

# PAT PARKER

b. January 20, 1944

d. June 17, 1989

## POET & ACTIVIST

*“After my first relationship with a woman, I knew where I was going.”*

**She was a Black lesbian poet and activist who used her writing to further the causes of racial and gender equality.**

Pat Parker was a Black lesbian feminist poet and activist. Her identity and life traumas, including poverty, assault, and the murder of her sister, fueled her writing and her quest for social justice and equality.

Parker (née Patricia Cooks) was born and raised in Houston, Texas. Her mother was a domestic worker and her father retreaded tires. Her childhood was marred by poverty and sexual assault. At 17, Parker moved to California where she attended Los Angeles City College and then San Francisco State College, where she studied creative writing. She never earned a degree.

Aged 18, Parker married the playwright Ed Bullins, who physically abused her. After she became pregnant, he pushed her down the stairs and she miscarried. They

divorced, and she quickly married again, this time to the writer and publisher Robert F. Parker.

Although she had been writing for years, Parker performed her poetry for the first time publicly in 1963. Thereafter, she traveled to various feminist venues, where she continued to present her work. She developed close friendships with her contemporaries, including Audre Lorde. Parker's work became influential in the Black, gay, and feminist movements, and their intersections.

During the 1960s, Parker joined the Black Panthers, a militant Black power party founded in Oakland, California. She soon decided marriage was not for her and divorced her second husband. By the late '60s, she had begun to identify as a lesbian. Experiencing newfound freedom, Parker moved to Oakland to focus more on her writing and activism.

The 1970s and '80s were especially productive for Parker. She joined the Women's Press Collective, published five books of her own work, and contributed to numerous anthologies. She started the Black Women's Revolutionary Council in 1980, and from 1978 to 1988, she served as the executive director and medical coordinator of the Oakland Feminist Women's Health Center.

A lifelong champion of civil rights, women's rights, and LGBTQ rights, Parker continued her activism and writing until her death at 45 from breast cancer. She was survived by her partner, Marty Dunham, and two daughters.

Pat Parker Place, a Chicago community center; the Pat Parker/Vito Russo Center (LGBTQ+) Library; and the Pat Parker Poetry Award, presented annually to a Black lesbian poet, were established in her honor. Parker was among the inaugural 50 Americans whose names appear on the National LGBTQ Wall of Honor at the Stonewall National Monument.



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