

What Is Pride, and Why Do We Celebrate It?

by Jackson K. Hart



Welcome to the month of June, or as we in the LGBTQ and ally community call it: Pride Month. For many, it's a month of marches, rainbow flags, glitter, singing, dancing, and radical forms of self-expression. You would be hard-pressed to find a more exciting month of the year. Of course, June wasn't always Pride Month...

Pride Is History: In order to understand how we got here, it's important to know where we've been. Historically, Pride began on June 28th, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village, New York City. Prior to this moment in time, being LGBTQ in the U.S. was a crime that was heavily policed. The better part of the 20th Century was an era when [homosexuality was classified as a mental disorder](#), religious institutions openly condemned LGBTQ people, and [anti-sodomy laws](#) were

enacted for the purpose of targeting and incarcerating members of the community. In fact, New York City – home of the [largest U.S. population](#) of LGBTQ people – created special police vice squads to raid gay establishments and entrap gay men.

In the early hours of that fateful day in June, however, patrons of the [Stonewall Inn](#) resisted what was supposed to be a routine police raid. Roughly handcuffed, the arrested waited outside for police wagons to transport them to the station. In the interim, a gathering crowd of

witnesses formed, and tensions erupted into action when a lesbian, complaining about her tight handcuffs, was beaten with a billy club and thrown into a police wagon. What resulted were several days of rioting: wagons were overturned, windows smashed, police outnumbered and trapped, garbage fires lit. That night, the LGBTQ community – with [trans women of color in the vanguard](#) – made a stand, and that stand was the beginning of a revolution.

Pride Is Civil Rights: After the riots, word of mouth and media coverage quickly spread, and a [sense of urgency](#) took hold of the LGBTQ community: the time was now. Established LGBTQ groups increased their protest efforts, while numerous grassroots organizations (e.g., the [Gay Liberation Front](#) and [Gay Activists Alliance](#)) took a

page out of anti-war and Black Panther playbooks. Such groups formed with a common goal: securing human rights and civil liberties for LGBTQ people. Nothing less would do.

On June 28th, 1970, the first anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, an assembly for the [Christopher Street Liberation Day](#) was held in Greenwich Village. This event – along with simultaneous marches in Los Angeles and Chicago – was the first LGBTQ Pride march in U.S. history. As the [New York Times](#) reported it, participants marched 51 blocks to Central Park and stretched across 15 city blocks as they made their journey.

Pride Is a Radical Act of Protest: Over the years, numerous cities across the world have joined in commemorating the LGBTQ civil rights movement in June by holding a march or parade. We march



to remember the struggles that brought us here, and we march as a reminder that we are [not done fighting](#) for equal rights. Some Pride marches, as in this [moving account](#), have a moment of silence to remember the millions of lives lost to the [AIDS Crisis](#), violence, and [suicide](#). And while we most certainly celebrate our individuality as well as our community's [achievements](#), notice that we generally use the word march. At its core, Pride is a protest. Then, as it is now, marching in full view down your city street with pride in your true self, in the face of so much opposition, is a radical act.