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Summary Article: **Stonewall Rebellion**

from *Culture Wars in America: An Encyclopedia of Issues, Viewpoints, and Voices*

The Stonewall riots, also known as the Stonewall rebellion, took on mythic importance for the gay rights movement. In the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar located in Greenwich Village, New York City. Raids of nightclubs and other venues frequented by gays were common in large American cities during the middle decades of the twentieth century, when repression of homosexuality and gender-bending were at their height. Bar patrons ordinarily complied with orders to leave the premises and passively accepted arrest if they were unable to produce identification. On this particular night, however, the patrons, many of whom were transvestites, resisted the police action, and a raucous crowd joined them outside the bar. Part of the legend of Stonewall is that the mood of some of the gay patrons was especially sour because of the recent death of Judy Garland, a gay icon whose funeral had been held in New York earlier that day. The riots lasted for six days, with police and gays locked in violent clashes that included throwing bricks and other objects, setting fires, and damaging police vehicles and other property.

Much like Rosa Parks's refusal to give up her seat on a bus, the Stonewall rebellion came to symbolize the active resistance of an oppressed group. Indeed, in his 2013 State of the Union Address, President Barack Obama specifically cited Stonewall as part of the great American civil rights tradition. But Stonewall had more than symbolic importance for the gay rights movement. It also signified the movement's embrace of "gay liberation," which was characterized by more radical goals and militant tactics than the assimilationist aspirations and peaceful political strategies of other gay rights activists. The movement made several major breakthroughs on the heels of Stonewall and the activism that it inspired, including the 1973 decision of the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.

See also: Feminism, Second-Wave; Feminism, Third-Wave; Gay Rights Movement; Police Abuse; Transgender Movement.

Further Reading

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