

MARSHA P. JOHNSON AND THE STONEWALL UPRISING



*Marsha P. Johnson, picketing Bellevue Hospital to protest treatment of gay people and the homeless.
Credit: Diana Davies, via New York Public Library*

Born from the Stonewall Uprising, the nascent gay liberation movement of the 1970s–’80s embraced a radically intersectional approach, linking arms with contemporary feminist and anti-racist movements to seek social transformation. It was spearheaded by transgender women of color, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, lifelong advocates for those who faced cross-cutting discrimination within the LGBTQ community.

The Stonewall Inn welcomed drag queens, at a time when same-sex kissing and dancing in bars was considered “misconduct” and bars could lose their liquor licenses. Most gay bars and clubs in New York at the time were operated by the Mafia, who paid corrupt police officers to look the other way and blackmailed wealthy gay patrons by threatening to “out” them. The club lacked a fire exit, running water behind the bar to wash glasses, and clean toilets. It became an important Greenwich Village institution, however, and was a nightly home for many runaways and homeless gay youths.

Police raids on gay bars were common, but on a particularly hot summer night in 1969, members of the city’s LGBTQ community decided to fight back against police harassment and social discrimination —sparking an uprising that would launch a new era of resistance and revolution.



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SOURCES

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History.com Editors. "Stonewall Riots." History.com, A&E Television Networks, 31 May 2017, www.history.com/topics/gay-rights/the-stonewall-riots.