

The Rainbow Flag

The rainbow flag, sometimes called 'the freedom flag', was popularized as a symbol of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) pride and diversity by San Francisco artist Gilbert Baker in 1978. The different colors symbolize diversity in the gay community, and the flag is used predominantly at gay pride events and in gay villages worldwide in various forms including banners, clothing and jewelry. For the 25th Anniversary of the Stonewall riots held in 1994 in New York City a mile-long rainbow flag was created and post-parade cut up in sections that have since been used around the world.

Originally created with eight colors, pink and turquoise were removed for production purposes and as of 2008, it consists of six colored stripes, which should always be displayed with red on top or to left. Aside from the obvious symbolism of a mixed LGBT community, the colors were designed to symbolize: red (life), orange (healing), yellow (sunlight), green (nature), blue (harmony), and purple/violet (spirit). The removed colors stood for sex (pink) and art/magic (turquoise). It is most commonly flown with the red stripe on top, as the colors appear in a natural rainbow.



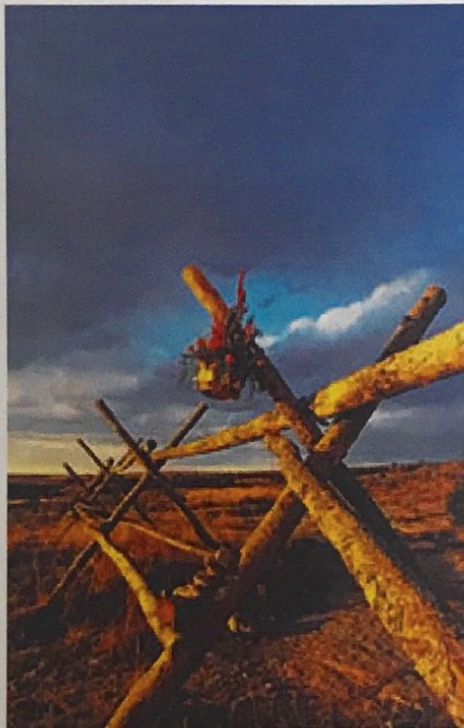
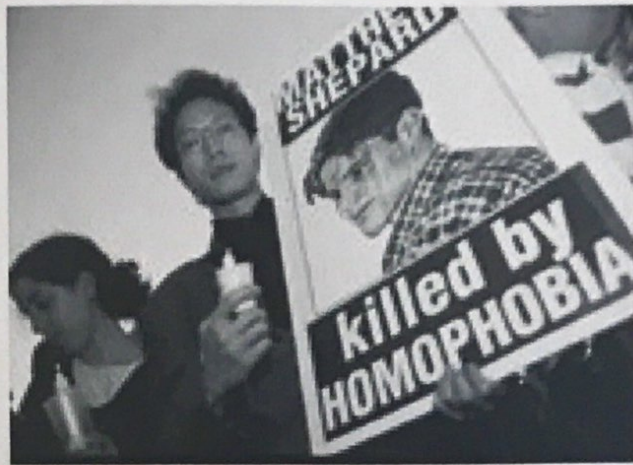
Homophobia

Homophobia is the irrational fear and/or hate towards homosexuals and homosexuality. Homophobia could be as simple as a derogatory remark. One can unknowingly utter homophobic terms (i.e. "That's so gay", "fag", "dyke", etc) and think they are not affecting anyone. Sometimes homophobia can manifest itself in full-fledged violence (known as "gay bashing"), as is the case with Matthew Shepard.


Case Study: Matthew Shepard

Matthew Shepard was an openly gay student majoring in political science at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, Wyoming. Matthew Shepard was attacked on October 7th, 1998. Matthew met two men at a bar, Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, and they offered him a ride home, which he took. However, their intentions were appalling. The two men took Matthew to a remote location where they brutally attacked and tortured him. After their attack, they tied him up to a fence and left him in the cold weather to die. 18 hours later, a cyclist found his tied up body; the cyclist thought that Matthew was a scarecrow. Matthew was found in a comatose condition barely hanging on to life. His attackers fractured his skull and left him with tremendous brain stem damage. He had various cuts on his head, face, and neck. Doctors stated that it would be too dangerous to operate on him. He remained in a coma until his death on October 12th, 1998 at 12:53 am. He was 21 years old. As for his assailants, they are both serving life sentences.

After his death, the nation was in shock. His death made people aware of the tremendous amount of hate towards the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered) community. The Matthew Shepard Foundation was founded and its goal is to eliminate discrimination and promote diversity. Other initiatives that grew from Matthew's untimely death were attempts to change the law to encompass attacks based on sexual orientation or sexual identity as a hate crime. This became known as the Matthew Shepard Act. Although the act was passed by the Senate in 2007, then President George W. Bush vetoed it. Our current President, Barack Obama has stated that he will pass the act thus bringing equality to our nation.



Let It End Here
There is *NO* place for hate in the world.
Matthew Shepard: 1976-1998



The Stonewall Riots:

During the 1960's, oppression of lesbians and gay men was nationally habitual in the United States. Many homosexuals were forced to live unhappy secret lives in fears of discovery. The reason they were not free to be open about their sexuality was primarily because of the strong hatred towards them.

The Stonewall Inn was a bar in Greenwich Village in New York City that was owned by heterosexuals. They risked their business by allowed homosexual clientele in to dance, drink, and escape the homophobic outside world. However, police raids of the bar were always frequent. Police officers were very fond of pulling gay men and lesbians out of the bar and throwing them onto the streets to beat them up as well as putting them in the back of their cop trucks and taking them to the police station for abusive questioning.

On the night of June 27, 1969 during a usual raiding, an unusual incident arose between a few people and the authorities. Soon enough, intensity grew in Stonewall and the police ordered all the homosexuals to exit the building. Outside, while officials tried to arrest as many lesbians and gay men as they could, the riot began. The customers started to throw rocks, bricks, and other objects at the police officers, attacked them as rebuttal, and also attempted to set them on fire using lighter fluid. The scene became so hectic that the police had to surrender and lock themselves in the empty bar as they waited for backup to arrive.

This riot continued until sunrise the next morning. Many more extreme demonstrations were made on that street throughout the week. Word spread quickly throughout New York about the riots and soon what was only a group of 200, became a rioting mass of thousands of demonstrators. Men and women of all races and ages protested for equal rights for gay and lesbian people on the city streets.

The Stonewall Riots were the beginning of a new era of activism, which would later be greatly progressive in the 1970's. The scene of the demonstrations, the Stonewall Inn, and the events that occurred there will forever be significant to the LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered) community and American history as being one of the first places where the right for gays and lesbians were fought. The Stonewall Inn was declared a National Historic Landmark in 2000.





Harvey Milk

In 1977, when he won a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, Harvey Milk became the first openly gay elected official in the United States. Less than one year later, on November 27, 1978, Milk was gunned down along with San Francisco Mayor George Moscone. The shooter was Supervisor Dan White, a conservative board member who had campaigned on a platform of law and order, civic pride, and family values.

White, packing a gun and extra bullets, climbed through a window in City Hall in order to confront Milk and Moscone about his troubled tenure on the Board of Supervisors. After shooting Moscone four times at close range, White reloaded his gun, walked to the other side of the building, and invited Milk into his former office. White shot Milk in the arm, the chest, and twice in the head. He then fled the building the same way that he had entered. A few hours after Diane Feinstein, who became Acting Mayor, named him as a suspect, White turned himself in.

On May 21, 1979, after White was convicted of voluntary manslaughter and sentenced to five to seven years in prison for killing both men, protestors gathered at City Hall to vent their outrage over the verdict. In what has come to be known as "White Night," demonstrators broke windows at City Hall, burned police cars, and clashed with police at various flashpoints throughout the city.

In 1985, after serving just over five years in Soledad prison and one year of parole in Los Angeles, White returned to San Francisco despite Mayor Feinstein's public objections. On October 21, 1985, seven years after the assassinations, White killed himself in the garage of his wife's home. White's suicide did not provoke any significant public reaction

Excerpt from Harvey Milk's "Hope" speech:

“And the young gay people in the Altoona, Pennsylvanias and the Richmond, Minnesotas who are coming out and hear Anita Bryant on television and her story. The only thing they have to look forward to is hope. And you have to give them hope. Hope for a better world, hope for a better tomorrow, hope for a better place to come to if the pressures at home are too great. Hope that all will be all right. Without hope, not only gays, but the blacks, the seniors, the handicapped, the us'es, the us'es will give up. And if you help elect to the central committee and other offices, more gay people, that gives a green light to all who feel disenfranchised, a green light to move forward. It means hope to a nation that has given up, because if a gay person makes it, the doors are open to everyone.”