

Pride Parades

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Pride parades are activities undertaken by the LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Intersex and Queer) community to gain visibility, social, and self-acceptance, and demand for legal rights of the community. Pride is celebration of diversity, equality, unity, and freedom. At many places, the celebrations are extended over a week or month. The month of June is considered to be the Pride Month which is witness to a series of events: marches, demonstrations, gatherings, political rallies, and parties mostly to raise awareness about the problems faced by the LGBTIQ community. This includes protests against the laws which are discriminatory and demand for enactment of new laws for the protection of the community. Pride parades may include from few to thousands of people, ranging from quite events to lavish productions. Pride parades may include representations from community organizations, schools, churches, unions, political parties, or local business. They may include fully decorated trucks playing music with people dancing. Pride parades usually end at a park where a huge party is organized, usually with live music, known as post-parade party or pride festival. Most pride festivals have a kid-friendly zone. Pride festivals sometimes include concerts, drag shows, outdoor games, film festivals, or beach parties. Pride festivals are attended by the queer community, their family and friends, people who support the LGBTIQ community, and individuals and families looking for some fun. Currently, many North American pride events are held on a weekend that falls close to June 28.¹ These events also help individuals embrace themselves and take pride in letting the world know who they are. Commemorations are also held for members who lost their lives to violence, hate crimes, and HIV/AIDS. Most pride events occur globally in the month of June to honor the Stonewall riots held in 1969, at Greenwich village in New York City.

Pride is an opportunity: it creates a space where people come together to not only celebrate the progress made in LGBT+ politics, but also to learn about the histories of the diverse identities that Pride celebrates by creating a safe environment that naturally fosters healthy discussion...

—Amanda Saenz

The Stonewall Rebellion was the shot heard round the world... The gay liberation movement was an idea whose

time had come. The Stonewall Rebellion was crucial because it sounded the rally for the movement... It became an emblem for gay and lesbian power.

—Lillian Faderman

The decades before the Stonewall uprising (SWU) were difficult times for the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual) community. Same-sex marriage was considered illegal in New York; hence, couples flocked to gay clubs where they could socialize without fear. However, the New York State Liquor Authority (NYSLA) fined and took action against clubs which served liquor to gay individuals. Gathering of homosexuals was considered as “disorderly” by NYSLA. Gay individuals were not served liquor due to anti-gay laws or made to sit facing away from the other customers so that they could not socialize. The NYPD (New York City Police Department) raided the Stone Wall Inn (SWI), in Greenwich Village, in New York City, in early hours of June 28, 1969 which led to 6 days of retaliation in the form of protests and violent clashes of bar patrons and local residents with NYPD.²⁻⁴

A crowd gathered outside SWI and started shouting “Gay Power” and throwing glass bottles and bricks from a nearby construction site. Sylvia Rivera threw the first beer bottle at the police during the SWI riots. The police soon lost control of the situation and barricaded themselves inside the SWI.¹ The riots spread from Christopher Street to the neighboring streets.

Marsha P Johnson was a black, trans, bisexual woman who played a major role in SWU movement. Both Sylvia and Marsha were very close friends and had a difficult childhood living on the streets from a young age. Marsha played a major role in propelling the SWU and extending it over 6 days with the support of others. Stormé DeLarverie was a Drag King,

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bouncer, and singer who worked with a travelling variety show called The Jewel Box Revue. Stormé is said to have given the first punch to the police after which the crowd revolted.⁵

It was a rebellion, it was an uprising, it was a civil rights disobedience—it wasn't no damn riot.

— Stormé DeLarverie

These riots acted as a trigger for the gay-rights movement in America and Worldwide. The protesters had a very basic demand—establishment of LGBT+ friendly public places, where they could meet without fear of arrest.

Shortly after the SWU, a number of gay supportive organizations were formed. Sylvia and Marsha founded a group called STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) for helping street kids and side by side taking part in various activities like pride march. On the first anniversary of SWU in 1970, community members of New York City marched through the local streets as a remembrance of SWU. This is considered the America's first gay pride parade also known as Christopher Street Liberation Day. The concept of "Pride Month" was given by activist Brenda Howard who was a bisexual. Known as "The Mother of Pride," she had organized the first year foundation parade and pride week of SWU. The first pride parade eventually transformed into what we know today as "the New York city pride parade" and was the guiding light for many such parades around the world. On the first anniversary of SWU, pride parades were also held in Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.²⁻⁴ The following year, the first Gay Day Picnic was held in Toronto. By 1972, marches for the LGBT community were being held across many cities in North America. In 1972, Morty Manford, a gay, was badly beaten while distributing leaflets to protest media oppression. His mother Jeanne Manford was the first person to openly protest against this. She wrote a letter to *New York Post* and appeared on various television shows defending her son and openly accepting his sexual orientation. The same year she marched along with her son and carried a sign which read "PARENTS OF GAYS: UNITE IN SUPPORT FOR OUR CHILDREN." These events finally led to the formation of PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) which is currently a National Organization. PFLAG takes active part in all pride events.¹

A pink triangle was drawn on the clothing of gay prisoners in Germany, a symbol which they shared with sexual predators. Homosexuals were considered inferior and degenerate in Germany and many were kept in concentration camps where they died between 1933 and 1945. Even after World War II, the anti-gay laws were retained in Germany. It was not until 1972, when the first gay rights organization "Homosexuelle Aktion Westberlin (HAW)" was formed. HAW propagated and reclaimed the pink symbol as sign of liberation. This pink symbol can be seen in various pride parades, on banners, and placards.⁶

The rainbow flag has become the symbol of pride for the LGBTIQ community with emphasis on the point that "Love-is-Love." These flags can often be seen during pride parades and routinely outside homes, pinned to shirts or on bumpers. Retrospectively till then, the pink triangle was often used to represent the LGBT community, on posters and banners. The pink triangle is linked with a very negative history, the symbol being used for homosexual prisoners in Germany during World War II. A flag representing the LGBT community was required and the need was felt and forwarded to Gilbert Baker. The flag was designed by an artist Gilbert Baker (War veteran and drag performer) on the request of a gay politician Harvey Milk. The design was to be an all-encompassing symbol for the San Francisco's annual pride march in 1978. The rainbow flag represents togetherness in diversity. The different colors carry different meanings; the 8 colors included in the original design were hot pink (for sex), red (for life), orange (for healing), yellow (representing sunlight), green (representing nature), turquoise (for art), indigo (for harmony), and violet (for spirit). A mile-long flag was made to celebrate the 25th anniversaries of SWU and Baker's creation of the flag.⁷

In addition to the rainbow flag, a number of other flags can be seen during various pride parades. These include the Trans flag, Non-binary flag, the Progress flag, the Philadelphia Pride flag, bisexual flag, and pansexual flag. These flags have been designed over time to represent different subgroups in the LGBTIQ community. Other symbols which are popularly seen during pride events include a double-headed axe called "Labrys" (from ancient Crete) which represents lesbian and feminist strength. Lambda, a Greek letter, is used as a symbol of gay and lesbian community.

World Pride are international events organized by an organization Interpride with coordinators from around the world. The first World Pride event was held in Rome in 2000. The fourth World Pride was held in Toronto, Canada with the theme "Rise up." In 2019, World Pride was held in New York marking the 50th anniversary of SWU. More than 4 million people are said to have attended the event. EuroPride is Europe's annual pride celebration which began in 1992 and has been hosted by various cities in Europe. Pride festival is held in Australia during summer in February and March which is of a month's duration—the Sydney Mardi Gras Parade. Pride parades were being organized in Turkey—called Gay Pride Istanbul, from 2003 to 2014; but they have been banned from 2015 onwards. Pride parades are being organized in Russia since 2006 and they continue to do so with support of European LGBT community despite the ban in 2012. In 2013, Russia passed a law banning "propaganda of non-traditional relationships." Rainbow flag is banned in Russia, an alternative to which is Human Pride Flag.⁸

Recent change in the approach of people towards LGBTIQ community has been welcomed, though there is still a long way to go. Bill Clinton was the first United States President to officially recognize Pride Month in the years 1999 and

2000. Bush administration maintained a stoic silence on this issue. Barack Obama declared June as LGBT Pride Month from 2009 to 2016. Donald Trump also recognized the same in 2019. The Deputy Inspector Seymour Pine who led the raid at the SWI in 1969, apologized for his actions in 2004 at age 91. Netherlands recognized same sex marriage in 2001, Canada in 2005, and America in 2015. Same sex marriage is now legal in more than 25 countries but still not in India.¹

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 220 pride events were postponed/cancelled in 2020. However, InterPride along with coordinators of EuroPride organized a digital “Global Pride” on June 27, 2020. Though the digital event is low on emotions when compared to the actual event, it is still a way to connect in these testing times and much better when compared to the 1950s. Stress in a sexual minority like LGBTIQ gets amplified during pandemics like COVID-19 due to discrimination, social inequality, and stereotyping.^{9,10}

Two events have been combined for 2021 (August 12–22): World Pride and EuroGames with an eclectic arts and cultural program and a strong human rights forum for LQBTIQ community at Copenhagen and Malmö. Registration has been extended till 26th July, but the third wave of COVID-19 is still a concern. There are usually parties and celebrations throughout the year in Delhi in support of the Queer community. Organized by Delhi Queer Pride committee, the Delhi pride march takes place on fourth Sunday of November annually. Pride parades of 2020 and 2021 were cancelled in Delhi.

The struggle for acceptance has been long, and the Queer community has done wonderfully for the last several decades. The mindset of the people is changing. However, during this COVID-19 crisis we need to be extra cautious while organizing in-person events. Till then, we can go into virtual or hybrid mode while organizing various pride events to keep the fire burning.

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