



Coming Out

LIVING AUTHENTICALLY

as **Black LGBTQ People**



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN
FOUNDATION

To access this resource online, please visit:

hrc.im/BlackLGBTQComingOut

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Introduction



No matter who we are
or whom we love, we all
deserve the right to live
out our lives genuinely,
completely and honestly.

We all deserve the right to live our lives genuinely, completely and honestly. Race, ethnicity, language, religion, culture, gender expression, sexual orientation and gender identity should never be barriers to us living our full lives. For lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people, coming out is often a significant part of reclaiming this right and living in our identity publicly.

For those who identify as Black LGBTQ people, the coming out process can be complex to navigate. This resource is designed for those embarking on their own coming out journey in the United States at the intersections of LGBTQ and Black identities.

This guide aims to recognize the unique experiences Black LGBTQ people have in coming out, while understanding that coming out is a personal choice and the lifelong coming out experience is different for everyone. In addition, this guide recognizes that Black communities are no more homophobic than white and other non-Black communities, even though they may be called out as such in politics and mainstream culture.

We hope that it can provide you and your loved ones with ideas, advice, education and support during this process.

A note on the use of Queer


Throughout this document, the word “**queer**” is used as an umbrella term for non-heterosexual identities. While the term “queer” has been used as a slur, in recent years it has become a word of empowerment.

Notes on Language Use



People use varying language to refer to their ethnic or racial identity, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression. Language is contextual, dynamic and powerful — influenced by culture, history and oppression throughout time. Although this document often uses the words **Black and LGBTQ**, we acknowledge that these terms may not be widely used or resonate within certain communities. This document uses LGBTQ as a general term and we recognize it is important to include the experiences and identities of those who identify as **same gender loving, men who have sex with men**, and many other ways people view and experience their gender and sexuality. This document also uses the word Black as an umbrella term to reflect the lived experiences of diverse races, ethnicities and histories in the United States that are part of the African diaspora. However, we recognize that many specific ethnicities, communities and identities may not be fully represented by these terms.

**COMING
OUT IS A
PERSONAL
CHOICE**



Before coming out, it is important to evaluate your unique circumstances and create a safe space for yourself. Look for supportive people you can turn to during times of need, especially if you believe you may face disapproval or rejection from your family, friends or community. Depending on your individual situation, pick a place and time to come out that makes you feel the most comfortable and safe.

Be aware that LGBTQ people who live openly face discrimination and even violence. This is especially true for Black LGBTQ people who face increased discrimination at the intersection of white supremacy, anti-Blackness and anti-LGBTQ attitudes. These systems of oppression have real consequences: Black LGBTQ people face some of the highest risks of violence, workplace discrimination, homelessness, HIV and AIDS, and healthcare disparities and mistreatment in America.

A note on the use of White Supremacy

When we discuss **white supremacy**, we are referring to an intentionally created and historically maintained political, social and economic system in which white people, both individually and collectively, are able to control power and resources and maintain conscious and/or unconscious beliefs about their superiority.¹

Coming out is a process by which you should feel more comfortable as you transition from living privately or discretely to publicly in your identity — and there is no one way to do it. Some LGBTQ people choose to only come out to certain people in their lives, while others do so to everyone. Coming out as LGBTQ should be done on your terms and at your pace. No matter what your journey looks like, seek out resources and support from those who affirm your identity.

Remember, you are not alone:

Across the United States, the strong community of Black LGBTQ people, family members and allies support you and love you exactly as you are.

Black LGBTQ people live proudly, openly and powerfully, with myriad contributions in business, social justice, government, sports, the arts and entertainment.

We hope that the stories of courage and authenticity shared in this resource can inspire you and provide strength and perseverance should you face roadblocks during your journey. Refer to our special section on [Black LGBTQ History and Culture](#) to learn more about the community's proud heritage.

“Coming Out” vs. “Inviting In”




“Coming out” has been the common term for someone who acknowledges being LGBTQ and it is used throughout this resource. However, it is important to note that this language centers the persons we are coming out to rather than us. It gives the impression that people who don’t identify as cisgender or heterosexual are hiding something from society, rather than acknowledging how homophobia and transphobia create an unwelcoming environment. When publicly identifying as LGBTQ, you are inviting people in to a part of your life that should be protected and celebrated. You are not asking for permission to be you. You control the narrative, as well as who and what you allow into your life.

Coming Out for Black LGBTQ People



Although Black people come from various cultural, regional and ethnic backgrounds, those who come out as LGBTQ often share similar experiences and challenges.



Some who were raised in religious communities must reconcile with traditions and teachings that may condemn or reject LGBTQ identities. Others must grapple with multicultural identities, experiences and institutions within the Black community that operate under anti-queer policy and practice. A lack of Black LGBTQ representation in media, entertainment and politics perpetuates invisibility. However, hypervisibility can also make Black LGBTQ people vulnerable, as shown by the high levels of fatal violence experienced by Black trans women. Atop these experiences, the Black community must contend with the realities of systemic racism and anti-Blackness that influence all facets of their daily lives — including their LGBTQ identities.

After coming out, some LGBTQ people report that they are able to better communicate with their family and friends, leading to stronger relationships and greater mutual understanding. The following sections discuss common issues that arise during the coming out process for those who are both LGBTQ and Black.



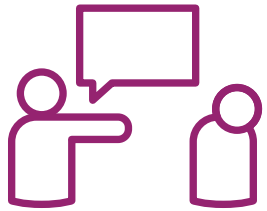
Coming Out to Family



Coming out to family can be difficult for many LGBTQ people, but it can pose additional challenges for those with family members who hold attitudes or beliefs that set rigid norms for gender expression, sexuality and relationships.

In 2017, the Human Rights Campaign Foundation partnered with researchers at the University of Connecticut to conduct a groundbreaking survey of over 12,000 LGBTQ youth and capture their experiences in their families, schools, social circles and communities.

Of the more than 1,600 Black LGBTQ youth who responded to the survey...



47%

have been
**taunted or
mocked by
family for
being LGBTQ**

Only
19%

say they can
**“definitely” be
themselves at
home**

Only
26%

have had **family
get involved** in
the larger **LGBTQ
community**

Examples could include
attending pride events,
advocating for LGBTQ
inclusion in their workplaces,
or learning about LGBTQ
identities and experiences

59%

say their **families make them feel bad because of their LGBTQ identity,**
including...


67%
of transgender and
gender-expansive youth

55%
of cisgender LGBTQ youth

A note on the use of cisgender

Cisgender is a term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.

We use both transgender and gender-expansive to describe all non-cisgender respondents because every person defines their identity differently. For example, some non-binary people identify as transgender, but not all do.



Coming out announcements can be uncomfortable and even scary for all parties involved. Before bringing this news to relatives more widely, you may consider identifying a trusted family member or friend to help you navigate these difficult conversations.

Though LGBTQ visibility and legal recognition has seen encouraging developments throughout the United States, LGBTQ people **around the world** still face stigma, discrimination and even violence in many communities and across racial groups — as homophobia and transphobia are not exclusive to Black communities.

It's important to know that your LGBTQ identity should not be a cause of shame or pain. Pain comes from the prejudices around you, not from who you are or whom you love.

Reactions Family Members May Have



Some family members may embrace your news immediately, while others may require time to work through concerns or fears they have regarding the unfamiliar or unknown. Others may never accept it. Regardless of their reaction, it is important that you are prepared, supported and safe.

Unfortunately, the lack of familiarity and exposure to LGBTQ people may lead some family members to mistakenly believe that being LGBTQ is wrong or invalid. Embracing a child's or relative's LGBTQ identity can be challenging for those raised in places, religions or cultures that supported homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, or where information about LGBTQ identities was less widely available. Language or cultural barriers can also make it challenging to directly discuss or even translate language related to LGBTQ identities and experiences.


Some facts:



Parents cannot and do not “turn” their children LGBTQ because of parenting mistakes. There are no known environmental factors that “cause” a person to be LGBTQ.

LGBTQ people do not choose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Many LGBTQ people become aware of it at a young age.

LGBTQ people live successful, happy and healthy lives — especially when they are embraced for who they are and whom they love.



Another common reaction that family members may have is fear. Some family members who you might have assumed were supportive of LGBTQ people may seem cold when you share your LGBTQ identity with them. They may be afraid that you will suffer and be mistreated as a result of who you are or they may act irrationally toward you. In the case of an irrational reaction, remember that your safety comes first. In instances where there is space for learning and dialogue, remind your family members that supporting you and providing a safe haven is the greatest gift they can give in the face of prejudice and challenges.


When considering if, when or how to come out to your family members, consider the full range of reactions that could arise from your LGBTQ identity being disclosed, especially if you are financially dependent on any of them. Most importantly, remember that your LGBTQ identity is valid, regardless of your family's understanding or acceptance.



Supporting Family Members in their Process




Just as you are on a coming out journey, your family members may take their own journey in learning your truth.



You can help them through this process by directing them to educational resources about LGBTQ identities, including sources that help with overcoming myths and misconceptions.

It is also important to note that many resources focused on family acceptance often predominantly or exclusively feature white stories, leaving out crucial perspectives and considerations for Black LGBTQ people. This can make it challenging to share relevant information with the people in your life. However, there are organizations doing meaningful and powerful work to support Black LGBTQ families — some of these resources can be found in the [Additional Resources](#) section of this document.



During this sensitive time, stay strong and acknowledge the feelings of your family members, but understand that disrespect is not something you have to accept. Remember to acknowledge, honor and assert your own feelings as well. Over time, it is quite common for family members to move from feelings of disappointment and confusion, to simple tolerance, to understanding, and finally to acceptance and love.

Many parents move beyond acceptance to fully embrace and celebrate their LGBTQ children, both in public and private.

Black LGBTQ Immigrants



The immigrant experience is intricately tied with the lived experiences of many Black LGBTQ people.

Today, there are at least

4.2 million
Black immigrants

living in the United States

nearly

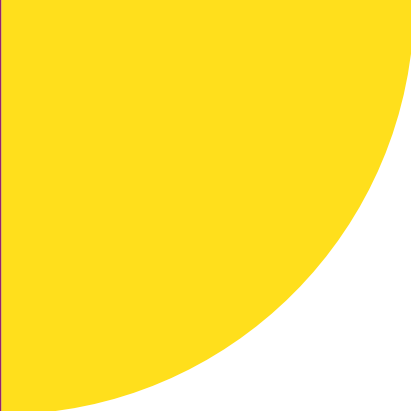
1 in 10

Black residents of
the United States
were born outside
of the country

roughly

half

of this population are
from the Caribbean,
with the largest proportions
of those migrants coming
from Jamaica and Haiti



Africans make up 39% of the Black population born outside of the United States. Some people also identify as Afro-Latinx, an identity most often representing Latin Americans with significant African ancestry. One quarter of all Latinx in the United States self-identify as Afro-Latinx, Afro-Caribbean or of African descent with roots in Latin America.

Some Black LGBTQ immigrants in the United States come from countries that may be less accepting or even intolerant of LGBTQ people. In some countries, LGBTQ identities are criminalized. Thankfully, there are activists and organizations across the globe challenging systems that censor, invalidate, incarcerate or even physically harm LGBTQ people.

About Forced Migration and Enslavement



Between 1502 and 1888, at least **12 million** Africans were forcibly migrated to the Americas, with about half a million taken to North America. The impact of this forced migration, enslavement and oppression can be observed today in virtually all of our systems and institutions. It is important to recognize that this impact and generational trauma can also intersect with the expression and exploration of LGBTQ identities among many folks in Black communities.

Black and African American LGBTQ people have existed throughout all time periods. However, most narratives about LGBTQ life in the United States **exclude** depictions and perspectives of Black LGBTQ people who experienced forced migration and enslavement. As more diverse historical narratives are revealed, it is important to remember that LGBTQ people have a place in the past, present and future of Black communities.

Terms like **“forcibly migrated”** and **“immigrant”** are often used in research data. Their use in this section is not intended to diminish enslavement in any way or to compare people who came through the traditional immigration process with those who were enslaved.

Throughout the history of the United States, various administrations and politicians have used inflammatory rhetoric, abolished important immigrant protections, and committed other anti-immigrant actions that have attacked the well-being and dignity of thousands of LGBTQ immigrants regardless of their immigration status or country of birth. In the face of these attacks, remember that **no one can make you any less American, Black, LGBTQ or any other identity you may hold. More importantly, no one can ever make you any less deserving of love and respect.** You are part of a supportive and affirmative community of millions of Black LGBTQ people and allies who will continue fighting with and for you.

For Black LGBTQ immigrants in the United States:



Coming out as LGBTQ should not increase one's chances of facing deportation or visa revocation*

It may be possible to obtain political asylum if LGBTQ people are persecuted in a person's country of origin*

LGBTQ immigrants, whether undocumented or documented, who fall in love with American citizens can legally marry, and U.S. citizens can petition for their spouses to remain in the United States and become citizens themselves*


***Consult with an attorney**

In all instances where immigration status is a consideration, it is important to consult with an attorney so you know your rights.

Multiculturalism and Code-Switching



Many Black people are living in a multicultural world, grappling with the norms and expectations of Black cultures, white American society, and the culture of their country of origin or descent.



Determining when, if and how to work through these overlapping realities — especially if they seem to conflict — can be challenging.

Though it is impossible to separate your identities — you are always whole — it may seem like you need to lean more or less into certain identities based on your context, safety and comfort. This is often referred to as **code-switching**, or contextually altering your behavior, speech or expression in order to protect yourself from discriminatory outcomes. Code-switching describes the use of different dialects, accents, language combinations and mannerisms within social groups in order to project a particular identity.

It's important to remember that how you live should not be defined by others' beliefs about how you “should” or “should not” behave based on your gender identity and/or sexual orientation. Depending on your situation, this may be difficult to manage if such beliefs are reinforced by your family, peers or community. However, you will likely find that it gets easier to navigate these interactions over time, especially as you gain a greater sense of self and better understand what values are truly important to you.

Your **intersectional identity*** can mean speaking multiple languages and engaging in cross-cultural communication, being both Black and LGBTQ, or code-switching. Expressing your sexual orientation or gender identity is difficult for many people, especially when they are first coming out. Conveying these complex feelings and emotions across cultural or language barriers can be even more challenging.

* “**intersectional identity**” is explained on the following page

When faced with challenges arising from living with multiple identities, consider the following suggestions:



Seek out LGBTQ-affirming resources more specific to your culture, language or history.

Get assistance from supportive loved ones who can help translate or facilitate difficult conversations across languages.

Look for LGBTQ-affirming stories and media specific to your community, native language, or country of heritage or origin. Culturally specific movies, TV shows, online videos and other media featuring LGBTQ people are increasingly accessible in the digital era.

Read the stories of Black LGBTQ people and other LGBTQ people of color who learned how to navigate their own multicultural identities.

Find community with other LGBTQ people or allies of a similar background through in-person support groups, organizations like the ones listed at the end of this guide and online communities.

Just as there is no singular Black experience, there is no single way to live out your own identity. The lack of visibility of prominent Black LGBTQ figures can sometimes make you feel like you are not reflected in the world. Even within Black LGBTQ communities, there is much work to be done to embrace the wide diversity of the Black community, including addressing the colorism and internalized homophobia, biphobia and transphobia that impacts many members of our community.

Above all, know that there is no specific Black “mold” you have to fit, even as you may feel pressure from your family or community. Being LGBTQ does not make you any “less” Black, or any “less” of any other national heritage, ethnic or racial identity you may hold. **Your Blackness cannot be earned or diminished — it will always be a part of you, no matter what language you speak, who you are or whom you love.**


Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Black American lawyer, civil rights advocate and leading scholar of critical race theory, to capture the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism and classism) combine, overlap or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups. It is also often used to refer to the ways in which we hold multiple, intersecting identities at once (e.g., being a second-generation Nigerian-American, non-binary person).



Reconciling Religion & Faith


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Religion plays a significant role in the lives of many people in Black communities.



Over 75% of Black Americans say that religion is very important to them and 73% pray daily. About 79% of adult Black Americans identify as Christian, including Historically Black Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Catholic and others. In addition, there are many Black people who practice Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, many other forms of religion and spirituality, and atheism.

More than half of Black people in the United States belong to a Historically Black Protestant faith. The historically Black church has long served as a unifying force for many Black people in the United States, functioning both as a place of catharsis and hope dating back to enslavement, and as a place of mobilization and political power. However, it has also served as a place of trauma for many Black LGBTQ people.

A large yellow circular graphic is positioned in the top-left corner of the page, partially cut off by the edge.

It may feel difficult to reconcile religious beliefs with your LGBTQ identity. However, millions of LGBTQ people are people of faith and many religious communities and denominations that were once non-affirming now recognize that embracing LGBTQ people is in line with the strong religious and spiritual values of compassion, love and the commitment to treat others how they would like to be treated. The number of LGBTQ-affirming religious communities across the country is steadily increasing.

It is important to recognize that even if you are able to reconcile your faith and LGBTQ identity, your family or community may still have difficulty accepting your sexual orientation or gender identity because of their own religious beliefs or traditions.

## **As you approach this topic individually or come out to your family and friends of faith, consider the following suggestions:**

Identify supportive and allied members in your existing religious community who may be able to provide assistance should you decide to come out.

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Read the stories or writings of other Black LGBTQ people and allies from your same denomination or ethnic heritage to learn from their faith journeys.

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Explore LGBTQ-affirming places of worship and congregations.

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Seek support from Black LGBTQ religious organizations that may be able to direct you to others who have had similar experiences.

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Explore spirituality and faith outside of traditional religions.

**For more information on this topic, please refer to [HRC's Religion & Faith resources](#).**

# Other Coming Out Considerations



**Coming Out at School**

**Coming Out at Work**

**Allyship and Advocacy**



# Coming Out at School

**Coming out at school can be a significant decision for people of all ages**, especially in communities or on campuses where LGBTQ people are not yet fully or openly embraced. Many school districts, colleges and universities actively and openly support their LGBTQ students, faculty and staff. Unfortunately, many schools are also unsafe for LGBTQ students — and bullying can be pervasive.

## **Before deciding to come out at school, consider:**

- Does your city, state, school district or university have inclusive non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies to protect LGBTQ students, faculty and staff?
- If you are not fully out in your community or to your family, can your physical safety and privacy be guaranteed if you are out at school? Students who rely on family members for financial support may need to carefully weigh their specific circumstances when coming out.
- Who are the classmates, teachers, counselors and other adults at school whom you can trust and can go to for support during your coming out process?
- Does your school have a dedicated safe space or LGBTQ-affirming organizations, such as a Queer Straight Alliance, LGBTQ resource center, or organizations that serve Black LGBTQ communities?

# Of the more than 1,600 Black LGBTQ youth who responded to HRC's 2017 Youth Survey...



Even if your school is relatively LGBTQ inclusive, it is still important to consider the ways in which homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, racism and anti-Blackness may be institutionalized into your program. Things like increased police presence or bias-ridden disciplinary policies contribute to the School to Prison Pipeline, which disproportionately and unfairly pushes LGBTQ youth of color out of school and into disciplinary settings. Furthermore, racial biases, pressure to perform, tokenism, Eurocentric education and a lack of support make it challenging for Black LGBTQ people to thrive on campuses across the country.

It is important to identify spaces, educators, and peers within or around your educational system that provide you the space to live in your identity. This could be a club, class, organization, group of friends or a single teacher. Having an educational environment where you know that your racial, ethnic and LGBTQ identity is affirmed can make a huge difference in your safety and well-being. But always remember: coming out at school should be your own personal decision made at your own pace and should never threaten your safety.

For more information about this topic, please refer to Lambda Legal's [Know Your Rights](#) for LGBTQ students.

**For more information and to get connected to other Black LGBTQ campus leaders, check out [HRC'S HBCU program](#). You can also find LGBTQ-affirming resources that reflect a commitment to educating and advancing racial justice through [HRC's Welcoming Schools Resources](#).**

# Coming Out at Work

**Just as in other facets of life, being open at work can be a daunting challenge.** This is especially true for Black LGBTQ people — research details the magnified negative impact of both racism and anti-LGBTQ attitudes on Black LGBTQ workers. Black LGBTQ people face some of the highest rates of unwarranted background checks, hiring biases, unequal pay, lack of mentorship and advancement, workplace discrimination and harassment on the job.

No one wants to put their job security, economic stability or opportunity for advancement in jeopardy. However, if it's at all a possibility for you, coming out can relieve some of the daily stress of hiding who you are.

## **Before choosing to come out at work, consider:**

- Does your employer have a formal non-discrimination policy that specifically covers race, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression? Check the official Equal Employment Opportunity statement (usually found on company websites and in employee handbooks) to ensure that the non-discrimination policy covers all your identities.
- Does your state or locality have a non-discrimination law that includes sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression?

- Is your company ranked on the HRC Corporate Equality Index? If so, what rating has it earned?
- Are your employer's health benefits fully LGBTQ-inclusive, including covering transition-related health care and domestic partner benefits?
- Does your employer have LGBTQ or Black employee networks or resource groups? If so, these may be good places to get support.
- What is the overall climate in your workplace, including whether other LGBTQ people are out and how co-workers talk about LGBTQ people?
- What is the overall climate in your workplace regarding representation in leadership positions and in the workforce? How do others talk about the Black community and Black individuals?

For more information about this topic, please refer to HRC's Coming Out at Work and Workplace Equality resources.



## Allyship and Advocacy

Ally is a verb, not a noun. Being an ally or advocate to any oppressed community means actively showing up, giving support and educating those around you without the expectation of receiving something in return. Advocacy and allyship go hand in hand.

We all have a critical role to play in dismantling the systems of oppression that continue to actively and passively discriminate against Black LGBTQ people in all areas of life.

Allies can help people coming out feel safe by researching and sharing culturally competent, linguistically appropriate resources, making introductions to others who are LGBTQ allies, and speaking up when others make anti-LGBTQ jokes and gender assumptions. However, be aware that each person must make their own decisions about how and when to come out about their LGBTQ identity. No one should share that information for anyone else unless asked explicitly to do so.

Anyone can be an advocate for LGBTQ equality and fairness. Speak out, share information and educate others, especially those for whom LGBTQ identities may be unfamiliar.

Do not assume that just because a space is said to be LGBTQ-inclusive, it is inclusive of all LGBTQ people. Homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, white supremacy, racism and anti-Blackness manifest in various ways within LGBTQ communities, spaces and organizations. We all must draw attention to and educate others about the micro and macro ways in which racism, discrimination and double standards present for Black LGBTQ people. To learn more about how you can get involved, visit HRC's [ally](#) resources.

**“I believe that telling our stories, first to ourselves and then to one another and the world, is a revolutionary act. It is an act that can be met with hostility, exclusion, and violence. It can also lead to love, understanding, transcendence, and community.”**

— **Janet Mock**, a Black transgender rights activist, author and TV host, in her book *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More*





# At the Intersections of Race and the LGBTQ Community



Racial discrimination  
continues to be a pervasive  
issue in our society.

The LGBTQ community is not untouched by racism, and as you seek love, understanding and equity there may be times where you have to confront that reality. You may feel at home in your Black identity, but uncomfortable expressing your sexual orientation or gender identity, or vice versa. There is ample work to be done by all communities to fully embrace intersectional and interwoven identities and experiences.

If you choose to come out and live publicly in your identity, you may find it helpful to surround yourself with others who recognize and affirm all of who you are, including both your Black and LGBTQ identities. Many LGBTQ people, including those who may not find full support among their families or communities of heritage, find love and support from “chosen family” who fully embrace them for who they are.

## **Most importantly, know that you are not alone.**

Far beyond the proud community of Black LGBTQ people, there are many who support you and will accept you for who you are.

# Black LGBTQ History and Culture



African queer heritage existed before colonization in many shapes, forms and experiences. Countless artifacts and oral histories reveal that LGBTQ identities and experiences existed in Africa throughout human history.



**Many different cultures have long documented same-sex interactions and gender-expansive traditions, including:**

In **Nigeria**, the *Yan Daudu* were individuals assigned male at birth who dressed in traditionally feminine garb and were accepted in northern Muslim regions.

In **Kenya**, the *Meru* had a leadership role called *Mugawe* which included wearing clothing and hairstyles typically reserved for women and could include formal marriage to a man. Similar roles existed among the Hutu and Tutsi peoples of Burundi and Rwanda.

The Dutch military met Nzinga in 1640, who succeeded her brother as the ngola, or “king.” She dressed in king’s garments and was referred to as King in what is present day **Angola**.

**Senegalese** *Gor Digen* were a group of individuals assigned male at birth who dressed as women and were viewed as a crucial part of the community.

In **Burkina Faso**, the *Dagaaba* people believed that men who had sex with men were able to bridge the human and spirit worlds through meditation.

In **Egypt**, the *Khawal* were individuals assigned male at birth who dressed in traditionally feminine clothing to entertain people with songs and dance.

There are **5,000-year-old** Indigenous Bushman works of art on southern African rocks and cave walls that depict same-sex intimacy between men.

In Southern **Ethiopia**, the *Maale* people documented a small group of men protected by the king who carried out traditionally feminine roles and tasks, and had sexual relationships with men.

In **Uganda**, there were highly-respected religious roles where those assigned male at birth dressed in traditionally feminine clothing.

Some of these communities, traditions and roles are still present in many parts of Africa today. However, colonization had a large negative effect on the expression of sexuality and gender in many parts of Africa, particularly through the criminalization of same-sex intimacy and relations.

Roles, communities and expressions that were once well-known and respected may now seem to conflict with the modern misconception that queerness and gender-expansiveness are “not African.”

**In reality, queerness is inextricably tied to Blackness and African culture and history—it is an integral part of the past, present and future.**

# LGBTQ Progress in the 21st Century



LGBTQ equality has seen forward momentum in recent years in African, Caribbean and Afro-Latinx countries, led by the courage and persistence of local activists and allies, even in countries where LGBTQ people are still ostracized or persecuted.



In 2018, a Trinidad and Tobago judge ruled the nation's colonial-era laws banning sex between two persons of the same gender was unconstitutional. This sets a precedent for similar advances in many other Caribbean nations. In addition, several African countries like Lesotho, São Tomé and Príncipe, Mozambique, the Seychelles, and Angola have abolished similar laws.

Black and Afro-Latinx leaders are also championing progress in governments and offices across the world. In some countries, LGBTQ rights and acceptance have progressed even further, or more quickly, than in the United States. For example, South Africa is often seen as a leader in LGBTQ rights throughout Africa. Beginning in the early 2000s, South Africa legalized same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples. Anti-discrimination laws there also ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

# Contemporary Black LGBTQ Leaders



Today, we celebrate the myriad of stories and contributions of Black LGBTQ people who continue to provide leadership, visibility and pride to their diverse communities.

Below we highlight a few Black LGBTQ leaders and figures. This list is by no means exhaustive — there are countless leaders around the world doing important work for Black LGBTQ people every single day.

Activists and Advocates like Marsha P. Johnson and Miss Major Griffin-Gracy have been recognized worldwide as the leaders of the [Stonewall Riots](#). The 1969 riots against the anti-queer New York Police Department were a milestone in the modern LGBTQ movement. Led by Black transgender women, queer men and women, and gender non-conforming people, these five days of rioting are an important part of both Black and LGBTQ history. Similar acts of resistance — at Compton Cafeteria and Black Cat — were also famous moments of history.

More recently, the [Black Lives Matter movement](#) against police brutality, racism and anti-Blackness was started by three Black and Brown queer women — Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi and Alicia Garza. Dubbed as the modern day civil rights movement, Black Lives Matter has helped to create structural changes and policies across the United States and galvanized marginalized people to fight for their rights from an intersectional feminist lens that is inclusive of Black LGBTQ people.

Black LGBTQ people throughout history have contributed to media, the arts, sports, activism, advocacy and politics. Their advancements enhance the lives and existence of LGBTQ people everywhere.


**“I feel like visibility and representation...create change. It’s when we are visible that we have the power to create empathy.”**

— **Billy Porter**, Actor and Performer

# Black LGBTQ Stories in Film and Television




Although Black LGBTQ people are often underrepresented in mass media and entertainment, trailblazing artists continue to pave the way and share their stories.



Films like ***The Color Purple, The Watermelon Woman, Tongues United, Paris Is Burning, Set It Off*** and ***Young Soul Rebels*** were instrumental in depicting parts of Black LGBTQ identities, experiences and truths in the 1980s and 1990s. The 1990s were neither the beginning nor the end of Black LGBTQ visibility in film, and recent years have provided us with films such as ***Blackbird, Tangerine, Pariah, I am Not Your Negro, The Skinny, Bessie, Naz & Maalik, Kiki, Brother to Brother*** and ***Punks***. In 2017, ***Moonlight*** won the Academy Award for Best Picture.

More and more television shows are featuring Black LGBTQ characters and storylines. Shows like ***Sense8, Dear White People, Chilling Adventures of Sabrina, True Blood, Master of None, Orange Is the New Black, Pretty Little Liars, Empire, The L Word, Arrow, Queen Sugar, Noah's Arc, Pose, The Handmaid's Tale, Looking, Cucumber, Glee, Six Feet Under, Black Mirror,***



***RuPaul's Drag Race, Sex Education, The Wire, Black Lighting, The Bold Type, UnREAL, This Is Us, Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Shameless, The Fosters, Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt, Queer Eye*** and ***Riverdale*** feature Black LGBTQ talent, characters, storylines and experiences.

Recently, Janet Mock became the first transgender woman to sign an overall deal with Netflix to write and direct content. ***Pose*** was also the first show to have a predominantly Black transgender and queer cast on network television.

Black LGBTQ people have been trailblazers in film and television, telling narratives that have always existed but have never been told. It's important that the next generation of Black LGBTQ creatives continue to have this space to grow and expand in storytelling until their stories are the norm and not the exception.

# Additional Resources

Educate and empower yourself and others.  
Support and resources are available.

The list below is in no way comprehensive of the vast number of organizations ready to support you. However, they may provide you with a good place to start.

## Northeast

[Gay Men of African Descent](#)

New York

[African American Office of Gay Concerns](#)

New Jersey

[Hispanic Black Gay Coalition](#)

Massachusetts

[Blacklight](#)

Washington, DC Metro Area

[QPOC Affinity](#)

Connecticut

[FIERCE](#)

New York

[Princess Janae Place](#)

New York

[Trans Women of Color Collective](#)

New York

[Ali Forney Center](#)

New York

[Trans Masculine Advocacy Network](#)

Pennsylvania

[Elements](#)

Pennsylvania

## South

[In The Life Atlanta](#)

Georgia

[SPARK](#)

Georgia

[Black TransMen Inc.](#)

Texas

[Bros In Convo](#)

Florida

[South Carolina Black Pride](#)

South Carolina



[Nashville Black Pride](#)

Tennessee

[Southerners On New Ground \(SONG\)](#)

Georgia

[Queer People of Color Collective](#)

North Carolina

[Southern Vision Alliance](#)

North Carolina

[AllGo](#)

Texas

## **Midwest**

[Civil Rights and Social Justice Advocacy for African-American Same Gender Loving Black](#)

[LGBTQ People](#)

Illinois

[Affinity Community Services](#)

Illinois

[LGBT Detroit \(formerly known as KICK\)](#)

Michigan

[Coalition for Justice and Respect](#)

Illinois

[QPOC Nebraska](#)

Nebraska

[Nebraskans For Equality](#)

Nebraska

## **West**

[PFLAG Black Chapter](#)

Oregon

[Sankofa Collective Northwest](#)

Oregon

[Zuna Institute](#)

California

[Brown Boi Project](#)

California

[Basic Rights Oregon](#)

Oregon

[Gender Justice League](#)

Washington

[Out Boulder County](#)

Colorado

[Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico](#)

New Mexico

[Southern Arizona Gender Alliance](#)

Arizona

## **National**

[National Queer Trans Therapists of](#)

[Color Network](#)

[National Black Justice Coalition](#)

[Center for Black Equity](#)

[National Black Gay Men's Advocacy Coalition](#)

[Communities of African Descent Resource Kit](#)

## **About the Human Rights Campaign Foundation**

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation improves the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people by working to increase understanding and encourage the adoption of LGBTQ-inclusive policies and practices. We build support for LGBTQ people among families and friends, co-workers and employers, pastors and parishioners, doctors and teachers, neighbors, and the general public. Through our programs and projects, we are enhancing the lived experiences of LGBTQ people and their families, as we change hearts and minds across America and around the globe. The HRC Foundation is a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization.



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