

# STONEWALL STORIES PART I OF II

Stonewall Stories continue on pages 16, 17, 19, 21 and 23. Watch for additional stories and first person accounts in the June 25 issue. Contact the features department for submission information.

## 'They lost that wounded look that fags all had ten years ago'

Stonewall: myth and reality

By Michael Bronski

Several years ago I was standing at Gay Pride listening to the speeches and the Emcee stated in a strong, vibrant voice: "Today we celebrate the Stonewall Riots, when a group of drag queens in New York City fought back against the police and claimed their rights. Many gay people died that night...." Well, no, not a single person died in the riots as far as we know. But like all great historical moments, the Stonewall Riots exist in both myth and reality. No one can underestimate the power that the Riots have had upon the popular and political imagination of gay people. We have enshrined the word — STONEWALL — in our vocabulary and it has come to mean political resistance and personal freedom, it has been a rallying cry as well as a source of solace in hard times. While just getting the basic facts straight is a good thing, an examination of

Truscott IV were also inside. Apparently the cops in the Stonewall got panicky and threatened the crowd from inside the locked door. One of the street queens punched in the plywood window of the bar and poured in some lighter fluid which he lit with a match. Police cars arrived on the scene at this point and everything stopped. The whole event lasted 45 minutes. By the time the cops had left, there was a sign up announcing that the bar would be open Saturday night.

As a crowd gathered outside the bar the next evening, the mood was festive. Queens were holding hands and making jokes. The police were chasing people away, but the crowd was in a good mood; they were defiant, but not as angry as the night before. Every now and then there were cries of "Gay Power." The next night, Sunday,



the realities and myths surrounding the riots and the immediate time after tells us a great deal about the beginnings of the post-Stonewall gay movements, as well as the movements today.

One of the most prevalent myths is that there was a single Stonewall Riot which was occasioned when the New York police harassed the clientele of the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village on the night of Friday, June 27, 1969. There were actually three nights of street action — Friday, Saturday and Sunday — which started when the police raided the Stonewall (which was not actually a bar but operated as a private club) for selling liquor without a license. After the police put the doorman, the bartender and three drag queens in the paddy wagon the crowd became raucous. Calling the officers "Pigs," and "Faggot cops," queens started throwing pennies, then quarters and finally bottles at them. Deputy Inspector Seymour Pine and Deputy Inspector Smyth (who seems to have no first name in the news reports) and some other police barricaded themselves inside the bar until reinforcements could arrive. *Village Voice* reporters Howard Smith and Lucian

there was a new feeling in the air. The Tactical Police Force was there, but so were the queens — some looking for trouble, some just making their presence felt. Poet Allen Ginsberg came by and commented to the reporter from the *Village Voice*, "You know, the guys there were so beautiful — they've lost that wounded look the fags all had ten years ago...."

Stonewall has come to symbolize and signify Gay Liberation and many people think that it was the absolute beginning of the movement. But there were actually many groups in existence before the Riots. Generally calling themselves "homophile" organizations, these groups included the Mattachine Society, The Homophile Youth Movement, The Student Homophile League, and Society for Individual Rights, as well as Daughters of Bilitis. They provided social and political structures, the latter of which extended to giving legal advice and bringing suits against discrimination. The magazine *ONE* won, in 1959, a major case before the Supreme Court to allow homosexually-oriented material through the mail. The homophile movement even approached gay rights on an international level when

Mattachine members picketed the UN in 1965 with signs claiming "CUBA'S GOVERNMENT PERSECUTES HOMOSEXUALS — US GOVERNMENT BEAT THEM TO IT" and "JEWS TO CONCENTRATION CAMPS UNDER NAZIS, HOMOSEXUALS TO WORK CAMPS UNDER CASTRO — IS THE US MUCH BETTER?" And although the first explicitly sexual gay newspaper — *Gay* — appeared in New York in November of 1969 — there were gay and lesbian magazines, most notable *The Mattachine Review* and *ONE* and the lesbian magazine *The Ladder* — years before.

What Stonewall did was give a focus to the street discontent building in urban centers. It capitalized on the mode of organizing and street action associated with the Black Power movement — the slogan GAY POWER was clearly taken from the language of Black organizers — and also dovetailed neatly into the more youthful counterculture, student movements, and New Left sentiment. Stonewall made it all right to be angry and gave a public image — at once sassy, energetic and rightfully angry — to a movement and a feeling which had existed for a long time.

Many people who hear about gay liberation, or who are just coming out, seem to think there is such a thing as a "gay movement." Even many of us who have been around, and involved, for years have the notion that Stonewall engendered a movement which only, after time, began to split apart and take on diverse agendas. The fact of the matter was that within only a week after the riots New York's gay scene was already filled with political controversy, and, it seems, a lack of any clear agenda.

The first organizing act to occur was a leaflet produced by the Homophile Youth Movement urging lesbians and gay men to boycott the Stonewall Inn and all other gay bars which functioned by being part of a syndicate-run monopoly (including constant police payoffs whenever they wanted to). The leaflet called for gay-owned and -run bars with a healthy atmosphere and a letter campaign to the recently elected, and rather liberal, Mayor John Lindsay. The New York Mattachine Newsletter wrote that the Stonewall was raided because it catered to the least enfranchised of the gay community — drags and homeless gay teens and youth. They also pointed out that the bar was a firetrap and existed to make money, not to serve the gay community. Such feelings were odd for the Mattachine Society, which once had radical leanings but at this point was willing to play to the more respectable segments of the community.

It was, however, the Mattachine Action Committee — run by Martha Shelley and Michael Brown — that originally took the lead in organizing the energy generated by Stonewall. Soon the views of the committee and the society became too divergent and on July 16 the committee called for a community meeting to discuss "Gay Power." The split within Mattachine — at least philosophically — finally appeared real and although there was a second Mattachine Action Committee, the real breakthrough in organizing came on Thursday, July 31, when an independent group of women and men met at the Alternative U. and formed what was to be the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). Somewhat disdainful of what they saw as the mainstream inaction of such groups as DOB and Mattachine, the Gay Liberation Front viewed itself as radical, a multi-front organization with no real power structure and a commitment to social change through political action and consciousness raising. But GLF was not for everyone and within less than four months Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) was formed. More focused on legislative change and bringing discrimination cases to court, but also interested in political street actions — called zaps — GAA combined some of the mainstream concerns of the older homophile groups with the new activism of GLF. Within a year they also opened the Firehouse — a building to the east of the West Village — as a political and cultural center for the gay and lesbian community.

Clearly all of this was a result of Stonewall, and even though the various groups seemed to be constantly at odds with one another, they formed the basis for much of the gay organizing to happen over the next 20 years. It is both a sobering and an encouraging thought that differences of politics, opinion and tactic have always been rife in the gay movement. Our strength, rather than our failures, lies in our diversity, no matter how difficult that may seem at times.

The Gay Liberation Movement — in its broadest sense — has had a tremendous effect on the lives of all gay people. Increased public visibility, discussions in the media

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I AM A  
LESBIAN  
AND  
I AM  
BEAUTIFUL



## Racism and remembering

Vivian Carlo

I was in Chicago in '69 and I was just about to come out. It was in '69 that I first got cruising and knew it. I was with a gay male friend of mine at a concert and he said this woman was cruising me. I looked at her and I knew what he meant.

I can remember being moved when I heard about Stonewall and the Gay Liberation Front in New York. There were so many movements at that time: women working for liberation, the anti-war movement, the anti-draft movement, the civil rights movement, the ecology movement. It was an intense and important time, not only for gay people but for straight people active in social change.

Hearing that the Stonewall rioters were primarily Black and Puerto Rican transvestites makes Stonewall even more moving to me. It also reminds me of the fact that the protests during the Vietnam War that got attention were the protests of white people for white people. We didn't hear very much back then about the fact that a lot of the G.I.s were Black and Puerto Rican. I think about the Black students that were killed at Jackson State a week after Kent State — we never hear about Jackson State, but we still hear all about Kent State. It all goes back to racism. And it angers and depresses me that we still have so far to travel and that we're still so divided from ourselves.

It behooves us to realize that if Stonewall is to have a real meaning and if we are to live in a way that shows we were inspired by it, we need to portray it accurately. We need to create a world in which we can remember it as accurately as possible.

Vivian Carlo is a Puerto Rican woman who is committed to her lifestyle. She embraces a vision of diversity and works towards that goal in every aspect of her life.

## Imagining Stonewall at age 27

Colin Robinson

Although there's long been a Black gay community, I also know that mine is the first generation to come out into an already organized autonomous Black lesbian/gay movement. That that reality, which I take so much for granted, continues to be so breathtaking to older Black lesbians and gay men is too difficult for me to imagine. I have little difficulty imagining oppression and homophobia. But to imagine the absence of the kind of community which defines my primary identity requires a feat of con-

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## Were there lesbians at Stonewall?

Journalist Lucian Truscott's eyewitness account in the July 3, 1969 *Village Voice* includes a mention of a lesbian at the Stonewall Inn during the first night of the riots:

Suddenly the paddywagon and the mood of the crowd changed. Three of the more blatant queens — in full drag — were loaded inside, along with the bartender and doorman, to a chorus of catcalls and boos from the crowd. A cry went up to push the paddywagon over, but it drove away before anything could happen. With its exit, the action waned momentarily. The next person to come out was a dyke, and she put up a struggle — from car door to car again...

Shortly thereafter, writes Truscott, "[T]he scene became explosive. Limp wrists were forgotten..."

Some writers analyzing Stonewall have explicitly credited the (as yet unnamed) lesbian with sparking the riot with her resistance to the cops. Still others make no mention of this dyke. If any readers have information about the lesbian presence at Stonewall or lack thereof, please give the *GCN* Features Dept. a call.

□ **Stephanie Poggi**

## Those who were ridiculed the most risked the most

**Joan Nestle**

I was in the streets the night after Stonewall. My first impression was that the streets belonged to us. There were barricades up. There was a sense that the world had been turned around in some ways. The Village was a different place from that point on.

The only danger about Stonewall is to think that it marks the beginning of lesbian and gay people fighting back, which is not the truth. It has become its own monument now, and I think that's important, but the monument should look both ways. It should look both to what came before Stonewall and what Stonewall made possible later. What came before was a private courage that at different times erupted into public stances. I'm talking here about the homophile movements before Stonewall and just the simple act of people holding hands on the streets in the early '60s and going to the bars and clubs in the '40s. Stonewall was not the first time that gay people took on the state. But it was such a dramatic expression. And it was done by the most marginal of our people, who had no thought that there would be anyone to protect them. I think that's the most important thing to remember, that those who had been ridiculed the most risked the most — their lives — to fight back. I think there will be many Stonewalls in our history, which is a history to be very proud of.

*Joan Nestle is the cofounder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York and author of A Restricted Country.*



## Non-Indians forget whose land this is

**Randy Burns**

In '69 I was living in rural Nevada on a reservation. You didn't get much media on the reservation and I didn't hear about Stonewall.

When I think about it now, I think that we have come a long way, but we have a long ways to go — in-house. The leadership in the gay movement is still very white and exclusionary. Non-Indians — in this case, whites — will often not deal with racism. I'm also tired of hearing things portrayed as having to do with Black and white, with sometimes a mention of Latino. What about American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander? People say to me when I bring this up, "There he goes again." But I'm going to keep doing it until you include us. When I speak I let people know that I am American Indian and that I do not represent all Indians.

In San Francisco, the gay Indian community is providing AIDS education and services to our community; we're caring for 20 people who have AIDS/ARC. We're tired of telling the big AIDS service groups to hire more racially diverse staff members, but we still need more cultural sensitivity.

So, I'm very proud of what took place 20 years ago and the fact that it was drag queens of color who started the Stonewall riots. But as Indians say sometimes, non-Indians tend to forget whose land this is. As lesbians and gay men, we can't repeat this mistake.

*Randy Burns (Northern Paiute) is a cofounder of Gay American Indians in San Francisco and a community organizer.*

## The fledgling lesbians of Bread and Roses

**Tess Ewing**

I didn't even hear about Stonewall until a year after it happened. It was the Women's Liberation Movement that first gave me the impetus and the freedom to begin to question sex roles. Bread and Roses, "an autonomous Women's Liberation organization" in Boston organized women in consciousness-raising collectives, demonstrated for the right to abortion and an end to the Vietnam War, and held "ogle-ins" to give men a dose of their own medicine. We also held regular Saturday morning open discussion groups on sexuality. It was all pretty straight, but the discussion groups got the ball rolling.

And then Bread and Roses provided the context for other subversive stimuli: Mary Damon, who was the first out lesbian in Bread and Roses, wrote a "Letter to My Sisters" which criticized B & R's lack of support for lesbians; *The Rat*, an alternative newspaper from New York that had been taken over by Women's Liberation and always had articles on "Gay Women's Liberation," as we all called it, was always around; and there was 11 Suffolk Street, a house where three lesbians lived and many others socialized.

I'm not sure when I first heard of Stonewall, sometime in late spring or early summer of 1970. But I know what it meant

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## The messiest

**Charley Shively**

My greatest joy is to have been alive in the '60s; my greatest sorrow is to have witnessed the loss of revolutionary joy and love that was then shared. The winds of change came from Africa, Cuba, Vietnam; the changes there discredited the establishment here. Blacks, women, Latinos, Native Americans found inspiration and strength from the uprisings around the world; and we faced an establishment which had lost all credibility.

Into this opening of freedom, Stonewall called us to revolution; the Gay Liberation Fronts took their name from the liberation fronts in Algeria and Vietnam. I first read about Stonewall in *WIN* magazine (a radical counter-culture part of the War Resister's League); I attended the Student Homophile meetings here in Boston in March of 1970. But the great turning point in my activism came after the assassinations at Kent State. My lover said at dinner: "Your agitating killed those students." I took all the dishes, the food and everything on the table and threw them at him; the cup of yogurt was the messiest. After that I never turned back.

*Charley Shively is a professor at the University of Massachusetts and author of the soon-to-be-published Cocksucking as an Act of Revolution.*

## Opening up the world

**Audre Lorde**

I think I was in Rhode Island visiting my lover Frances in June of 1969. There are two things I remember about that summer.



There was the moon walk. And there was Stonewall. I just thought it was wonderful. There was a kind of excitement in my bones. I knew things would never be quite the same in terms of lesbian and gay visibility. As a Black lesbian, my feeling about what that would mean in my life was much more ritualistic than actual. You have to remember in 1969 I was very involved in the Civil Rights struggle, very involved in the Black Power struggle. That was the beginning of Women's Liberation. I thought: how will this play itself out in my life as a Black lesbian with children?

When Stonewall happened it was part of a whole tide of opening up the world to those of us who actually lived in it, which came to be part of a general revolution of people. But it was the kind of revolution that had never happened before. Stonewall felt like a piece of it; it had the potential of real genuine change. Change in New York, change in the world, change in the United States.

*Audre Lorde is a Black feminist lesbian poet, warrior, and mother. She holds the Thomas Hunter chair at Hunter College in New York City, and is the author of 13 books.*

## 'Homosexuals who call themselves gay'

**Sterling Stowell**

I remember hearing about Judy Garland's funeral, but I don't remember hearing about Stonewall. I was about 12 in '69 and that was about the time that I began to recognize my gay feelings. I remember an article at that time, probably in *Life* magazine, about "homosexuals who call themselves gay." And at the school I went to in Boston, kids would ask each other, "Are you gay?" The kids who didn't know what "gay" was starting to mean would say, "Yeah, I'm gay, I'm pretty happy today." And the other kids would say, "Well then, you must be homosexual."

I do remember the gay pride marches in the early '70s. They gave me a sense that there was a community, that being gay didn't just mean wearing a raincoat and getting arrested. Stonewall and those marches came at a time when I was first starting to see positive things about being gay. There had been so little out there to latch onto. I remember a television movie in '72 called "That Certain Summer." Every so often there might be a mention on another show like *Maude* or *All in the Family*.

Now when I think about Stonewall I think of it as the point when the gay movement went from being a quasi-underground community to proclaiming ourselves openly. I identify as a queen so I also feel a kinship with the queens that were involved. The people who were most visible and couldn't hide led the movement.

*Sterling Stowell has been the adult advisor of BAGLY (Boston Alliance of Gay and Lesbian Youth) for nine years. He is also the office manager at GLAD (Gay and Lesbian*

*Advocates and Defenders) and he works with the Outreach Institute, a professional organization dealing with education and information on gender issues.*

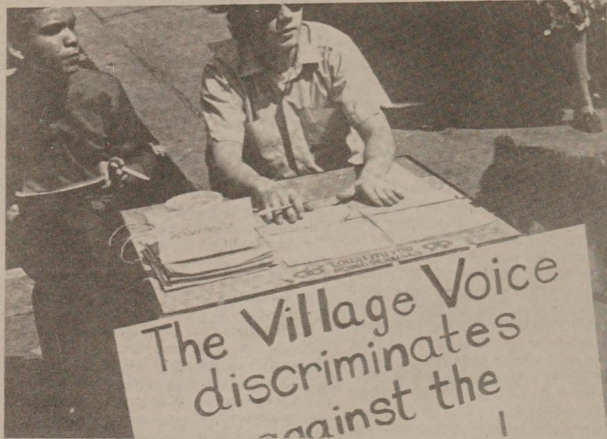
## The gayristocrats

**Steven Rose**

I remember going to meetings in '78 in Providence to plan for the first Gay/Lesbian March on Washington in '79. Some people were saying "We want to be just like everybody else" and other people were saying, "We have to remember Stonewall. We have to remember the drag queens and lesbians on motorcycles." I was a college student then, and I didn't realize that ten years later, many of us would be denied access to what we need to live. But the truth is that the gayristocrats, as I call them, have become "like everybody else." And they're trampling their own, they're trampling PWAs.

There's this image that PWAs are being taken care of, but those people sitting in the

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Campaign against anti-gay 'Village Voice'

## That look

Continued from centerspread and the now casual occurrence of women and men admitting and celebrating their homosexuality has helped innumerable people come out and deal with their sexuality. But the Stonewall Riots, and to some degree the early movement groups, were not particularly representative of all homosexuals. It has become somewhat fashionable to talk about the "lesbians and gay men" at Stonewall, although there are surprisingly few written accounts of exactly *who* was there. The common presumption is that the crowd was mostly male and white, even though gay historian John D'Emilio mentions in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* that Stonewall patrons "tended to be young and non-white." The Black and Puerto Rican drags and hustlers have been written out of gay history. It is probably a safe bet to say that there were few women there — lesbians had their own bars and although there were some mixed watering holes, the Stonewall does not seem to have been one of them.

The meetings that took place after the riots seem to have been almost exclusively white, and did not include drag queens, hustlers or transvestites. At the meetings of the GLF I attended in the fall of 1969, Marcia Johnson and Sylvia Rivera — members of Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) and respectively Black and Latina — were exceptions to the norm. During this time, many lesbians were very active in the women's movement and in groups such as Radicalesbians, which were fueled more by the ideology of women's liberation than gay liberation. The same is true of many Black women and men who chose to work with clearly defined Black movement groups, leaving the mostly white gay liberationists to deal with their racism. We have come a long way since then in attempting to form a movement which will include diversity as one of its high priorities. But I think it is ironic, that those street kids, hustlers and drag queens fighting in the street at Stonewall might very well not be welcomed in our contemporary movement. I can't imagine them at a Human Rights Campaign Fund dinner or on the board of Gay Men's Health Crisis or AIDS Action Committee. Or, for that matter, at *Gay Community News* itself — although drags with their second-hand finery and street-wise mentality calling one another "Miss Bitch" around the office would be refreshing.

Stonewall — both the reality and the myth — is a vital part of our movement. No matter what actually happened on those nights, or who was there, or who was organizing within those first weeks it is the *idea* of Stonewall — the specter of rebellion and freedom which still keeps it going. When I think about Stonewall, and all of those meetings in those early days (and all of the meetings, endless meetings, since) I always recall something that happened late in the fall of 1969. I was coming back from a GLF meeting on a mostly empty train and sitting across from me and my friends was an elderly, very well dressed, rather fragile looking man; he might have been a vicar in an English novel. He was holding a newspaper in front of him and as he dozed off for a moment — it must have been 1:30 a.m. — the paper slipped to reveal a copy of the newly published *Gay Power* (which featured movement news and naked men in perfectly compatible union).

As his *New York Times* fell to the floor he woke up with a start and realized that *Gay Power* had exposed him to those sitting across the subway car. He was panicked for a second, but then saw us smiling at him. With a sheepish grin, he picked up his paper, covered his copy of *Gay Power* and continued reading. I remember thinking that I wished he had just tossed the *Times* away and come out right there on the train. But in retrospect that sheepish grin — replacing that "wounded look the fags had" as Ginsberg put it — showed how far we had come in a few months. That moment of self-acceptance and connection seemed to epitomize what Stonewall made possible. □

## Bread

Continued from centerspread to me and the other fledgling lesbians in Bread and Roses. It meant the beginning of a new movement which started, as all truly grassroots movements do, with a spontaneous explosion of pent-up rage from the oppressed — not from respectable, polite doorknocking or lobbying. It meant an emancipatory vision of Gay Liberation, not just gay rights, just as Bread and Roses stood for Women's Liberation, not just women's rights. It meant a total challenge to oppressive traditions and stereotypes, a radical questioning of sex roles, of sex, of relationships. It meant gender-fuck, it meant outrage and outrageousness.

It gave us the push to form the first Gay Women's Liberation contingent in a Boston demonstration — NOW's August 26, 1979 march to commemorate women's suffrage. Despite the fact that NOW didn't want us, we were there, dressed all in purple, and acting as outrageous, as exhilarated, and as angry as gay contingents always have.

*Tess Ewing lived in Cambridge, Mass. at the time of Stonewall and has been a troublemaker all her life. She still lives in Cambridge and hopes to continue being a troublemaker for the rest of her life.*

## Sexual liberation for everybody

### Henry Ablove

In 1969, I was a grad student living in Connecticut. The news of the crowd action against the police at the cruise bar called The Stonewall Inn reached me through friends who telephoned. I remember that I was thrilled to hear that there were gay people willing to stand together and fight in the streets for our right to be sexual as we liked.

Twenty years later, I'm convinced that sexual liberation for ourselves and ultimately for everybody else, too, should be our movement's primary goal, and that we should persevere in fighting for it with all our might, even at those times when the goal is unpopular and the fight is dangerous and scary.

*Henry Ablove teaches history and lesbian/gay studies at Wesleyan University. He is a founding member of Connecticut ACT OUT.*

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