

Militant Flamboyance

a brief history of the stonewall riots
and other queer happenings



PRIDE is an annual GLBTQ celebration that originated 39 years ago as the Christopher Street Liberation Day on the first anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. This pamphlet was produced to be distributed at Chicago PRIDE 2009, which marks the 40th Anniversary of Stonewall. There is a rich history to celebrate and take pride in—this zine is meant to be a reminder of those moments and individuals that made that history a reality. There is a lot to celebrate, and there is still a lot more to struggle for (and against).

Note: throughout this zine we use various terms when discussing the GLBTQ community. We've done our best choose terms specifically and carefully. In choosing differing terminology, we've attempted to re-articulate how specific groups and individuals have chosen to identify themselves throughout history. All these terms have significant histories and no single label can adequately define all the identities and communities that have struggled and continue to struggle for sexual and gender freedom.

In the late 1960s and the years prior, gay bars served as one of the very few places that gay, lesbian or trans people could gather with one another. However, even these spaces were often unable to provide homosexuals and gender-variant individuals with the opportunity to comfortably and safely gather. Often times, they were owned by straight men and/or connected to the mob and were looking to make money at the expense of the gay community rather than serve it. Gay bars were also regularly subjected to police raids as most states had anti-gay laws, including statutes regarding "gender-appropriate" clothing and laws making it a crime to serve alcohol to a homosexual. Along with these laws that were on the books, police forces would find additional excuses to take out their anti-gay hostility. These policies reflected a larger culture of homophobia and anti-gay sentiment. There is a long history of anti-gay laws and repression, and there are multiple stories of gay activists through history, but by and large, there had been little public action defending the rights of gay, lesbian or trans people. There were some writers and activists who would speak out in defense of gay issues or publish underground newspapers like *Friendship and Freedom*, a paper printed in 1924 by the Society for Human Rights here in Chicago, which led to members being arrested and fired from their jobs or Emma Goldman's adamant defense of Walt Whitman in the 1920s. But the fact remained that for decades, those who spoke out against homophobia were faced with being ostracized and jailed.

Beginning in 1950, a new wave of activist groups began to form, and became known as the "homophile" (a pre-Stonewall preferred term) movement. The first group that was formed was the Mattachine Society, a gay men's organization that began to work against the various anti-gay laws along with greater society's anti-gay bias. Taking aim at the law prohibiting the sale of liquor to homosexuals, in 1966, Mattachine organized "sip-ins" in which they would order drinks at "straight" bars and announce they were gay with intention of exposing and suing the discriminate bars as well as the State Liquor Authority.

In addition to Mattachine, there were various other homophile organizations, notably ONE, Inc. and Daughters of Bilitis—perhaps the first lesbian activist group. While each group, in their own way, responded to the extreme homophobia that ran deep in the larger culture, the prominent strategy within the homophile movement was an attempt to be

accepted by mainstream society. Women involved would always wear skirts and stockings and the men would wear suits. Public displays of affection at homophile actions were typically condemned for "hurting the movement." This approach to a politics of difference often distanced the movement from more radical politics to avoid being further marginalized by the mainstream. This was the prominent, though challenged, climate of the pre-Stonewall activist movement.

In discussions of gay history, Stonewall has often been treated as a spontaneous combustion of frustration, anger, and joy with a particularly rebellious attitude. While this is all true, the rebellion at Stonewall was also a development of and reaction to the previous movements for gay rights. It is also important to view Stonewall in the context of the era, as resistance movements were developing internationally and uprisings, rebellions and riots were occurring with regularity.

So, with all this talk about Stonewall as a rupture that permanently impacted the struggles around gender and sexual identity, it is important to discuss what actually took place at Stonewall Inn and how it helped to push a movement forward...



Stonewall Inn was a sleazy and gritty gay bar on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village.

It had no running water; they cleaned their glasses by running them through a vat of "sterilized water" behind the bar and served them up again. The bar was established and run by Mobsters who would pay off the cops to keep raids to a minimum, let the management of Stonewall know when they were coming, and raid early in the night when business was slow.

During the early morning on June 28, 1969, the cops again raided Stonewall, this time with no prior warning. Usually, the only ones arrested were those without IDs or those dressed in clothes of the "opposite gender" (New York law required three articles of clothing "appropriate to one's gender.") Not unlike other clashes with the police, a crowd began to form around Stonewall, and at the beginning of the raid, the police began arresting for a variety of usual reasons. When the wagon pulled up, an unexpected rebellious opposition began to form, unlike any of the other raids that had happened at the bar. The crowd usually dispersed cooperatively and went along their way with a somewhat typical night of annoyance caused by another police raid on their bar.

Some of the arrestees began striking poses as they were being led off by the police while others arrested or confronted were mouthing off, and some threw their coins at the police. Still the cops continued to shove some arrestees into the police wagon. Some consider the most explosive moment to be when a butch lesbian was arrested and thrown in the wagon and began to rock it. Around this point in the night, some accounts speak of several spontaneous flashes of anger, a mass opposition, and militant refusal to accept the police harassment. One queen took off her high heel, smashed a police officer and knocked him down, grabbed his handcuff keys and freed herself. She then passed along the keys to her comrades, while others started to yell "Pigs!" "Faggot Cops!" and "Gay Power!" All of this led to the crowd transforming and growing into a mob, which began throwing everything possible at the police; bricks, coins, bottles, garbage cans, even dog shit.

The police, who seriously underestimated a bunch of cowering "queers" and "gays," only sent eight police officers to perform the raid, and when the unexpected near riot broke out, the police were ordered by their commander to retreat into the bar. They barricaded themselves in, which of course led to attacks on the bar from the resistance in the street, including people using a parking meter as a battering ram. Eventually the crowd partially breached the barrier between them and the police, and one rioter successfully tossed a match and some lighter fluid into the bar, starting a fire. The cops, with pistols pulled, were ready for another clash, and one yelled, "We'll shoot the first motherfucker that comes through the door!" Finally the riot police came, armed with clubs, helmets and

tear gas. Upon their arrival, the crowd scattered, but did not leave the scene. The mob decentralized, and they began kicking their high heels in the air Rockettes' style, shouting:

*"We are the Stonewall Girls
We wear our hair in curls
We wear no underwear
We show our pubic hair...
We wear our dungarees
Above our nelly knees!"*

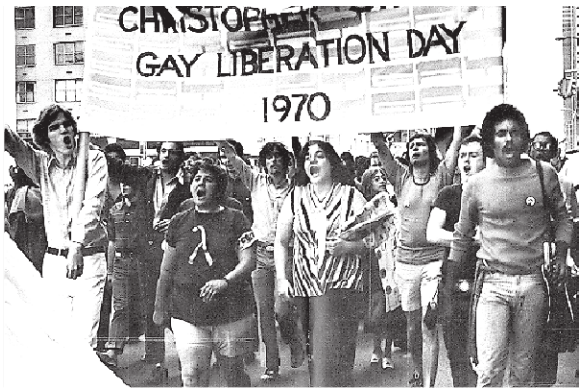
Eventually the cops cleared the streets. The night had resulted in several rioters beaten and injured, four cops injured, and thirteen arrested. The night was violent and surprising and shifted the perspective of possible queer resistance.

The following day, word began to spread. Some mainstream media covered the event, but mostly the news spread through word-of-mouth. All day, people were going past the bar to see the damage done, and as night came, the crowds grew. There were people who were there the night before, radicals who were hoping for another confrontation, and onlookers who were curious to see what would happen. The riot police also showed up, determined not to have a repeat of the night before.

The police began using clubs to push people back, but the crowd continued to resist. Some of those present were experienced activists (both in gay and straight movements) who came prepared for a clash with the police and began throwing bottles and bricks at officers and marbles under the feet of the police horses. The crowd blocked Christopher Street and refused to allow any traffic through while some militant and flamboyant queens jumped on top of vehicles attempting to drive through the crowd. Meanwhile, other radical queer rioters dropped something onto a police cruiser, smashing its windshield. The skirmishes went until 4 am.

The third night a smaller crowd still showed up, as did the police. Tensions were high, and there were some exchanges between radicals and the police, but compared to the two nights prior, the situation was subdued. Though the rioting had ended, it was clear that something had changed and that the gay struggle had achieved a new energy and intensity. What happened at Stonewall would appear to be just what activists needed to take their activism in a more militant and radical direction. It was a turning point and a new day in queer activism, visibility and persona.





Almost immediately following the Stonewall rebellion, organizations began to develop to fight for gay liberation. Just weeks after the riots, in July 1969, queer activists met in New York City and formed the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), a radical organization that connected the struggle against gay oppression to other social movements active at the time. They identified the movement as connected to the women's liberation movement, the anti-war movement, Black Power groups and stood in solidarity with international resistance movements.

A few months later, a group of activists split off from GLF to form the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), which was more of a single-issue organization focused on gay and lesbian rights. Although GAA didn't associate themselves with the radical politics of the other social movements of the time, they did incorporate many of the direct-action and civil disobedience tactics. They often utilized sit-ins as part of their campaigns to end anti-gay policies of politicians, government institutions and media outlets.

Unfortunately, many of the gay organizations failed to adequately deal with gender issues and individuals founded their own groups to address their specific needs. Radicalesbians was a lesbian caucus of GLF that split off and became its own organization and similarly, female activists left GAA to found Lesbian Feminist Liberation. There was also a group named Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) that was founded to provide necessary services (like clothing, food and housing) to homeless trans and gender-variant young people living on the street, many of whom were involved in sex work. STAR also pushed existing gay groups to include transvestite and drag issues in their campaigns, as the gay organizations would often exclude them to appeal to politicians and straight citizens.

There were a number of groups active in the 1980's and 1990's that embraced the radical politics and direct action tactics of the early gay liberation movement. In 1980's, activists founded AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT-UP), an organization that used civil disobedience and large spectacles to fight on behalf of those with AIDS, most of whom were gay men. A few years later, Queer Nation developed which included some former members of ACT-UP and continued ACT-UP's legacy of radical street actions. In 1992, the Lesbian Avengers were formed, with chapters starting across the country. This direct action group dealt with issues specifically of interest to lesbians, while developing a strong analysis of gender, race and class issues.

FURTHER READING:

Stonewall - Martin Duberman

Queer Theory: An Introduction - Annamarie Jagose

Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation - Karla Jay and Allen Young

"Stonewall Was A Riot" - from Guide Magazine by Michael Bronski
its online—just google it

"Out of the Closets and Into the Libraries" - zine compiled by bangarang collective
zine downloadable at <http://www.geocities.com/thebangarangcollective/projects.htm>

1860

In the late 1860s, Prussia drafts new penal codes criminalizing homosexuality (later accepted by Germany) known as Paragraph 175. KARL-MARIA BENKERT, Hungarian doctor, drafts statement to government stating that paragraph 175 violates the “rights of man” and calling upon authorities to reject the proposal. The code is instated, instigating a new wave of homosexual repression. Paragraph 175 is later adopted by Hitler’s Germany and utilized in the execution of thousands upon thousands of homosexuals.

1895

OSCAR WILDE is tried for his homosexual lifestyle, or more specifically “acts of gross indecency with men”. Forcing many people to confront with same-sex relations for the first time.

1897

MAGNUS HIRSCHFELD, a German radical sexologist, starts the SCIENTIFIC HUMANITARIAN COMMITTEE with goals to “win legislation to the position of abolishing the antigay paragraph 175; enlightening public opinion on homosexuality; and ‘interesting the homosexual himself in the struggle for his rights.’” The SHC becomes most active gay advocate organization in Europe, enduring until around 1923.

1902

JOHN WILLIAM LLOYD publishes the first issue of *The Free Comrade*, a politically and sexually radical journal dedicated to “creating a world where sexual diversity was valued”.

1920

In the early 1920s, MAGNUS HIRSCHFELD goes on speaking tour, and the action committee of the SHC issues an appeal to the homosexuals of Germany. “Homosexuals, you [...] must carry on the fight yourselves. [...] Justice for you will be in the fruit only of your efforts. The liberation of homosexuals can only be the work on homosexuals themselves.”

1925

Modeled after the Hirschfeld’s SHC in Germany, activists in Chicago form the SOCIETY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. They would go on to publish two issues of FRIENDSHIP FOR FREEDOM and despite their defense of “law and order” and their pledge not to threaten the “public welfare,” their identities were exposed by the media—leading to several arrests and losses of jobs for members.

1927

EMMA GOLDMAN publicly defends WALT WHITMAN. In a letter, she states: “The fools do not seem to realize that Walt Whitman’s greatness as a rebel and poet may have been conditioned in his sexual differentiation, and that he could not be otherwise than what he was” and states publicly that “I regard it as a tragedy that people of differing sexual orientation find themselves proscribed in a world that has so little understanding of homosexuals.”

During the rise of Nazism and between the two World Wars, same-sex rights organizations begin to fold under political repression and pressure, especially in Europe. Here in the US politics also shift, stifling most attempts at continuing a movement. This is largely due to the Red Scare—which results in a larger intolerance for difference of lifestyle and opinion.

1950

The first re-emergence of a gay rights group after the war, MATTACHINE forms in 1950 a gay men’s group, beginning what becomes known as the “homophile” movement. They publish the *Mattachine Review*—a politically moderate gay men’s publication.

Splintering from Mattachine, ONE, Inc. is formed, accepting both women and men and the first lesbian rights group, the DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS, is formed.

1965

In 1965, “Miss Shearer,” a member of the Chicago Chapter of DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS, appears on a two-hour televised debate about homosexuality on Chicago’s WBKB. The program is one of the first times self-identified homosexuals appear on television, and “Miss Shearer” is the only woman featured.

1969

In July 1969, following STONEWALL, the GAY LIBERATION FRONT (GLF) is founded. For the first time, GLF connects the GLBTQ struggle with other radical communities, including the Black Power movement, and connects the struggle to the feminist movement by beginning to discuss how sexism and homophobia are overlapping forms of oppression. In December 1969, GLF splinters, and GAY ACTIVISTS ALLIANCE (GAA) is formed.

1970

the STREET TRANVESTITE ACTION REVOLUTIONARIES (STAR) is founded in NYC by SYLVIA RIVERA and MARSHA P. JOHNSON. They make connections with other radical groups, notably the Young Lords, a revolutionary Puerto Rican organization which Rivera (who is of Puerto Rican and Venezuelan descent) is active with.

To commemorate the one-year anniversary of the Stonewall rebellion, gay activists organize CHRISTOPHER STREET LIBERATION DAY to take place on June 28, 1970 in NYC. Events also take place in LA, San Francisco and here in Chicago, where about 200 people march through downtown Chicago.

Starting in 1970, gay liberation activists begin protesting the American Psychiatric Association (APA) because it considers homosexuality to be a mental disorder. For years, they protest psychiatrists promoting and practicing electroshock treatment and aversion therapy to “cure” homosexuals and demand that the practices end.

GAA begins weekly dances at the Firehouse, their NYC headquarters. Dances become fundraiser for as well as a recruiting tool.

1971

1973

1977

The work of gay activists pays off and the APA removes homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.

Activists across the country take action against pop singer and former beauty queen ANITA BRYANT who fronts “Save Our Children,” a religious group campaigning against legal protections of gays and lesbians. Some of these actions include thousands of demonstrators in Houston chanting so loudly outside a venue that her performance is disrupted. At a press conference in Des Moines, Iowa, a gay activist throws a pie in her face, at which point she prays for him to be “delivered from his deviant lifestyle” and bursts into tears. Actions like these permanently damage her public image and career, while galvanizing gay activist movements.

1987

ACT-UP stages a demonstration against the lack of access to over-priced AIDS medication by having 300 activists sit down to block traffic on Wall Street while hanging an effigy of the FDA commissioner. The FDA then agrees to shorten the approval process for the drugs.

1989

On September 14, 1989, ACT-UP members enter the New York Stock Exchange and chain themselves to a VIP balcony to demand that the cost of experimental AIDS medication AZT be more affordable. (It cost each patient \$10,000 a year at that point).

1993

LESBIAN AVENGERS and ACT-UP Women’s Network create the first DYKE MARCH, a grassroots march through New York City to highlight the issues specific to lesbians and create a radical alternative to the mainstream, male-focused Pride event. It takes place on the Saturday before the Pride Parade and the event continues to happen each year in cities across the country, including Chicago.

The last decade has seen tremendous strides in GLBTQ movements, with countless organizations, individuals, artists and groups taking action to successfully oppose homophobia and gender injustice. However, the same period has seen significant attacks against individuals who identify as gay, queer and gender-variant. These attacks have been physical, legal, political and social and have occurred on many levels around the world. The struggle continues. The future is unwritten.

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