



Credit: Haley Saba

# How kick lines become pride parades

The enduring strategy of movement, 50 years after Stonewall.

 **Carlie Fishgold**  
Strategist

Share to   

Friday, June 28, marks 50 years since the Stonewall Riots in New York City.

Stonewall was a piss-stinking hole-in-the-wall bar with weak drinks and blacked-out windows boarded up from previous raids. The lovable kind. Back door entry was for drag kings and queens, sex workers, and anyone in transit to or from cruising the queer ruin of Hudson piers.

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, oppression, even extortion by the bar owners themselves. Thousands took to the streets, weaponizing pennies, bottles, rocks, garbage — anything they could — against riot gear-clad police.

Drag queens linked arms and formed Rockette-style kick lines. In waves, they clashed with night sticks and helmets to the tune of “Ta-ra-ra Boom-de-ay,” singing,

*We are the stonewall girls*

*We wear our hair in curls!*

*We don’t wear our underwear*

*To show our pubic hair!*

Called the “Shot glass heard around the world,” no one can confirm exactly [who started it](#). In the pantheon of [trans-cestoral](#) mythology are [Sylvia Rivera](#) (first brick), [Stormé DeLarverie](#) (first punch), and [Marsha P. Johnson](#) (first molotov). What’s certain is that they’d had enough discrimination and abuse.

So, they made space.



Pictured left to right: Sylvia Rivera, Stormé DeLarverie, Marsha P. Johnson.

**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.

The following year, on June 28, 1970, a march was organized by more than 10 New York LGBTQ+ activist groups — including the Gay Liberation Front, the Lavender Menace lesbians, Queens Liberation Front, and NYU’s Student Homophile League.

What was originally called Christopher Street Liberation Day is considered the first Pride celebration.

**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 [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.

“On the lampposts were handbills that read: NO PARKING/ SUNDAY/ PARADE/ — POLICE DEPARTMENT,” [accounts The New Yorker](#).

Parade!

For sixty blocks, from [Sheridan Square up Sixth Avenue](#), attendees marched in procession through Midtown to Central Park where they coiled into a [receiving line at Sheep Meadow](#) and concluded as a sit-in turned low-key party in the park.

Momentum is 5,000 people in solidarity. They were *out* in the streets. And they held that space.

Stonewall was equal parts riot and a rebellion. It was a Rockette-style kick line. And a vigil. A march. A procession. A ritual. Stonewall was the opening to the great epic poem that is LGBTQ+ Pride.

Every parade, a recitation.

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 to achieve equality. The best ideas and the best work come from what you know. Yet, according to the Human Rights Campaign’s [“A Workplace Divided” report](#), 46% of LGBTQ+ employees still report being closeted at work, and 53% report anti-LGBTQ+ humor.

Here are some things we’re considering as we work to create a more inclusive environment for all:

- 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.




**Carlie Fishgold**  
Strategist

Carlie channels strategy through intuitive analysis that gets to the cultural context around the root of the problem. Because there’s a lot to learn from the stratigraphy of dirt.



 @CFishgold     Carlie Fishgold

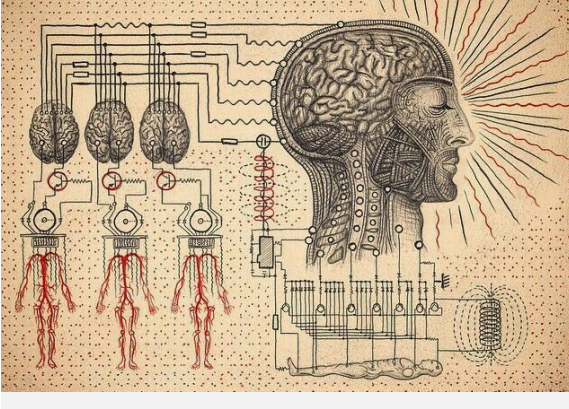
## Read More



**What you need, dear brand, is a point of view**

How to make better content decisions and start delighting people already.

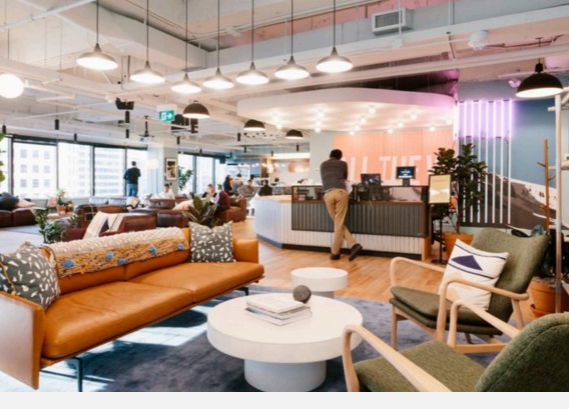
Steve Bryant  
Head of Content



**Don't persuade. Explain.**

Lessons from AWS ReInvent, explaining super complicated ideas, and avoiding the curse of knowledge.

Steve Bryant  
Head of Content



**Will WeWork for love**

One startup's journey to build an inclusive dating app in the land of casual misogyny.

Steve Bryant  
Head of Content