

STONEWALL

The Riot that Started a Revolution

June 28, 1969



Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, law enforcement officials kept track of suspected homosexuals and the places that catered to them. Police regularly raided bars, seizing alcohol, and shutting down establishments. It was not uncommon for the people arrested during these raids to be exposed in newspapers, fired from their jobs, jailed, or confined to mental institutions. On June 27, 1969, about 200 patrons packed New York City's Stonewall Inn. In the early morning hours of June 28th the police attempted a large-scale raid on the Mafia-owned gay club. No one – not the police or the people they were targeting – knew what was about to happen. While the police waited for patrol wagons to cart away the arrested suspects and seized alcohol, the bar's patrons began to resist. Men refused to show their IDs, and those in drag refused to accompany female officers to a bathroom to have their gender confirmed. The mood gradually turned from somber resignation to camp humor to angry shouts. When a lesbian arrested inside the bar was brutalized while being placed in a police car, rage exploded among the several hundred people who had gathered in an uncharacteristic mob on the street. As the crowd erupted, the arresting officers – who were outnumbered more than 50 to 1 – barricaded themselves inside the bar. Within hours over 1000 people arrived and five more days of rioting engulfed the streets surrounding the club. Though the events of that immortal night were neither the first protest actions nor the first clashes between the police and LGBT people in the U.S., the unique confluence of rage and circumstances at the Stonewall Inn are considered the flashpoint that launched the modern LGBT Civil Rights Movement. Each year the world's LGBT communities unite to celebrate June as Pride Month, with hundreds of parades to commemorate the day when the most marginal elements of the LGBT community – homeless street youth and transgender persons – sparked an uprising that rejected decades of non-confrontation, fear, and oppression to declare their outrage in one unmistakable voice that resonates to this day.

Lesson Plan

LEVEL 1: CONTRIBUTIONS APPROACH

1. **Activate Prior Experience:** What do you know about the Stonewall Riots in New York City in June 1969?
2. Read the information on the plaque transcript (above) and connect this to newspaper articles at this link:
<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/eresources/exhibitions/sw25/case1.html>
3. **Group Discussion:** In analyzing these resources, discuss the reason(s) why the riots occurred in June.
4. **Extend Knowledge:** Compare and contrast the images of LGBT life and beliefs through reviewing these sources:
<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tag/stonewall-riots>

LEVEL 2: ADDITIVE APPROACH

1. Build your knowledge of the beginning stages of 'Gay Life' in the 1950s-60s, which set the stage for Stonewall by reviewing http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stonewall_riots. The riots were preceded by the funeral of gay icon Judy Garland. Similarly, massive groups of LGBT people gathered to march after the murder of Harvey Milk. (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Night_riots.) Compare and contrast the two events and the days that followed.
2. **Group Activity:**
Group A view this link to scenes from Stonewall at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/stonewall/player/>
Group B view this link at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4O0KaMEvBDo>
Discuss the timeline, common themes, and the impact that this event had on individuals. Create a newspaper article, editorial, or essay about the significance of the Stonewall Riots for the Gay Rights Movement and the impact on the society at large.

LEVEL 3: TRANSFORMATIONAL APPROACH

1. Describe the challenges that the LGBT Movement has had in history and compare these to the African American Civil Rights Movement.
2. Analyze if there any other connections that you can make between the Civil Rights Movement and the pre-Stonewall LGBT Rights Movement. View this link at <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/civilrightstimeline1.html> for more information.
3. In viewing the historical milestones of Legacy Project at http://www.legacyprojectchicago.org/Historic_Milestones.html describe another movement that has made an impact on LGBT History and explain any similarities or differences to the Stonewall Riots.
4. How has the LGBT Movement been transformed since the early 1950s? Can you locate a resource that can be shared with others?

LEVEL 4: SOCIAL ACTION APPROACH

1. Describe any social action movement today that is similar to the Stonewall Riots? Provide a website link or news related article.
2. How have the scenes from the Gay Pride parades changed in the past 45 years since Stonewall? Who are the political and famous figures featured in the parade today? View the slides at http://www.gaycities.com/outthere/32954/photos-45-years-of-gay-pride-in-45-amazing-images/?utm_source=queerty&utm_medium=sidebar&utm_content=45yearsphotos&utm_campaign=outthere
3. Based upon your own exploration of current news sources, such as Box Turtle Bulletin (<http://www.boxturtlebulletin.com/>) or the Human Rights Campaign (www.hrc.org), how would you demonstrate your advocacy for the LGBT movement either privately or publicly?