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### The Stonewall Riots

Imagine looking down at your jacket, and there's a small pink triangle sewn on. It doesn't seem like much, right? Okay, now imagine this. People look at the pink triangle with disgust; if they notice it, they herd their children away from you. You can't get jobs at certain places because of the pink triangle that's required by law for you to wear. This was what it was like in 1930s Germany. Gay men were forced to wear pink triangles during the Nazi regime, and were thrown into concentration camps where they were tortured and killed. Many people don't know about things like this, but gay people in general have been the subject of harsh discrimination for a long time, and many events like this happened, but were swept under the rug. Even in the mid-1900s, the LGBT community was still facing injustices in their daily life, but in the late 1960s, things started to change. On June 28, 1969, the first night of the Stonewall Riots broke out, and changed the future for gay people (Frizzel). These riots forever impacted the gay rights movement in a positive way, revolutionizing the way people thought about it and inspiring people to start to stand up for their rights.

The gay community hasn't always been as accepted as it is now. For centuries, it was hated and discriminated against. People couldn't come out for fear that they would be arrested, or in some places and periods, killed. This even happened in the United States of America, one of the most accepting countries today. For example, in 1779, Thomas Jefferson wrote a law

against homosexuality which used castration as a punishment for gay men (DeMichele). Also, most people have heard the gay slur f\*\*\*\*t, but not a lot of people know where this came from. At one point in history, people found out to be gay would be rolled up in carpets, and lit on fire. This would obviously, in most cases, result in the death of the gay individual. At this point in this time, cigarettes were called the (now popular) gay slur, and the gays burning looked like cigarettes. That's where that term came from: a horrendous slew of hateful acts. In the time around the Stonewall Riots, there were still quite a few laws prohibiting being gay, and there were still a lot of people against it, although it wasn't as bad as it was before. For example though, if you were wearing less than three items of gender-specific clothing items that corresponded with your biological sex, you could be legally arrested in New York during the 1960s (History.com). Gay couples could absolutely not adopt, could legally be fired from their jobs, and could be legally told to leave a public area, which they would then have to leave (History.com). Being openly gay was also illegal. If someone was caught even just holding hands with someone of the same gender, they could be arrested for disorderly conduct (History.com) If bars served alcohol to suspected members of the LGBT community, the New York State Liquor Authority would arrest and fine them, while also possibly revoking their liquor license for selling alcohol in a "disorderly" way (History.com). This led to police raids (History.com).

During the 1960s, it was popular for police to conduct raids on bars that they suspected were letting gay people on the premises and serving alcohol to said gays (History.com). These raids were inherently violent, and could result in injuries to bar-goers. This was deemed okay though, and the police would not get in trouble, as they were upholding and protecting New York

laws; police would arrest any gay people that they found in the establishment (History.com). Sometimes, bars that were busted for these things would pay off the police officers to not arrest the employees and/or not publish their name(s) in the newspaper. The money used to pay the police officers was deemed “gayola” and was a popular currency (Frizzel). Also during the 1960s, being gay was still on the list of mental disorders, which didn’t help their case when having to deal with arrests and such. At this time, the Stonewall Inn was a booming bar, that did willingly sell alcohol to gays. Since they allowed member of the LGBT community to drink, the Stonewall Inn became an increasingly popular bar for gays to hang out, and eventually was labeled as a gay bar, albeit slightly sneakily (Lisker). The gays knew that it was basically a gay bar, but it was kept under wraps. Eventually, though, the police started to suspect.

On June 28, 1969, police finally decided to raid the Stonewall Inn after hearing all the talk about it becoming a gay bar (History.com). The resulting raid quickly turned into a riot, from the gays deciding to fight back. “All hell broke loose when the police raided Stonewall.” (Lisker). This was how the local newspaper retold the story of the Stonewall Riots just three days later, and they were right. All hell did break loose. Once the people in the bar realized what was happening, they went wild; they started fighting back a few minutes, throwing anything at the cops that they could get their hands on (Lisker). In the streets, the gays formed a swarming group of pure anger. Each time the police would break them up, they would just regroup over and over again. Instead of complying with the police, the drinkers had resisted; it was described as “A flash of group, of mass anger” (Frizzel). The crowd went on to a nearby place named “Christopher Street” to continue their protests, yelling “Gay power!” all the way (Lisker). These riots went on for three nights, halting during the way, but was still excruciatingly chaotic

(History.com). The LGBT community used the chaos to their advantage, using it to hand out leaflets and pamphlets giving more information to spread the word (Frizzel). At the end of the three nights, there were four injured policemen and 13 arrested drinkers, but even though it hadn't gone completely in favor of the gays, it still forever changed their future, and the future for gay rights (Lisker). “ ‘We may have lost the battle sweets, but the war is far from over,’ lisped an unofficial lady-in-waiting from the court of the Queens.” (Lisker.) The Queens is what the drag queens were referred to at the time, and rightly so. That Queen put it perfectly. They did lose that battle, but it was a start of a war for gay rights, and commonly referred to as the “War of Roses” (Lisker).

This event in history is important because it inspired people to stand up for their basic human rights. It inspired a whole group of people to speak up against the injustices that they had to face, and speaking up led to changes around the world. So far, about 25 or so countries have legalized gay marriage, which is huge compared to where gay rights were in the 1960s. Currently, it's still illegal to be gay in a little over 70 countries, which is still a large jump from where the world was. The Stonewall Riots pushed gay rights further than they ever had been. Just a year after the Stonewall Riots, New York and San Francisco were holding their first gay pride celebrations, and other places around the world were following suit with celebrations of their own (DeMichele). Within a year, the LGBT community had gone from hiding to having celebrations of being themselves.

The gay community has faced much abuse, but because of these riots, they fought for equal rights. Today, the world is more accepting, and LGBT people have seen a lot of change. Yes, there's still a lot of work to be done, but they're better off than they were; now, gay people

don't have to be afraid to even just hold each other's hands. The Stonewall Riots, or "The War of Roses," deserves to be remembered in history for the positive impact it had on the world, and how it continues to give people courage to fight for and defend their rights.

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