THE MAKING OF THE STONEWALL MYTH

On the evening of June 27, 1969, New York police raided the Stonewall Inn, a homosexual bar in Greenwich Village. This was not unusual since police **raids** of homosexual bars were common in New York and other American cities in the 1960s. This time, however, bar patrons fought back instead of passively enduring humiliating treatment. Their response initiated a riot that lasted into the night. The Stonewall riots are typically viewed as the **spark** of the gay liberation movement and a turning point in the history of gay life in the United States, and they are commemorated in gay pride parades around the globe. Writing about homosexual activism, historian Marc Stein (2000) quoted an activist who claimed, "No event in history, with perhaps the exception of the French Revolution, deserves more [than the Stonewall riots] to be considered a watershed. "President Clinton made the Stonewall Inn a national historic landmark. It is common to divide gay history into two epochs—"before Stonewall" and "after Stonewall".

Claims about the historical importance of Stonewall continue, even though historians of sexuality have challenged the novelty of the events at the Stonewall Inn. The Stonewall riots did not mark the origin of gay liberation. They were not the first time gays fought back against police; nor was the raid at the Stonewall Inn the first to generate political organizing. Other events, however, failed to achieve the mythic stature of Stonewall and have been virtually forgotten.

Why did the events at the Stonewall Inn acquire such significance, while other similar events did not? Collective memories are "images of the past" that social groups select, reproduce, and commemorate through "particular sets of practices." Collective memories are never formless. The fact of **embodiment** is what all collective memories share. How memory is embodied varies within and between societies. Carriers of memory may include books, statues, memorials, or parades.

Studies of collective memory have attended more closely to struggles over how particular events are remembered than to why some events are remembered, and others are not. A comparative-historical analysis of the factors affecting the creation of collective memory was conducted by comparing the Stonewall riots with similar events that occurred in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York in the 1960s, which seem to have been forgotten in history.

Stonewall is remembered because it is marked by an international commemorative ritual—an annual gay pride parade. Accounts of other events are confined almost exclusively to books by historians of sexuality. Explaining Stonewall commemoration is central to understanding its privileged position in gay collective memory. Stonewall was not the first of the five examined events to be viewed by activists as commemorable. It was, however, the first commemorable event to occur at a time and place where homosexuals had enough capacity to produce a commemorative vehicle—that is, where gay activists had adequate mnemonic capacity. That these conditions came together in New York in 1969,as opposed to in other cities at earlier times, was a result of historical and political processes: time and place mattered. Gay liberation was already underway in New York before Stonewall, which enabled movement activists to recognize the opportunity presented and to initiate commemoration.

Not all proposed commemorative vehicles are successful. We found that the resonance of the Stonewall story, the appeal of a parade as a commemorative form, and the fit between those two contributed to a commemorative success. Its commemoration not only survived but also grew and spread. **Features** contributing to institutionalization included its annual design, compatibility with media routines, cultural power, and versatility.

Our findings suggest a rethinking of the role of Stonewall in gay movement history. A research suggests that the claim that Stonewall "sparked" gay liberation was a movement construction—a story initiated by gay liberation activists and used to encourage further growth. The Stonewall story is thus better viewed as an achievement of gay liberation rather than as a literal account of its origins.

Armstrong E. & Crage S. (Oct. 2006) (Takenand adapted from https://web.ics.purdue.edu/~hogane/Soc%20525/Armstrong_and_Crage_2006_Stonewall.pdf)

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LIVEWORKSHEETS

Reading Section

1. 1. Based on the text, match the words in bold in column A with their closest meaning in column B. There are three extra definitions you DO NOT NEED TO USE. (4 points, 1 each)

COLUMN A	COLUMN B
raid	**A.** a prominent or distinctive part, quality, or characteristic
spark	**B.** the reason for which anything is done, created, or exists
embodiment	**C.** a sudden forcible entry into a place
feature(s)	**D.** the act of representing an abstraction as a physical thing
	E. a violent disturbance of the public peace for a common purpose
	F. the system around which something is built up
	G. anything that serves to animate, kindle, or excite

2. Complete the following sentences using information from the text ONLY. Write NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS in each gap. (7 points, 1 each)

A. The incident that ignited the subsequent events at Stonewall Inn was that the bar patrons decided to fight back against the _____ given by the police.

B. The Stonewall riots cannot be labelled as the start of the _____ since there were previous events in the US history.

C. Books, monuments or parades are among the multiple ways to keep a record of social communities' _____.

D. The application of a _____ between *Stonewall* and other similar events helped to understand factors that affect the social collective memory.

E. Although gay liberation was already in progress in New York before *Stonewall*, it was the _____ event where gay activists could be remembered in time and place.

F. The fit between _____ and the parade worked as vehicle to boost the social protest.

G. Researchers have considered that Stonewall must be regarded as a(n) _____ of gay liberation and not as the beginning of it.

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