

# The Fight for Civil Rights: Stonewall Riot and Harvey Milk

As with so many people in history the LGBTQ community has struggled to achieve equality in America. The first Gay Rights organization was created in the US in 1924 by Henry Gerber, a German immigrant. The organization was called the Society for Human Rights and it was quickly broken up in 1925. In 1955, the Daughters of Bilitis formed a lesbian rights organization in San Francisco. Despite these efforts a century or so ago, the struggle will intensify by the 1960's and still continues today.

In the 1960's, it was illegal to be in a same-sex relationship in New York City. Because of this law, many members of the LGBTQ community went to gay bars where they felt they could express themselves openly. The New York State Liquor Authority would look for gay bars and shut them down, claiming that the people that went there were "disorderly."

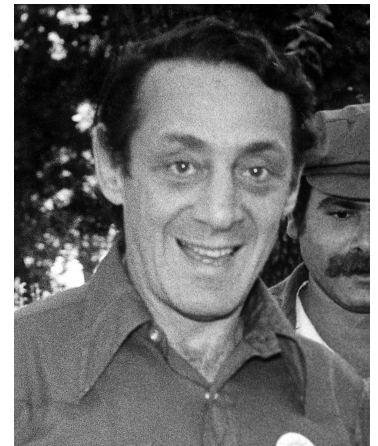
The Stonewall Inn was an establishment purchased by the Mafia in NYC in the mid 1960's. In 1966, the Stonewall Inn was opened in Greenwich Village as a gay bar. Since it was run by the mafia, police were often bribed to overlook it. The bar itself was unsanitary and unsafe. It had dirty toilets and unwashed glasses, along with watered down drinks and blocked fire exits. Sometimes customers were blackmailed by mafia members and had to pay to keep their sexuality secret. Customers brought their own alcohol and it was one of the only bars that allowed drag queens and dancing.

On the morning of June 28, 1969, NY police officers entered the bar and started roughing up customers. People were arrested and some were bashed on the head, while others were taken in the restroom to check if



they were dressed in drag. As people were being dragged out, hundreds of people started to gather on Christopher Street, where Stonewall was located. As things became more tense, a riot would break out that lasted 6 days. Protests and many violent interactions with the police occurred. This violent event would start official gay organizations in the U.S. that would eventually pave the way to the Gay Rights Movement. In 1999 and 2000, President Clinton named June Gay Pride month and President Obama called it that from 2009-2016. In 2016, President Obama also declared the area around the Stonewall Inn, a national monument to recognize the struggle and sacrifice made for LBGQT rights.

A leader in the Gay Rights Movement was a man named Harvey Milk. He was born in NY City and knew he was gay by high school. He was popular and well-liked. He decided to enlist in the Navy after high school, but quit in 1955, after his sexuality was questioned. He became a NY public school teacher and a production associate on Broadway. By the late 1960's, he started to become interested in politics and moved to San Francisco in 1972. Due to his outgoing personality, Harvey quickly became the spokesperson for the Gay community. After trying two other times, he was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1977 and became the first openly gay elected official in the U.S. He supported diversity bills and protections for gay rights, even though he advocated for all groups he served. He was assassinated in 1978 for his views.



While Harvey was in office, gay pride marches began to grow in attendance and Harvey wanted the LBGQT community to have a recognizable symbol that would unite them. He asked an artist named, Gilbert Baker, to create the Rainbow Flag. Each color has a meaning and it's meant to say, 'this is who I am!' The flag was first flown in 1978 in the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day parade and became an official symbol in 1994.



1. What began to change in the U.S after the Stonewall Riots?

2. Describe who Harvey Milk was and how he became a leader for LGBTQ Civil Rights.

3. Why was the Rainbow flag created and what does it represent?