

Queers United Against Pride Profiteering

[www.UnitedAgainstPride Profiteering.org](http://www.UnitedAgainstPrideProfiteering.org)



Dear neighbor,

It is in the spirit of LGBTQI+ pride and our city's unique place in the heritage of pride that we are writing to share with you our profound concerns about the "Progress" flag and to respectfully request that you not display it again (we'll be happy to give you a replacement).

As trans and LGBTQ+ people of color are under attack across the nation, we certainly understand and support your desire to show specific support for, and inclusion of, these communities. There are many other ways to do that other than using the "Progress" flag.

It's Profiteering, Period.

Most people do not know about this flag's distasteful origins. Its creator *appropriated* Gilbert Baker's 1978 rainbow flag *and* the light blue, pink, and white stripes from the 1999 Trans Pride flag created by Monica Helms (without even a call to her), *and* the black and brown stripes from the 2017 More Colors More Pride Flag designed in partnership with Philadelphia's Office of LGBT Affairs (again without asking for permission) and *then* proceeded to **LICENSE THE DESIGN FOR PROFIT**.

Today there are at least 92 other pride flags and to the best of anyone's knowledge, **none** of their creators have imposed fees to reproduce their designs. This proud tradition goes back to 1979, when Gilbert Baker went to court to prevent the San Francisco pride organization from copyrighting the rainbow flag.

In contrast, the "Progress" pride flag license is **not** a free-use, public domain license. It requires that anyone reproducing the flag or its design commercially (meaning virtually *any* manufacturer) get permission and pay a fee to its creator. Each time anyone buys a "Progress" pride flag or pin, or sticker, etc., money is going into the pocket of its *creator*.

The "Progress" pride flag creator is quite open about this, saying on their [website](#), "We want you to be able to use the design in your work, but we also want to make sure that it is used properly, that it still supports the message of the flag, and **supports the creator of the work.**" The designer even charges a *tiered fee* based on the size the entity requesting permission to duplicate it.

Appropriating the creative work of others without consent is wrong; doing that for profit makes it even worse; and having a non-trans, white designer of the "Progress" flag wrap that up in platitudes about racial and trans justice and visibility and in opposition to "rainbow profiteering" makes it nauseating.



I am very disappointed and upset that the creator of the Progress Flag used the colors of the Trans Pride Flag without even asking me if he could.

I have not made money off of my flag and I live on Social Security. I hope that he will donate his flag and like everyone else has and return all the profits to our community.

Monica Helms
Creator of the Trans Pride Flag
Author, "More Than Just a Flag"

The profit from this stolen design is significant. In retail stores across the country, 2'X3' "Progress" flags – *printed on cheap fabric* – cost about \$50 while *hand-sewn, nylon* rainbow flag are under \$30. **Why the \$20+ difference?** Ask any store clerk and they will tell you: "**it's the licensing fee.**" (If you have been able to get it less expensively, you've purchased an illegal, bootleg version, most likely produced abroad).

Moreover, the "Progress" flag designer has entered into agreements with large corporations such as Absolut, Citibank, McDonald's and MISTR and has refused to disclose how much income those are generating.

Multiply this profit margin by all the products using the "Progress" flag design – easily hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Here's the truth: If this was about elevating and supporting queer people of color and trans people then **100% of the profits would be donated to people of color and trans organizations!**



Gilbert died poor but deeply enriched. He did not profit from the rainbow flag's use by others, ever. That would have been unimaginable for him and have gone against the freedoms and expressions that we all long for collectively, sub-identity wise, and individually. As his most poetic maxim goes, "flags are torn from the soul of the people."

Richard Ferrara

One of Gilbert's best friends. Richard spent 6 months with Gilbert stitching the mile-long rainbow flag for the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots

All of this spits in the face of the artists/activists who have created pride flags over the years and given their designs freely for all to use. Almost all of these creators live on the financial edge, including Gilbert Baker, who struggled with being poor his entire life, and Monica Helms, who survives on Social Security.

To us, this means we all need to reject the "Progress" pride flag until its creator (a) drops the license; (b) apologizes to the artists from whom they appropriated their work; (c) opens their books to provide a full accounting of the licensing fee profits to date; and (d) donates 100% of those profits to organizations serving trans and queer people of color.

When the "Progress" pride flag creator does this, and if this flag still speaks to your heart, then, by all means, fly it proudly! There is plenty of room for all our community's non-profiteering flags.

In the meantime, if you want to show your specific support for trans people, fly the trans flag! If you want to highlight your embrace of Black queer people, fly the Black pride flag! Your inclusion of Black and Brown people, fly the More Colors More Pride flag!

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We are happy to answer any questions you may have and to provide you (for free) a rainbow flag, a trans pride flag, or a Black pride flag to replace your "Progress" flag.

Sincerely,

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GET THE FACTS

