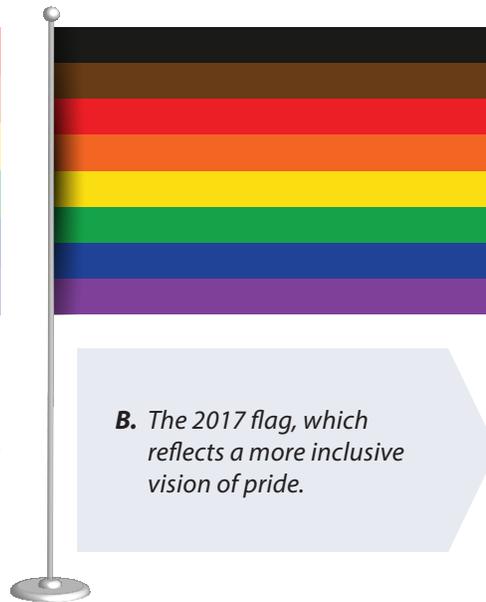


The Evolution of the Pride Flag

by Kevin Aldridge



A. The “original” Pride Flag by Gilbert Baker: red (life), orange (healing), yellow (sunlight), green (nature), blue (serenity) and purple (spirit).



B. The 2017 flag, which reflects a more inclusive vision of pride.



C. The 2019 flag, which includes the stripes representing the trans community.

The first known Pride flag – sewn by Gilbert Baker – debuted at the June 1978 San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade. Baker was urged by Harvey Milk, an early gay activist and firebrand, to construct a flag to symbolize the value and dignity of what was then called “the gay community.”

The first iteration of the flag contained eight stripes, each a separate color of the rainbow plus hot pink. Demand for flags increased after Milk’s assassination in November 1978, and hot pink was removed due to the unavailability of fabric in that color. The following year, the San Francisco Pride parade organizers removed another stripe. The six-stripe version, with each stripe having a separate meaning, would become the historical standard of the Pride flag for the next several decades. This flag is shown in image A.

There have always been variations of the Pride flag, with each version reflecting our history while striving for increased awareness of our diverse community. For example, during the height of the AIDS epidemic, some flags were made with a black stripe to memorialize those who succumbed to the disease. Some flags contain the stars from the U.S. flag with the six rainbow stripes in place of the 13 red and white stripes. And South Africa activists blended the traditional rainbow flag with the South African national flag.

In just the past four years, there have been two major changes to the flag, both of which reflect the desire of the queer community to become more inclusive. First, during Pride Month 2017, the city of Philadelphia unveiled a rainbow flag with black and brown stripes added to the traditional six to represent people of color in the queer community, whose voices and concerns were often disregarded. This flag is shown in image B.

And even more recently, the flag evolved once again to embrace trans members of the community through the inclusion of light blue, pink and white stripes. These stripes reflect the transgender Pride flag created by Monica Helms in 1999. This flag is shown in image C.

The mutability of Pride flags is a testament to the strength and diversity of the broader queer community. We are not centralized; we have no leader; and our understanding of the world, ourselves and each other is constantly evolving. While many people recognize only the six-stripe rainbow flag because it is anchored in their own experience, the evolution of Pride flags encourages all of us to keep examining who we are, what we stand for and what work still needs to be done.

