

A Movement on the Verge: The Spark of Stonewall

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A Movement on the Verge: The Spark of Stonewall

The night of Saturday, June 28, 1969, the streets of Central Greenwich Village were crowded with angered gay men, lesbians, “flame queens”, and Trans*gender.¹ That was the second day of disorder of what would later be called the Stonewall Riots. Centering around Christopher Street’s bar for homosexuals, the Stonewall Inn, the riots began the night before on June 27 and lasted until July 2. These five days of rioting were the result of decades of disdain against the police force and the general population that had oppressed the gay inhabitants of New York City. Although these confrontations with police were not the first movements against homosexual oppression, the Stonewall Riots caused a great increase in momentum in the gay and lesbian rights movement.²

¹A “flame queen” or “scare queen” is a kind of gay male that became almost nonexistent after 1969. Characteristics of a “flame queen” are gay males who would wear feminine-like clothing. For example, they would wear brightly colored clothing that accentuates female body parts such as the hips (i.e. hip huggers). “Flame queens” would also wear make-up, such as eye liner or mascara, though not as much as modern drag queens. David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2004), 76.

² Two sources that offer a broad history on the gay and lesbian rights movement in the United States are Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.: A Documentary History* (New York: Meridian, 1992) ; and Barry D. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987). For a more detailed look at the forty years leading up to the Stonewall Riots, John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), is an excellent monograph. In Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), a history of lesbian life is given, including a recounting of the Stonewall Riots. Two books that give an overview of the Stonewall Riots, each with a different perspective, are Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York, NY: Dutton, 1993) ; and David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2004). Also useful when researching the riot is David Carter, “Stonewall Stories,” *Advocate*, no. 1027/1028 (June/July 2009): 94-99, which gives the personal accounts of some of the participants of the Riots. For a series of oral accounts concerning the fight for gay and lesbian rights, including accounts of the Stonewall Riots, examine Eric Marcus, *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights 1945-1990 An Oral History* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992). Concerning Stonewall, but looking forward is Amin Ghaziani, *The Dividends of Dissent: How Conflict and Culture Work in Lesbian and Gay Marches on Washington* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). For an examination and analysis of why Stonewall has been commemorated by the gay community and also a comparison to other events similar to Stonewall during that time see, Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Suzanna M. Crage, “Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth,” *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 5 (October 2006): 724-751. An essay that examines the Stonewall Riots and its distinctive characteristics is David Carter, “What Made Stonewall Different,” *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* 16, no. 4 (July/August 2009): 11-13. A video that “captures” the life of homosexuals from the time of the riots until the end of the century and should be highly regarded is *After Stonewall: From the Riots to the Millennium*, directed by Janet W. Baus and Dan Hunt, produced by Vic Basile and John Scagliotti (First Run Features, 2005), DVD. Newspaper articles deserve attention when analyzing and interpreting these riots starting with *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*.

In the decades prior to the 1969 riots, tension was building between the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*gender)³ communities across the United States and the homophobic population. The 1950's were a peak time for anti-homosexual opinions, especially in major centers of American society such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York City. In order to combat the anti-homosexual tendencies which Americans had embraced, Henry "Harry" Hay, Jr. began the Mattachine Society in 1951 in Los Angeles. The Mattachine Society became the cornerstone of the homophile⁴ movement in the 1950's and throughout the 1960's. Specifically for gay men, the Mattachine Society's focus was to "allow members to participate with relative safety in a gay organization."⁵ In 1955 a similar organization was created in San Francisco for gay women, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB). The organization was originally created as a social group as an alternative to gay bars and clubs, but as the creators, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, recognized the Mattachine Society's intentions they redirected the organizations objectives. The following year, in 1956 the DOB and the Mattachine Society joined forces to advocate for the spread of the homophile movement. By 1960, however, membership in both organizations had dropped significantly, from originally being an estimated over 5000 to a mere 300 combined. Even with DOB leader Phyllis Lyon emphasizing the importance of both gay men and women in the homophile movement, membership was on a steady decline.⁶

³ LGBT is a term used to describe the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans*gender community. It was adopted in the 1990's from the initial LGB (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual) acronym and has been added too since the 1990's. Variants of the acronym include an 'A' for Asexual and a 'Q' for Queer. Although the universally recognized term for the community is LGBT.

⁴ Homophile is a term synonymous with homosexual. The Homophile movement was the name attributed to the gay and lesbian rights movement of the 1950's through 1960's before being renamed the gay liberation movement (1970's) and then the gay and lesbian rights movement (1980's onward). John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 240.

⁵ John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 57-58.

⁶ John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 57-178 ; Will Roscoe, "The Radicalism of Harry Hay," *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* 20, no. 6(November 2013): 1-5. ; Simon Hall, "The American Gay Rights Movement and Patriotic Protest," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19, no. 3 (September 2010): 539-542 ; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 146-147.

Both societies had members at their branches in New York, a metropolis for young homosexual men and women. In the early 1960's, New York City was growing in population, including its population of LGBT members. Many young homosexuals who flocked to New York went there to find other young homosexuals in order to find a mate or just to make a family. Many found success, as by the mid 1960's, "New York had the largest gay population in the United States."⁷ Specifically, Greenwich Village was the center for the gay population and homosexual culture. Another reason why young homosexual men and women traveled to New York was because many thought that it was more liberal than their home towns. Ironically, according to one scholar, "New York was...the city that most aggressively...targeted gay men as criminals."⁸ Equally as distressing was that a fair percentage of the young gay men in New York were runaways and became homeless. Some of them would live in parks such as Christopher Park or Washington Square Park, while others would live on the street. Both the general population and the police harassed the homeless men and women that inhabited these areas.⁹

The gay population of New York endured physical, psychological and emotional harassment during the 1960's. For example, homosexuality was classified as a mental disorder according to the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and homosexual acts considered not only immoral but also criminal because they violated sodomy laws, which viewed sodomy as impure and as an unacceptable behavior. More than half the states in the United States passed "sexual psychopath laws" which deemed homosexuality a socially threatening disease.¹⁰ Furthermore, police often entrapped or physically harassed homosexuals. They purposefully

⁷ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 17.

⁸ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 17.

⁹ John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 88-90 ; David Carter, *Stonewall*, 17-79 ; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 188-189.

¹⁰ Under Sexual Psychopath laws, a gay citizen could be put into an asylum without trial or conviction. It was also not uncommon throughout the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's for a family to commit their gay family members to asylum against the member's will. John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 17-50.

attempted and succeeded in tricking typically young homosexuals into performing an illegal act (whether it had been consuming/buying alcohol or a sexual favor) and then arresting them.¹¹

Despite the many obstacles, much of the gay population thought a new era was going to dawn in 1969. Within the previous decade thousands of gay people assembled in major cities and created communities with one another. These communities concentrated around the similar characteristics of sexuality and youth. In 1969, “the subject of homosexuality was more and more in the air”, whether it be in the air of politics or everyday conversations.¹² Throughout the 1960’s, progressive politics had started to take place in the United States with the FDA’s approval of a woman’s birth control pill. According to scholar Michael Bronski, “the introduction of the birth control pill...helped the cause of homosexual liberation and struck against anti-homosexual prejudice.”¹³ In everyday connotation, newspapers and magazines, such as the *Hymnal*, began to run articles centering on homosexual topics, wanting to inspire the homosexual subculture. Along with print culture, movies and music began to express homosexual themes and undertones in 1968 and 1969, an example of music being *Hair*’s most popular song which celebrated a theme of homosexual love along with harmony. However, politics and popular culture were not the only things that inspired gay men and lesbians that homosexual culture was on the verge of changing.¹⁴

One of the biggest symbols of the upcoming gay liberation movement was the number of the year itself. Many gay people believed it was a good sign that the year ’69 was a symbol for mutual oral sex, but additionally according to Chinese astrology it was also the year of the

¹¹ Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011): 17. ; John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 17 ; David Carter, *Stonewall*, 17-40.

¹² David Carter, *Stonewall*, 114-115.

¹³ Michael, Bronski, *Queer History*, 207.

¹⁴ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 114 - 115 ; Michael Bronski, *Queer History*, 206-208 ; Eric Marcus, *Making History*, 178 - 179 ; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 169 ; From David Carter, *Stonewall*, 114-115 , a series of articles he used from the *Hymnal*, “It’s What’s Happening” and “On Stage,” *Hymnal* 1, no. 5, (June-July 1968).

rooster. With a slight change in vocabulary, some homosexuals dubbed it the “year of the cock”, following the example set by D.D.¹⁵ Additionally, the energy of a new decade beginning and the end of the smugness of the 1960’s gave the homosexuals of Greenwich Village the drive to enter the upcoming gay liberation movement.¹⁶

In Greenwich Village this energy was found in gay bars and clubs, where mostly gay men, “flame queens”, and some Trans*genders would congregate with friends and acquaintances. The mafia ran most of the gay bars in Greenwich Village, and they paid off the police in order to avoid being raided on a regular basis. A transaction of envelopes containing cash was made once a week between one of the bar’s employees and a member of the police force to ensure that raids would not be conducted on that specific bar within a designated time. The most popular, among patrons, of these Mafia run bars was the Stonewall Inn, managed by Tony Lauria, or Fat Tony. The Stonewall Inn patrons saw the bar as an oasis, as a home. In fact, some of the young, homeless, homosexuals practically lived in the bar- by staying from opening until closing every night. The Stonewall Inn was opened in 1967, reopening in the same building as the Stonewall Inn Restaurant. The Stonewall charged \$1.00 admission on weeknights and \$3.00 on the weekends, in addition to charging for drinks for \$1.00, which was expensive for the time. Each patron admitted to the Stonewall received two tickets from the doorman for drinks, but employees were trained to make customers buy drinks. The initial cost of opening the Stonewall was \$3,500 between four investors, including Fat Tony. On the first night of business, the Stonewall brought in between \$5,000 and \$6,000, meaning that the Stonewall recouped its initial investment and made pure profit.¹⁷

¹⁵ D.D. was the *New York Mattachine Newsletter*’s gossip columnist in 1969.

¹⁶ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 114 ; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 169.

¹⁷ Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 180-182 ; David Carter, *Stonewall*, 76-82 ; Simon Hall, *Patriotic Protest*, 544-545.

The main appeal of the Stonewall was that it possessed two dance floors. Dancing was immensely popular with the young gay crowd, and most other establishments prohibited it. One Stonewall dance floor was in the front room where more upbeat dancing songs were played, while the other followed a hallway that had dim lighting where more relaxed songs were played. Both floors were popular, but for different crowds. The front room was often filled with older men, while the back room was where younger men and the “in” crowd at the time would dance and have conversations. Almost all of the clientele at the Stonewall was male, as lesbians very rarely went there. If a lesbian or a heterosexual woman was at the Stonewall, the lesbian was more than likely “butch”¹⁸ and the heterosexual woman was a kind of motherly figure to the young runaways at the club. More broadly, patrons of the Stonewall were homosexual male youth, some older homosexual men (30-40 years of age), “flame queens”, few drag queens, and a handful of Trans*genders and transvestites. It is a common misconception that the Stonewall Inn was a bar specifically for drag queens, when in reality, few drag queens were allowed into the Inn unless they were well known among the community or were friends with the bouncer. There was a community contained within the Stonewall Inn, in which most of the clientele knew one another and was familiar with the practices of the establishment.¹⁹

In addition to being familiar with fellow patrons of the bar, clientele of the Stonewall Inn were also aware of the Stonewall’s infamous lack of a proper liquor license. The Stonewall was unable to obtain a liquor license to serve to its homosexual clientele because the State Liquor Authority (SLA) deemed it illegal to serve alcohol in an area of homosexuals.²⁰ In order for the

¹⁸A Butch lesbian refers to a masculine lesbian.

¹⁹ Eric Marcus, *Making History*, 140-146 ; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 187-190 ; David Carter, *Stonewall*, 70-88.

²⁰ The SLA was created by a set of laws passed after Prohibition ended in 1933, and was given the power to interpret laws pertaining to alcohol. The SLA deemed homosexuals unable to behave properly in an area of alcohol, categorizing them as “rude and dissolute”. This restriction led to an increase in organized crime, overall leading to Mafia involvement in gay bars. David Carter, *Stonewall*, 17-18.

Stonewall to serve alcohol, it adopted a Mafia trick, a “bottle club system”, in which the members of the club would supposedly bring their own bottles to the club, write their names on the bottles and the bottles would be left at the club for future use. The Stonewall made up clients’ names to write on the bottles to serve to patrons of the club. In addition to using this “bottle club system”, the mafia supplied alcohol that the Stonewall served, and they were always watered down, even for the favored clientele. The Mafia was heavily involved with the Stonewall Inn until 1969 when police raids became a regular occurrence.²¹

In the spring and early summer of 1969, the New York police force conducted countless raids on gay bars in the city, specifically in Greenwich Village.²² Deputy Inspector Seymour Pine was moved to Manhattan’s First Division of the Public Morals police and given the order to put the Mafia run gay bars and clubs out of business. Pine conducted a series of raids on the bars in Manhattan’s Sixth Precinct and on June 24, 1969 there was a raid on the Stonewall Inn. A few employees were arrested and liquor confiscated, but there were no major occurrences that night. However, one patron, Ronnie Di Brienza, summed up the evening’s attitude by exclaiming “...this shit has got to stop!”²³ Pine was conflicted after the raid, as he had not succeeded as much as he had hoped, but a sneer from one of the bar’s owners: “We’ll be open again tomorrow” challenged him.²⁴

Three days later, on Friday June 27, 1969, Seymour Pine was back at the Stonewall Inn, along with two female plain clothes detectives and a few additional officers. The plan called for the policewomen to go in the Stonewall and gather evidence that the bar was operating without a

²¹ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 17-72.

²² Gay Bars that were favored to be raided by the NY police force in Manhattan’s Sixth Precinct included The Stonewall Inn, The Checkerboard, and The Snake Pit. David Carter, *Stonewall*, 143.

²³ Ronnie Di Brienza, “Stonewall Incident,” *East Village Other* 4, no. 32 (July 1969): 2 as quoted in from David Carter, *Stonewall*, 125.

²⁴ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 100-143.

liquor license, then come out before Pine and the other officers would begin the raid. Just prior to midnight, the peak time of club activity, the policewomen entered the Inn, while Pine and officers waited outside. Around one A.M., after no sign of the policewomen, Pine decided that something must have gone wrong and he began the raid. Bar patrons were led out single file. Usually after a raid, patrons would scatter, but that night, they congregated outside of the bar.²⁵

By two A.M. the crowd outside of the Stonewall had begun to engulf Christopher Street. Onlookers and curious bystanders, along with patrons of the Inn, joined the crowd to witness the raid on the Stonewall Inn. Some members of the growing mob began to climb onto the hoods of cars, and nearby stoops to gain a better view. Others simply joined their friends to discuss the raid. By this time, Pine started to arrest some of the Mafia's employees and other patrons he seemed worthy of arrest: transvestites and individuals in full drag. Pine also confiscated evidence from the bar such as liquor and drugs. As the crowd witnessed Pine and the other officers hauling away employees and patrons, some bystanders cheered, while someone began to sing "We Shall Overcome," a familiar protest song from the era. The growing crowd outside of the Stonewall had a mixture of humor and hostility in their comments towards both the police, as they called "Pigs", and the arrested patrons of the bar.²⁶

The mob on Christopher Street was not aggressive until the police physically assaulted one of the transvestites outside of the bar. The transvestite aggravated the officer, however, by smacking him in the head with her purse. The police officer clubbed her with his nightstick. After a series of boos swept through the crowd, the mass of people began to throw coins, rocks, and beer bottles at the bar. Patron Fred Sargeant remembered: "The kids felt that some of the

²⁵ Dick Leitsch, "Police Raid on N.Y. Club Sets Off First Gay Riot," *Witness to Revolution: The Advocate Reports on Gay and Lesbian Politics, 1967-1999* (New York: Allison Books, 1999): 11 originally published in *New York Mattachine Newsletter* ; John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 231 ; David Carter, *Stonewall*, 129-137; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 190-192.

²⁶ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 137-148 ; John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 231-233.

other kids were being kept inside and being beaten up by the police.”²⁷ After several other arrests, an officer attempted to arrest a lesbian inside the Stonewall Inn. She put up a fight, and once outside, the officer “heaved” her inside the police vehicle.²⁸ After witnessing this incident, the hostility in the crowd escalated. Pine attempted to call for backup several times, but each time his calls were diverted and no backup was supplied. Pine made an executive decision to barricade himself, his policemen, and reporter Howard Smith in the bar, until reinforcements arrived.²⁹

The crowd outside of the Stonewall grew steadily as patrons called their friends to tell them about the raid and the barricade of the police. The rain of coins and beer bottles continued to fall on the Stonewall, but the windows and doors of the Stonewall were reinforced with plywood to prevent police from entering in times of raids, so there was little damage. Unable to break the windows with bottles and stones, some patrons uprooted a nearby parking meter and used it as a battering ram against the door. One of the patrons succeeded in breaking a window and soon Molotov cocktails, filled with lighter fluid according to crowd member Dick Leitsch, were launched into the Stonewall. Pine and his officers succeeded in putting out the small fires, but they were unsure of how much longer they were going to be able to stay barricaded in the Stonewall.³⁰

Reinforcements had yet to arrive when Pine ordered the officers inside the Stonewall to prepare to exit the club. Some officers searched for an alternate way out, while reporter Howard

²⁷ An excerpt from *The New Symposium II*, a WBAI gay radio program, broadcast program. Taken from David Carter, *Stonewall*, 149.

²⁸ From Lucian Truscott, “Gay Power Comes to Sheridan Square” *Village Voice*, July 3, 1969, and Howard Smith, “Full Moon Over the Stonewall,” *Village Voice* July 3, 1969, p. 25. Taken from David Carter, *Stonewall*, 150-151.

²⁹ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 158-237 ; John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 231-232 ; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 195-202.

³⁰ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 68 ; Dick Leitsch, interview by David Carter. There are multiple dates recorded for possible date of the interview, including December 6, 1997, March 2, 1999, and July 21, 2001. It is not indicated from which interview this information came. ; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 196-202 ; Eric Marcus, *Making History*, 199-202.

Smith rummaged for a weapon to defend himself if they were to exit in the direction of the mob. The two female officers succeeded in finding a small vent that led to the roof and Pine ordered them to go to a nearby firehouse and call for emergency assistance. Meanwhile, the crowd outside of the Stonewall grew more agitated and attempted to set the club ablaze once more by throwing a flaming garbage can into the coatroom. They had literally set the closet on fire. As Pine and his officers were putting out the fires, sirens approached, and the Tactical Patrol Force (TPF) arrived.³¹

Pine and his remaining officers were able to leave the Stonewall safely. After exiting the club, Pine finalized the arrests that were made earlier in the evening while the TPF was ordered to clear the streets of Greenwich Village. The TPF was notorious for using brutal techniques in order to break up large mobs. However, that night the crowd was taking a stand and making a point, to both the TPF and to New York City. As the TPF attempted to clear the streets, the crowd would disperse, but would regroup on the other side of the TPF's "V" formation. One scholar compared it to being "like a tug-of-war that went on for a few hours that night."³² The crowd did not just use tactics such as running away and reforming. A rather famous technique used during the Stonewall Riot by crowd members was a kick-line routine in which members of the crowd formed a line similar to the Rockettes, and sang a familiar reprise among bar goers:

We are the Stonewall Girls,

We wear our hair in curls.

We wear no underwear:

We show our pubic hairs.³³

³¹ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 164-173.

³² David Carter, *Stonewall*, 175.

³³ A play from the original lyrics from "It's Howdy Doody Time!" taken from David Carter, *Stonewall*, 176.

For two hours, members of the crowd evaded the TPF by dancing, singing, and running into Christopher Park. Around four A.M. Manhattan police officers finally regained control of Greenwich Village, having arrested 13 persons total.³⁴

The following night, Saturday June 28, the crowd returned to the Stonewall Inn along with new graffiti painted on the boarded windows, including “Support Gay Power”. Word of the riot had spread through the gay community of New York City and by early Saturday night groups of protestors formed on Christopher Street. Between ten o’clock and midnight, the crowd grew as protestors chanted “Gay Power” and “Equality for Homosexuals”. Lines from “We are the Stonewall Girls” from the night before were sung in unison in addition to militant chants for liberation. Crowd-goers had mixed feelings about the protest Saturday night. Ronnie Di Brienza claimed that “too many people showed up looking for a carnival rather than a sincere protest.” While another, Chris Babick, disagreed, saying that “We were there...The homosexual standing on the streets. And it was incredible.”³⁵ However the protest was not peaceful for long after midnight. As the crowds grew too large for the sidewalks to contain them, they spilled into the streets, out of Sheridan Square Park, and blocked traffic, which caused chaos. As havoc ensued, the TPF was called in, in addition to the precinct officers who were already on site. An estimated 150 TPF officers were dropped off at Christopher Street to control the crowd of an estimated 2,000 protestors. The game of tug-of-war between the TPF and the protestors was reenacted just as the previous night as the TPF attempted to disperse the crowd. The protestors, however, had more anger than the previous night, and were able to withstand the brutality of the TPF.³⁶

³⁴ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 172-180 ; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 199-202 ; “N.Y. Homosexuals Protest Raids,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, July 1, 1969. Accessed April 27, 2014, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post.

³⁵ Ronnie Di Brienza. “Stonewall Incident”, 2 as quoted in David Carter, *Stonewall*, 184 ; Christopher Babick, interview by Michael Scherker, December 10, 1988 taken from David Carter, *Stonewall*, 185.

³⁶ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 182-193 ; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 202-203.

An estimated 250 to 300 police officers and TPF officers were employed on Christopher Street between midnight and five A.M. during the Saturday night riot. The officers combated homosexual protestors using nightsticks and clubs, but the protestors did not give in. Instead, the “queens” and mobs of tourists that had joined them fought the police. Police gave up on arresting anybody and focused on clearing the area, however, that feat was not done easily. The 2,000 protestors had become more militant and lost their jovial attitude and began chanting “Christopher Street belongs to the Queens!” The police did manage to break up some small groups of demonstrations, but the protestors remained to liberate Christopher Street.³⁷

After five hours of having evaded both the TPF and regular officers, protestors had successfully liberated Christopher Street. Many protestors, “queens”, homosexual youth, and tourists alike, stayed to liberate Christopher Street that Saturday to protest the decades of oppression the LGBT community had faced. Morty Manford, a protestor that night, stated that “the anger from oppression and discrimination was coming out very fast at the point of Stonewall.”³⁸ The following nights, Sunday through Tuesday were “relatively calm”, according to scholar David Carter, stating that “the police had learned several lessons from the first two nights of the riots.”³⁹ During this time, there were few minor acts of resistance, mostly using humor to spread homosexual awareness in New York City.⁴⁰ The riots and acts of resistance had shown both the general population of New York City and the police force that the homosexual

³⁷ Dick Leitch, “Police Raid on N.Y.”, 11-15 ; David Carter, *Stonewall*, 183-194.

³⁸ Eric Marcus, *Making History*, 202.

³⁹ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 196.

⁴⁰ The minor acts consisted of daring police to make raids on the Sixth Precinct’s Headquarters and putting brightly colored bumper stickers with the slogan “Equality For Homosexuals” on the cars of police officials. According to scholar David Carter, these acts were taken with humor by the officers. David Carter, *Stonewall*, 197.

community was through being harassed. The gay community and its supporters had begun to take a stand against oppression⁴¹

For a couple of days, New York was silent with homosexual protest but on Wednesday evening, the protests returned at full force. There are two main reasons for the renewed protests: 1. *The Village Voice* had published several articles headlining the raid and riots at the Stonewall; and 2. Several Leftist political groups had gone to New York to protest in support of homosexual equality. Between Sunday and Tuesday, tension in the community had settled, but with the reintroduction of attention on Greenwich Village and the riots via the media and the Leftist groups, the protests were renewed. Wednesday evening, around ten P.M., homosexual youth, “queens”, and supporters of the “liberation” arrived on Christopher Street to protest. The scene Wednesday night was described as “more than serious” by the *East Village Other*, as reported by Ronnie Di Brienza.⁴² The crowds of an estimated 1,000 people that congregated on Christopher Street in front of the now closed Stonewall Inn Bar, had lost their cheerful demeanor, and gained a serious, somewhat angry assertiveness. Wednesday night contained more violence than the riots of Friday and Saturday. Trash cans were set on fire in the street, and shops were broken into, along with physical confrontation with police. It was clear that the homosexual community and the “queens” of New York had taken a stand.⁴³

Word of the protests spread quickly through the United States in the days following the riots. Due to the rapid succession of news, many protestors and members of the gay community in New York wanted another protest in Greenwich Village to raise more awareness that the homosexual community had acted against oppression. However, the Mattachine Society, led by

⁴¹ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 187-197 ; Eric Marcus, *Making History*, 199-203 ; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 204-210.

⁴² Ronnie Di Brienza, *Stonewall Incident*, 2 as quoted in David Carter, *Stonewall*, 203.

⁴³ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 201-205 ; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 205-209.

Dick Leitsch, did not support another protest. Prior to the Wednesday's riot, Mattachine-New York had put up a "prominent sign" on one of the Stonewall Inn's windows urging peace among protestors:

“WE HOMOSEXUALS PLEAD WITH
OUR PEOPLE TO PLEASE HELP
MAINTAIN PEACEFUL AND QUIET
CONDUCT ON THE STREETS OF
THE VILLAGE---MATTACHINE”⁴⁴

Although the Mattachine Society had been present in New York throughout the 1960's, they were not as influential as they were in the 1950's, due to the membership that had declined and the inability to fund newsletters. Even with these challenges, Mattachine-New York survived and was able to distribute newsletters following the riots both advocating for and arguing against additional protests. According to scholar David Carter, “some members of the Mattachine Society were trying to stop such acts”, while “Mattachine Society leadership was trying to use the riots to advance the cause”.⁴⁵ Several Mattachine leaders, in addition to Leftist, anti-war gay men and lesbians organized a meeting for other community members similar to themselves to come together on July 24, 1969.⁴⁶

The meeting that occurred July 24, 1969 did not yield any results but one: a march that took place at the conclusion of the meeting from Alternate U. to Sheridan Square chanting “Gay Power!” and singing “We Shall Overcome”. Originally dubbed “March on Stonewall”, this was the first organized march to celebrate gay pride on the East Coast. The following week at the second meeting, the group dubbed themselves the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), an activist

⁴⁴ Randy Wicker, interview by Michael Scherker, August 8, 1988 taken from Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 207.

⁴⁵ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 203.

⁴⁶ David Carter, *Stonewall*, 196-217 ; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 207-208 ; Michael Bronski, *Queer History*, 210.

organization devoted to both liberating homosexuals from oppression and furthering the human rights of homosexuals. The organization, although radical for its time, was revolutionary in its concepts. According to an article published in the *Advocate*, the GLF “pressured bars to drop rules against same sex touching”, along with having published “the Come Out! newspaper.”⁴⁷ This newspaper advocated gay rights and also urged homosexual college students to come out to their peers. The GLF also worked alongside the Homophile Youth Movement (HYMN) to try to end Mafia involvement in gay clubs and bars. The efforts by this coalition of activists were the first of many to be born out of the riots that occurred at Stonewall.⁴⁸

In November 1969 another similar organization, the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), was formed. The GAA was formed for the same reasons as the GLF, to help liberate homosexuals from oppression. Both of these organizations protested for gay rights in public atmospheres by staging kiss-ins in restaurants and hosting street demonstrations.⁴⁹ The organizations also led protests on university campuses to object to anti-gay rules that the universities had in place. During these protests, members of the organizations would chant phrases such as “We are the Gay Liberation Front!” and “Gay Power!” These phrases became mottos for the organizations in the 1970’s. Many members of the GLF and the GAA saw themselves as a part of a greater

⁴⁷ “The Gay Liberation Front,” *Advocate*, November 12, 2002, 48.

⁴⁸ Michael Bronski, *Queer History*, 210-212 ; Amin Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 26-27 ; David Carter, “Stonewall Stories” ; Ian Lekus “The Long Sixties” *OAH Magazine of History*, March 2006, 34 ; Lige Clark and Jack Nichols, “N.Y. Gays: Will the Spark Die?,” *Witness to Revolution: The Advocate Reports on Gay and Lesbian Politics, 1967-1999* (New York: Allison Books, 1999): 16 ; David Carter, *Stonewall*, 217-221 ; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 235-239.

⁴⁹ A kiss-in was a type of protest that took place in a restaurant, in which multiple gay couples would enter a restaurant or bar that had anti-gay rules and the couples would proceed to kiss until the management of the bar or restaurant agreed to remove the anti-gay rules. The couples would then leave the establishment. Eric Marcus, *Making History*, 204.

community with a purpose: to liberate homosexuals from the harassment of an oppressive majority.⁵⁰

One of the major accomplishments of the GLF and the GAA occurred in 1970, roughly a year after the riots on Christopher Street. The GLF and the GAA organized a one year anniversary Gay Pride march to commemorate the riots. Dubbed “Gay Liberation Day”, the anniversary of the Stonewall riots, thousands of people attended to celebrate gay pride and commemorate the riots that had occurred. The large amount of attendees was in part due to violence in the weeks prior. “Gay liberationists”, according to scholar John D’Emilio had been provoked by “bar raids and street arrests of gay men.”⁵¹ The march took place from Times Square to Greenwich Village, whilst the crowd members chanted “Out of the closets and into the streets!” and the traditional “Gay Power!” The crowd was made of different coalitions representing different associations from across the country. Members of the DOB were present along with several gay organizations from major universities in the country, such as Yale, Rutgers, and NYU. The GLF and the GAA had not only succeeded in bringing together thousands of homosexual citizens and supporters, but also succeeded in uniting organizations around the country using a common goal.⁵²

The GLF and the GAA, unfortunately, would not last but until the mid-1970’s, when members separated from the organizations to form other associations to further the rights of homosexuals. In 1972, the GLF disintegrated completely; followed by the GAA in 1979-1980.

⁵⁰Brett Beemyn, “The Silence Is Broken: A History of the First Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual College Student Group,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no 2 (April 2003):205-223. ; Eric Marcus, *Making History*, 172-204 ; Yolanda Retter and Walter L. Williams, eds., *Gay and Lesbian Rights in the United States: A Documentary History* (Boston: Greenwood Press, 2003):118-120 ; John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 232-233 ; Michael Bronski, *Queer History*, 210-211 ; David Carter, *Stonewall*, 222-232.

⁵¹ John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 234.

⁵² John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 232-235 ; John Louritsen, “Gay Liberation in New York: Year One,” *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* 16, no. 4 (July/August 2009): 27-29 ; David Carter, *Stonewall*, 253-254.

Out of the dismemberment of these two groups came the formation of numerous other gay and lesbian rights organizations, including the National Gay Task Force, founded in 1974.⁵³ After the dismemberment of the GLF and the GAA, over fifty gay and lesbian youth support groups across the nation were founded and formed in addition to a copious amount of adult organizations, allowing teens and young adults to form bonds with other homosexual youth. Scholar Michael Bronski claimed that the creation of these groups was in part due to “youth counterculture” in addition to “young people engaging in sex earlier.”⁵⁴ Bronski also pointed out that with the creation of these organizations, “gay and lesbian youth now had a political and social framework in which to declare and celebrate their identity.”⁵⁵ The creation of these youth organizations were just one way that both youth and adult homosexual organizations strived to make differences in social structure and the sexual culture of the United States.⁵⁶

It was realized in the 1950’s, and possibly prior, that oppression of the homosexual community was caused by the regulation of gender/social structural norms. In the 1970’s organizations had begun to take action against the regulation of these norms in order to stop oppression. One of the oppressive norms in American culture was homosexuality as a mental illness. Homosexuality had been classified as a mental disorder in the United States for decades, and according to scholar Eric Marcus “after many years of discussion and internal debates—and three years of protests and pressure from gay activists” had finally convinced the APA to remove homosexuality from the “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.”⁵⁷ The *Advocate* reported the removal of homosexuality in January 1974, a month after the APA’s ruling. The *Advocate* stated that the APA also “passed a resolution urging repeal of all state and

⁵³ The National Gay Task Force is now the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

⁵⁴ Michael Bronski, *Queer History*, 212.

⁵⁵ Michael Bronski, *Queer History*, 212.

⁵⁶ Michael Bronski, *Queer History*, 211-212.

⁵⁷ Eric Marcus, *Making History*, 173.

local sodomy laws and deploring discrimination against gays.”⁵⁸ After decades of laws against homosexuality, action had been taken by gay activists and success granted.⁵⁹

The organizations had succeeded in removing homosexuality from the APA’s list of mental illnesses, but in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s there was an emergence of an illness that shocked the homosexual community. HIV/AIDS first appeared in the United States in 1981 in major cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York. HIV/AIDS, although not specifically related to homosexuality, was especially common in the homosexual community due to its quick spread through the gay male population.⁶⁰ Little was known about HIV/AIDS until the mid-1980’s, and even then there was no treatment or cure, simply a diagnostic test. In 1983, the *Advocate* published an article stating that the only “fact known about AIDS is that it exists.”⁶¹ The government did not cooperate with the community to fund research to find treatments for the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In response to the government, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) was formed in 1987. ACT UP held strikes and protests on Wall Street in order to “call attention to pharmaceutical companies’ profits from the AIDS crisis by charging prohibitive prices for many AIDS drugs,” according to scholars Walter Williams and Yolanda Retter.⁶² Due to increasing efforts to attempt to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS, membership of gay and lesbian organizations vastly increased in the 1980s. Eric Marcus stated that “thousands of gay people...were motivated to join the fight against AIDS.”⁶³ Many of these organizations, in

⁵⁸ “Sick No More,” *Witness to Revolution: The Advocate Reports on Gay and Lesbian Politics, 1967-1999* (New York: Allison Books, 1999): 62.

⁵⁹ Eric Marcus, *Making History*, 172-173 ; Michael Bronski, *Queer History*, 218.

⁶⁰ Michael Bronski, *Queer History*, 225.

⁶¹ John Rechy, “AIDS: Mysteries and Hidden Dangers,” *Witness to Revolution: The Advocate Reports on Gay and Lesbian Politics, 1967-1999* (New York: Allison Books, 1999): 159.

⁶² Walter L. Williams and Yolanda Retter, *Gay and Lesbian Rights*, 192.

⁶³ Eric Marcus, *Making History*, 405.

addition to ACT UP, were present at the 1987 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, which has been renowned as a defining moment for gay activism.⁶⁴

On October 11, 1987, hundreds of thousands of homosexual men and women, and their supporters gathered in Washington D.C. to march on Washington. The *Advocate* reported that the people gathered in Washington to “demand a federal war on AIDS” and to “end homophobic discrimination.”⁶⁵ The march had an estimated turn out of anywhere between 200,000 and 650,000 members: one of the largest crowds to ever gather in Washington. Many emotions were demonstrated during the march as many crowd members laughed and cried at the sheer size of the crowd; while others were angry with the government’s inability to fund AIDS research. Although there were mixed emotions during the march, the crowd kept a peaceful demeanor, while chanting “Two, four, six, eight! Being gay is really great!” and “What do we want? Gay rights! When do we want them? Now!” The familiar song that was sang at the Stonewall riots, “We Shall Overcome” was also sung. Known by activists as “The Great March”, the 1987 march on Washington is the second largest march in American history, following a march protesting the Vietnam War. Nearly twenty years after the Stonewall riots, thousands of homosexuals and their supporters were protesting for equal rights together in the nation’s capital.⁶⁶

The Stonewall Riots was the origin for the stand against oppression in the homosexual community. Once that stand was taken, homosexuals and their supporters rallied and protested for equal rights, by forming organizations and hosting public demonstrations. In 1969 the homosexual community sought liberation by rioting on Christopher Street and chanting

⁶⁴ Walter L. Williams and Yolanda Retter, *Gay and Lesbian Rights*, 192-193 ; Eric Marcus, *Making History*, 405-407 ; Michael Bronski, *Queer History*, 224-235.

⁶⁵ Peter Freiberg, “The March on Washington: Hundreds of Thousands Take the Gay Cause to the Nation’s Capital,” *Witness to Revolution: The Advocate Reports on Gay and Lesbian Politics, 1967-1999* (New York: Allison Books, 1999): 205.

⁶⁶ Amin Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, xiv-123 ; Peter Freirberg, “March on Washington”, 205-206 ; Walter L. Williams and Yolanda Retter, *Gay and Lesbian Rights*, 194-195.

“Christopher Street belongs to the Queens!” However, Martin Duberman stated that liberation is a process in his interview with Stephanie Fairington.⁶⁷ The process of liberation had begun before Stonewall, but was furthered by the riots. Prior to Stonewall, there was a Gay Liberation Movement, based on the decreasing membership to organizations such as the Mattachine Society and the DOB, it was slowing down. The liberation movement that was formed following the Stonewall riots was much more active, allowing membership in organizations to flourish. Gay pride across the United States took on new roles, as parades and marches occurred in major cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago. An article published in the *Chicago Tribune* reported a march that occurred in San Francisco with a crowd of “a quarter of a million.”⁶⁸ The same article described a march that occurred in 1979 in New York to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Stonewall riots. The *New York Times* also reported on the march that occurred in New York in 1979, having reported that the thirteen original Stonewall arrestees were the ones leading the march.⁶⁹ This march, among the others that had taken place in Chicago and San Francisco, exemplified how strong gay pride had grown since the Stonewall riots.⁷⁰

The riots at Stonewall were not the beginning of an LGBT liberation movement, but instead a gateway into the upcoming liberation movement. What happened at Stonewall was more than likely inevitable, but seeing as though oppression of the homosexual community was rising in the 1960’s via increased entrapment and an increase in sodomy laws matched with a decrease with membership in gay and lesbian organizations, the homosexual community was

⁶⁷ Stephanie Fairington, “‘Affirm Who You Feel You Really Are’: An Interview With Martin Duberman,” *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 20, no. 5 (September/October 2013): 24-26.

⁶⁸ “Gays March For Civil Rights on Two Coasts,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 25, 1979. Accessed April 28, 2014 via ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1990).

⁶⁹ “Homosexuals’ Parade Marks 10th Year of Rights Drive: Original 13 Lead Parade,” *New York Times*, June 25, 1979. Accessed April 28, 2014 via ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times. (1851-2010)

⁷⁰ Stephanie Fairington, “Affirm Who You Feel,” 24-26 ; Amin Ghaziani, *Dividends of Dissent*, 26-27 ; “Gays March”, *Chicago Tribune*.

more than likely to react to stimulus if prompted. The raid at the Stonewall acted as this stimulus, and the homosexual community acted with aggression against the police after years of mistreatment. In the years following the riots, the homosexual community, and its supporters, reacted less aggressively to stimulus, with marches and peaceful protests in order to gain civil rights. Since 1969, eighty-one organizations have been founded in the United States dedicated to the rights and support of gay men and women in addition to countless others that have been formed internationally. Although gay rights organizations were able to form prior to the Stonewall riots, these particular organizations, including their significant membership levels, probably would not have been able to form if the Stonewall Riots had not occurred. Aside from organizations, major breakthroughs in societal norms might not have happened in the timely manner which they did. Perhaps the most notable accomplishment of the Stonewall riots would be the gay pride marches and the congregation of thousands of people for a cause. The commemoration of Stonewall and the celebration of gay pride is a tradition that started a week after Stonewall and continued into the twentieth century, where the LGBT community still fights for gay rights.

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