

QUEER HISTORY STREET POP UP



2SLGBTQIA+

BLACK

INDIGENOUS

PEOPLE OF COLOUR

Voices in History

QTBIPOC

HISTORY

REFERENCE





Content Warning:

Mentions of racial and gender-based discrimination, violence, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia

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ABOUT QTBIPOC

Queer is an umbrella term for a social/intellectual/political movement that seeks to encompass a broad range of sexual identities, behaviours, and expressions. It has also been reclaimed as a personal identity for some, after its historical use as a homophobic and transphobic slur. However, not all individuals are comfortable with the reclamation of the word, and it should not be used to describe someone without their consent. It is sometimes used as a catch-all for the rainbow community, and may or may not be seen to include trans people.

Trans –short for 'transgender'–is a term used to describe a person who identifies either fully or in part with a gender other than the gender associated with their birth-assigned sex–often used as an umbrella term to represent a wide range of gender identities and expressions. Transgender people, like cisgender people, can claim any identity in relation to their sexual/romantic orientation.

Black is a racial identity/identification used generally to refer to peoples of African descent or lineage as well as peoples with ties to the African diaspora. Diaspora refers to the scattering of people from their homeland including the historic forced migration of enslaved Africans as part of the transatlantic slave trade. 'Black' thus encompasses a diversity of individuals with different nationalities, backgrounds, cultures, experiences, and histories. Scholar-activist, Rinaldo Walcott, explains that "Black Canadian life takes its formation, its politics and its intellectual traditions, its contributions and consciousness in concert with other forms of global blackness." Black peoples in Canada and around the world have historically faced and continue to face discrimination, violence, marginalization, and silencing on the basis of their racial identity.

Indigenous is defined by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Research Lexicon as a "collective noun for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people in Canada. Also, an inclusive term used to describe the diversity of First Peoples in an international context. While "Indigenous" may be considered the most inclusive term since it identifies peoples in similar circumstances without respect to national boundaries or local conventions, it remains a contentious term since it defines groups primarily in relation to their colonizers."

People Of Colour* is an umbrella term referring to those of non-white or non-European ancestry or cultural heritage, those who are visibly racialized, and those who face instances of direct and indirect oppression as the result of their race. The term is meant to encompass all those who are non-white and has, for instance, included those of Asian, Indigenous, and Latinx descent in addition to those of Black or African descent. On its own, the term POC is widely debated and has been criticized for its erasure of those of specific races or ethnicities and their associated realities. When used within 'BIPOC'–Black, Indigenous, and people of colour– it emphasizes the particular oppression faced by Black and Indigenous peoples when compared to others who may identify as POC but benefit from privilege as the result of their skin colour or physical appearance and/or the particular historical and societal circumstances associated with their race or culture.

* The term 'people of colour' may also be adapted to 'women of colour' and accordingly the term QTBIPOC to QTBIWOC.

Do QTBIPOC people have a history in Canada?

Yes! QTBIPOC have a long and rich history in Canada and abroad. If we change our thinking and assume that QTBIPOC peoples have always been around, they become easier to find. Heteronormativity has persuaded us to believe that 2SLGBTQIA+ peoples are absent from history, but with a new frame of reference, we can find histories we would have otherwise missed.

Why are QTBIPOC so hard to locate in history?

Racism is one of the primary reasons that QTBIPOC have been and continue to be erased from 2SLGBTQIA+ history in Canada. The histories of people of white or European descent have been prioritized in Canadian history, partly because they have been the ones writing history. As a result, historical sources and archives that usually designate what is 'official' history have not focused on the voices of QTBIPOC. This is true for 2SLGBTQIA+ histories and historians too!

Fear, censorship & suppression have also made QTBIPOC hard to find. Many QTBIPOC were just focused on survival and never got the chance to accumulate evidence of their lives and experiences. Or, maybe they kept a diary, letters, or photographs but destroyed them out of fear of persecution. Sometimes destruction and censorship were imposed by the government and institutions that targeted, undervalued, and judged the works of QTBIPOC.

Is it offensive or inaccurate to label people in the past as QTBIPOC?

This is a tough question! Many of our labels and methods of talking about the 2SLGBTQIA+ community have been created pretty recently. Historians have been reluctant to use modern labels for past people, because they argue that we aren't able to have a conversation with an individual in the past about their identity in the same way that we can with someone today.

But, if we aren't labelling people as 2SLGBTQIA+ in the past then they remain invisible. We might not be able to know for sure if someone in the past would have chosen a particular label, but why would it be offensive to give them a 2SLGBTQIA+ label if there's nothing abnormal or wrong with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community? Should we assume everyone was straight and cisgender?

There is no perfect way to talk about history or people in the past, but if we approach these conversations with the respect and open-mindedness that we bring to conversations with people around us today, then we can write and learn better histories.



& ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVISTS

Community groups, task forces, organizations, and collectives are important places of activism and kinship for QTBIPOC. **Below is an introductory list of some of the historic QTBIPOC organizations that paved the way for activism in Canada today.** This list includes groups focused on 2SLGBTQIA+ people of Indigenous, Black, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, Asian, South East Asian, Latin American descent and more.

- Aboriginal Circle of Two-Spirits (Edmonton)
- Alberta Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Two-Spirited Rural Youth Outreach Project (Calgary)
- Al-Fatiha (TO)
- Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (TO)
- Association des gais et lesbiennes latino-américains de Montreal (MTL)
- Asian Lesbians of Toronto (TO)
- Asians and Friends (OTT)
- AYA (TO)
- Black CAP (TO)
- Black Lesbian and Gay Action Group (TO)
- Blackness Yes! (TO)
- Black Sisters Supporting Black Sisters (TO)
- Diversity (Winnipeg)
- Dykes of Colour (Calgary)
- Gaies et lesbiennes asiatiques (MTL)
- Gay Asians (VAN)
- Gay Asians of Toronto (TO)
- ¡Hola! (TO)
- Juka—The Nova Scotia Black Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Association (NS)
- Khush, Gay South Asians (TO)
- Lesbians of Colour (TO)
- Lesbians of Colour (Winnipeg)
- Long Yang Social Club (VAN)
- Manitoba AIDS Aboriginal Task Force (MB)
- Nichiwakan Native Gay and Lesbian Society (Winnipeg)
- No Me Digas Que No Sabias (TO)
- Of Colour (Calgary)
- Queer Women of Colour (OTT)
- Salaam (across Canada)
- Sepia (TO)
- Simon Nkoli Anti-Apartheid Committee (TO)
- The Atish Network (VAN)
- Two-Spirited People of the First Nations (TO)
- Two-Spirit Youth Group (VAN)
- Very Asian/Vari/Asian (VAN)
- Young Ebony Sisters (TO)
- Zami (TO)

note...

Not all of these organizations are historic - some of them are still operational and helping communities today!



QTBIPOC TIME LINE

- 1980** Canada's first QTBIPOC activist group, Gay Asians Toronto (GAT) is formed.
- 1983** GAT organizes an event called CelebrAsian, held at the 519 Community Centre in Toronto, that was the first fundraiser for HIV/AIDS held in the city, pre-dating the formation of the AIDS Committee of Toronto.
- 1984** Zami—Canada's first organization for Black gay and lesbian people of Caribbean descent—is formed. Xtra! Magazine runs a cover story featuring Zami and another QTBIPOC group, Lesbians of Colour.
- 1985** Zami marches in its first pride parade in Toronto as out Black lesbians and gays and holds its first Caribanna party. The Gay and Lesbian Community Appeal accepts Zami as a gay and lesbian group. Zami and GAT team up to respond to a racist ad placed by a white gay man in popular 2SLGBTQIA+ magazine, the Body Politic.
- 1987** Khush (meaning 'happy' or 'pleased' in Hindi and Urdu)—a group for 2SLGBTQIA+ South Asians of diasporic origin—is formed.
- 1988** A group of Toronto QTBIPOC hosts the fifth International Lesbian and Gay People of Colour conference, with attendance from the Caribbean, England, and the United States. Zami celebrates Black History Month at the 519 Community Centre. Khush and GAT jointly organize Unity Among Asians—the first conference for 2SLGBTQIA+ Asians in North America.
- 1989** The Toronto-based Two-Spirited People of First Nations group is created with the aim to provide a place of connection for 2SLGBTQIA+ Indigenous peoples to meet and honour the role of two-spirited peoples in Indigenous communities.
- 1990** The Black activist groups, AYA, Young Ebony Sisters, and Black CAP are all formed. The first Black lesbian and gay retreat is held north of Toronto. The first annual cultural festival, Desh Pardesh (1990-2000), is held in Toronto celebrating South Asian diasporic art and culture and featuring 2SLGBTQIA+ workshops, performances, and participation. In August 1990, the Nichiwakan Native Gay and Lesbian Society organizes the third international gathering of Indigenous gays and lesbians near Winnipeg, called Spirituality in the '90s.
- 1992** Salaam—the first group for lesbian, gay, and bisexual Muslims—is formed in Toronto. Calgary's Of Colour is founded in order to address the issues of racism, homophobia, and sexism in the lesbian and gay population of Calgary.
- 1993** The Aboriginal Circle of Two-Spirits organization is formed in Edmonton in order to help members connect to their culture and language as well as hold sessions on topics such as HIV/AIDS and mental health. Psychiatric Survivor Pride Day is founded by Libyan-Jewish psych survivor, Lilian Finkler.
- 1996** GAT mounts a campaign to counteract homophobia in Chinese language media. The first Lotus Roots: A Gathering for East and Southeast Asian Lesbians, Gays, and Bisexuals is held in Vancouver.
- 1998** Blackness Yes! Collective is formed and the first Black 2SLGBTQIA+ pride event, Blockorama is organized as a response to Pride Toronto's discriminatory practices. Winnipeg group, Diversity, for people who are 'queer and coloured' is formed. Ottawa group, Queer Women of Colour, holds its first meetings.
- 2000** Mohammed Khan—coordinator of group, Al-Fatiha Toronto, for Muslim transgender folks—writes an article for Xtra! Magazine discussing the redefinition of Muslim cultural norms within the context of gay and lesbian equality efforts.
- 2013** "Why Would I Come to a Party Where my Friends Are Barred?" action takes place in Toronto organized by QTBIPOC Elisha Lim and Loree Erickson, protesting the inaccessibility of buildings and locations for disabled folks.
- 2012** Sins Invalid—a U.S. based disability justice performance incubator—performs at the Art Gallery of Ontario after an invitation from QTBIPOC activist, Syrus Marcus Ware, and highlights the disabled QTBIPOC reality.
- 2016** Black Lives Matter is the honourable group for Toronto's Pride Parade and stops the procession to protest anti-Black racism within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and continued police brutality in Canada.

LET'S KEEP LEARNING

note...

Although activist organizations emerged in large numbers during the 1970s-1990s with Queer, Black, and Women's Liberation, QTBIPOC in Canada have had a longer history of resistance. In particular, Indigenous peoples have a much longer history than that of 'Canada' as created by settlers.

This document represents only a small piece of QTBIPOC history in Canada! Scholars, educators, students, artists, activists, and community members have been and continue to be hard at work centering QTBIPOC voices in mainstream narratives. Engage meaningfully and respectfully with their work and keep questioning the narratives you encounter. QTBIPOC have always existed - their exclusion is the result of larger systems of oppression at play. They may be 'harder' to find information about, write about, or understand, but this does not mean that their exclusion is justified.

For more snapshots of QTBIPOC history, take a look at some of the documents in our series...

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Manitoba Gay and Lesbian Archives

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Rise Up! Feminist Archives

<https://riseupfeministarchive.ca>

Two-Spirit Archives at the University of Manitoba

<https://archives.uwinnipeg.ca/our-collections/two-spirit-archives.html>



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