

How Kick Lines Become Pride Parades

The enduring strategy of movement, 50 years after Stonewall — how a moment becomes a movement through spectacle, ritual, and scalable platforms.

Friday, June 28, marks 50 years since the Stonewall Riots in New York City. What police thought would be a routine raid on the Stonewall Inn at 53 Christopher Street in the Village turned into a fierce uprising of socio-political traction for LGBTQ+ civil rights. It was a radical redrawing of the lines where queer bodies could be safe.

For days, Stonewall patrons and their allies fought in solidarity against state-sanctioned brutality and oppression. Thousands took to the streets, weaponizing pennies, bottles, rocks, garbage — anything they could. Drag queens linked arms and formed Rockette-style kick lines. In waves, they clashed with night sticks and helmets.

In the pantheon of trans-cestoral mythology are Sylvia Rivera, Stormé DeLarverie, and Marsha P. Johnson. What's certain is that they'd had enough discrimination and abuse. So, they made space.

Liberation Takes Movement

The folklore surrounding the rebellion is vast, colorful, contentious, and of course, queer. Stonewall is just one among several uprisings embedded in the origin of the Pride movement: Compton's Cafeteria, Black Cat, and Snake Pit, to name a few.

Breaking down cultural oppression is a process, and a commemorative march is exactly that: a procession of bodies moving through space, tracing and rehearsing memory together, literally processing.

How a Moment Becomes a Movement

By observing Stonewall as a post in time, the inaugural march was both a pivotal opportunity to hold space and preserve LGBTQ+ rights progress and a strategic initiation of ritual. Organizers leveraged spectacle as a vehicle for a scalable, repeatable platform with national reach that celebrates identity in defiance of oppression.

Equal parts protest, celebration, and community building opportunity, the commemorative march became a heuristic for LGBTQ+ groups to process cultural tensions and explore identity. Unlike the somber Annual Reminder marches of the '60s, organizers wanted to exercise true liberation. Something less somber. More noise. No dress code. All ages.

Those participating were encouraged to show up and be their truest selves. They held hands in public — for many, the first time ever — with pride.

Creating Inclusive Environments

As we commemorate Stonewall and all of LGBTQ+ civil rights history, it's important to recognize that after a half century of Pride, there's still work to be done. According to the Human Rights Campaign, 46% of LGBTQ+ employees still report being closeted at work, and 53% report anti-LGBTQ+ humor.

- Provide safe spaces, where people can be comfortable and feel heard
- Identify allies and make them visible
- Check yourself for discriminatory language and behavior
- Don't be defined by your mistakes if you're called out — give space and learn
- Support underrepresented groups and provide them the support needed to succeed