

Marching for Pride: The Basics

A collaboration of the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, Making Gay History, New York Public Library, GLSEN, National Parks Conservation Association, ONE Archives Foundation, and the Stonewall 50 Consortium.



Thousands of Homosexuals Hold A Protest Rally in Central Park

By LACEY FOSBURGH

Thousands of young men and women homosexuals from all over the Northeast marched from Greenwich Village to the Sheep Meadow in Central Park yesterday, proclaiming “the new strength and pride of the gay people.”

From Washington, Boston and Cleveland, from Ivy League colleges, from Harlem, the East Side and the suburbs, they gathered to protest laws that make homosexual acts between consenting adults illegal and social conditions that often make it impossible for them

• When did the first Pride marches take place?

The first Pride marches, parades, and celebrations were held in June 1970 to mark the one-year anniversary of the 1969 uprising at the Stonewall Inn gay bar in Greenwich Village. They have been held annually ever since.

• Where was the first Pride march held?

Contrary to popular belief, the first Pride march did not take place in New York City, but in Chicago. The Chicago march took place on Saturday, June 27, 1970, with between 150 and 200 people marching from the city’s Washington Square Park to Daley Plaza. New York City was second on Sunday, June 28, along with Los Angeles, where 1,200 marched down Hollywood Boulevard, and San Francisco, where approximately 30 people marched down Polk Street and a “Gay-In” gathering was held in Golden Gate Park.

• Were the 1970 Pride marches the first public LGBTQ civil rights demonstrations in the United States?

No, there had been several protests, both organized and spontaneous, in the decade prior to Stonewall. These included a 1966 uprising by drag queens and trans women against the police at Compton’s Cafeteria in San Francisco and the Annual Reminders, a series of demonstrations held every July 4 from 1965 through 1969 at Independence Hall in Philadelphia. During these pickets, a few dozen well-dressed gay and lesbian protestors carried signs with messages that were meant to remind the American people that homosexuals still lacked basic rights.

• How did New York City’s first Pride march come about?

Gay rights activist Craig Rodwell came up with the idea for the march. Craig was a Chicago native who became active in New York City’s “homophile” movement in the 1960s. Craig originated the idea for the Annual Reminders, and in 1967 he opened the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop, the first gay and lesbian-focused bookshop in the world, in Greenwich Village.

After attending the Annual Reminder on July 4, 1969, just a few days after the Stonewall uprising—in which Craig had participated—he began thinking about organizing a “gay holiday” as a way to channel the explosive energy released at Stonewall. He shared the idea with his boyfriend, Fred Sargeant, and together they shared it with their friends Ellen Brody and Linda Rhodes, who were members of the New York University Lesbian and Gay Student Union.

In October 1969 the four friends met with several other activists at Craig’s apartment on Bleeker Street in Greenwich Village to write a resolution to change the time, place, and name of future Annual Reminders with the goal of establishing what would become known as the New York City Pride March.

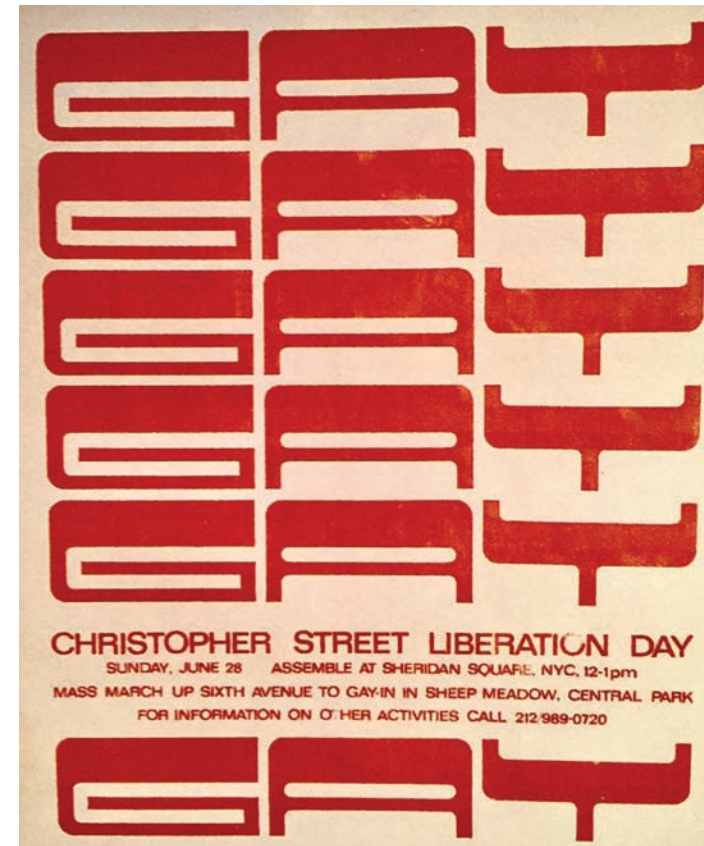
In November 1969, the resolution was presented at the Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations (ERCHO) in Philadelphia. Representatives of more than 20 gay rights groups voted in favor of the resolution.

• What did the resolution say?

That the Annual Reminder, in order to be more relevant, reach a greater number of people, and encompass the ideas and ideals of the larger struggle in which we are engaged—that of our fundamental human rights—be moved both in time and location.

We propose that a demonstration be held annually on the last Saturday in June in New York City to commemorate the 1969 spontaneous demonstrations on Christopher Street and this demonstration be called CHRISTOPHER STREET LIBERATION DAY. No dress or age regulations shall be made for this demonstration.

We also propose that we contact Homophile organizations throughout the country and suggest that they hold parallel demonstrations on that day. We propose a nationwide show of support.



“I used to dream about, daydream even, about millions of homosexuals marching through the streets openly and everything. And that’s come to pass in my life. So it was more than a dream. It was almost a vision in a way of the future... We are the world. We really are.”

— Craig Rodwell (1940-1993) from a 1989 interview with Eric Marcus conducted for Making Gay History

Note: After much debate, the organizers decided against holding the march on the last Saturday of June, but opted for the last Sunday instead—the 28th, the same date when the Stonewall uprising began.

• Why was the march called the Christopher Street Liberation Day March rather than the Stonewall Anniversary March?

The organizers chose to leave “Stonewall” out of the name in order to shift attention from the Mafia-controlled Stonewall Inn gay bar, which had since closed, to the very public battle for gay liberation that burst forth in the months after the uprising.

• What was the route of the New York City march and how many participated?

On the morning of Sunday, June 28, 1970, hundreds of marchers assembled along Washington Place and Waverly Place between 6th and 7th Avenues, just around the corner from the Stonewall Inn where the uprising had taken place the year before.

The marchers, many carrying banners and signs, stepped off onto 6th Avenue, filling two lanes on the west side of the broad street. As the group headed north to Central Park, hundreds more joined until there were approximately two thousand people in a line that stretched for blocks. Along

the way they chanted, “Say it clear, say it loud, gay is good, gay is proud,” “Out of the closets and into the streets,” and “Gay power!”

Despite fears of anti-gay violence, the marchers were mainly greeted with looks of wonder and bewilderment from Sunday tourists and passersby. The march ended in Central Park’s Sheep Meadow at a planned “Gay-In” gathering where the two thousand marchers were joined by thousands more.

• Who marched?

In addition to the individual LGBTQ people who had traveled from across the northeastern United States to participate, more than 20 organizations were represented at the march, including the Gay Activists Alliance, the Gay Liberation Front, the Mattachine Society of New York, the Daughters of Bilitis, the Lavender Menace, the Church of the Beloved Disciple, as well as student organizations from Yale, Rutgers, New York University, and Columbia University’s Student Homophile League, which was the first gay student organization in the U.S., founded in 1966.

• How was the march documented?

The march attracted national media attention. It was recorded in numerous articles and photos, as well as in a [short film](#) by Lilli Vincenz and on an audio documentary [record](#) by Breck Ardery. Both works are titled *Gay and Proud* and are available online.

• How many Pride marches, parades, and other celebrations are now held each year?

Millions of LGBTQ people participate in more than 300 parades, protest marches, and celebrations to mark the anniversary of the Stonewall uprising in towns and cities in over 60 countries around the world, from New York City and Sarajevo to Mumbai and Mexico City.

First page images, clockwise from top left: (1) Craig Rodwell (left) and Fred Sargeant; (2) from right, Ellen Brody, Arlene Kushner, and Linda Rhodes; (3) Frank Kameny and the Mattachine Society of Washington march contingent; (4) Donna Gottschalk; (5) front-page New York Times article, June 29, 1970; (6) “Gay-In,” Central Park; (7) Gay Liberation Front march contingent; (8) march banner. All photos other than (2) taken at the Christopher Street Liberation Day March, New York City, June 28, 1970. All photos by Diana Davies, except for (3) by Kay Tobin Lahusen. All images © Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, except for (5) © 1970 The New York Times Company, all rights reserved, used under license.



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