

The Rainbow History Project

Preserving Our Community's Memories

DC Black Pride Events

A Tradition of Celebration

From 1975 until 1990, the Memorial Day weekend for DC's African American LGBT community was distinguished by the annual Children's Hour party at the Clubhouse (1296 Upshur St. NW). The Children's Hour was an all night celebratory bash for which the community dressed up, partied hard, and truly celebrated. The success of the annual Children's Hour celebrations extended nationwide: African American Lesbians and Gay men made Memorial Day weekend in Washington DC a rite of passage into summer during the Eighties. When the Clubhouse closed in 1990, it seemed the Memorial Day weekend would be empty for the community.

Welmore Cook, Theodore Kirkland and Ernest Hopkins were concerned with supporting the city's growing number of HIV positive African Americans and sought an opportunity to raise funds for HIV/AIDS organizations. They floated the idea of holding a Pride event for the city's African American gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered and using it also to help raise funds for community organizations. Cook remarked in 1991, that "the planned celebration represents an attempt on the part of black Gays to help themselves and not ask anyone for a handout." Loss of the Memorial Day weekend Children's Hour was about to be compensated with creation of the nation's first black gay Pride celebration.

Creating a New Tradition of DC Black Pride

Cook, Hopkins, and Kirkland, with significant support from the DC Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gay Men and from the Inner City AIDS Network (ICAN), organized the first DC Black Lesbian and Gay Pride Day for Memorial Day weekend 1991. They also found support from local social clubs, the Encore Social Club, Best Friends, Hung Jury, Ziegfeld's, the Black Lesbian Support Group, and Faith Temple. The first event was an unqualified success, raising nearly \$3000 for AIDS organizations and drawing a crowd of 750 to 800 people.

This first event featured only the Sunday festival at Banneker Field, on Georgia Avenue NW. The 1991 event was held on an unusually hot sunny day. The organizers had hoped for 500 visitors but drew 50% more than they anticipated.

More often, though, the Pride event has been held in the rain. The first 'rainy' DC Black Pride was in 1992. In 1995, a dreary rainy day cut attendance by more than half from the previous year's level. For several years, the DC Black Pride event was preceded by the DC Coalition's New Renaissance cultural and artistic event. Because late May often brings rainy weather to Washington DC, the festival moved indoors to the Washington Convention Center in 1999.

Growing, Changing, Black Pride

Over the years, DC's annual Black Lesbian and Gay Pride Day has grown and grown, in attendance, the number of people it draws, and in income. DC Black Pride events now begin on the Thursday or Wednesday before Memorial Day and fill the agenda through the weekend. The Sunday festival is flanked by dances, artistic and cultural events, cruises on the Potomac, prayer breakfasts, and After Pride parties. DC's event has inspired similar African American Pride events around the nation and DC Black Lesbian and Gay Pride Day, Inc. has advised many regional and city groups on how to set up local celebrations.

By 1999, DC's annual Black Lesbian and Gay Pride Day has inspired the creation of sixteen Black Gay Pride days around the nation. At the 1999 celebration in Washington, DC, a national federation of black Prides formed.

"LET'S ALL COME TOGETHER": The program guide for the first DC Black Pride, May 25, 1991



May 25, 1991--- a bright hot sunny afternoon

Organizers: Welmore Cook, Ernest Hopkins, Theodore Kirkland

Coordinators: Welmore Cook, Ernest Hopkins, Theodore Kirkland

Location: Banneker Field, Georgia Avenue NW

Awards:

The **Community Service Award** to Adrienne Blackwell. Ted Kirkland remarked, "He's been at the forefront in our community to raise money for AIDS. Whenever anyone's called on him, he's more than willing to give his time." **Man of the Year** to Phil Pannell. **Woman of the Year** to Carlene Cheatam.

Best Male Entertainer: Melvin Parks. **Best Female Entertainer:** Halima Williams. **Best Drag Entertainer:** Sparkle Maharris

Entertainment: Steve Langley, Melvin Parks, Halima Williams, Sondra Allen, Sam Jennings, Ray Gonsalves

Estimated participants: 800 visitors (Washington Blade)

Funds raised: \$3,000 for AIDS organizations

May 24, 1992--started sunny, but rain began about 3 pm

Organizers: DC Black Gay Pride Day, Inc.

Coordinator: Carlene Cheatam, Chauncey Lyles

Location: Banneker Field, Georgia Avenue NW

Awards:

Entertainment: The second year offered a midnight cruise on the Potomac as a first event (sold out the week before Memorial Day), the first local screening of Marlon Riggs' *Tongues Untied*, a prayer breakfast on Sunday morning, and Renaissance III the night before the festival. Queen Patti, Demetrius, Insatiable.

Estimated participants:

Funds raised: \$10,000

May ?, 1993

Organizers: DC Black Gay Pride Day, Inc.

Coordinator: Jaqui'O

Location: Banneker Field, Georgia Avenue NW

Awards:

Entertainment:

Estimated participants:

Funds raised: \$17,000

May 29, 1994 Keep in Stride with Black Pride

Organizers: DC Black Gay Pride Day, Inc.

Coordinator: Riley Campbell

Location: Banneker Field, Georgia Avenue NW

Awards:

Entertainment: Friday: Unity Ball at WUST; Saturday: Art-Film-Health Festival; African Rain Forest fashion show at Tracks; Black Pride Warehouse Party at WUST featuring Me'Shell NdegeOcell (who didn't show up);

Sunday: Interfaith prayer breakfast; the Festival at Banneker Field; and the After Black Pride Day Party at WUST. UltraNate

Estimated participants: 7,300 (Washington Blade)

Funds raised: \$2,125 (after \$51,194 in expenses)

May 28, 1995--began with cloudy skies and then day long rain

Organizers: DC Black Gay Pride Day, Inc.

Coordinator: Berrita 'Renee' Parker, Carlene Cheatam, Ray Carter

Location: Banneker Field, Georgia Avenue NW

Awards: Welmore Cook Award for Community Service to Wanda Alston and Thomas Gleaton

Entertainment: Thursday: Pre-Pride Party at Trumpets; Friday: Anniversary Ball at Tracks, Kickoff Party at The Edge; Saturday: Art-Film-Health Fair at the Embassy Row Hotel; Sunday: prayer breakfast, the Festival at Banneker Field (Alyson Williams didn't show up).

Estimated participants: 2,200 (Washington Blade)

Neither Marion Barry nor Eleanor Holmes Norton participated. Women in the Life had parties at the Circle.

Tracks had an opening night event (that drew few people).

May 26, 1996 - rain in the afternoon

Organizers: Black Gay Pride Day Inc.

Coordinator:

Location: Banneker Field, Georgia Avenue NW

Awards:

Entertainment: Gloria Hightower was the headline entertainer.

Estimated participants:

Letters to the *Washington Blade* complained of its lack of coverage of the event. Marion Barry hosted the kick-off reception at One Judiciary Square. Women in the Life held events at Diversite and Babylon. Profitability was undermined by \$15,000 in fines from the city and a \$6,500 charge for police officers who hadn't been requested. Speakout II and Black Gay Media events drew writers and journalists from around the country.

May 25, 1997

Organizers: Black Gay Pride Day Inc

Coordinator:

Location: Banneker Field, Georgia Avenue NW

Awards:

Entertainment: Inner Light Unity Fellowship presented Jennifer Holliday.

Estimated participants:

The *Washington Blade* devoted several full pages to the schedule and events surrounding Black Gay Pride Day. The kick-off reception was at the Radisson Barcelo.

May 24, 1998

Organizers: Black Gay Pride Day Inc

Coordinator: Earl Fowlkes Jr, Cheryl Head

Location: Banneker Field, Georgia Avenue NW

Awards:

Entertainment: Sweet Honey in the Rock, Michelle Parkerson, Reverb.

Estimated participants: 12,000

It DIDN'T rain! The kick-off party was at the Edge. The opening reception was at the Radisson Barcelo. Ruth Ellis made a much celebrated appearance. During the 1998 event, representatives from New York City, Detroit, Atlanta, and Washington, DC at a workshop at the Barcelo created a national organization of Black Prides.

May 30, 1999

Organizers: Black Gay Pride Day Inc

Coordinator: Earl Fowlkes Jr, Cheryl Head

Location: Banneker Field

Awards:

Entertainment: Cece Peniston, Crystal Waters

Estimated participants: 10,000

The weather was clear and hot. A Federation of Black Prides meeting was held simultaneously. Ruth Ellis's 100th birthday was celebrated at Club 2:k:9.

May 28, 2000 "Pride 2K"

Organizers: Black Gay Pride Day Inc.

Coordinator: Earl Fowlkes Jr, Cheryl Head

Location: Washington DC Convention Center

Awards:

Entertainment:

Estimated participants:

Black Gay Pride Day Inc moved the festival indoors to the Convention Center. Many events were held at the Renaissance Hotel. The Federation of Black Prides met during the festival.

May 27, 2001 Self Love = Black Pride

Organizers: Black Gay Pride Inc.

Coordinator: Earl Fowlkes Jr, Noel Sheperd

Location: Washington DC Convention Center

Awards:

Entertainment: Monifah, Delta Elite celebration of 25 years

Estimated participants:

May 26, 2002 A Time to Heal

Organizers: Black Gay Pride Inc.

Coordinator: Earl Fowlkes Jr.

Location: Washington DC Convention Center

Awards:

Entertainment: Crystal Waters, film festival, poetry slam

Estimated participants:

May 25, 2003 "Living Free in 2003"

Organizers: Black Gay Pride Inc.

Coordinator: Earl Fowlkes Jr., Ronnie Foster,

Location: Washington DC Convention Center

Awards:

Entertainment: 702, Staceyann Chinn, film festival, wellness workshops

Estimated participants: 13,000

Opening reception at the Renaissance Hotel.