that abolished the permit requirement in exchange for a "no-speech zone" covering downtown's white-collar districts, a deal that put Pershing Square off-limits. As a result of the deal, and of the growing popularity of automobiles (which decreased pedestrian traffic), the square was largely abandoned as a center of political activity.



Pershing Square, 2008.



People milling about Pershing Square, circa 1956.

Nonetheless, because of its relatively open political atmosphere, Pershing Square became well known as a cruising ground for gay men from diverse racial and class backgrounds. A site for sex and friendship, Pershing Square was an easy walk to gay bars downtown and in Bunker Hill; up until the mid-1960s, the downtown core held Los Angeles' most significant concentration of gay male life. Many gay men describe this crossroads as important to the development of their political consciousness. Harry Hay remembers meeting both other gay men and leftist radicals at Pershing Square during the Depression. Hay became a Communist Party member and later helped found two of the first gay rights organizations in the country: the little-known Bachelors for Wallace (1948) and the better-known Mattachine Society (1950), both of which were based in Los Angeles. Archivist Jim Kepner, who was critical in the development of the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives (www.onearchives.org), described Pershing Square as continually policed by the LAPD, yet also continually dynamic and vibrant.

Police sweeps and cleanups became harsher in 1959 and 1964, however, and a moral panic over "degeneracy" helped pave the way for the square's redesign. In 1964, Pershing Square's trees, grass, and bushes were removed; it was paved with concrete, and a parking garage was constructed underneath. Urban growth, decentralization, the dominance of automobiles, and the rise of alternative forms of media such as radio and television also eroded the park's political importance. During a redesign process in

1989–90, tight restrictions forbade the inclusion of trees, grass, or other "hiding places," and the public restrooms were removed because they were perceived as a nuisance to maintain (new ones have since been constructed). Pershing Square is now a gathering place for homeless men and women from the nearby Skid Row community, who face near-constant police harassment, as do activist groups such as Food Not Bombs, which seek to raise the visibility of homelessness and poverty in Los Angeles.

NEARBY SITES OF INTEREST

Millennium Biltmore Hotel Los Angeles

506 S. Grand Ave., Los Angeles 90071
(213) 624-1011 (www.millenniumhotels.com/millenniumlosangeles)

A Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument built in 1923 and noted for its beautiful Italian Renaissance architecture. Also the site of a Chicana/o activists' protest against Ronald Reagan in 1969 that resulted in the trial of the Biltmore Six.

Walt Disney Concert Hall

111 S. Grand Ave., Los Angeles 90012
(323) 850-2000 (www.laphil.com)

Designed by architect Frank Gehry and famous for its striking stainless steel exterior, the hall is home to the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

TO LEARN MORE

Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (Basic Books, 2006).

Mark Wild, "Preaching to Mixed Crowds: Ethnoracial Coalitions and the Political Culture of Street Speaking, 1900–1929," in *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2005).