

Causes and impacts of the stonewall riots



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On Saturday, June 28, 1969 the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village in New York City was raided by the NYPD at just after midnight. The inn itself was a gay bar that was owned by the Italian Mafia and was known to be selling alcohol without a proper licence. In these raids, they would arrest people accused of transvestism or soliciting for gay sex, as those things were outlawed at the time (Stock 382). Police raids on the inn were commonplace, and the raid on June 28 was just like any other. The bar's patrons, however, had reached their breaking point. They quickly took to the streets and organized protests and demonstrations against the state-backed oppression they faced on a daily basis. This one raid sparked The Stonewall Riots, which marked the beginning of the gay rights movement.

The raid itself was led under the command of Deputy Seymour Pine of the NYPD. Raids such as these were part of Mayor John Lindsay's re-election campaign promise to crack down on gay bars. The people arrested in the raid resisted the police and drew a massive crowd of onlookers, totaling 500 to 600 people (Poindexter n. p.). The suspects proceeded to get into fights with officers while the crowd cheered them on. The riot lasted for about 40 minutes in total. The event ended when a team of riot police showed up to clear the streets.

In the hours after the riot, people observed the extent of the damage. Sheridan Square looked like a war zone. Felice Picano, who witnessed the event firsthand, describes the event as follows: " Coming out of that building two hours or so after the riot had happened, the bartender and I thought we were hallucinating. Sheridan Square was transformed and almost unrecognizable. There were large black NYPD buses all around the square

blocking it off from other streets. There were wooden horses set up inside the park itself like a maze. You couldn't see the Stonewall at all. There were wood panels over the window and doors. The place was filled with policemen and firemen in full gear. Everywhere you stepped there were big black fire hoses snaking along the ground. There was a Volkswagen knocked over onto its back. A taxicab was halfway up a fireplug. It had knocked the cap off and water was gushing twenty feet into the air. Stepping out of the building, we were immediately escorted by cops over to Seventh Avenue and told to go up to Bleecker Street, as the area was closed off. We couldn't figure out what happened. It was like a meteorite had hit or something equally catastrophic," (Picano n. p.). People were confused, scared, and anxious about what was going to happen next. The first riot's effect on the surrounding area was devastating, and the destruction was only made worse by the six days of riots that followed.

In the years after the riots, gay rights activist groups succeeded in changing government policy on LGBT+ issues. In 1982, Wisconsin made sexual orientation a protected class. In 2000, civil unions between same-sex couples were legalized in Vermont. In 2003, a Supreme Court decision found that laws limiting or prohibiting same-sex conduct were unconstitutional. In 2006, the Supreme Court of New Jersey decided that heterosexual marriage benefits must also be given to same-sex couples. Finally, in June of 2015, the Supreme Court struck down all bans of same-sex marriage, making it legal in all 50 states. The fight for equality under the law took many decades, but it was achieved thanks to the efforts of LGBT+ activists like those involved in Stonewall (CNN Library n. p.).

The riots' effect on the people who witnessed it or participated in it was profound. They remember where they were when the riots started. Some were going out to eat, walking home, or going to parties. Others were inside the Stonewall Inn as the riots began. Miss Majors, a transgender woman who participated in the riots, remembers spitting at an officer and being knocked out with a nightstick before waking up in a police van (Picano n. p.). The riots were empowering to the gay community as they were seen as a turning point in societal discourse. People remember the event to this day just as vividly as the day it happened.

The broader effect of Stonewall on the gay rights movement cannot be understated. The riots are generally accepted as the catalyst that marked the beginning of the gay revolution in America. The first Gay Pride parade was held in New York City exactly one year after the riots occurred (Marotta n. p.). Since then there have been Pride parades in every major city in the United States and around the world. Today, parades in the United States and most of the first world are more of a celebration of how far the LGBT+ community has come, but that isn't the case for countries like Russia, Japan, and most of the countries in the Middle East. Pride parades in those countries are organized to protest discriminatory government policies. In some countries, homosexuality and gender nonconforming behavior are criminalized. Activists in those countries use tactics similar to those of the demonstrators of Stonewall in the fight for LGBT+ equality.

One single police raid was the last straw for the LGBT+ community. At first, it only caused a few days of rioting, but that was all it took to open people's eyes to a community that had been largely ignored for centuries. The gay

community took this as an opportunity to have their voices heard with protests and demonstrations throughout the United States. Because of this exposure, society's view of homosexuality slowly changed, and there were laws put in place that gave the community more freedom and representation. LGBT+ people today, in theory, have equal representation under the law with sexual orientation being added to the list of protected classes, but there are still societal problems that need to be addressed. Despite these problems, the LGBT+ community has never been more accepted and liberated. At every Pride parade, the legacy of Stonewall can be seen with flyers, pamphlets, buttons, and T-shirts made in remembrance of the event. The effects of Stonewall can be seen all around the world. This single event in history has affected every member of the LGBT+ community more than any other event of its caliber and started a movement that brought the world one step closer to true equality.

Works Cited

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