

Activity #1: Newspaper Articles the Day After the Stonewall Riots

Historical Context: Below are two articles written the day following the Stonewall riots by the New York Times and the

3 Cops Hurt as Bar Raid Riles Crowd

New York Daily News, June 29th, 1969 (Dennis Eskow)

A predawn police raid on a reputed Greenwich Village homosexual hangout, the second raid within a week, touched off a two-hour melee yesterday as customers and villagers swarmed over the plainclothes cops

Before order was restored, the cops were the targets of thrown coins, cobblestones and uprooted parking meters, windows were smashed, a police van was nearly overturned and the front of the raided bar, the Stonewall Inn, was fire-bombed.

Three cops suffered minor injuries and 13 persons were arrested. The fire was quickly doused by a hose from the bar.

First Raid a Cinch

Police officials said they had raided the social club at 53 Christopher St. last week to gather evidence of illegal sale of alcohol. The club had no license to sell alcoholic beverages to the public. That raid went off without a hitch.

Yesterday, at 2 a.m., plainclothesmen, under direction of Inspectors Seymour Pine and Charles Smyth, moved in under orders to gather fresh evidence of illegal sale of alcohol, arrest offending parties and close the bar.

After 28 cases of beer and 19 bottles of liquor were confiscated, police began clearing the bar.

Reinforcements Called

The customers milled around outside. They were joined by other villagers. As the cops came out, some persons in the crowd began throwing things. The missiles gradually grew more dangerous and the brief fire followed.

Reinforcements were called and the crowd was dispersed.

Among those arrested was doorman, Anthony Verra, 25, of 864 49th St., Brooklyn, charged with unlawful sale, consumption and storage of liquor, and Dave Van Ronk, 33, of 55 Sheridan Square, a folk singer, guitarist and song writer.

Cop Hit by Missile

Van Ronk, who made his Town Hall debut in October 1965 before 1,000 young people, was accused of throwing an object that injured Patrolman Gil Weissman, 44, of the Charles St. station.

Judge Nicholas F. Delagi in Criminal Court paroled Van Ronk for a hearing July 15, but held Verra in \$500 bail for a hearing July 14 because there was a similar warrant out for him.

Seven of those arrested were charged with unlicensed sale of liquor. Police have been keeping an eye on the inn to explore the possibility of "local syndicate involvements."

4 Policemen Hurt in Village Raid

*Melee Near Sheridan Square Follows Action at Bar
New York Times, June 29th, 1969*

Hundreds of young men went on a rampage in Greenwich Village shortly after 3 A.M. yesterday after a force of plainclothes men raided a bar that the police said was well known for its homosexual clientele. Thirteen persons were arrested and four policemen injured.

The young men threw bricks, bottles, garbage, pennies and a parking meter at the policemen, who had a search warrant authorizing them in *[sic]* investigate reports that liquor was sold illegally at the bar, the Stonewall Inn, 53 Christopher Street, just off Sheridan Square.

Deputy Inspector Seymour Pine said that a large crowd formed in the square after being evicted from the bar. Police reinforcements were sent to the area to hold off the crowd.

Plainclothes men and detective confiscated cases of liquor from the bar, which Inspector Pine said was operating without a liquor license.

The police estimated that 200 young men had been expelled from the bar. The crowd grew to close to 400 during the melee, which lasted about 45 minutes, they said.

Arrested in the melee, was Dave Van Ronk, 33 years old, of 15 Sheridan Square, a well-known folk singer. He was accused of having thrown a heavy object at a patrolman and later paroled in his own recognizance.

The raid was one of three held on Village bars in the last two weeks, Inspector Pine said.

Charges against the 13 who were arrested ranged from harassment and resisting arrest to disorderly conduct. A patrolman suffered a broken wrist, the police said.

Throngs of young men congregated outside the inn last night, reading aloud condemnations of the police.

A sign on the door said, "This is a private club. Members only." Only soft drinks were being served

New York Daily News.

Class Discussion Questions

- 1) According to the articles, who are the key actors in the Stonewall Riots and what are the key events? Think critically about occupation and gender.
- 2) Who is left out of this narrative? How could the newspapers frame the story differently?

3) In what ways does the newspaper have a bias? What are the consequences of this?

Activity #2: What the Stonewall Riots Means

Document A

Historical Context: This an excerpt from the countercultural newspaper The Berkeley Barb by activist Leo Laurence about the initial events of the Stonewall Riots.

“Ironically, it was a chick who gave the rallying cry to fight. Pigs were loading her into the wagon when she shouted to a big crowd of bystanders: ‘Why don’t you guys do something!’ That did it. The crowd rushed the police wagon as someone yelled: ‘Let’s turn it over.’ The pig driver drove off, escaping the angry crowd.”

Source: *The Berkley Barb*, 4 July, 1969

Discussion Question

- 1) Why do you think Laurence used the word ironically? What point is he trying to make? What can we learn about the LGBTQ movement from this?

Document B

Historical Context: Trans activist Sylvia Rivera reflecting on the events of Stonewall Riots in December of 1972 in the magazine Come Out!

“By being liberated my half sisters and brothers and myself are able to educate the ignorant gays and straights that transvestism is a valid life style. Remember the Stonewall Riots? That first stone was cast by a transvestite half-sister June 27, 1969 and the gay liberation movement was born. Remember that transvestites and gay street people are always on the front lines and are ready to lay their lives down for the movement.”

Source: *Come Out!* Winter 1972.

Discussion Question

- 2) In what ways do you see friction within the LGBTQ movement (the term “ignorant gays”)? What can we learn about social movements in general from this?

Document C

Historical Context: This excerpt was taken from Chapter 33, Resurgence of Conservatism from The American Vision and is the only reference to the LGBTQ community in the textbook. This textbook is one of the most commonly used textbooks for American high school students.

“Social Activism”

AIDS increased the visibility of the country’s gay and lesbian community, but some homosexuals had been engaged in efforts to defend their civil rights since the 1960s. On June 27, 1969, New York City police raided a Greenwich Village nightclub called the Stonewall Inn. The police had a history of raiding the nightclub and targeting its patrons because of their sexual orientation. Frustration among the gay and lesbian onlookers boiled over into a public disturbance. The Stonewall riot marked the beginning of a gay activist movement. Soon after, organizations such as the Gay Liberation Front tried to increase tolerance of homosexuality and media coverage of gays and lesbians.”

Discussion Question

- 3) What advice would you give to the textbook authors? What should they also include, if anything? Why?
- 4) How would the authors of Document A and B respond to the authors of Document C? Why?

Activity #3: Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera

Directions. This is a piece written by Natasha Schlaffer for Pennsylvania State University on the unsung heroes of the Stonewall Riots.

“The Unsung Heroines of Stonewall: Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera”

Important Terms:

Transgender: (adj.) denoting or relating to a person whose self-identity does not conform unambiguously to conventional notions of male or female gender.

Transvestite: (n.) a person, typically a man, who derives pleasure from dressing in clothes traditionally worn by the opposite sex.

Drag Queen: (n.) a man who dresses up in women’s clothes, typically for the purposes of entertainment.

Note: at the time of the Stonewall riots, the gay community did not have the same extensive vocabulary to describe sexuality as we do today. Marsha and Sylvia were transgender women, but primarily referred to themselves as drag queens or transvestites, which have separate meanings today. Transvestite is now considered a derogatory term.

For much of history, trans people and people of color have been excluded from both the gay rights and women’s rights movements, in spite of the fact that they are often the most negatively impacted by gender and sexuality-based discrimination. Two trans women of color, however, refused to be left out of the fight for equality from the very beginning. Activists Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera were on the front lines of the fight for trans rights from as early as the 1960s when the movement was just beginning to gain traction.

Born in 1945 in New Jersey, Marsha P. Johnson was an outspoken African American trans rights/gay rights/AIDS activist, sex worker, and drag queen during the late 20th century. Famous for her uniqueness, individuality, passion for equality, and compassion for others, Marsha was truly a one-of-a-kind woman. Whenever she was asked what the “P” in her name stood for, she famously replied “Pay it No Mind.” Like the queen that she was, Marsha used the same reply when people pried about her gender or sexuality.

Sylvia Rivera was born in New York City in 1951; she was of Venezuelan and Puerto Rican descent, and worked as a trans rights/gay rights activist and drag queen around the same time. Rivera was orphaned at an early age, and after she began to wear makeup in the 4th grade, Sylvia was thrown out of her house by her grandmother at the young age of 11. At this point, Rivera began living on the street and working as a prostitute before she was adopted by the local drag queen community. These tremendous hardships could not crush Sylvia’s incredible spirit and passion for the fight for equality, however. As the saying by Gina Carey goes: “A strong woman looks a challenge dead in the eye and gives it a wink.”

Rivera and Johnson’s paths crossed at the famous Stonewall riots in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of Manhattan, New York City which catalyzed the modern gay rights movement. At this point in 1969, the Stonewall Inn was one of the few places in the city that the gay community was able to commune without suffering harassment from the police and public shaming. Furthermore, the regular patrons of Stonewall were not the mainstream members of the gay community (white males), but rather the most marginalized members.

The most common patrons at Stonewall were drag queens, transgender people, butch lesbians, male sex workers, and homeless youth. Most of these patrons also happened to be living in poverty by virtue of the fact that they were outcasts even in their own subculture; many were also people of color, as, at the time, much of the gay community tended to sideline members who were not white.

Marsha P. Johnson was celebrating her 25th birthday at Stonewall during the early morning hours of June 28th, 1969 when the police began a raid of Stonewall under the guise of busting the establishment for selling liquor without a license. When the police began arresting and harassing gay patrons at the club that night, however, the gay community had had enough. Too many times, establishments across the city where gay patrons congregated had been raided and too many times, gay patrons had suffered persecution by the police.

At the time it was standard procedure for police officers to lead women in the club to the bathroom to verify their sex, and promptly arrest any crossdressers among the crowd. According to eyewitness reports, the police also began sexually harassing lesbian patrons at the bar that night while they frisked them. At this point a crowd of sympathizers had begun to gather outside the inn, and they watched in horror as employees and drag queens alike were dragged outside and violently handled by the police before being shoved into police cars. Finally, when a police officer clubbed a butch lesbian named Stormé DeLarverie over the head for saying that her handcuffs were too tight, a violent riot broke out and the crowd exploded. They could no longer stand silently and watch members of their community be assaulted and unjustly imprisoned for their sexuality.

Marsha P. Johnson was among the first of the patrons to resist the police that night, and Sylvia Rivera among the first in the crowd of onlookers to take action by throwing a bottle at her police oppressors. The riots they helped catalyze spread to surrounding neighborhoods until all of New York was in an uproar, and continued on to last several nights. Their bravery, along with the others at the bar that night, led to the gay liberation movement: one year after the riots the first gay pride parades were held, and two years after there were gay rights groups in every major American city.

After Stonewall, Marsha and Sylvia co-founded the organization STAR, or Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, a group dedicated to helping homeless young drag queens and trans women of color. They dedicated their lives to the fight for equality.

Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera serve as inspirational reminders that, even when the world seems to be pitted against us, we still must find the strength and courage to stand for what is right. And if others would try to stand in our way? Pay It No Mind.”

Link: <https://sites.psu.edu/womeninhistory/2016/10/23/the-unsung-heroines-of-stonewall-marsha-p-johnson-and-sylvia-rivera/>

Discussion Questions

- 1) Why do you think Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera are considered unsung heroes of the LGBTQ movement and Stonewall?
- 2) How does intersectionality further complicate the LGBTQ movement today?

Teacher Note: This video will also help students to understand the life and contributions of Marsha P. Johnson advanced in this reading (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6-P1TyVKjs>)

Summative Assessment

Listen to this story from National Public Radio (NPR). This is a report about a recent fictional movie about the Stonewall Riots.

Link: <https://www.npr.org/2015/09/24/442857514/the-big-question-behind-stonewall-backlash-who-threw-the-first-brick>

Questions for Student Response (Mandatory)

- 1) How does this story about the film *Stonewall* showcase the challenges faced within the LGBTQ movement during and after Stonewall? Be sure to include connections to the life of Marsha P. Johnson, her impact on the movement, and the themes embedded within the documents.

Additional Questions to Prompt Student Debate, Discussion and Writing

- 1) Should this film be boycotted? Why or why not?
- 2) Based on what you have learned today, what are your major takeaways? What is the significance of this lesson?
- 3) Why is intersectionality so important to understand the LGBTQ movement in America?