Historical LGBTQ+ Icons

**Bisi Alimi**
A Nigerian gay rights activist, public speaker, writer and HIV/LGBT advocate, he became the first Nigerian to come out of the closet on television. Amid both admiration and death threats, Alimi has continued his advocacy on gay rights within migrant African communities.

**Kye Allums**
Allums was the first Division I openly transgender athlete in NCAA sports history. Today, Kye is a transgender advocate and the founder of Project I Am Enough, a project dedicated to encouraging self-love & self-definition for everyone.

**Gilbert Baker**
Baker helped define the LGBTQ movement as the designer of the rainbow flag. The flag was first unveiled at the San Francisco Pride Parade in 1978 and has become a universal symbol for the community.

**Jack Baker & Michael McConnell**
In 1970, they became the first same-sex couple known to apply for a marriage license. Turned down by Hennepin County, they fought to the United States Supreme Court. After 47 years of litigation, a judge declared them legally married.

**James Baldwin**
Baldwin was writing gay and bisexual characters years before the LGBTQ movement fully took form and up until his death in 1987. When asked about his sexuality, he was a firm believer in fluidity over rigid categorization. He was also active in the Civil Rights Movement.

**Tammy Baldwin**
Baldwin earned her place in history in 1998 when she became the first openly gay person elected to Congress. She was also the first openly gay person in the Senate after her election in 2012. She’s been a crusader for LGBTQ rights as well as women’s rights throughout her political career.

**Chi Chia-Wei**
Chi is a veteran LGBTQ rights advocate from Taiwan and was instrumental in bringing marriage equality to his home country earlier in 2019. In 1986, at just 28 years old, Chi publicly came out as gay, before being imprisoned for 162 days on fabricated claims of robbery. Over the next 30 years, Chi worked tirelessly to champion LGBTQ rights, which finally came to a head in May when Taiwan became the first state in Asia to pass marriage equality.

**Rudolf Brazda**
Brazda was the last known concentration camp survivor from Nazi Germany on charges of homosexuality. Brazda spent nearly three years at the Buchenwald concentration camp, where his prisoner uniform was branded with the distinctive pink triangle that the Nazis used to mark men interned as homosexuals. His rare testimony has been pivotal in documenting gays persecuted during the Holocaust.

**Lynn Conway**
After coming out as trans to family and friends in 1999, Conway joined the fight for transgender rights. She launched a website providing resources and offering advice to the trans community. Conway’s fight included standing up to the psychiatric community to eliminate Gender Identity Disorder from the vernacular.

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**Dustin Lance Black**
Black is an American screenwriter, director, film and television producer, and LGBT rights and Marriage Equality activist. He is best known for winning the Academy Award for his 2008 film Milk. In 2011, Black wrote the play 8, which portrays the actual events in the Hollingsworth v. Perry trial and the testimony which led to the overturn of California’s Proposition 8.

**Keith Boykin**
Boykin was an editor of The Daily Voice and a White House aide to President Bill Clinton. After Clinton’s election, Boykin became a director of specialty media. He became the highest-ranking openly gay person in the Clinton White House and helped organize the nation’s first meeting between gay and lesbian leaders and a U.S. President. Since his time in the White House, Boykin has written a number of books on gay issues.

**Rudyrmal Brazda**
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**Nancy Cárdenas**
Playwright and director Nancy Cárdenas is thought to be one of the first Mexican people to openly come out on television. Much of her work revolved around her lesbian identity, writing collections of poetry and plays addressing gay and lesbian themes. She wasn’t only a writer—she was also an activist. Cárdenas helped start the struggle against gay prejudice in Mexico and fought for equal rights for everyone, no matter their sexuality.
MICHAEL DILLON
Michael Dillon was the first trans man to undergo phalloplasty, or the surgical construction of a penis, in the 1950s. He was also thought to be the first person to undergo feminization therapy to begin his transition. Dillon then became a doctor and eventually served as a naval doctor. However, press discovered that Dillon was not born male, and the attention caused him to flee to India. There, he took vows to become a monk in a Buddhist monastery.

HENRY GERBER
Henry was an early homosexual rights activist in the United States. Inspired by the work of Germany’s Magnus Hirschfeld and his Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, Gerber founded the Society for Human Rights in 1924.

BRENDA HOWARD
Brenda Howard is widely considered a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance, performing as a dancer. She was one of the first historians of LGBT experience and protest. Hamilton documented what it was like to be queer and also between the 1920s and in 1886, she died. Along with her partner of over 40 years, Lilian Fost, Hampton would work tirelessly against LGBT rights over the decades.

BLAIR IMANI
Imani is an ethicist, mental health activist, and historian living at the intersections of Black, Queer, and Muslim identity. Blair is the author of Modern HSHistory Stories of Women and Nonbinary People Revisiting History. Blair began working with the internationally renowned LGBT rights organizations including the Tegan & Sara Foundation, GLAAD, It Gets Better and LOVING2LOVE to continue elevating the stories of queer people of faith globally.

RICHARD ISAY
Isay was a psychiatrist and gay activist who is credited with changing the way psychiatrists and psychoanalysts think about gender identity. When he threatened to sue the American Psychiatric Association over its discriminatory policies towards LGBT people, the APA changed its name to the American Psychological Association.

ANDREA JENKINS
Jenkins is a policy expert, politician, writer, performance artist, poet, and transgender activist. She is known for founding the first black and openly transgender woman elected to public office in the United States, serving since January 2019 on the Minneapolis City Council. She helped create a Racial Equity Community Advisory Committee consisting of city residents that focuses on creating greater equality for women, for people of color, particularly for LGBT identified community members.

JANET MOCK
Janet Mock has become one of the most visible transgender icons following her public coming out in 2011. Mock released her first book, "valentine," in February 2014 and pioneered the righteous campaign, a movement encouraging trans women to live vibrantly.

IFI NAIM
Naim was a gay Pakistani American past. Having moved to the United States to escape persecution for his sexual orientation, he became known locally for establishing SANGAT, an organization to support LGBT south Asian youths, and internationally for publishing Nawaaz, a weekly collection that was the first open expression of homosexual themes in the Urdu language. Naim was inducted into the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame in 1996.

SIMON NIKOLI
Simon Nikolai is known by many as the central hero of the LGBT struggle in South Africa. He was an anti-apartheid, gay, rights, and HIV/AIDS activist. He founded the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand in 1990. He organized the first Pride March in Johannesburg. He played a key role in convincing South Africa to formally recognize LGBT rights in the country.

SHANE ORTECA
Ortega is an Indigenous (Native American) and openly transgender former American soldier who served in the U.S. Army as an aviation flight engineer. Beginning in 2008, he advocated transgender rights. He co-founded support organizations and lobbied with legislators, often using his personal experiences and performance record to help advance the cause for transgender and LGBT service members working with the military chain of command and the ACLU.
ARSHAM PARSİ
Arsham first began secretly working to support members of the LGBTQ community in his native Iran. But in 2005, the queer activist was forced to flee his country, where homosexual activity remains illegal. Today, Parsi lives in exile in Canada, where he has founded the Iranian Railroad for Queer Refugees, which supports and provides guidance to LGBTQ asylum seekers from the Middle East.

SYLVIA RIVERA
Sylvia Rivera was a queer, Latina, self-identified drag queen who fought for transgender rights, as well as for the rights of gender-nonconforming people. After the Stonewall riots, Rivera started S.T.A.R. (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries), a group focused on providing support to queer, homeless youth. She was an activist even on her deathbed, meeting with the Empire State Pride Agenda about trans inclusion.

VITO RUSSO
Russo was an American LGBT activist, film historian and author. He is best remembered as the author of the book The Celluloid Closet, described in The New York Times as “an essential reference book” on homosexuality in the US film industry. In the 1980’s he also became a prominent AIDS activist. In 2013, GLAAD named the “Vito Russo test” after him, a set of criteria that analyzes the representation of LGBT characters in films.

ALEXYA SALVADOR
Alexya is a trailblazer and trans woman in Brazil, where violence against LGBTQ people has reached an all-time high. More than 380 LGBTQ-identifying people were murdered in Brazil in 2017 and 58 died by suicide. She is also a pastor. Salvador calls herself the “first transgender shepherd of Latin America,” and, with other trans pastors from around the world, held a groundbreaking LGBTQ-friendly mass in Cuba last year.

JOSÉ SARRIA
In 1961, Sarria became the first openly gay candidate to run for office when he ran for the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. He was known for performing as a drag queen at the Black Cat Bar. He’s founder of the Imperial Court System, which is one of the oldest LGBTQ organizations in the world.

DAN SAVAGE
Dan is an activist and journalist who writes the internationally syndicated relationship and sex advice column “Savage Love” and the podcast by the same name. He also wrote the internationally best-selling book “Savage Love: A Life of Love, Lust and Lessons.”

EDIE WINDSOR & THEA SPYER
Windsor became an activist after reading about the Stonewall Riots with her partner, Thea Spyer, in 1969. When Spyer died in 2009, Windsor took on the government after being forced to pay taxes for inheriting her wife’s estate as part of the Defense of Marriage Act. Her victory in that case was instrumental in the fight for marriage equality in the U.S.

PETE SAVAGE
Pete Savage is an accomplished author, actor, journalist and advocate for LGBTQ rights. He is a regular commentator on CNN and MSNBC, and the author of several books, including the 2017 national bestseller “Gender Games: The New Rules for Success.”

ALICE WALKER
Author of The Color Purple, Alice Walker is a writer and activist. In addition to writing about injustice, she travels to speak internationally on the side of the poor, disenfranchised, and oppressed. Walker’s work as a queer woman of color has been vital to the civil rights movement.

EVE SEDGWICK
Well known by any Women’s Studies major, Sedgwick is a matriarch of queer theory. She is perhaps best known for her work, the Epistemology of the Closet in which she explores the meaning of hetero and homosexuality and the how queerness exists as a separate, less restricting entity.

BAYARD RUSTIN
Organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, Rustin never hid his homosexuality while fighting alongside Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. His openness pushed him to work behind the scenes of the movement. Rustin worked to bring the AIDS crisis to the NAACP’s attention. He also worked on NYC’s gay rights bill before his death in 1987. He was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Honor by President Obama in 2013.

JOSE ZAMORA
Pedro Pablo Zamora was a Cuban-American AIDS educator and television personality. As one of the first openly gay men with AIDS to be portrayed in popular media, Zamora brought international attention to HIV/AIDS and LGBT issues and prejudices through his appearance on MTV’s reality television series, The Real World: San Francisco. Zamora is credited with humanizing those living with HIV and AIDS as well as for the rights of gender-nonconforming people. After the Stonewall riots, Rivera started S.T.A.R. (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries), a group focused on providing support to queer, homeless youth. She was an activist even on her deathbed, meeting with the Empire State Pride Agenda about trans inclusion.

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