

A RAINBOW FLAG FOR PRIDE

How did the rainbow become the symbol of the LGBTQ community? Ever since the Stonewall Riots, gay people had gathered every year to commemorate the anniversary of that first major gay uprising. With picnics in parks and public rallies, they celebrated what became known as Gay Freedom Day. Two cities, Chicago and Los Angeles, also held small marches for gay civil rights.

These first marches were very quiet. Soon, however, other cities started hosting their own marches, combining celebrations of gay identity with determined political purpose. These Pride parades became famous for brightly decorated floats and outspoken community contingents, but something seemed to be missing—an instantly recognizable symbol that would stand for the gay community. In 1977 San Francisco artist Gilbert Baker had a vision to design something that represented “the dawn of a new gay consciousness and freedom.”

The original US flag of thirteen stars and thirteen stripes, which hung everywhere for the country’s 1976 bicentennial anniversary celebrations, inspired Baker. He also took inspiration from the gay nightclubs and parties he went to, which combined all different kinds of people on the dance floor. So Baker fashioned a rainbow flag that reflected the diversity and values of the gay community as it fought for its own liberty.

The flag consists of different-colored stripes, each representing a specific meaning, from spirit (violet) to healing (orange) and life (red). The flag flew at the 1978 Pride parades and was an immediate hit. The rainbow graces everything from bracelets to tattoos, representing LGBTQ Pride.

