

# ARTICLES & NEWS

## THE STONEWALL RIOTS - NOT JUST A BUNCH OF QUEENS

On the eve of the 20th anniversary of the Christopher Street riots, which started outside of a bar in New York City, we received a fundraising letter from the Human Rights Campaign Fund which began:

"Twenty years ago, the sight of a paddy wagon in front of a gay bar was no surprise. So when one pulled up outside the Stonewall Inn just before midnight on June 27th, 1969 most passersby considered it 'business as usual'...but it wasn't business as usual for long...A lot of the drag queens started jeering at the police, drawing a crowd...Then a lesbian was pulled out of the bar, and pushed toward a patrol car...she did something that triggered three nights of rioting, rebellion and ultimately, revolution. She resisted."

Over the years, we've seen innumerable references to the Stonewall Riots. However, this was the first time we saw any mention of this lesbian who sparked the riots. We did a little research with the help of Anne Tracy, who works in Special Collections at Michigan State University Library. Sure enough, the July 3rd, 1969 edition of the Village Voice (which had two journalists on the scene) reported, "The next person to come out was a dyke, and she put up a struggle - from car to door to car again. It was at that moment that the scene became explosive." Only one other source that we could find (SEXUAL POLITICS, SEXUAL COMMUNITIES: THE MAKING OF A HOMOSEXUAL MINORITY IN THE UNITED STATES, 1940-1970 by John D'Emilio, U of Chicago Press) attributed the start of the riots on Christopher Street to that one lesbian who resisted. This bit of information was missing from the Stonewall coverage in all of the other publications we checked, even those from 1969.

On the 10th anniversary of the riots, the Lesbian Tide ran an article about the "omission of lesbians from a focal role in Gay Pride celebrations." The writer didn't mention the lesbian who started the whole thing, instead saying, "Maybe it was the heat, maybe it was that one cop shoved the wrong 'queen,' maybe one gay man had a migraine. Certainly no one premeditated the riot that ignited that night."

Almost every account of Stonewall published on this, the 20th anniversary, could be added to the list of articles which report that no one knows what started the riots. In the Tide article one lesbian remarked (about Stonewall), "It's theirs and it was always theirs, never ours." Twenty years after the fact, we think it is important to reclaim this bit of lesbian herstory. --Cheryl & Margy

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A bill which would end discrimination against lesbians and gays seeking to immigrate into or visit the US was introduced into the House of Representatives by Congressman Barney Frank (D-Mass). The bill (HR 1280) would remove the current "sexual deviation" exclusion used to block lesbians and gays from entering the US or applying for citizenship. --Press Release

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