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# Speak Out Now

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## Pride! Recapture the Spirit of Stonewall!

June is Pride month, we see rainbow displays in store windows and pride flags hanging from buildings and cars. The Pride Parade at the end of June transforms San Francisco into a colorful festival. Many who come to Pride don't know where it came from. In many ways it has become more of a corporate show than a show of resistance.

Pride celebrations began following the Stonewall uprising. Fifty years ago, at the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City, a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) movement was launched. At the time it was incredibly difficult to be "out" as a gay person. Being gay was considered a mental illness by the medical profession and many thought gay people were immoral or diseased. If you were gay, you could lose your job, apartment, be arrested or institutionalized. LGBTQ people faced harassment and violent attacks and were routinely targeted by the police - being LGBTQ was effectively illegal.

Gay bars were some of the only places where LGBTQ people could find refuge. They were safe spaces that allowed people to exist openly as they were, and meet others like themselves. But police raids where cops would regularly beat and arrest people were common. The night of the Stonewall uprising was no different. On June 28<sup>th</sup> 1969 police stormed the Stonewall Inn and began their assault. That night people decided enough was enough. One person the cops tried to arrest broke free from their grasp and refused to go into the cop car. People in the bar, who had been forced out onto the street during the raid, surrounded the police. As the crowd grew they started to shout things like "Gay Power" and picked up whatever was on hand to throw at the cops. The scared and outnumbered cops retreated into the bar locking themselves inside.

People in the area joined those in the streets. This was a time of resistance, people were fed up with harassment and discrimination of all kinds. People were fighting back against racism, sexism and the

war on Viet Nam. The LGBTQ community was joining them in fighting for their rights.

For days following the initial outbreak, people continued to protest in the streets surrounding the bar. When the fight died down, the atmosphere had shifted. LGBTQ people had proclaimed their existence in the streets, defying the law, and finding pride in their identities. They would not be put back into the stifling closets they had been forced into before. Out of these protests bloomed the first mass gay rights organizations which forced society to recognize LGBTQ people's humanity.

In several U.S. cities gay rights groups organized demonstrations in 1970, the one-year anniversary of the Stonewall uprising. A march went through the busiest shopping center in Chicago. In San Francisco protesters held a march and 'Gay In'. In L.A. a particularly bold march through Hollywood Boulevard was deemed a 'Pride Parade'.

The gains of the LGBTQ struggle, like those of African-Americans, women, workers and others, were not given, they were won. Gains can be made rapidly when fights are at their peak. But, when they die down, the system chips away at what was won.

Recently laws have been promoted by the Trump administration that allow businesses to discriminate against workers based on their sexual orientation. Transgender people have been banned from being out in the military. Refusing to allow government buildings to fly rainbow flags during Pride engenders hostility toward LGBTQ people. Horrific violent attacks on LGBTQ people, especially transgender people continue all over the U.S.

If the gains of the LGBTQ struggle are to be protected, it means being ready to stand up as they did at Stonewall. But why should we have to constantly mobilize and fight for such basic rights? Together we have the ability to bring the kind of world into being that we know is possible - the kind of world we see every time people unite in struggle. That is what our future could be.