



The SAGE Encyclopedia of Trans Studies

Trans Pride Flag

Contributors: **Author:**Genny Beemyn & Monica F. Helms

Edited by: Abbie E. Goldberg & Genny Beemyn

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The Trans Pride Flag was developed for trans people to have a specific image to represent themselves, similar to how the LGBTQIA+ community in general is symbolized by the Rainbow Flag. Over the past 20 years, the flag has been widely adopted, such that it is commonly seen at LGBTQIA+ and trans events, on a vast array of trans-themed merchandise, and in media coverage of trans people. Having a flag of their own has been critical to increasing the visibility of trans communities and to helping trans people feel included and recognized. The flag has also served as a unifying symbol, as it has been adopted by trans people around the world.

The Flag's Origins

The most popular version of the Trans Pride Flag was developed by U.S. trans activist Monica Helms in 1999. She was urged to create it by Michael Page, who had designed the Bisexual Pride Flag and felt that the trans community likewise needed to be represented by its own flag. She came up with a flag consisting of five horizontal stripes of equal width: light blue stripes on the top and bottom, pink stripes next to them, and a white stripe in the middle. Helms chose these colors because light blue is traditionally associated with boys and masculinity and pink with girls and femininity. The white stripe stands for nonbinary trans people. Helms also chose to design the flag to be horizontally symmetrical, saying in an article in ThinkProgress that “no matter which way you fly it, it is always correct, signifying us finding correctness in our lives.”

Figure 1 Monica F. Helms With the Trans Pride Flag



Source: Courtesy of Monica F. Helms. Photo by Mara Kiesling.

Displaying the Flag

Helms, who lived in Phoenix, Arizona, at the time, debuted the Trans Pride Flag at the Phoenix Pride Parade in 2000, where she carried it as part of the color guard, as Helms is a Navy veteran. She subsequently took the flag to other LGBTQIA+ parades, conferences, and events, and it gradually started to be adopted by other trans people and groups. The flag began to be extensively used at Transgender Day of Remembrance events and pride parades around the world in the late 2000s, as it became a way to visually symbolize the trans

community. The flag also appears widely today at International Transgender Day of Visibility events and other trans awareness activities.

Some U.S. state and federal officials have displayed the Trans Pride Flag to indicate their support for trans rights. The Philadelphia Mayor's Office began raising the flag over its city hall in 2015 to mark the opening of the Philadelphia Trans Wellness Conference, and California Governor Gavin Newsom ordered the flag to be flown from the state capitol in 2019 in honor of the Transgender Day of Remembrance. Other U.S. cities that have raised the flag to mark trans events include San Diego, San Francisco, and Salem, Massachusetts. Members of Congress have also hung the flag outside of their Capitol Hill offices in solidarity with trans people, beginning in 2019 with then newly elected Representative Jennifer Wexton from Virginia. For the International Transgender Day of Visibility in 2019, several dozen legislators, including 2016 and 2020 presidential candidate Bernie Sanders and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, displayed Trans Pride Flags, which were provided to all members of Congress by the National Center for Transgender Equality.

On August 19, 2014, exactly 15 years after she came up with the idea for a Trans Pride Flag, Helms donated the original flag to the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History to be part of its LGBTQ+ history collection. Discussing the importance of the flag being acquired by the federally run museum, Helms stated to ThinkProgress, "It tells the world that trans people are part of this country" and that "we deserve to be recognized, and our history needs to be displayed like everyone else's." Along with being shown at the museum, the flag was included in a Smithsonian exhibit at the White House for the Obama administration's celebration of Pride Month in 2016. Another honor was the approval of a trans flag emoji in 2020 by the Unicode Consortium, the organization that oversees the creation of new emojis.

Significance of the Flag

The importance of having a trans flag is indicated by how quickly and widely the Trans Pride Flag has been adopted by trans communities and the larger society. For the unprecedented number of younger people who are out as trans today, the flag provides a sense of empowerment and community and a way to communicate their identity to others. For trans individuals who are not out or who are struggling with being trans, the flag offers a sense of belonging and enables them to feel less isolated; they may not feel comfortable being involved with the trans community, but they can benefit from knowing that there are trans people who are open and proud of their gender identity. The flag also brings visibility and legitimacy to the trans community. Just as the Rainbow Flag has become almost universally known as a symbol of LGBTQIA+ communities, the Trans Pride Flag is increasingly recognized internationally as an emblem for trans people. Its growing prominence helps raise awareness of trans communities and, with it, hopefully greater acceptance.

Genny Beemyn and Monica F. Helms

See also [Activism](#); [International Transgender Day of Visibility](#); [Transgender Day of Remembrance](#)

Further Readings

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