

The Yellow Brick Blog

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What is LGBT+ history month?

First celebrated in February of 2005, LGBT+ History Month was created by the Schools OUT UK charity to promote equality and diversity, particularly within schools, but also throughout the general public.

Unlike Pride Month, which is dedicated to the celebration of LGBT+ lives and is a reminder of the fight for the rights of the LGBT+ community—including how far we have come, as well as how far we still have to go—History Month specifically focuses on education.

Whether this is teaching about the lives and work of past figures, raising awareness of present issues, or advancing equality within educational establishments, LGBT+ History Month is an important way to include the LGBT+ community as part of the wider school community and of British society as a whole.

This year, the theme for History Month is 'Behind the Lens', which aims to highlight the contributions of LGBT+ people to all aspects of film, cinema, and TV.

Nowadays, it has become much easier for LGBT+ actors and screenwriters to be open about their gender and sexuality, even creating shows and portraying characters which celebrate these aspects of identity, but it is vital that we acknowledge how, until quite recently, this was near impossible.

For decades, most LGBT+ actors had to hide their gender or sexuality, or risk, not just their careers, but the possibility of prison. The same went for writers, making it difficult to write about issues close to their hearts.

However, that didn't erase their existence, and History Month is the perfect opportunity to remember the struggles these figures faced, and honor them as their true selves.

#BehindtheLens

The theme of this year's LGBTQ+ History Month - #BehindTheLens - invites us to learn about the contribution of the LGBTQ+ community to film from behind the lens through positions such as directors, cinematographers, producers, writers, animators, designers and beyond.

To celebrate just a few of these contributions, here are five of some of the most influential LGBTQ+ directors:

Cheryl Dunye was a key contributor to the 'New Queer Cinema Wave'. This was a movement in queer-themed filmmaking, predominantly in the early 1990s. Her film *The Watermelon Woman* explored traditional gender roles in the 1930s and has a satirical tone. This film is also the first feature film to be directed by a Black lesbian woman. Dunye is currently working on *Bridgerton* and *The Umbrella Academy*.

Pedro Almodóvar is a famous name in Spanish cinema and has been exploring themes of political and sexual freedom through film since the 1980s. He is openly gay, and his semi-autobiographical film 'Pain and Glory' explores his career, struggles and sexuality.

Lisa Cholodenko directed the 2010 comedy-drama 'The Kids Are All Right'. This was one of the first mainstream films to feature a lesbian couple raising children, reflecting her real-life experience of raising her child with her wife. Cholodenko has also notably discussed the fluidity and complexity of sexuality.

Dorothy Arzner was a director active between the 1920s and 1940s. She was the only female director in the era of silent film and directed 20 films. Arzner identified as a lesbian and interpretations of her films have found critiques of gender inequality and discussions of sexuality.

Sam Feder is an award nominated film director best known for the film 'Disclosure.' Feder's films explore the entanglement of issues such as race, gender visibility, social status and politics. They have also critiqued problems with representation in film in the past.

A Flag of Pride

The rainbow flag has been a symbol for LGBT+ pride since 1978 where openly gay man and drag queen Gilbert Baker designed the flag on the instruction of Harvey Milk, one of the first openly gay elected officials in the US.

Baker's version of the flag was hand-dyed and sewn and first flew at the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day in June 1978. His flag contained eight colours, each representing a different aspect of the LGBT+ community. These included orange to represent healing, green representing serenity and nature, and indigo as a shade of harmony.

This flag caught on in the LGBT+ community over the next year, particularly when Harvey Milk was assassinated in November 1978 attributed to conflict surrounding Milk's activism - in particular his work against homophobia and police violence.

As a result, the flag soon was in very high demand, and mass production began. The demand was so immense that the 8-stripe flag could not continue production due to the difficulty in obtaining the hot pink fabric – thus the 7-stripe flag was born.

Complications soon arose regarding the 7-stripes – it was difficult to split at Pride parades as decoration, amongst other reasons. The turquoise and indigo flags were combined to a royal blue and the flag was finalised in 1979 as the 6-stripe flag we now know and recognise.

The LGBT+ community agreed to fly the flag with the red stripe horizontally at the top. The popularity of the flag continued to increase on an international scale, becoming a focal point of political and lawful decisions such as John Stout's determination to fly his flag from his apartment in 1989.

The 6-stripe flag remained the main symbol of LGBT+ pride for almost 40 years and is still the most well-recognised today. However, within the past 10 years, there have been a number of alterations and additions to the beloved flag.

In 2017, two additional stripes were added to the top of the flag by the city of Philadelphia. These were black and brown and symbolised the inclusion of all LGBT+ people, no matter race or colour. Pride festivals across the world adopted this flag to promote inclusion within the LGBT+ community itself.

In 2018, activist Daniel Quasar designed an updated version of this flag – the Progress Pride Flag. It was the original 6-stripe flag with a chevron on the left-hand side, containing the colours of the transgender flag along with black and brown stripes. The chevron represents both forward movement and the need for continued progress toward equality. The colours are used to represent marginalised members of the LGBT+ community, including trans people, people of colour, and those who are living with, or who have been lost, as a result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Most recently, Valentino Vecchietti further updated the Progress Pride Flag, through adding the intersex flag within the chevron on the left-hand side.

The pride flag has and will always be a symbol for those who are members of the LGBT+ community, of all races and colours. It demonstrates pride primarily, but also establishes inclusion within the community. It is likely to continue to change in the future but ultimately, the message remains the same.