

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*African American.  
Bisexual. Singer.*



## Bessie Smith

Born in 1894, Bessie developed her own act in Atlanta after working for the Moses Stokes company. Signed by Columbia Records, her biggest hit was "Down Hearted Blues." She became the highest paid Black entertainer of her day. She was married but very open about her bisexuality and affairs with women. Smith was described as a "large masculine lady" by Langston Hughes and was acclaimed for her gender performances. In 1937, doctors had to amputate her arm, following a car accident. She never regained consciousness and died the next morning. Rumors claim that she was first taken to a White hospital and was refused treatment, which contributed to her death.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*African American.  
Lesbian. Activist.*



## Wanda Alston

Wanda was raised in Virginia, joined the Air Force, and then moved to Washington, DC in 1985. She recovered from being a cocaine addict in 1990 and then began her activist work. She served as a liaison between Mayor Anthony Williams and the LGBT community in DC, and was Assistant to the Director, Pat Ireland, of the National Organization for Women. She joined the U.S delegation to the World Conference on Women in Beijing, China in 1995 and was also appointed to head office on LGBT Affairs in 2001. In March 2005, she was stabbed to death in her apartment that she shared with her partner in DC. She died at age 45.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Indian. Lesbian.  
Scholar. Artist.*

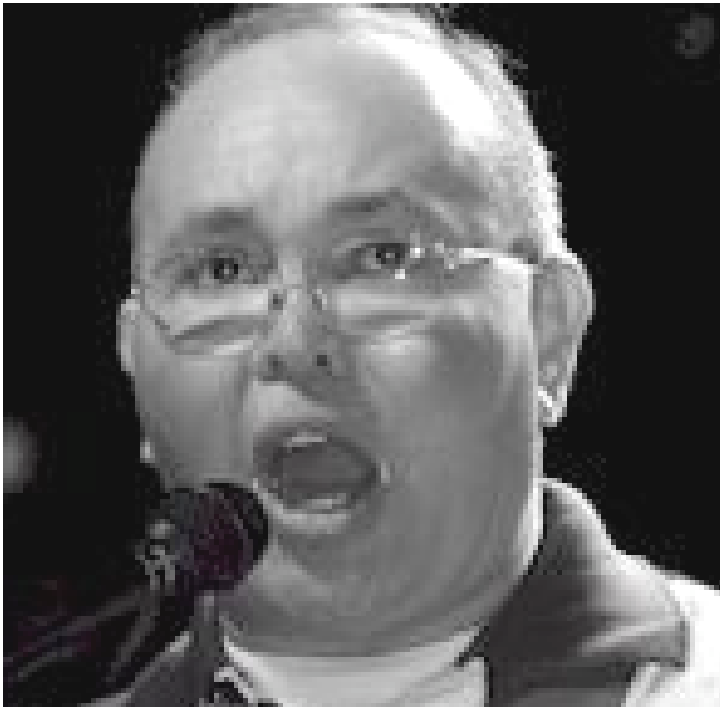


## Giti Thadani

Giti has worked socially and academically to open up Indian society to queer life. Trained in Western history, she combats Indian homophobia and colonial impositions by revealing and articulating fluid perspectives of gender and sexuality from the Vedas- Hindu religious texts. As a cutting-edge queer theorist, Giti has fought Hindu Right political party agendas, and co-founded the organization called Sakhi in 1990. Sakhi serves as a place of lesbian activism and support. She travels throughout India and documents lesbian and third-gendered ancient art. Her current projects are on women artists and she recently published *Sakhiyani: Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India*.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Latino. Gay.  
Veteran. Activist.*



## Nicole Murray-Ramirez

Nicole laid most of the groundwork for the San Diego Pride movement during the 1970s. In 1974, he spoke at the first pride rally at Balboa park despite hostile comments from the crowds. He served as the co-chair for Stonewall and was on the board for Equality of California. He is a powerful fundraiser with gay friendly politicians and organizations. Nicole has received many awards including the Cesar Chavez Humanitarian award and San Diego LGBT Pride's Lifetime Achievement Award. He has also written several columns for magazines such as Gay and Lesbian times and In Magazine. He remains a strong activist for the Latino community.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Native American.  
Lesbian. Scholar.*



Photograph by Tama Rothschild Photography

## Paula Gunn Allen

Born in 1939, Paula has spent her life reinterpreting Native American historic and mythic beliefs from a feminist perspective. She received her Ph.D. in American Studies with an emphasis in Native-American Studies, and by then, had already married, had children, and been divorced. In the introduction of the 1986 book, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, she reveals a shift in her career. In it, she comes out as a lesbian, and claims that colonizers distorted accounts of same-sex relationships in tribal cultures. As an out professor at universities including UCLA, she has helped pave the way for other lesbian and gay Native-American writers.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Taiwanese. Gay.  
Activist.*



## Chi Chia-wei

Chi is a well-known gay rights and AIDS activist in Taiwan. He has repeatedly tried to legally marry his partner since 1986 and is pressuring the Council of Grand Justices to review the country's marriage laws. He was first discriminated against when he attempted to register his marriage. The legislature claimed that "Homosexuals are a minority of perverse people..." Chi continued fighting despite the bleak and oppressive environment. He currently runs a hotline and is a fundraiser for AIDS treatment and prevention. He not only has a goal of legal recognition, but also strives to achieve ideological goal of a society in which homosexuality is seen as normal human variation.



# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Mexican American.  
Lesbian. Scholar.*



## Carla Trujillo

Carla completed a dissertation in Educational Psychology on the treatment of underrepresented students in college. She is the author of several short stories about the intersections of identity, sexuality, and higher education. She is the editor of *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* (1991) and won the LAMDA book award for best lesbian anthology. She has made significant contributions to literature on gay/lesbian lifestyles. She is the editor of *Living Chicana Theory* (1998) and is currently the Director of Diversity Programs in the College of Engineering at Berkeley. She also lectures in Ethnic Studies at Berkeley and in Women's Studies at San Francisco State University.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*African American.  
Gay. Activist.*



## Bayard Rustin

Bayard was born in Pennsylvania in 1912. He first experienced racism when he was refused service at a restaurant and soon became involved in the Young Communist League in 1936. In the 1940's, he organized local non-violent direct-action groups, which later formed a national organization called the Congress of Racial Equality. He strongly believed in the methods of Gandhi and worked closely with MLK Jr. laying the creative groundwork for the civil rights movement. He was best known for his help in organizing the 1963 March on Washington, one of the largest nonviolent protests ever in the U.S. Bayard also participated in the Free India Movement and protested Japanese internment during WWII. He died in 1987 of cardiac arrest in New York City.



# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Chicana-Anglo. Lesbian. Poet. Teacher.*



## Cherrie Moraga

Cherrie describes herself as “La Guera,” which means “fair-skinned,” because she can pass as being White. She has realized the advantages of having “white privilege,” but this has also had a negative affect on her ability to connect fully with her Chicana background. Her works, especially those of the 1980’s, reflect her struggle her Chicana identity and effectively set the stage for younger generations of writers and activists. Along with books, she has written plays, addressing feminism, ethnicity, sexuality, and other gender-related issues. She co-edited *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* with her long time partner Gloria Anzaldua, and published the first openly lesbian Chicana book in 1983 called *Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Paso Por Sus*. She is currently a member of the Theater Communications Group.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Indian. Lesbian.  
Scholar. Activist.*



## Urvashi Vaid

Born in India in, 1958, Urvashi moved to the United States when she was 8. She began being politically active at age 11 in anti-war marches and gave pro-McGovern speeches at age 12. She was concerned about oppression in all its forms. After college, she co-founded the Allston-Brighton Green Light Safe House Network for anti-violence, and co-founded the Boston Lesbian/Gay Political Alliance after law school. She became highly involved in LGBT rights issues and HIV/AIDS issues before becoming the Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) Policy Institute in Washington, DC. She also co-founded the NGLTF's Creating Change conference, which is held annually. In 1995, she published *Virtual Equality* and is currently still serving at the policy institute.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Puerto Rican.  
Lesbian. Activist.*



## Carmen Vazquez

Carmen was born in Puerto Rico and raised in the Harlem projects. She served as the coordinator of Lesbian & Gay Health Services for the San Francisco area and was the founding Director of the San Francisco Women's Building. She has worked extensively for lesbian, gay, immigrant, refugee, and women's rights and was on the board of directors for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force from 1990 to 1993. She is currently on the Board of Directors for the Center for Lesbian and Gay studies at City University of NY and is the deputy Executive Director of the Empire State Pride Agenda. Living in Brooklyn, NY, she is a leader in shaping vision, context, and program development for statewide advocacy and grassroots organizing.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*African American.  
Lesbian. Author*



## Barbara Smith

Barbara has played a groundbreaking role in opening a national, cultural, and political dialogue about the intersections of race, class, sexuality, and gender. She has specifically examined the sexual politics of the lives of women of color in representing the lives of Black lesbians and gay men. She was among the first to define an African American women's literary tradition and to build Black Women's Studies and feminism in the United States. She co-founded Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, appeared in films *Pink Triangles*, *Black is Black Ain't*, and spoke on NPR, MSNBC, and many other programs. She was a Fellow at the Bunting Institute of Radcliffe College from 1996-1997. She continues to promote the interconnectedness of race, class, gender, literature, politics and theory for the empowerment of Black women everywhere.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*African American.  
Gay. Activist.*



## Keith Boykin

Keith is a national political activist focused on issues of race and sexuality. He worked in the Clinton administration as a liaison and spokesperson between the White House and the African American and gay media groups and activists. He helped organize and took part in the nation's first meeting between gay and lesbian leaders and the U.S. President. Keith also served as the Executive Director of the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum to empower the Black LGBT community. He has appeared on numerous media programs including *Our Voices with Bev Smith* and *This is American with Dennis Wholey*. New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today, and others have quoted Keith in articles. His most recent project, a book entitled, *Beyond the Down Low: Sex, Lies & Denial in Black America* (2005), looks at stereotypes on sexuality in the Black community and the spread of HIV/AIDS.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Puerto Rican.  
Bisexual. Politician.*



## Evelyn Mantilla

Evelyn is an openly bisexual American politician, serving as a Connecticut State Representative. She is the leader for the End Child Poverty Social Investment Fund. She was once arrested for non-violently protesting the U.S. Navy's bombing tests and military practice on the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico. Evelyn was a part of the first delegation of gay and lesbian legislators to meet with President Clinton. She was one of the few that brought up transgender issues. She was recently elected for her fifth term and represents an urban district with many people of color, mainly people of Latino/Puerto Rican descent. She is currently serving on the Labor and Public Employees Committee and is also a member of the Government Administration and Election Committee. She has received several awards for her fight for social justice.



# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Chicana. Lesbian.  
Feminist. Theorist.*



## Gloria Anzaldúa

Gloria was born in Texas to a family of Mexican immigrants in 1942. After receiving her Masters in English and Education, she went on to teach bilingual preschool. Later, she also taught for a special education program for the mentally handicapped. She also worked as a teacher of children from migrant families. She later worked to educate on feminism, Chicano/a studies, and creative writing at universities including University of Texas, Vermont College of Norwich University, and San Francisco State University. Her book *Borderlands*, which examined Chicanos in White American society, as well as lesbians in the straight world, is number 38 on the Literary Journal's best book list. She used *Borderlands* to "vent her anger on all oppressors of people who are culturally or sexually different." She died in 2004 from complications of diabetes.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Puerto Rican.*

*Transgender. Activist.*



## Sylvia Rivera

Sylvia was born Rey Rivera Mendoza in 1951. She was a boy prostitute at 11 years old and a drag queen in her late teens. She also took part in the riots at Stonewall in 1969. She was later arrested for demanding the right to promote a political petition for the New York City Gay Rights Bill, which excluded trans rights. She co-founded Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries in New York City, which was designed to achieve rights and provide services for trans people. In her lifetime, she received Lifetime Achievement Awards from the Puerto Rican Gay and Lesbian Association of New York, the Neutral Zone Youth Organization of New York, the National Transgender Advocacy Coalition, and many other organizations. She died of liver cancer in 2002 at the age of 50.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Caribbean American.  
Lesbian. Activist*



## Audre Lorde

Audre graduated from Hunter College in 1959 and Columbia University in 1961. She married Edward Rollins in 1962 and had two children. She divorced him in 1970 and had long term relationships with women thereafter. Her prose and poetry were always personal, and as well as political. Some examples of her work include *Our Dead Behind Us* and *Between Ourselves*. She was also the Co-founder of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, along with Barbara Smith. She received the Walt Whitman Citation of Merit for poetry in 1991. Besides writing, Audre was also passionate about making breast cancer into a feminist issue. She died of breast cancer in St. Croix, Virgin Islands, where she lived with her partner Gloria Joseph. A biographical film on her life called *Litany for Survival: The Life and Work of Audre Lorde* came out after her death in 1995.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*African American.  
Gay. Writer.*



## James Baldwin

James was born in 1924. He left home at the age of 17 and became an expatriate to the United States. He spent a short time of his life as a preacher, which ultimately influenced his writing. His novel *Giovanni's Room* was a story about gay love. It became a metaphor for the proverbial closet. James urged American society to acknowledge and remove its myths, for he himself was not afraid to speak out on issues of oppression. Baldwin played a crucial role in expanding literature into the realms of gay life in a racialized society. Unlike other writers of his time, he portrayed the gay identity as one to be embraced and celebrated. A gay bookstore in Philadelphia uses his name as their title. Baldwin died in 1987 of stomach cancer.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Thai. Activist.  
Scholar. Professor.*



## Vitit Muntabhorn

Vitit is a professor of law at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand. He is an Oxford graduate and taught at a number of human rights institutions around the world. He has conducted extensive research on human rights issues, specifically those in Asia. In 2001, Vitit was appointed to the Board of Directors for the Canadian Government's International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development. He is currently the United Nations reporter on human rights situations in North Korea and is a member of the UN Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation on Human Rights. He wrote Thailand's first report for the UN Convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Vitit was one of the keynote speakers at the *Sexualities, Genders, and Rights in Asia*, a conference on Asian Queer Studies, in July of 2005. There he spoke on issues of gender, reproductive rights, sexual diversity, and gender identity.



# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Taiwanese. Feminist.  
Scholar. Professor.*



## Josephine Chuen-Juei Ho

Josephine completed her graduate and post-graduate work in the United States, attending Indiana University, University of Pennsylvania, and University of Georgia. She has opened up discursive space for issues in Taiwan by speaking out and publishing books on the politics of gender and sexuality. She has greatly enhanced and influenced academic research on queer studies, sex work studies, and transgender studies. Some examples of her work include *Radical Sexuality Education: Gender/Sexuality Education for the "New Generation"* and *The Admirable/Amarous Woman*. She was also instrumental in nurturing the emergence of a new generation of young local scholars on sexuality studies. Josephine is currently the president of the Cultural Studies Association and the founder and coordinator of the Center for the Study of Sexualities at National Central University, created in 1995.



# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Chinese American.  
Journalist. Activist.*



## Helen Zia

Helen Zia is an award-winning journalist and scholar who has covered Asian American communities and social and political movements for decades. A second generation Chinese American, Zia has been outspoken on issues ranging from civil rights and peace to women's rights and countering hate violence and homophobia. Zia is a former Executive Editor of *Ms. Magazine*, and has authored *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People*, and co-authored, with Wen Ho Lee, *My Country Versus Me*, which reveals what happened to the Los Alamos scientist who was falsely accused of being a spy for China in the “worst case since the Rosenbergs.”

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Native American.  
Poet. Activist. Artist.*



QPOC Heroes Poster Series created by Avani G. Trivedi

## Chrystos

She is of mixed-blood ancestry but identifies with her father, who was of Menominee ancestry. Her mother's heritage was Lithuanian/Alsace Lorraine. Chrystos is a self-educated writer as well as an artist who designs the covers of her own books. Her work as a Native land and treaty rights activist has been widely recognized, and politics are an essential part of her writing, though she refuses to be taken as a "voice" of Native women or as a "spiritual leader." Her works have appeared in a number of anthologies, such as *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981) and *Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology* (1988).

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Mexican. Painter.  
Bisexual.*



## Frida Kahlo

Kahlo was born in Mexico City in 1907, the third daughter of Guillermo and Matilda Kahlo. Her father was a photographer of Hungarian Jewish descent, who had been born in Germany; her mother was Spanish and Native American. In 1925, Kahlo suffered a serious accident which set a pattern for much of the rest of her life. She met fellow artist, Diego Rivera, and married him in August 1929. After Rivera embarked on an affair with her sister in 1935, Kahlo began a series of affairs with men and women that would last until her death in 1954. She is widely known for her striking, often shocking, images that reflected her turbulent life.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*Comedian. Asian  
American. Activist*



## Margaret Cho

Margaret Cho was born Dec. 5, 1968 and raised in San Francisco. Cho started performing stand up at age 16 and soon after, she won a comedy contest where first prize was opening for Jerry Seinfeld. She moved to Los Angeles in the early '90s and starred in a short-lived ABC sitcom called *All-American Girl* in 1994. Cho has had four sold out national tours, including *I'm the One That I Want*, *Notorious C.H.O.*, *Revolution*, and *Assassin*. She recently completed her first narrative feature, *Bam Bam and Celeste*. She has been honored by ACLU of Southern California, GLAAD, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and PFLAG to name a few, for her commitment to equal rights for all regardless of sexuality, race or gender identity.

# Queer People of Color Heroes

*WNBA Player. African American.*



## Sheryl Swoops

Swoops was born in 1971 in Brownfield, TX. She played basketball for Texas Tech University, and helped them win the NCAA Championship title in 1993. She went on to play with the Houston Comets, and has been one of the most successful basketball players in herstory. She has netted over 2,000 career points, 3 WNBA MVP awards, 3 WNBA Defensive Player of the Year, and 4 WNBA Championships. She has also been a member of 3 gold medal U.S. teams (1996, 2000 & 2004). In Nov. 2005, Swoops came out on the front of the *Advocate* and went public about her seven-year relationship with another woman, becoming the only team athlete to come out during the peak of her career.