

Pride & Prejudice
By LISA JONES
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Homo Nest Raided, Queen Bees Are Stinging Mad,” sniped the headline in *The New York Daily News* on July 6, 1969. Late that June, police had raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar. At that time, gay bars were no longer illegal in New York City, but gays and lesbians were still routinely harassed and arrested.

At Stonewall, the bar patrons resisted arrest, touching off a series of riots in Greenwich Village. *The New York Times* claimed that 400 youths participated in the first riot, which lasted about 45 minutes. At the next evening’s riot, observers estimated thousands of participants. Almost overnight, “Stonewall” became the rallying cry for freedom from homophobic oppression.

Stonewall wasn’t the first time that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people stood up for themselves and the sake of equal rights. Even so, GLBT communities throughout the United States commemorate Stonewall each June with pride festivals, parades and protest marches.

In this decade of *Ellen* and openly gay congresspeople, though, many people ask: What is there left to protest?

“Every social justice movement in American history has introduced into society new ideas about law, civil rights, government policy and social relationships,” explains Urvashi Vaid, policy institute director for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. “The gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered movement is no exception. Our struggle for equality over the last several decades has been built on new interpretations of human sexuality, individual freedom, gender roles, family structure and conventional morality. These ideas have been forged out of painful legacies of stigma, prejudice and discrimination that continue to this day.”

Hostile Climate: A State by State Report on Anti-Gay Activity, published in 1997 by People for the American Way, concludes that “while 1996 saw real progress made in the battle against anti-gay prejudice and discrimination, the overall climate for gay men, lesbians and bisexuals continues to be hostile indeed.”

The report tracks ballot measures, legislation, local ordinances, court cases and anti-gay rhetoric aimed at restricting the rights and freedoms of GLBT people. For example, as part of the negative backlash toward Hawaii’s same-sex marriage case, the “Defense of Marriage Act” passed by congress and signed by President Clinton permits states to bar same-sex marriages. And 15 states passed bills that denied legal recognition to same-sex marriages, even if legally recognized in another state.

Also, according to the report: In Florida, a judge awarded custody of an 11-year-old girl to her father, the convicted murderer of his first wife, rather than grant custody to the child’s mother, a lesbian. The judge stated that the child should have “the opportunity and the option to live in a non-lesbian world.”

In other words, it’s better to be raised by a murderer than a lesbian — and forget about an option to live in a world where one’s sexual orientation is a non-issue.

So, in commemoration of Stonewall, there’s reason to celebrate social progress and greater freedom — and to protest the still extant forces of bigotry and repression.

This month, as GLBT people take to the streets to express their pride and determination to overcome discrimination, they’ll display the symbols of a human rights movement that’s much older than the Stonewall riots. One example is the pink triangle: The Nazis forced Jewish people under their jurisdiction to wear yellow stars of David; they extended this

classification scheme to other prisoners, using pink triangular cloth to identify men convicted of homosexuality. Lesbians were considered asocial and were accordingly marked with a black triangle. Today, these symbols are worn voluntarily to demonstrate solidarity with those who suffered persecution in the past, as well as those who are still persecuted.

But the most widely visible symbol of the GLBT movement is the rainbow flag, with horizontal stripes of red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple. According to Gilbert Baker, the flag's designer, the colors represent, respectively, life, healing, sun, nature, art and harmony. It symbolizes the diverse community that has blossomed over the past few decades despite — and perhaps in response to — vitriolic and often violent efforts to squelch it.

It's a banner of optimism.

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