



Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution

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"Riveting...Not only the definitive examination of the riots but an absorbing history of pre-Stonewall America, and how the oppression and pent-up rage of those years finally ignited on a hot New York night." - Boston Globe

In 1969, a series of riots over police action against The Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City's Greenwich Village, changed the longtime landscape of the homosexual in society literally overnight. Since then the event itself has become the stuff of legend, with relatively little hard information available on the riots themselves. Now, based on hundreds of interviews, an exhaustive search of public and previously sealed files, and over a decade of intensive research into the history and the topic, Stonewall brings this singular event to vivid life in this, the definitive story of one of history's most singular events.

Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution Details

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alphonse p guardino says

This is a meticulously researched and documented account of the actual riots along with information of the previously existing gay and lesbian rights organizations and how the riots influenced and changed those organizations. The author also briefly discusses similar previous riots elsewhere in the country and addresses ideas as to why those other riots did not have the same influence as Stonewall.

Teri says

At the heart of Greenwich Village, NY, sits the Stonewall Inn. In 1969, this mafia-run gay bar became the site of a large riot that led to the rising of the Gay Revolution. The area of Greenwich Village near Christopher Park was known as a place where many gay, young, homeless men, struggled to survive or to purposely live among the people they could best identify with. It was also an area heavily run by the mafia. This was also a time when the country was in turmoil due to the Vietnam war, Civil Rights, Women's Liberation, and the rise of the New Left.

To avoid red tape and extra costs, the Stonewall Inn was run as an exclusive club, rather than a bar. The cops were paid off to avoid the area, but occasional raids happened during off-hours to keep up appearances, until one night, Deputy Police Inspector Seymour Pine hatched a plan to close the bar down for good. In a spontaneous raid, Pine and his laches raided the place, sparking a 2-night riot. Many involved in the gay community and supporters of the inn's patrons instigated the riots and eventually started a revolution by coordinating the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activist Alliance. Author David Carter profiles key figures involved in the riots, the atmosphere in the gay community, and the events that led up to the raid on June 28, 1969.

Also covered is the aftermath of the riots and the work of GLF and GAA in the months following, as well as the fight for the basic rights of the gay community. This is an important story that needs to be told. The 60s were a time of change and revolution. It was a time that many fought for simple civil rights for minority groups: women, blacks, ethnic groups, and LGBTQ.

This book is very well researched, very readable, and very enlightening.

?Laura says

This account of the Stonewall riots, including the events leading up to it and resulting from it, was comprehensive, well-researched and very readable. It has definitely helped me to put the events in context and to better understand the history of the LGBTQ rights movement. Well worth reading.

Jamie says

David Carter presents the definitive look at the event that is generally considered the birth of the Gay Rights Movement. Carter's exhaustive search through archives and meticulously collected eyewitness accounts capture the event in vivid detail, but it is his framing of the actual riots with an in-depth look at what it was like to be gay in America during the 60s, the political and legal landscape in New York, and the individual key players, that establishes a much-needed context. Equally important is the author's exploration of the ramifications of Stonewall - particularly the birth of countless activist organizations that were spawned as a result. Finally, Carter dispels some important misconceptions: Judy Garland's death on the same day was purely coincidence and played no part in the riots (p. 259), and although some of the key figures in the events leading up to the riots were persons of color and transvestites (Marsha P. Johnson, "The Congo Queen," etc.), the majority of those involved on the front lines were, contrary to popular belief, caucasian (p. 262). Not that this matters in the least, but much brouhaha was made over the supposed "whitewashing" of the recent Hollywood depiction which, as it turns out, was quite accurate in many ways.

I would like to note that a PBS documentary (Stonewall Uprising) was based on Carter's book, but does not do it justice. It should only be used as a companion to the book, not a substitution. I highly recommend this book for historians or anyone interested in an insightful and accessible book on LGBT history.

Stacey Miner says

Extremely well written. Less droning lecture and more a spirited storytelling adventure. While reading, I felt like I was really there, in Greenwich Village, witnessing history as it happened. Consider me delightfully enlightened.

Ashley says

One of the best books I've read about the Stonewall Riots. I really recommend this to anyone who is looking to learn about the Riots. Easy to read, not a stuffy non-fiction book, with tons of quotes from witnesses. It goes beyond just the weekend of the Riots. You learn a lot from this book. Important read for anyone who is interested in LGBTQ history.

Rem says

So far, I am enjoying this book very much and not even half way through it I feel as if I learned more about the gay right's movement than I have in my entire lifetime. The introduction gives a clear picture for the setting of the Stonewall riots and how much of a "powder keg" the whole scene/crowd was, being at the tail end of the civil rights movement in America during that decade.

"[Arthur Evans] noticed a quotation by the revolutionary [George Washington] inscribed on the arch's top: "Let us raise a standard to which the wise and the honest may repair.'" pg. 29

"The presence of drag queens at the Stonewall Inn has been much exaggerated over the years for a number of reasons. One of the first is a terminology problem. The word queen [italicized] was more widely used in the late sixties to indicate any gay man who was not conventionally masculine, whereas today the word usually occurs in the phrase drag queen or indicates a very gay male. Thus when a contemporary person reads about "a whole bunch of queens," the picture that may come to mind is one of transvestites, whereas the 1960s usage probably simply indicated a group of gay men, with the understanding that none of them were totally straight-acting.

Complicating the picture is the existence in the late 1960s of gay men known as scare queens or flame queens. One of the club's regular customers explains the meaning of these terms that describe a kind of gay male who became practically nonexistent not long after 1969: "What you had back then was flame queens, which were very similar to the character Emory in Boys in the Band: they were super-effeminate, hair would be teased, they would wear eye makeup, Tom Jones-type shirts, maybe hip-huggers, bright colors." pp. 75-76

"While other clubs and settings may have offered places for socializing and making romantic and sexual liaisons and while there were a number of clubs where people could dance, the Stonewall was the only sizable place where gay men could express their sexuality freely and openly for sustained periods of time. Bathhouses offered places where gay men could actually have sex--that was the bathhouses' sole purpose--but socializing there was largely incidental to sexual activity. In other words, the Stonewall Inn was the only place where gay men could express all sides of their personalities. Not only could gay men dance freely, but there also could be a certain expansiveness about their dancing, given the physical size of the club and the security provided by the Mafia." pp. 87-88

"Many other credible witnesses offer similar testimony concerning the gay street youth. Lanigan-Schmidt says, "What I know definitely from my own experience is that the people who did the most fighting were the drag queens and the hustlers. [They] fought with the same ferocity they would fight with any situation of survival put their sense of dignity on the line, very much like Bob Dylan's 'When you ain't got nothing, you got nothing to lose.' " pg. 162

"What is the Gay Liberation Front?," the answer was given was, if grounded in theory:
We are a revolutionary homosexual group of men and women formed with the realization that complete sexual liberation for all people cannot come about unless existing social institutions are abolished. We reject society's attempt to impose sexual roles and definitions of our nature. We are stepping outside these roles and simplistic myths. We are going to be who we are. At the same time, we are creating new social forms and relations, that is, relations based upon brotherhood, cooperation, human love, and uninhibited sexuality. Babylon has forced us to commit ourselves to one thing . . . revolution." pg. 219

"The media-savvy group realized that it could be highly beneficial to have a log or symbol, which was provided by Marty Robinson's new lover, Tom Doerr, a graphic design artist....the symbol Doerr suggested was that of the lambda, the eleventh letter of the Greek lowercase alphabet, which resembles an inverted letter Y...the lambda was chosen because in chemistry and physics it symbolizes a complete exchange of energy, "that moment that's witness to absolute activity." pg. 237

Chris says

I wasn't sure I was going to like this one. About halfway through, I was seriously considering giving up. Too much in the way of speculation about motives and various shadowy Mafia figures involved in the illegal bars, etc. But then, once the buildup to the bust of the Stonewall Inn and the subsequent riots began, the book

was EXCELLENT. Very good "frontline" story telling. It also gave the perspective of the police who were initially trapped inside the building, which I quite liked.

I also found the "aftermath" section very interesting, about the formation of the GLF and GAA, and the almost overnight creation of the gay rights movement as a serious political force. Not to denigrate the efforts over the previous decades by activists, but the explosion in activism and support can be linked fairly clearly with Stonewall.

So, I do recommend this to not only readers interested in gay rights and gay history, but for anyone interested in an under-reported aspect of the tumultuous late 60s. Just give it some time, and you'll be rewarded.

Joey Comeau says

This book is so good. But holy shit does it ever make me want to punch a cop.

Ramon Esquivel says

Engaging history, though I was puzzled by some of the author's conclusions. A number of names are mentioned. Sadly, many of the most compelling figures of the era, like Marsha P. Johnson and Zazu Nova, died before they could be interviewed. Strangely, though the author wrote about lesbians, transgendered individuals, and effeminate gay men of different races and ethnicities, he felt compelled to state that the majority of people responsible for the riots were white, gay, cisgendered men. This conclusion seems counter to what he just wrote about. I appreciated this book mostly for the context of blackmail and organized crime that surrounded the Stonewall raid.

Dave Cullen says

This is THE book to read if you're interested in the subject. I needed to research the subject for a chapter in my gay soldiers book, and after quite a bit of reading, this was the source that came up regularly as the definitive account. It really captured the details of the entire series of events, as well as the background and context.

And it was also an engaging read.

Iqra Choudhry says

Although this is great for understanding the issues faced by the LGBT+ community in the lead-up to the Stonewall riots, it is a narrative that ignores prominent figures in the riots, such as Marsha P. Johnson. The author also concludes that the Stonewall riots and the activism that followed, were spearheaded by cis white gay men, and erases the stories of black and brown, lesbian, bisexual and transgender activists of the time.

Sir Michael Röhm says

I initially became interested in the book while looking into the life of Ed "The Skull" Murphy, a man involved in the blackmailing of homosexuals, child sex trafficking, and the Mafia.

Carter dishes on Murphy, but the book is concerned with the subject of gay rights and activism before and after Stonewall. The story is interesting and engaging, involving Mafiosos, cops, "respectable" gay activists, and the "gender fluid" (to use a modern term) homeless youth who congregated both in Stonewall and in the Village as a whole.

My primary critique is minor, in that Carter sometimes drops a person into the narrative without explaining who he or she is. This happened a couple of times, most notably for me with Leo Martello.

Martello was involved both in the gay liberation movement and the early Wicca/Neopagan movement in NYC. He's a very interesting person himself, tied to not just GLF but the Magickal Childe, other New York homosexuals, and early pagan publications, including a series of books that he wrote about the early days of American Wicca, Satanism, etc.

I don't expect Carter to chronicle the early pagan movement in NYC, but some information on the man and the roles he played in two different, but now very important, groups would have been welcome, especially since he is mostly forgotten nowadays.

Another minor issue, this not being Carter's fault, is that a number of key players at the time could not be interviewed because they have long since passed away. The street kids especially had rather short life spans because of turning tricks, doing drugs, heavy drinking, anti-gay attacks, etc. and all of this before AIDS. Further, many used street names, drag names, etc. making tracking them down all but impossible.

Despite these two minor complaints, one of which is beyond the author's control, this is well worth reading.

Joy says

Carter claims explicitly that trans people and people of color were marginal to the Stonewall riots. I think that's all I need to say.

Aitziber says

David Carter's *Stonewall* is a tremendously comprehensive look at the June/July 1969 riots. Indeed, the book first gives the reader a rundown on the history of Greenwich village, as well as the urban design that led to the short, one-way streets and triangular lots around the bar. If it is related to the Stonewall riots, Carter covers it.

Of particular interest were the human stories. Ed Murphy, the gay Mafioso that blackmailed wealthy, closeted gay men, and pimped the underage and poor. Murphy was able to whitewash his image after the

riots, taking control of the Christopher Street Liberation March and changing its route so that it ended in Greenwich Village where he still controlled many locales. It appears that with his death in 1989, he has become long forgotten, which is for the best, really. Other interesting people were the street youth that first rioted, their histories courtesy of Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt and Bob Kohler; the conservative homophile activists that chided the kids for the destruction, such as Dick Leitsch and Randy Wicker; the deputy inspector, Seymour Pine, who led the raid; and the Gay Liberation Front and Gay Activists Alliance who smartly took advantage of the momentum to improve the lives of LGBT people.

As well as providing a full account of the riots, David Carter's book seeks to settle the most debated questions about the event, namely, was Seymour Pine lying when he claimed that the raid wasn't motivated by homophobia, but rather because the manager, Ed Murphy, was operating a blackmail ring out of the bar? Was there really a lesbian who urged the onlookers to help her? What was the extent of the involvement of transgender people? Do the riots lose their significance now that we know just what a Mafia den the Stonewall was? Was Judy Garland's death connected to the riots? Etc.

Carter leads the reader through the whole gamut of emotions, first sadness and powerlessness as he lays the background for the riots, and just what a shitty situation LGBT people lived in before the riots, then anger and joy as the rioters get the best of the cops, and finally, satisfaction, as the GLF and GAA seize the moment, force the hand of politicians in their favor and organize dances that were, finally, not Mafia-controlled.

The narration is fairly slow to start (that chapter on urban design!) and fairly dense and impenetrable at times, which may lead the uninvested to give up before Carter gets down to business. So I dock a point for that. Otherwise, *Stonewall* is highly recommended, to the point where even the footnotes deserve attention and add details.
