

# GILBERT BAKER

b. June 2, 1951

d. March 31, 2017

## RAINBOW FLAG DESIGNER

*"I love going to cities around the world  
and seeing the rainbow flag."*

**As the self-described  
"gay Betsy Ross," he  
originated the most  
widely recognized  
LGBT symbol today.**

Gilbert Baker was an American artist and LGBT activist best known for creating the rainbow flag. The flag provided a defining symbol for the LGBT civil rights movement and is considered the first and most widely recognized gay symbol today.

Growing up gay in the small rural town of Chanute, Kansas, Baker felt like an outcast. After spending a year in college, he was drafted into the army and served as a medic. He was stationed in San Francisco, where he remained for most of his life.

Baker became friends with Harvey Milk, a gay rights leader and among the first openly gay politicians elected to public office. A member of the San Francisco Board

of Supervisors, Milk asked Baker to create a symbol for the gay rights movement. Baker flew his first rainbow flag at the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade on June 25, 1978, where roughly a quarter of a million marchers participated. Milk was assassinated in November of that year. Following Milk's death, demand for Baker's flag increased dramatically.

With the help of volunteers using trash cans of dye, Baker made his first flag in the attic of the Gay Community Center of San Francisco. The original design included eight stripes: pink for sexuality, red for life, orange for healing, yellow for the sun, green for nature, turquoise for magic, blue for peace and purple for the human spirit.

Many years and flags later, the self-described "gay Betsy Ross" spent months creating a 30-foot wide, mile-long flag featuring just six colors of the rainbow. Commissioned in 1994 for the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, it was hoisted by thousands of New York City marchers. The Guinness Book of World Records officially declared it the largest flag in the world.

In 2003 Baker was the subject of a feature-length documentary, "Rainbow Pride." He was interviewed for the DVD of the 2008 Academy Award-winning film "Milk," and he was featured in Dustin Lance Black's 2017 documentary series about LGBT rights, "When We Rise."

In 2015 the Museum of Modern Art listed the rainbow flag as one of the most important symbols globally. It continues to fly at gay marches and events around the world.

Baker died at age 65. The New York Times published his obituary.



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