

The 1940s

In the 1940s, global attitudes toward homosexuality were in flux and varied greatly between nations. It was a time period in which many LGBTQ individuals faced immense persecution, but it also saw the beginnings of changing laws, and recognition from academic institutions. It was a time when relationships had to be kept behind closed doors, and same-sex partnerships were not recognized legally or socially.

LEGAL CHANGES

In the early part of the decade, homosexuality was illegal in Nazi occupied countries. Paragraph 175 was a German statute that criminalized sexual relations between men and had been in effect since 1871, however it was very narrowly applied. The Nazi regime changed this paragraph to more broadly target gay men. While the paragraph did not directly target lesbian women, they were still targeted by other laws. Under this new version of paragraph 175 thousands of gay men were arrested and faced prison time, and those viewed as “repeat offenders” were sent to concentration camps. Paragraph 175 was in effect in all countries under Nazi occupation, though the extent to which it was pursued varied.

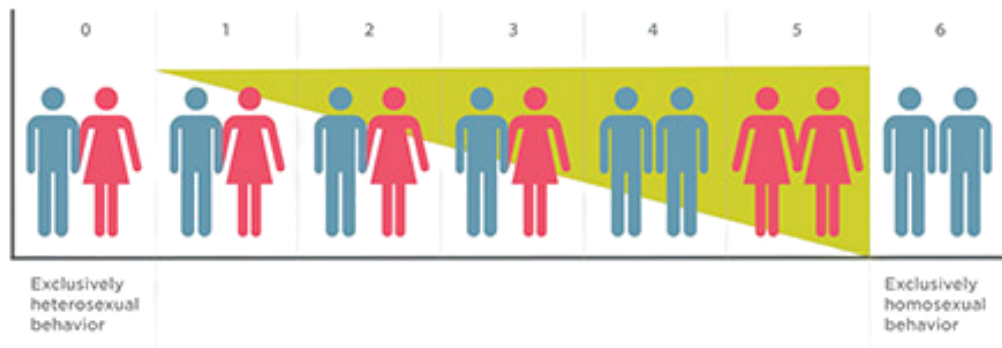
As countries were liberated, their laws reverted back to what they were pre-war, which in many cases was some variation of decriminalization. Additionally, Switzerland, Iceland, and Sweden decriminalized same-sex activity in this decade.

In the same time period, the United States banned lesbians and gays from actively serving in the military. Many nations in this decade also changed their age of consent laws - raising the age of consent for same-sex relations to be higher than straight relations.



The 1940s

Kinsey Scale of Sexual Behavior
Originally published in 1948



ACADEMICS & CULTURE

In 1947, Dr. Alfred Kinsey founded the Institute for Sex Research (later renamed the Kinsey Institute), with the goal of reporting more reliable data on human sexuality. “Dr. Kinsey began collecting wide-ranging materials reflecting both historical and contemporary views of sexuality and brought together a multidisciplinary research team who would eventually conduct 18,000 survey-based interviews on human sexuality” (The Kinsey Institute). Dr Kinsey’s first ground breaking report was published in 1948, this report included the Kinsey Scale. The Kinsey Scale is a method of talking about a person’s sexuality outside of labels like gay, straight, bisexual, etc. The scale allows us to talk about sexual attraction in a consistent manner even if terms and accepted definitions change.



The 1950s

The 1950s weren't a great place to be queer in many parts of the world, however there were still some steps forward. Unfortunately there were few positive steps towards liberation in Canada.

LEGAL CHANGES

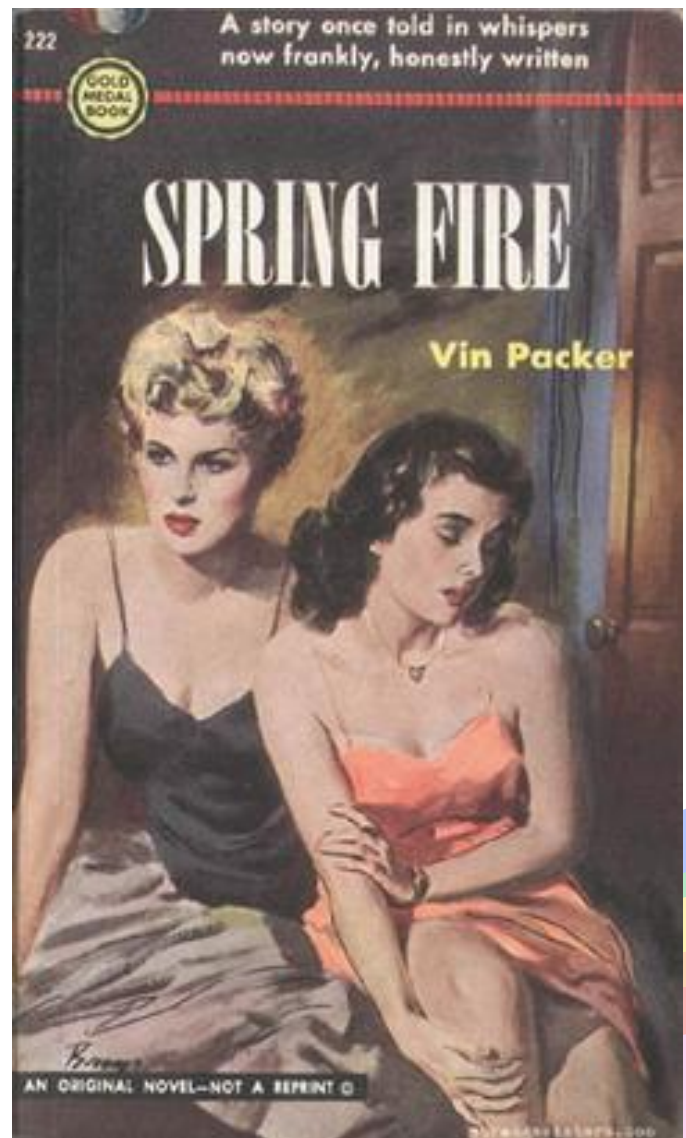
In 1953, legislation was introduced to classify sodomy and related homosexuality as criminal-sexual-psychopathic acts; in 1955 a lesbian was convicted of sexual assault for the crime of trying to kiss her coworker; and in 1958 The McRuer Commission advocated for lifetime jail sentences for homosexuals.

In East Germany, Paragraph 175 (which you can learn more about in the 1940s segment) was partially repealed.

CULTURE

Lesbian pulp novels spread like wildfire, and the book that launched a thousand ships, *Spring Fire*, was published in 1952. Though the ending is quite sad (as was the precedent for gay fiction at the time), *Spring Fire* sold 1.5 Million copies, and launched the "Lesbian Pulp" genre.

Howl and Other Poems, by American poet Allen Ginsberg was published by City Lights in 1954. In 1957 City Lights Bookstore manager Shig Murao as well as City Lights' publisher Laurence Ferlenghetti were arrested and tried for publishing obscenity, as the poem depicts the use of several illicit substances, as well as both homosexual and heterosexual sex acts. In the end, the court did not find either litigant guilty of obscenity. This was not the only case of the US Government attempting to censor LGBTQ art and literature. The US Government also attempted to purge lesbian and gay individuals from working in any branch of the government.



The 1950s

The US Government justified this persecution by claiming lesbian and gay individuals were more at risk for blackmail and were thus a threat to national security.

This period was later coined as the “Lavender Scare”. While the Canadian Government’s similar attempts did not receive a witty title, there are several reports of the lengths the RCMP went to in order to identify gay and lesbian public servants in order to terminate their employment

ORGANIZING & ACTIVISM

In this decade, several prominent gay rights organizations were founded, including The Daughters of Bilitis (US), and The Homosexual Law Reform Society (UK). LGBTQ+ people also fought to create community and safe spaces. In Chicago, the first Gay Leather bar (Gold Coast) opened in 1958.



The 1960s

In the 1960s, LGBTQ+ members of the Canadian armed forces, the RCMP and the federal public service continued to be systematically discriminated against, and often fired as a result of policy and sanctioned practice.

LEGAL CHANGES

In 1967, George Everett Klippert was the last person to be arrested, charged, prosecuted, convicted and imprisoned for gross indecency in Canada before the decriminalization of homosexuality. This case directly resulted in the introduction of Bill C-150, and the eventual decriminalization of homosexuality.

On May 14, 1969, homosexuality was decriminalized between consenting adults in Canada.



Although many formal gay liberation organizations didn't become widespread until the 1970s, the Klippert case motivated activists, lawyers, journalists and civil liberties groups to challenge anti-homosexual laws.

ORGANIZING & ACTIVISM

The broader social movements of the 1960s, including civil rights, feminism and student activism, all encouraged greater discussions about personal freedoms, sexuality, and privacy. These cultural shifts contributed to growing support for the LGBTQ+ community as well as LGBTQ+ rights.

Due to criminalization and social stigma, many LGBTQ+ Canadians at the time kept their identities generally private. Small social networks existed in bigger urban areas such as Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. However, during the majority of the 1960s, media coverage often portrayed homosexuality as immoral, criminal, or a mental illness.

The 1960s

In the US, the Stonewall Riots were a turning point in Gay Rights activism. In the early hours of June 28th 1969, the New York Police Department raided the Stonewall Inn, a prominent gay bar. Their goal was to arrest people who were not dressed “appropriately” for their assigned sex at birth - effectively targeting drag performers and trans individuals. These raids were common place in the New York gay scene at the time, and tensions were mounting between the gay community and the NYPD.



The June 28th raid spiraled after a police officer hit a detained woman with his baton - the crowd turned violent, overwhelming the police officers.

Officers barricaded themselves inside the Stonewall Inn, while the riots outside escalated. The LGBTQ community of New York, especially those who were poor, homeless, or otherwise additionally marginalized, were tired of being targeted and harassed by the NYPD. The riots were the boiling point of the anguish felt by the community, and created a sense of urgency throughout the city. In the months and years following the riots, the community used this urgency to create activist organizations and fight for the rights of LGBTQ people to exist without harassment.

In 1970, the anniversary of the riots was marked by Pride Marches - in New York and across the US.

While there are many moments of LGBTQ history that are celebrated during pride month, and different cities have different watershed moments, the Stonewall Riot is one of the most influential. You may hear the phrase “the first Pride was a Riot”, which refers to the Stonewall Riots and reminds us where we came from - our predecessors threw beer bottles and bricks and lit garbage cans on fire to fight for rights we can easily take for granted today.

The 1970s

The 1970s was a tumultuous time for LGBTQ rights across the globe; for every step forward there seemed to be a step back. However, this decade was an instrumental one in terms of gay liberation and standing up against oppression.

LEGAL CHANGES

Everett Klippert, the last Canadian imprisoned for his sexuality, and whose resulting legal battle was followed closely by politicians and activists alike, and galvanized Canadians and lawmakers into decriminalizing homosexuality in 1969, was released from prison on parole in 1971 - though his record would not be expunged until 2020.

CULTURE & COMMUNITY

Canada's first gay book store, Glad Day, opened December 1, 1970, and while it would face discrimination, heavy scrutiny, and even a lawsuit in the future, the store still operates in the heart of Toronto's gay village to this day!



Left: The home of Glad Day founder Jearld Moldenhauer, where he first ran Glad Day.
Right: the third Glad Day location (1981 - 2016)

In the late 70s, more and more cases of AIDS were being reported in North America (though it did not have a unified label at the time). Initially, it was unknown how the disease was transmitted and its long, often symptomless, incubation period allowed it to spread unchecked through communities.

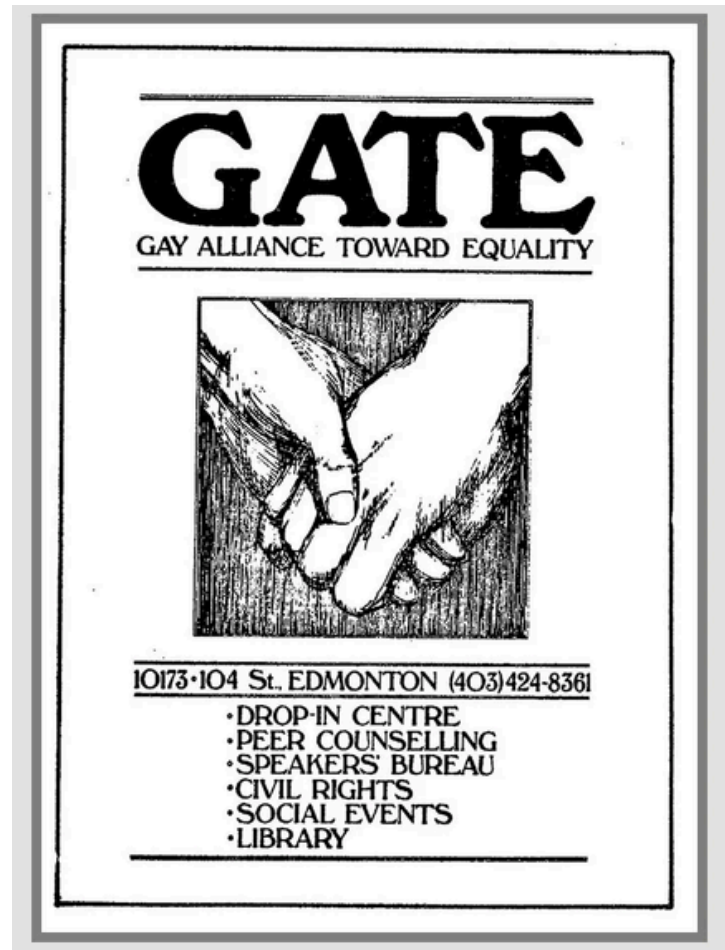
The 1970s

The first pride flag, designed by Gilbert Baker at the behest of political icon Harvey Milk, was flown in San Francisco, California in 1978. The Baker flag remained the inspiration behind many future iterations of the general pride flags we see today, including the Philadelphia pride flag (designed in 2017) and the Progress Pride flag (designed in 2018). The original Baker flag contained 8 colours, and each colour represented a specific meaning/theme. The colours were Pink, Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Teal, Blue, and Violet; their respective meanings were sex, life, healing, sunlight, nature, magic, serenity, and spirit. The pink and teal stripes were removed for efficiency, as they were more difficult to produce on a grand scale. Demand for sales of the flag skyrocketed after the assassination of Harvey Milk in the same year.



ORGANIZING & ACTIVISM

The 1970s spawned countless gay rights organizations including (but not limited to): CAMP (Australia, 1970), STAR (USA, 1970), GATE (Canada, 1971), PFLAG (USA, 1973), Association of Homosexual Liberation (Japan, 1976) and many more.



Homosexuality was decriminalized and/or legalized in a great number of nations including Austria, Costa Rica, Finland, Norway, Malta, Croatia, Montenegro, Slovenia, Cuba, and Spain.

The 1980s

The 1980s was a decade of grief and determination. While there was a wave of decriminalization and several landmark legal battles, the community suffered immense loss due to the AIDS crisis.

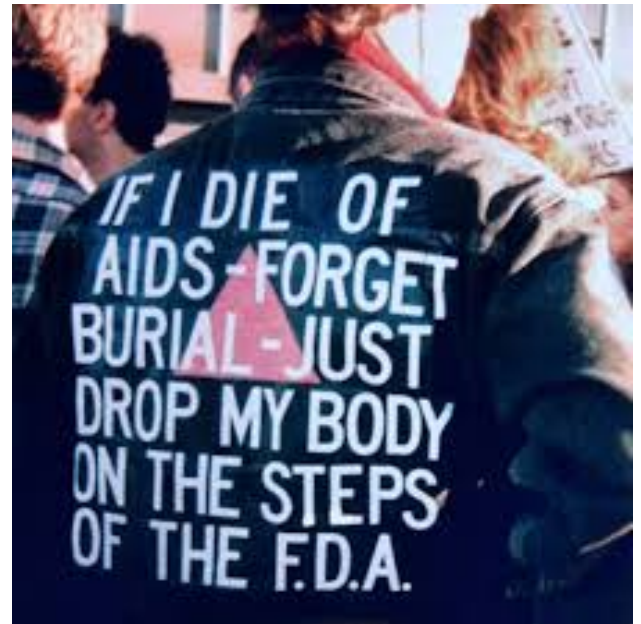
LEGAL CHANGES

In 1981 the European Court of Human Rights resolved that Northern Ireland's criminalization of same-sex acts was a violation of the European Convention of Human Rights. This landmark judgement meant any states wanting to join the Council of Europe could only do so on the condition of decriminalization.

The Canadian Charter of Rights & Freedoms was introduced in 1982, while it eventually led to protections against discrimination based on sexual & gender identity, neither were expressly protected under its initial introduction.

COMMUNITY

In 1981, AIDS was officially declared an epidemic. AIDS devastated the queer community throughout the '80s, with tens of thousands of people dying before the end of the decade. In the early '80s, very little was known about the disease and very few resources were available to those afflicted. The US Government refused to invest in scientific research or education campaigns because it predominately affected the gay community, drug users, and sex workers - stigmatized groups without a voice in power.



With no other recourse, the queer community came together to care for each other - through public activism and education, as well as the very hands on caring for the dying who were unable to access, or were refused, health care. As same-sex partnerships were not legally recognized, many partners were barred from hospital rooms, were unable to collect their partners bodies, or lost access to their personal belongings.

The 1980s



ORGANIZING & ACTIVISM

The Bathhouse Raids

On February 5th 1981 Toronto Police stormed 4 gay bathhouses. Bathhouses were gathering places for queer men, intended to be safe spaces for hook-ups and other activities.

Three hundred men were arrested, and many reported humiliation, taunts, and physical violence from police officers. Detainees were forced to stand naked for hours as the police collected personal data, including workplaces and phone numbers, causing immense fear of further repercussions.

While homosexuality had been decriminalized in Canada in 1969, the Toronto police used laws regarding brothels to charge the bathhouse owners and patrons - despite there being no actual evidence of sex work being uncovered.

Community Response: On February 6th, 3000 protestors took to the streets and overwhelmed police to march on Queens Park. This watershed moment is often referred to as "Canada's Stonewall".



THE FIRST PRIDE CELEBRATIONS IN CANADA

Many cities had their first official pride celebrations in the 1980s. At the same time, many grassroots protests and marches were being organized.

- Vancouver Pride Parade (August 1981)
- Dykes in the Streets (march organized by Lesbians Against the Right, October 1981)
- Edmonton Pride Weekend (June 1982)
- Winnipeg Pride Week (August 1987)
- Halifax Pride March (July 1988)



The 1990s

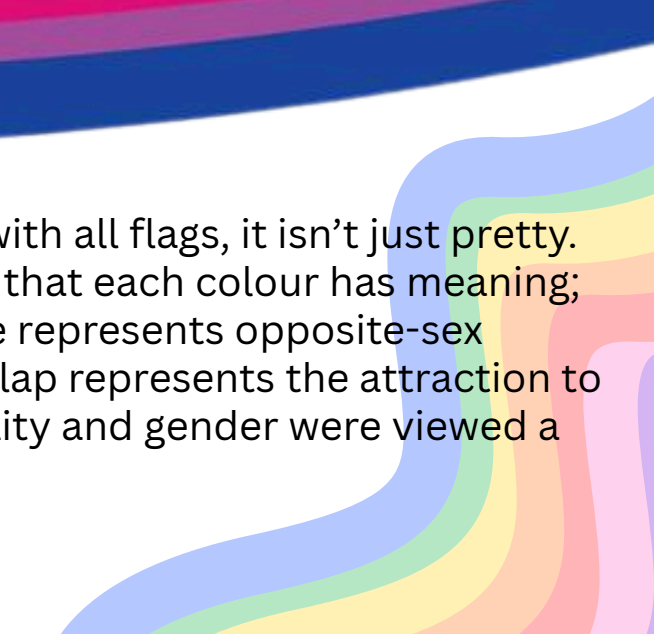
The 1990s marked a time of increased visibility and improving rights for the global community.

LEGAL CHANGES

The World Health Organization published their 10th edition of the ICD and officially removed homosexuality from their list of mental disorders. While several health orgs representing individual countries had depathologized homosexuality throughout the 1970(such as Australia, New Zealand, and Sweden and even the American Psychological Association), this declassification was a large, *global*, step forward.

The 1990s also saw a huge wave in decriminalization across Europe as former Soviet nations decriminalized as they joined the Council of Europe. The European Court of Human Rights also drew attention to the unequal consent laws that were prevalent at the time. Other countries that decriminalized in the '90s include: the Bahamas (1991), Hong Kong (1991), Guinea Bissau (1993), Ireland (1993), Belarus (1994), Kosovo (1994), Serbia (1994), Ecuador (1997), Cyprus (1998), South Africa (1998) and Chile (1999).

However, it was still incredibly dangerous for LGBTQ individuals in many countries. For those living in countries where their sexuality was a matter of life and death, Canada, the United States, and Australia begin to grant refugee status for those seeking asylum.



ORGANIZING & ACTIVISM

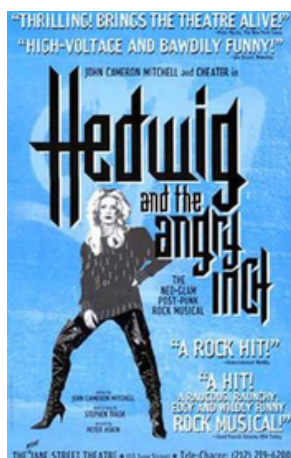


The bisexual pride flag was unveiled in 1998. As with all flags, it isn't just pretty. Michael Page, the designer behind the flag notes that each colour has meaning; the pink represents same-sex attraction, the blue represents opposite-sex attraction, and the purple made where they overlap represents the attraction to "both" sexes (pardon the dated language - sexuality and gender were viewed a little differently at the time!).

The 1990s

CULTURE & COMMUNITY

In terms of media visibility, the 90's were a hotbed. Films like *The Birdcage*, *To Wong Foo Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar!* (yes, that is the whole title!), *Boys Don't Cry*, *The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, *My Own Private Idaho*, *Paris is Burning*, and countless other films were produced in the 1990s. The Millennial comfort watch, *Friends*, featured one of the first televised lesbian weddings in an episode titled *The One With the Lesbian Wedding*. While in 2026 this may seem like very little in terms of representation, this episode was not met without protest when it aired 30 years ago in January of 1996. While this may not have been the first gay wedding to air, it was certainly one of the most visible - *The One With the Lesbian Wedding* had 31.6 million people tuning in to watch Susan and Carol tie the knot. These mainstream cultural moments may seem underwhelming now, but they did the important work of normalizing queer relationships, and without that foundation shows like *Drag Race* or *Heated Rivalry* would never have aired.



The stage was also home to a great many musicals and plays at this time including but not limited to: *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*; *Falsettos*; *Rent*; and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. Theatre provided a space for work that pushed boundaries, and presented relationships and themes that couldn't be shown on screen.

The 2000s

The 2000s saw massive leaps in LGBTQ+ rights around the world and here at home.

LEGAL CHANGES

In this decade, dozens of countries and many US states introduce equal age of consent laws, meaning the age of consent for same-sex and heterosexual acts are the same.

Many countries introduced or expanded anti-discrimination laws to protect individuals based on sexual orientation, and in some places gender identity.

Changes in laws and statutes in many countries, states, and provinces allow individuals the right to change their legal gender, however it is often with caveats - they must have a medical diagnosis, or undergo surgery in order to access this right.

However, while strides were being made around the world, some countries were further restricting the rights of LGBTQ citizens - several African nations (including Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo), as well as European nations (including Kosovo and Latvia), and several US States changed their definitions of marriage to expressly ban same-sex marriages.

In 2003, the US Supreme Court ruled in case of *Lawrence v. Texas* that laws criminalizing sodomy (laws that criminalized specific sexual acts and predominately targeted acts between people of the same sex) were unconstitutional. The decision invalidated sodomy laws across the United States, a massive step for the US Gay Rights Movement.



KEY CANADIAN MOMENTS

April 11, 2000 - Bill C-23 was passed. This federal bill expanded the definition of common-law relationships to include same-sex couples. While marriage was still not attainable, same-sex couples could access the same tax and social benefits.

The 2000s

January 2002 - The North West Territories becomes the first Canadian jurisdiction to add gender identity to its human rights legislation.

June, 2003 - The Ontario Court of Appeals legalized gay marriage in Ontario in their decision that the exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Similar decisions across Canada were made in the following months & years.

July 2005 - Same-sex marriage was legalized across Canada, becoming the 4th nation world-wide to do so on a national level.

June 2009 - Toronto's First Trans March - in response to Toronto Pride's lack of Trans community inclusion, the first Trans March was organized.



CULTURE

RuPaul's Drag Race aired on LogoTV on February 2nd 2009 bringing a broader representation of queer culture to mainstream media.

The show would go on to win multiple Emmy's, spawn spin-offs in multiple countries, and give a platform to drag artists across the world.

The 2010s

The 2010s saw the continuation of legal wins for the LGBTQ community. However, it also saw an increase in anti-trans rhetoric both online and in political spaces. While the LGBTQ+ and its allies celebrated the legalization of gay marriage in the US in 2015, we also continued to fight against drag bans and new pressures from the Far Right.

LEGAL CHANGES

In 2017, Bill C-16 amended the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code to include gender identity and gender expressions as protected grounds.

On November 28, 2017, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau delivered a formal apology in the House of Commons to those who have been harmed by federal legislation, policies and practices that led to the oppression of and discrimination against two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in Canada.

On December 12, 2017, the Ontario government marked November 20th as the official Trans Day of Remembrance. This bill requires the legislature to hold a minute of silence at 10:29 am each year in honour of trans people who have died as a result of anti-trans violence.

On May 23, 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) voted to remove “transgender” from being designated as a mental disorder.

ACADEMICS & CULTURE

On November 6, 2010, Angela James became the first openly gay hockey player, and second black athlete to ever be inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame.



On June 1, 2016, a Pride flag was raised on Parliament Hill in Ottawa for the first time in history.

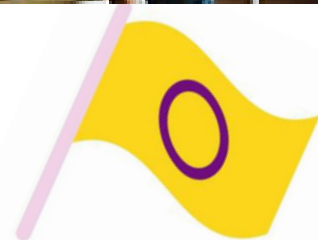
The 2010s

On February 11, 2013, Kathleen Wynne won leadership of the Ontario Liberal Party, making her both Ontario's first female premier and the first openly LGBTQ+ premier.

On May 5, 2015, Estefan Cortes-Vargas (right) was elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, making them the first non-binary politician elected to the Alberta Legislature.



On October 25, 2019, the cities of London and Barrie raised the Intersex flag at city hall for the first time to mark Intersex Awareness Day (October 26).



ORGANIZING & ACTIVISM

Many provinces and territories in Canada hosted their first Pride festivals and marches.

Many of these festivities were in the month of June, but many cities celebrate in other months for various reasons. Fredrickton's first official pride was held on February 8, 2010. The first Pride March in the Yukon was held on August 1, 2012. The Northwest Territories First Pride had events that took place between August 31 and September 3, 2012.

On May 26, 2019, the University of Winnipeg launched the first Two-Spirit archives in Canada. These archives are believed to be the most comprehensive collection of two-spirit materials in Canada, most of which was donated by a two-spirit activist from Winnipeg named Albert McLeod.

On October 29, 2019, hundreds of people gathered outside of the Toronto Public Library to protest the library's allowing an event for a controversial writer with transphobic views. The officials defended their decision, resulting in many authors and queer organizers refusing to do events or engagements at the library. This led to the Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians issuing a statement that the TPL failed to consider the impact their decision had on the further discrimination of the transgender community.