

The Stonewall Riots' Effect on The Gay Rights Movement

by

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## Chapter 1

In Manhattan's Greenwich Village stands a small bar in the middle of Christopher Street. Walking by this bar, you would never guess what groundbreaking and rich history that the Stonewall Inn boasts. Starting on June 28th, 1969, four pivotal nights of rioting and protesting started a revolution that has changed the course of gay rights in America forever. Gay Pride Parades, decriminalization of homosexuality, protections for LGBT people's rights, and gay marriage can be traced as direct outcomes of the Stonewall Inn Riots of 1969.

Many historians argue that the foundation that allowed for the accomplishments for LGBT rights was laid down long before the Stonewall Inn Riots, especially in New York where gay men forged their own communities before the Stonewall Riots, creating the foundation for gay rights. Pro-Gay Rights groups like the Mattachine Society were active in helping bring gay rights to the forefront of government and legal outlets. An important example of their work was Mattachine member Dick Letisch's case where Letisch became the first man in American history who admitted to being gay, during a time where homosexuality was illegal in a court setting, but was not legally charged with any crime.

As an openly gay man, I chose to investigate the way in which the Stonewall Riots affected the current Gay Liberation and Rights movement. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we

celebrate the riots as the birth of that movement, although this is not necessarily true. Through investigating gay history prior to Stonewall, I learned about many unsung heroes throughout the movement, as well as educate others on them too.

Each chapter in this senior project examines a time period in its relativity to the Stonewall Riots of 1969. The second chapter consists of gay history in New York prior to Stonewall. The third chapter examines the Stonewall Riots themselves. The fourth chapter examines political outcomes after the Stonewall Riots.

Lillian Faderman's The Gay Revolution played a key role in finding information for the periods before Stonewall. Gay New York by George Chauncey also laid out a strong foundation on information about gay communities in New York City prior to Stonewall. For chapter 3, David Carter's Stonewall as well as various newspapers from 1969 aided in creating a full narrative of what occurred during the Stonewall Riots in Greenwich Village. Niel Miller's Out of The Past and Linda Hirshman's Victory helped outline important political outcomes of the riots. Using many newspaper articles from the period of the AIDS epidemic also created an illustration of what life was like for many gay men at the time.

Gay history is a relatively new subject as a majority of books pertaining to a gay timeline have been released within the last 100 years. The timeline of gay history is also interpreted differently by many historians. This is why looking at the significance of an event known as the "Birth of the Gay Rights Movement" is important because it gives a

reader or researchers the chance to engage with information presented and allows them to create an opinion on the significance of that said event.

## Chapter 2

In 2019, New York City's gay pride parade was named "World Pride," the first pride celebration where people from different cities and countries came together in order to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City. World Pride was hailed as the biggest pride celebration to date. Yet it would have been inconceivable something of this nature would have occurred only 50 years ago. The catalyst to change, The Stonewall Riots, are identified as the beginning of the gay rights movement and gay liberation in America.

Some historians like Linda Hirshman view the riots as a reaction to a long grim history that many gay men and women endured. Between "witch hunts" of gays in public, to the "witch hunts" of gays in public office, gay life was something that was detested by lawmakers and law enforcement officers. Instances of anti-gay propaganda were common throughout major cities across the country, in turn, making the general public turn away from the "perversions" of the "homophiles", a term used to describe homosexuals.

Pre-Stonewall gay culture is marked by a constant struggle by gays for acceptance into wider society. Yet pro-gay-right groups were present many years before Stonewall. One of the best-known groups was the *Mattachine Society*,

celebrated for helping to push for protections for gay-men during the 1950s. The Mattachine Society was active in pushing gay rights to the forefront of government and legal outlets.

“Homosexual emancipation” is a common term used today to portray the fight for gay rights, but was not a term used widely during the years leading up to The Stonewall Riots. This is why the Mattachine Society was extraordinary in gay American history. Created by Henry Hay in 1950,<sup>1</sup> the pro-gay group was credited with starting a conversation for gay-rights in Los Angeles. Hay derived the name “Mattachine Society” from the “Societe Mattachine”, groups of lifelong fraternities of unmarried townsmen who never performed in public unmasked.<sup>2</sup>

In the spring of 1952, two years after the group’s formation, Dale Jennings, a group member of the Mattachine Society, was targeted by an undercover cop who enticed Jennings to perform sexual acts on him in public. Jennings rejected the offer, but was still arrested anyway and was charged with soliciting a police officer.<sup>3</sup> Henry Hay and the rest of the Mattachine Society called for action against entrapment of homosexuals. During the 1950s, undercover cops and investigators would pose as gays in bars, public parks and restrooms, places where gay men would go to find one

<sup>1</sup>Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History*. (The Hearst Corporation,1976) p.410

<sup>2</sup>Katz p.412

<sup>3</sup>William Dudley Clendinen, “Dale Jennings, 82, Writer and Gay Rights Pioneer” *The New York Times*, May 22,2000, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/05/22/us/william-dale-jennings-82-writer-and-gay-rights-pioneer.html>

another.<sup>4</sup> While rallying for Jennings' innocence, the issue of civil rights was brought forth for the first time regarding anti-gay law practices.<sup>5</sup> During Jennings' trial, he admitted he was homosexual, but did not engage in any sexual acts with the undercover officer. The jury voted 11 to 1 for acquittal, and the judge dismissed Jennings' case.<sup>6</sup> It was the first time in California history where someone who admitted to being a homosexual went free.<sup>7</sup>

After the historic trial, many people wrote to Hay and wanted to extend the Mattachine Society to their own cities. New York, Chicago, Saint Louis, and various cities all over California began their own branches of Mattachine that rallied for help to fight gay entrapment cases.<sup>8</sup>

In 1966, members of New York's Mattachine Society, Dick Letisch, John Timmons and Craig Rodwell, organized "sip-ins" at various bars around the city.<sup>9</sup> The three men drew inspiration from "sit-ins" used during the Civil Rights Era in the United States. At these "sit-ins" people of color who were declined service at restaurants sat in restaurants across the country and demanded service peacefully. Similarly, these gay

<sup>4</sup> Clendinen, *The New York Times*, May 22, 2000, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/05/22/us/william-dale-jennings-82-writer-and-gay-rights-pioneer.html>

<sup>5</sup> Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: the Story of the Struggle* (Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2016) p.64

<sup>6</sup> Clendinen, *The New York Times*, May 22, 2000, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/05/22/us/william-dale-jennings-82-writer-and-gay-rights-pioneer.html>

<sup>7</sup> Faderman p.65

<sup>8</sup> Faderman p.65

<sup>9</sup> Faderman p.117

“sip-ins” consisted of sitting down in a bar, and requesting service, while revealing that you were homosexual. These were done to protest to a New York City law that targeted homosexuals, and banned them from consuming alcohol. The State Liquor Authority argued that this was done due to homosexual bar patrons being disorderly and rowdy.<sup>10</sup> The men chose to enact their sip-in at a bar named *Julis* located at Waverly Place and 10<sup>th</sup> Street in Greenwich Village, that had undergone a raid by the New York Police Department a week prior. At *Julis* a bartender forbade Letisch, Timmons and Rodwell from drinking at the bar by place his hands over their cups.<sup>11</sup> This event was captured by a photographer for *The Village Voice newspaper*.<sup>12</sup>

After gaining coverage from the New York Times<sup>13</sup>, Letisch filed a formal complaint with the State Liquor Authority to both the New York Commission on Human number had a convincing quality to it.<sup>14</sup> After hearing this, a Senate committee launched an investigation. The fear of homosexuals in government was something that garnered attention from the public as much as, if not more than, concern about Communists.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Scott Simon “Remembering a 1966 ‘Sip-In’ for Gay Rights” NPR, June 28, 2008, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=91993823>

<sup>11</sup> Simon NPR

<sup>12</sup> Faderman p.117

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Johnson, *3 DEVIATES INVITE EXCLUSION BY BARS: But They Visit Four Before Being Refused Service, in a Test of S.L.A. Rules*(New York Times,1966)

<sup>14</sup> Linda Hirshman, *Victory*(HarperCollins Publishers,2012) p.47

<sup>15</sup> Neil Miller, *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present* (New York: 1st Vintage Books , 1995) p.238



The “Lavender Scare resulted in about 100 homosexuals being dismissed from their civil service jobs from 1947-1950. <sup>16</sup> Then, in 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower issued Executive Order 10450 officially banning gays from government: “*WHEREAS the interests of the national security require that all persons privileged to be employed in the departments and agencies of the Government, shall be reliable, trustworthy, of good conduct and character, and of complete and unswerving loyalty to the United States;...*”<sup>17</sup> Under the new policy, “sexual perversion” was sufficient for exclusion from federal and civil service jobs. Aiding in this was the general public’s views towards communism and homosexuals.

During the Lavender Scare, many people characterized “*queers*”, a derogatory term at the time, as mentally and morally unstable.<sup>18</sup> The rise in “sex crime panic” also turned the public away from support for homosexual people. Many people believed that homosexual “perverts” controlled uncontrollable sexual impulses and could sexually assault young children.<sup>19</sup> This resulted the number of homosexual firings rise from 100 per year to 400 year.<sup>20</sup> By the 1960s, the Federal State department dismissed about 1,000 homosexuals. It is estimated that 5,000 gay or lesbian employees may have lost their jobs in the federal government during the early days of the Cold War.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Miller p.238

<sup>17</sup> “Executive Orders,” National Archives and Records Administration (National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), <https://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/10450.html>)

<sup>18</sup> Vicki L. Eaklor, *Queer America*(The New Press New York,2008) p.88

<sup>19</sup> Eaklor p.88

<sup>20</sup> Miller p.238

<sup>21</sup> Eaklor p.47

The military was also a target of homophobia. In 1919, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt assigned special investigators to search for sailors engaging in sexual acts with men.<sup>22</sup> During the late 1940s the United States military discharged close to 1,000 homosexual soldiers. A 1949 Department of Defense memorandum stated “Homosexual personnel, irrespective of sex, should not be permitted to serve in any branch of the Armed Forces in any capacity.”<sup>23</sup> This made it easier for any of the various branches to implement this anti-homosexual attitude throughout the military. By the early 1950s, the number of soldiers dismissed for homosexuality jumped to 2,000 a year.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, gay communities still flourished in large cities across America, to the disapproval of law enforcement and much of the general public. One of these flourishing communities was in New York City, which was known as an epicenter for gay culture even before “Stonewall”. Many communities created their own language and customs with its own traditions and histories.<sup>25</sup> In the 1920s, the rise of the “drag balls” began in Harlem. Many of these drag balls attracted thousands of participants and spectators.<sup>26</sup> In Greenwich Village gay bars begin to appear increasingly. These gay communities forged a world of social networks the New York’s streets, apartments, bathhouses, cafeterias, and saloons.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, a one mile strip of lower Manhattan, known as

<sup>22</sup> Faderman p.31

<sup>23</sup> Miller p.239

<sup>24</sup> Miller p.239

<sup>25</sup> George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. (Basic Books, 2019)I

<sup>26</sup>Chauncey p.ii

<sup>27</sup> Chauncey p.ii

The Bowery, also became a center of gay life by the 1890s. By the 1920s, three distinct gay neighborhoods with a different class, ethnic character, gay cultural style, and public reputation began to flourish. These were Greenwich Village, Harlem, and Times Square.<sup>28</sup>

Greenwich Village has always played a large role in gay history. A large number of gay bars in the early 1900s were also located in The Village, and into 21<sup>st</sup> century it has remained a center of a thriving LGBT community. In the 1910s and 1920s, Greenwich Village was known as a pocket of political radicalism and sexual freedom.<sup>29</sup> Like Harlem, The Village also sported many popular Costume Balls. In 1914, these massive all-night parties were held at the historic Webster Hall, located at East 11<sup>th</sup> street, and were organized to benefit various Village groups and Organizations.<sup>30</sup> Due to the rowdy nature of The Costume Balls, Webster Hall was coined the nickname the “Devils Playground”. Webster Hall has been regarded as the “first gay club” in America.<sup>31</sup>

Another key gathering place were Village bathhouses, places for sexual encounters. One of the most popular gay baths was the “Everard” north of the Village on West 28<sup>th</sup> Street, which rose to prominence by World War I. Originally a church,

<sup>28</sup> Chauncey p.iii

<sup>29</sup> Miller p.125

<sup>30</sup> Miller p.129

<sup>31</sup> Chris Thomas “The Secret History of Webster Hall, America's First LGBTQ Club.” (*Milk*, June 2016)

Everard was converted into a bathhouse in 1888.<sup>32</sup> The bathhouse had a reputation for being the classiest, safest, and best known of the baths in New York by the 1930s.<sup>33</sup>

Like Greenwich, Harlem also boasted a visible gay culture. By the 1920s, Harlem, which had been predominantly Italian and Jewish, had started changing as a large migration of Southern blacks settled there, and was celebrated as a center of nightlife. The new African American residents expressed their cultural voice in a movement known as The Harlem Renaissance, which flourished in music and art, as well as *sexual expression*. The Harlem Renaissance gave birth to “The New Negro” who looked to his or her own past and experience rather than white culture as the source of inspiration and content.<sup>34</sup>

During the Prohibition Era, that began in 1920, many people capitalized on the “anything goes” attitude that came with the opposition to banning of alcohol. Many Harlem apartments hosted private parties such as “rent parties” where bootleg liquor was served, and “buffet flats” which were sex clubs that featured shows and prostitution.<sup>35</sup> These parties were oftentimes ignored by authorities, which helped Harlem maintain its notoriety for its nightlife. Even though the guests at these parties were engaging in sexual acts with members of the same sex, some in Harlem’s community were fluid with their sexuality, and did not define themselves as

<sup>32</sup> Miller p.143

<sup>33</sup> Miller p.143

<sup>34</sup> Eaklor p.47

<sup>35</sup> Miller p.136

homosexual.<sup>36</sup> Drag Balls in Harlem were substantially larger than ones mentioned in Greenwich Village. By 1929, 3,000 spectators, many of them black, attended these Harlem drag balls at Rockland Palace located on 155<sup>th</sup> street and 8<sup>th</sup> avenue.<sup>37</sup>

Although a grand emergence of a gay subculture took place in New York City, there was not a direct effort to assert gay power on a political stage during the 1920s. Police crackdowns on gay spaces were prevalent. Gay history expert George Chauncey explains that in 1926, 600 men were arrested for sexual cruising in New York City parks, restrooms and public squares.<sup>38</sup> Censorship for many gay and lesbian art forms also were extremely prevalent during the 1920s. The New York play “The Captive” contained a plot revolving around lesbianism. In 1927, the play was raided with the producer and cast ultimately getting arrested.<sup>39</sup> James Walker, New York City’s Mayor at the time, ran a campaign in-order to eradicate “immoral” plays. Amongst these plays was “Mae West’s: The Drag”, which featured 40 gay chorus boys.<sup>40</sup>

George Chauncey explains that an informal understanding between gay men and the authorities in New York City allowed for gay men to socialize and gather in public.<sup>41</sup> This changed during the 1930s due to the ever-growing visibility of gay culture. New York’s legislators began to pass laws that targeted the gay community specifically. After

<sup>36</sup>Miller p.136

<sup>37</sup> Chauncey p.54

<sup>38</sup> Miller p.131

<sup>39</sup> Miller p.131

<sup>40</sup> Miller p.132

<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History*. (The Hearst Corporation,1976). Pg.85

the theater raids, censorship prohibited any play in New York City from depicting any gay or lesbian scenes. In the Motion Picture code, depictions of “sexual perversion” were also banned during this time. To make matters worse, the New York State Liquor Authority created laws prohibiting gays and lesbians from being served alcohol after prohibition ended.<sup>42</sup>

Gay America has a rich history that predates the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Despite the Riots being labeled as the birth of the gay rights movement, we can see that there have been numerous efforts to bring forth awareness of the unfair treatment and discrimination gays faced. Henry Hay’s pro-gay rights group, the Mattachine Society, paved the way for future accomplishments that gay groups are benefiting from today. Several monumental and notable events took place ranging from the entrapment case involving a police officer and gay man, which resulted in Dale Jennings being exonerated of all fraudulent charges, which was the first ever seen in American history, to Dick Letisch’s organized “sip-ins” that reversed the New York State Liquor ban for gay men and women. These accomplishments opened the door for a conversation on gay liberation on a political scale. In many ways, New York’s gay community served as a leader in establishing gay rights for themselves and the rest of the United States.

<sup>42</sup> Neil Miller, *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present*. (Alyson Books, 2006)132

### Chapter 3

On a hot summer day in New York City's Greenwich Village, the New York Police Department raided The Stonewall Inn, a gay bar. Little did these policemen know the impact that this raid would have on the future of gay rights and the gay liberation movement. Gay communities had been forged in New York, and minor political efforts were made to better the life of these gay communities. The Stonewall Inn Riots of 1969 are commonly credited as the birth of the gay rights movement throughout American History.

Beginning on June 28th, 1969, two nights of riots against the New York Police Department ensued centered on the Stonewall. Stonewall Inn was one of many gay bars in New York's Greenwich village. Located at 53 Christopher Street, the Inn was owned by The Genovese crime family, a Mafia affiliated group that owned a majority of Greenwich Village's gay bars.<sup>43</sup> The Bar was set up as a "bottle club" to avoid being investigated by the New York State Liquor Authority, which was still regularly investigating gay bars for "orderliness."<sup>44</sup> A bottle club is a social gathering place that does not serve alcohol, but guests are welcome to bring their own liquor and alcohol.

<sup>43</sup> PBS, "Why Did the Mafia Own the Bar?" (Public Broadcasting Service, 2019)

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/stonewall-why-did-mafia-own-bar/>

<sup>44</sup> Linda Hirshman, *Victory* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012) p.97

Like many of the Mafia's establishments, The Stonewall Inn was dirty, had no running water, and had overpriced, watered-down liquor.<sup>45</sup> Still, large numbers of gay men would frequent the popular bar. The Stonewall Inn differed from other gay bars in the neighborhood due to its lively and varied clientele. Bar goers included blacks, whites, Puerto Ricans, and Asians.<sup>46</sup>

After a fire had destroyed The Stonewall Inn Restaurant in 1964, "Fat Tony", a member of the Genovese family, undertook the project of re-opening the establishment as a gay bar.<sup>47</sup> During this time, gay bars were extremely lucrative, as gay men did not have many options when it came to bars. It took about \$3,500, a lot of money at the time, to renovate the establishment.<sup>48</sup> The outside of the bar was brick, with two large windows in front. Like most gay bars at the time, the windows were blacked out so that cops and the public could not see inside.<sup>49</sup> When creating the bar, Fat Tony kept in mind that police raids would be an obstacle when operating a gay bar, as they were extremely common.<sup>50</sup> The doors to The Stonewall Inn were large oak doors with iron inside of them. They also installed a peephole so that the bouncers could weed out possible undercover cops.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Hirshman p.97

<sup>46</sup> Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: the Story of the Struggle*(Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2016) p.171

<sup>47</sup> David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked The Gay Revolution*(St. Martin's Press New York, 2004)67

<sup>48</sup> Carter p.67

<sup>49</sup> Carter p.68

<sup>50</sup> Carter p.68

<sup>51</sup> Jerry Lisker, "Homo Nest Raided, Queen Bees Are Stinging Mad," *Sunday News* , July 6, 1969, <https://splinternews.com/this-1969-newspaper-cover-story-about-the-stonewall-riot-1793848746>)



On June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1969, at about 1 a.m. six officers of Manhattan's First Division Public Morals Squad began their raids on the bar.<sup>52</sup> Four of the officers were undercover women who posed as bar patrons. The other two officers were Detective Charles Smythe and Deputy Inspector Seymour Pine who were in uniform and announced the raid on The Stonewall Inn.<sup>53</sup>

The scene has been described by David Carter as going from festivity to sadness, as the jukeboxes fell silent, and the "go-go" dancers stopped dancing to put their clothes back on.<sup>54</sup> The officers justified the reason for the raid as The Stonewall Inn did not have a liquor license. Many of the bar's patrons were accustomed to the raids, when officers would request Identification to ensure no underage bar goers were present.<sup>55</sup>

Outside of the bar, local residents, including gay men and transgender women, were sitting outside on stoops in the 80° weather. As the raid inside of Stonewall continued, many men and drag queens who exited without being arrested remained on the streets outside of the bar to see what would happen to their friends.<sup>56</sup> As many of the bar patrons were put into the back of many police cars, spectators began to surround the police and police cars as well.<sup>57</sup> It was not until a "transvestite" yelled "Why

<sup>52</sup> Faderman p.171

<sup>53</sup> Carter p. 137

<sup>54</sup> Carter p.139

<sup>55</sup> Hirshman p.96

<sup>56</sup> Hirshman p.99

<sup>57</sup> Hirshman p.99

don't you guys do something?" that the crowd began to fight back. They began to throw pennies at the cops on Christopher Street.<sup>58</sup> Because of a broken radio system, the six police could not call for assistance.<sup>59</sup> As the police tried to stop the attacks from the crowd, the rioters began backing the officers towards a construction site.<sup>60</sup> It was here that the gay bar patrons found loose bricks to throw at the police.<sup>61</sup> Dick Letisch, who famously orchestrated the gay "sip-ins" just three years earlier in 1966, was home when the radio news station WNEW announced that there had been a disturbance at the Stonewall Inn.<sup>62</sup> As he headed down to the bar to explore the scene, he speculated that "this is the death kneel for mannerly homophile groups like [The Mattachine Society]"<sup>63</sup>

The rioting continued to grow in intensity, forcing the officers to retreat into The Stonewall Inn where they barricaded themselves inside for protection from the angry crowd outside.<sup>64</sup> The rioters began to throw a barrage of trashcans, beer bottles, and whatever else they could find laying on the ground of Christopher Street.<sup>65</sup> John O'Brien, a frequent patron at The Stonewall Inn, describes the experience at the front of the riots: most of the riot "was led by transvestites, drag queens, young gays, as well as homeless gays."<sup>66</sup> At one point, a group of gay men were destroying a parking meter,

<sup>58</sup> Lucian Truscott, "Gay Power Comes to Sheridan Square," *The Village Voice*, accessed July 3, 1969, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2009/06/24/stonewall-at-40-the-voice-articles-that-sparked-a-final-night-of-rioting/>)

<sup>59</sup> Hirshman p.99

<sup>60</sup> Truscott, *The Village Voice*

<sup>61</sup> Faderman p.174

<sup>62</sup> Faderman p.176

<sup>63</sup> Faderman p.176

<sup>64</sup> Carter p.165

<sup>65</sup> Truscott, *The Village Voice*

<sup>66</sup> Carter p.165

and unearthed the entire mechanism from the sidewalk. They then used the parking meter as a battering ram on the Stonewall Inn's doors.<sup>67</sup>

Inside of the bar, the six officers were unclear what their next move would be. The rioters broke the windows to the bar, and began to throw Molotov cocktails that they created using lighter fluid from cigarette lighters and cans found on the street.<sup>68</sup> The officers found small peepholes that showed the front of Christopher Street from inside of the bar. Officer Symthe recalls that the crowd "looked like a thousand people" from inside of the bar.<sup>69</sup> It was not until the rioters caused a fire inside of the bar that caused the Officers to panic. The rioters rolled up pieces of paper and stuffed them into holes in front of the bar. They then used their lighters to light these papers on fire, which caused a large fire inside of the bar.<sup>70</sup>

After almost two hours of rioting, at 2:55am the Tactical Patrol Force arrived, whose major job had been to disperse New York City's race riots and antiwar protests.<sup>71</sup> They were also assisted by officers from New York's Fourth, Fifth and Tenth precincts.<sup>72</sup> The officers wore riot helmets with long visors and carried shields with them for protection.<sup>73</sup> While a majority of the rioters continued to fight the police, they were also

<sup>67</sup> Carter p.165

<sup>68</sup> Hirshman p.99

<sup>69</sup> Carter p.166

<sup>70</sup> Dennis Eskow, "3 Cops Hurt as Bar Raid Riles Crowd," *New York Daily News*, June 29, 1969, <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/stonewall-riot-place-1969-article-1.2267954>)

<sup>71</sup> Vicki L. Eaklor, *Queer America* (The New Press New York,2008)123

<sup>72</sup> Carter p.173

<sup>73</sup> Eskow, *New York Daily News*

met with peaceful acts of “revolt” by these gay men and drag queens, including a Rockettes-style chorus line of drag queens who linked arms and kicked high.<sup>74</sup> The officers tried their best to disperse the crowd from Christopher Street. Officer Charles Holmes was injured and treated at St. Vincent’s Hospital, in Chelsea after being bitten on the right wrist by a rioter whom he tried to place under arrest.<sup>75</sup> The remainder of rioters were dispersed when the Tactical Patrol Force finally used a fire truck hose to spray at the crowd.<sup>76</sup> At about 4 a.m. the Tactical Patrol Force finally cleared the street of rioters.<sup>77</sup>

Four hundred men were involved in the June 28 riot at The Stonewall Inn in 1969.<sup>78</sup> The New York Police Department arrested a total of 13 people, who were charged with harassment, resisting arrest, and disorderly conduct.<sup>79</sup> A total of 4 policemen were injured after the riots.<sup>80</sup>

The day after, June 29<sup>th</sup>, New York newspapers reported the events in full detail. During the day, the Department of Sanitation swept Christopher Street, and the

<sup>74</sup> Faderman p.182

<sup>75</sup> Sewell Chan, *Police Records Document Start of Stonewall Uprising*. (*The New York Times*, 22 June 2009)

<sup>76</sup> Carter p.177

<sup>77</sup> Faderman p.183

<sup>78</sup> Faderman p.183

<sup>79</sup> *4 POLICEMEN HURT IN 'VILLAGE' RAID: Melee Near Sheridan Square Follows Action at Bar*(The New York Times, 29 June 1969, <https://www.nytimes.com/1969/06/29/archives/4-policemen-hurt-in-village-raid-melee-near-sheridan-square-follows.html>)

<sup>80</sup> *4 POLICEMEN HURT IN 'VILLAGE' RAID: Melee Near Sheridan Square Follows Action at Bar*(The New York Times, 29 June 1969, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/eresources/exhibitions/sw25/case1.html>))

smashed windows of the Stonewall Inn were boarded up and painted black.<sup>81</sup> By 9 p.m., gay men and lesbian women showed up at Stonewall and formed small groups on the sidewalk.<sup>82</sup> Within two hours however, the crowd grew to over a thousand people.<sup>83</sup> The rioters were joined by police from the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth and Ninth Precincts who were there to ensure that riots did not occur.<sup>84</sup> They began to chant slogans like “Gay Power”, “We Want Freedom Now” and “Equality for Homosexuals”.<sup>85</sup>

Many gay men and lesbian women also engaged in public acts of affection during the protest. Chris Babick explains the experience as exhilarating. “We were in the streets...We were there. And I was there...Here’s the homosexual standing on the streets.”<sup>86</sup> The crowd grew so large that people could no longer be contained on the sidewalks, and vehicular traffic was blocked.<sup>87</sup> It was not long until the riot took a violent turn. Like the night before, many fires were started in trash cans throughout Christopher Street.<sup>88</sup> Marsha P. Johnson, who is widely celebrated for her contributions to the riots, climbed to the top of a lamppost and dropped a bag with something heavy in it on a squad car parked directly below, shattering its windshield.<sup>89</sup> People in cars driving by the scene were also harassed by the crowd. The protestors harassed onlookers by

<sup>81</sup> Carter p.182

<sup>82</sup> Carter p.183

<sup>83</sup> Carter p.183

<sup>84</sup> Carter p.191

<sup>85</sup> *POLICE AGAIN ROUT 'VILLAGE' YOUTHS; Outbreak by 400 Follows a Near-Riot Over Raid*(The New York Times, June 30,1969)

<sup>86</sup> David Carter p.185

<sup>87</sup> Martin Duberman and Andrew Kopkind, *The Night They Raided Stonewall. (Grand Street, no 44, 1993) p. 120*

<sup>88</sup> Duberman and Kopkind p.120

<sup>89</sup> Carter p.187

cornering and roughhousing them until they professed their allegiance for homosexuality.<sup>90</sup>

As more patrol cars began to arrive at the scene, the crowd of over a thousand gays surrounded the cars and shook them as if to tip them over. Around 2:15 a.m. the Tactical Patrol Force was called in again to control the crowd of more than 1,000.<sup>91</sup> Using riot shields, helmets and billy clubs,<sup>92</sup> they approached the crowds, people ran onto streets surrounding Christopher Street.<sup>93</sup> In a showdown with the Patrol Force, the drag queens and “sisses” locked arms and began a Rockettes style dance just as they did the night before.<sup>94</sup> They were the last to disperse from the crowds. Dick Letisch, Mattachine Society leader in New York, said it was not the masculine men that showed the most courage against the law enforcement, but it was the effeminate men and “queens” that stood their ground against the officers.<sup>95</sup> It was not for another hour at 3:30 a.m. that the police finally succeeded in dispersing all of the crowds.<sup>96</sup>

The riots of June 28<sup>th</sup>, and June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1969 were especially influential in shaping gay American history. This is the first instance in America where thousands of gay men and women showed a direct assertion on a political stance. These two nights in 1969 created the conversation of Gay liberation on a large scale.

<sup>90</sup> Duberman and Kopkind p.120

<sup>91</sup> Carter p.189

<sup>92</sup> Carter p.189

<sup>93</sup> Carter p.191

<sup>94</sup> Duberman and Kopkind p.120

<sup>95</sup> Carter p.193

<sup>96</sup> Carter p.194

## Chapter 4

After the Stonewall Inn Riots, the timeline of gay rights in America changed forever. The road towards gay liberation in America was not always an easy one, and it took many acts of activism and advocacy for and by the LGBT community. “Gay Pride” parades in America and The AIDS Awareness Group “ACTUP” were direct outcomes of the efforts of the Riots of 1969 Stonewall Riots. The Stonewall Riots laid the foundation for the need for political change and toleration for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people.

In 1970, “The Christopher Street Gay Liberation Day” protest became what is known as the first Gay Pride parade. In November of 1969, Craig Rodwell, a prominent gay rights activist, had proposed a commemoration of the demonstrations at the Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations, a meeting in which multiple Pro Gay-Rights activist groups are present.<sup>97</sup> All of the groups present supported Rodwell except for New York’s Mattachine Society.<sup>98</sup> the parade was intended to show the LBGT presence on New York City’s streets. The Christopher Street Gay Liberation

<sup>97</sup> Fred Sargeant, “1970: A First-Person Account of the First Gay Pride March,” *The Village Voice*, June 22, 2010, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2010/06/22/1970-a-first-person-account-of-the-first-gay-pride-march/>)

<sup>98</sup> David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked The Gay Revolution* (St. Martin’s Press New York, 2004) 230

parade differed from pro-gay marches that occurred before as Rodwell wanted everyone's "true selves" to be on display during the march.<sup>99</sup>

About a dozen groups were involved with the parade planning, though they did not always agree on details. And not every group had representation. One of the most critical issues was deciding which group would have the honor of leading the march. It was Rodwell who decided that each group would have one representative to lead the march.<sup>100</sup> One group, The Gay Activists Alliance, wanted to make homosexuals aware of the need to confront politicians and public officials.<sup>101</sup> Rodwell assured them that showing up for the parade was a political statement in-itself, as he wanted a non-violent approach to The Gay liberation movement.<sup>102</sup>

The parade was held on Sunday June 28th, 1970. It began on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, at the Stonewall Inn. It then traveled to Sheridan Square, a nearby park next to the Stonewall Inn, and continued upwards on Avenue of the Americas.<sup>103</sup> Newspapers reported that about 5,000 people were involved in the march, making it the largest pro-gay demonstration in history.<sup>104</sup> The parade stretched about 15

<sup>99</sup> Sargeant, *The Village Voice*

<sup>100</sup> Sargeant, *The Village Voice*

<sup>101</sup> Linda Hirshman, *Victory* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2012) 126

<sup>102</sup> Hirshman p. 126

<sup>103</sup> Lacey Fosburgh, "Thousands of Homosexuals Hold A Protest Rally in Central Park," *The New York Times*, June 29, 1970, <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/06/29/archives/thousands-of-homosexuals-hold-a-protest-rally-in-central-park.html>)

<sup>104</sup> Andrew Solomon, "The First New York Pride March Was an Act of 'Desperate Courage'," *The New York Times*, June 27, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/27/nyregion/pride-parade-first-new-york-lgbtq.html>)



blocks, and ended with a “gay-in” at Sheep Meadow in Central Park.<sup>105</sup> The parade marshals wore orange armbands and handed out flyers that said, “Welcome to the first-anniversary celebration of the Gay Liberation movement. We are united today to affirm our pride, our life-style, and our commitment to each other.”<sup>106</sup>

The “gay-in” derived from the term “sit-in” that was used for civil rights protests. At this “gay-in” the parade marchers “existed” in public, and wanted a sense of visibility. The duration of the parade was shorter than expected, as Rodwell and his organizers contained a mixture of excitement and fear.<sup>107</sup>

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Gay Pride parades take place all around the world, and draw millions of spectators. In 2019, 5 million people attended “*World Pride*”, which commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Stonewall Inn Riots of 1969.<sup>108</sup> It is important to note just how far the LGBT community has come in-terms of societal acceptance and tolerance. In 1969, men and women were arrested for congregating at gay bars in New York City, and within 50 years, New York City sponsors one of their largest parades celebrating gay rights and culture.

<sup>105</sup> Fosburgh, The New York Times

<sup>106</sup> Anthony Hiss, “Parade,” *The New Yorker*, July 4, 1970, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1970/07/11/parade>) url??

<sup>107</sup> Jay Shockley, “Historic Context Statement for LGBT History in New York City ,” The NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, May 2018, <https://parks.ny.gov/shpo/documents/FinalNYCLGBTContextStatement.pdf>) url

<sup>108</sup> Karma Allen, “About 5 Million People Attended WorldPride in NYC, Mayor Says” ABC News, July 2, 2019 , <https://abcnews.go.com/US/million-people-crowed-nyc-worldpride-mayor/story?id=64090338>)

But gay life had its dark periods also. A decade later, in 1981 the AIDS epidemic devastated New York's gay population. It started a period of uncertainty, hysteria from the media, and heightened homophobia for gay men. The AIDS crises of the 1980s led to a new movement as well as a new struggle for the gay community, and it brought a community together in protest against the government and its failure to treat the disease in its early stages. Originally titled GRID, Gay-Related Immune Deficiency by the media, HIV/AIDS began to gain news coverage all across America.<sup>109</sup> The disease was titled "gay cancer" or "gay plague" by News outlets, AIDS represented a huge struggle for gay men across the country.<sup>110</sup>

The AIDS crisis had started in 1981, when doctors in San Francisco and New York identified common symptoms of illness.<sup>111</sup> They shared one characteristic: they were all men, and all homosexuals. Within three years, scientists were able to isolate what they believed to be the virus that caused the disease.<sup>112</sup> It is important to note that this was only done after many other groups of people, including children who underwent blood transfusions, were also affected with the disease. In March 1985, the United

<sup>109</sup> Tim Murphy, "7 New Yorkers Remember the Early Days of the AIDS Epidemic," *New York Magazine*, May 29, 2014, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2014/05/memories-aids-new-york.html>)

<sup>110</sup> Lawrence Altman, "RARE CANCER SEEN IN 41 HOMOSEXUALS," *The New York Times*, June 3, 1981, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/07/03/us/rare-cancer-seen-in-41-homosexuals.html>)

<sup>111</sup> Hirshman p.174

<sup>112</sup> Neil Miller, *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present*. (Alyson Books, 2006) 410

States Food and Drug Administration licensed the first test to detect the antibody to the virus.<sup>113</sup>

There was not enough government's reaction to this new disease. In 1982, Larry Speakes, press secretary for President Ronald Reagan, laughed when asked about whether the President was tracking the spread of AIDS.<sup>114</sup> The situation in hospitals was particularly problematic. Patients often sat for days in emergency rooms. When finally admitted, they would sit in their own urine as doctors and nurses were too afraid to handle them.<sup>115</sup> When a patient with AIDS died, he was put in a black trash bag. Many funeral parlors refused to handle these AIDS victims.<sup>116</sup>

Despite fears that the AIDS epidemic, as it was later known, could hinder the growth of the gay liberation movement, it did just the opposite by mobilizing many members. For example, in January of 1982, Larry Kramer created the "Gay Men's Health Crisis" which sought to do everything for people with AIDS that the government was not doing.<sup>117</sup> Within one year, the "Gay Men's Health Crisis", or GMHC, established itself as the nation's premiere AIDS service organization. Kramer and his 80 organization members handed out 300,000 "Health Recommendation" brochures in

<sup>113</sup> Miller p.410

<sup>114</sup> Tim Fitzsimons, "LGBTQ History Month: The Early Days of America's AIDS Crisis," NBC (NBC, October 15, 2018), <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/lgbtq-history-month-early-days-america-s-aids-crisis-n919701> url

<sup>115</sup> Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: the Story of the Struggle* (Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2016)419

<sup>116</sup>Faderman p.419

<sup>117</sup> Faderman p.419

New York City, set up an AIDS hotline that offered legal and financial assistance, and offered many forms of therapy for victims.<sup>118</sup> It was not until Kramer published an article in the *New York Native* titled “1,112 and Counting” following the death of the thousandth victim, that New York State’s officials took action for AIDS research.<sup>119</sup> Mayor Ed Koch and Health Commissioner David Sencer announced the formation of an the Office of Gay and Lesbian Health Concerns.<sup>120</sup>

In 1983, Kramer resigned from the “Gay Men’s Health Crisis” but continued to be an activist for HIV/AIDS in New York City.<sup>121</sup> By 1987, 40,000 Americans had died from AIDS.<sup>122</sup> Kramer and his friends reached a boiling point with both the State and Federal governments, and decided to create the “AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, or “ACT UP”.<sup>123</sup> The group differed from the GMHC which Kramer had also founded, in its attitude concerning government financial support for AIDS research and treatment. One of ACT UP’s main missions was to urge pharmaceutical companies to find safer drugs as quickly as possible.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Miller p.413

<sup>119</sup> Larry Kramer, “1,112 And Counting ,” *New York Native* , March 1983, <https://longform.org/archive/publications/new-york-native>)

<sup>120</sup> Miller p.414

<sup>121</sup> Hirshman p.174

<sup>122</sup> Nurith Aizenman, “How To Demand A Medical Breakthrough: Lessons From The AIDS Fight,” NPR (NPR, February 9, 2019), <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/02/09/689924838/how-to-demand-a-medical-breakthrough-lessons-from-the-aids-fight>)

<sup>123</sup> Hirshman p.188

<sup>124</sup> Jason Deparle, “Rude, Rash, Effective, Act-Up Shifts AIDS Policy,” *The New York Times*, January 3, 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/01/03/nyregion/rude-rash-effective-act-up-shifts-aids-policy.html>)

The group's first demonstration took place on March 24th, 1987, at the busy New York City intersection of Wall Street and Broadway.<sup>125</sup> On the 68 degree spring day, 250 members of ACT UP showed up waving signs, including the historic slogan "SILENCE = DEATH," and chanting "Act Up, Fight AIDS!"<sup>126</sup>

The demonstration demanded the following: "*Immediate release by the Federal Food & Drug Administration of drugs that might help save lives, Immediate release of these drugs to everyone with AIDS, Immediate availability of these drugs at affordable prices, Immediate massive public education to stop the spread of AIDS, and Immediate policy to prohibit discrimination in AIDS treatment, insurance, employment, and housing.*"<sup>127</sup> During the demonstration, police arrested seventeen protesters.<sup>128</sup>

On March 24th, 1988, the one year anniversary of ACT UP's first demonstration in New York, the group returned to Wall Street to demonstrate. This time they were joined by over 1000 protesters,<sup>129</sup> protesting the high prices that pharmaceutical companies were charging for HIV and AIDS medication and government inaction.<sup>130</sup> Another instance of ACT UP's political demonstrations took place on September 14th, 1989 at the New York Stock Exchange. Seven activists from ACT UP were able to

<sup>125</sup> ACT UP, *ACT UP Flyer* (March 24, 1987) [bit.ly/2R3sWrv](http://bit.ly/2R3sWrv)

<sup>126</sup> Sarah Schulman, "Interview of Larry Kramer," *ACT UP ORAL HISTORY PROJECT*, November 15, 2003, <http://www.actuporalhistory.org/interviews/images/kramer.pdf>

<sup>127</sup> ACT UP, *ACT UP Flyer*

<sup>128</sup> ACT UP, *ACT UP Chronology in Brief*, [bit.ly/3a0i0TZ](http://bit.ly/3a0i0TZ).

<sup>129</sup> NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project "ACT UP Demonstrations on Wall Street." <https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/act-up-demonstration-at-the-new-york-stock-exchange/>

<sup>130</sup> NYC LGBT Historic Sites

slip past security guards and delayed the start of trading by five minutes with a loud demonstration.<sup>131</sup> This was the first time in history that the New York Stock Exchange trading was stopped completely by a protest.

During the demonstration, the ACT UP members protested the high price of AZT, the anti-viral drug created by Burroughs Wellcome, the pharmaceutical company.<sup>132</sup> Burroughs Wellcome charged individuals \$8,000 per year, which made AZT, the only drug approved to fight HIV and AIDS, the most expensive drug in History at the time.<sup>133</sup> At 9:29 a.m. one minute before the New York Stock Exchange opened for trading, seven members from ACT UP tied themselves to a banister on the upper balcony of the trading area, and shouted out on fog horns for Burroughs Wellcome to lower the price of AZT.<sup>134</sup> As a result of this demonstration, Burroughs Wellcome lowered the prize of AZT by 20% four days later.<sup>135</sup>

Many LGBT citizens have benefitted from the politicization efforts of the Gay Liberation Movement. ACT UP played a pivotal role in gaining support from the government during the AIDS crisis in America. The Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade created one of the biggest celebrations and traditions in New York City today. A

<sup>131</sup> Michelangelo Signorile, "AIDS Activists Storm Stock Exchange, Halting Trading High Price of Burroughs' AZT Under Fire," *OutWeek Magazine* pg.10, n.d., September 24, 1989)

<sup>132</sup> Signorile p.10

<sup>133</sup> Signorile p.10

<sup>134</sup> Signorile.10

<sup>135</sup> Philip J. Hiltz, "AIDS DRUG'S MAKER CUTS PRICE BY 20%," *The New York Times* , September 19, 1989, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/09/19/us/aids-drug-s-maker-cuts-price-by-20.html>)

small political demonstration of 5,000 was able to morph itself to a celebration held each year drawing crowds of millions from all over the world. In summation, these events would not have been able to take place without the pivotal Stonewall Riots of 1969.

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