

STONEWALL

Written by Vas L. Wojtanowicz for the Dragged Into History project. Content warning: Violence

Before the Rainbow Flag, came orange text flyers, as well as, red, white and blue pins, advertising a parade commemorating a new revolution.

Similarly to the first US Revolution, sanitized narratives about the Stonewall Rebellion, don't capture the terrifying chaos of this retaliatory action against violent oppression. Even at the time, folks couldn't agree as to what exactly happened, or who did what. Nevertheless, the following likely happened based on historical evidence from a variety of sources.

- 1** The violence of the rebellion was driven by frequent acts of police brutality and corruption, targeting The Stonewall Inn, an illegal club owned by the New York City mafia which catered mostly to gay men.
- 2** Although operating as a bar without a permit, the Stonewall Inn provided a rare welcoming space for Gays, Lesbians and groups that were less recognized, at the time.
- 3** Contrary to contemporary claims, white Gay men of privilege, did not lead the Stonewall Rebellion. Marginalized youth of diverse backgrounds stood at the forefront. According to early accounts, "Lesbians, Queens, and Nellies," did most of the work. Unfortunately, no one actually knew who started the revolt with certainty.
- 4** The mainstream media was not kind to the resistance, often using slurs and ridicule to dismiss it.
- 5** Several accounts mentioned a Lesbian who was brutalized and arrested by law enforcement. She was credited for giving the rallying cry of, "Why don't you guys do something?" These words called folks to action. Some believe that the person was Biracial Drag King, Stormé DeLarverie. Though arrested and assaulted by a police officer, Stormé claimed that another unnamed Lesbian actually gave the call to action that started a revolution.

6

According to Black Trans activist, Marsha P. Johnson, herself, and others who were there at the time, she threw what came to be known as, "The Shot Glass That Was Heard Around the World," in the midst of the chaos, and not the brick that started the resistance. Nevertheless, her huge contributions to queer liberation, should never be dismissed.

7

Though it's hard to tell who sparked the rebellion, one thing is certain. The people most likely to be denigrated as "sissies" and "swishes", turned out to be the most courageous and sensible individuals in the rebellion, according to multiple accounts. Thanks to their medical care, compassion, humor and quick-thinking, no one died during this violent event.

8

In spite of the mayhem at the Stonewall Inn, the rebellion that took place changed the face of gay rights, and ultimately, queer liberation efforts forever. The first Pride parade (then known as Gay Freedom parade) happened because of it. Without it, we would never have experienced the decriminalization of being trans and gay in the United States. Gender and sex diverse folks would have never enjoyed legal same-sex marriage, positive media representation, or improved medical care. Regardless of what happened in this messy yet decisive turning point, we owe a great deal of gratitude to the folks who fought against the powers that be in the Stonewall Rebellion.

Sources:

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