



Marsha (left) and Sylvia (right) march down Seventh Avenue in 1973.

Marsha P. Johnson

"Born a male and named Malcolm Michaels, Marsha legally changed her name after 1966, when she moved from New Jersey to Greenwich Village permanently, to Marsha P. Johnson. When people would ask her what her middle name was, she replied, "Pay it no mind." This response was intended to be a rhetorical answer to the question many had on their minds as to whether she was male or female. By putting "pay it no mind" in her name it deterred the public from asking the question she hated to receive. Marsha was an eccentric woman who was known for her exotic hats and jewellery which stood out to the public and attracted attention to her. When she was wearing these items or any female clothing she was Marsha P. Johnson. But there were times when she went back to her male persona of Malcolm.

On the night/morning for June 28, 1969 police in Greenwich Village raided a known gay bar The Stonewall Inn, which Marsha P. Johnson had been at, and a violent riot followed. Robert Heide remembers the role Marsha played the night of the riots, "just saw her in the middle of the whole thing, screaming and yelling and throwing rocks and almost like Molly Pitcher in the Revolution or something". Heide and several others interviewed for David Carter's book, Stonewall, claim that Marsha was the person who "really started it" on the first night of the riots. Sylvia Rivera recalls about the night of the Stonewall riots, "This was started by the street queens of that era, which I was part of, Marsha P. Johnson, and many others that are not here"[4]. The Stonewall Riots had become the spark that ignited transgender rights and activism through the efforts of Marsha P. Johnson and other fellow activists and supporters.

Along with fellow transgender activist and friend, Sylvia Rivera, they founded the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR). They were able to organize with homeless and or runaway transgender individuals to build a community and live together. According to Rivera, "STAR was for the street gay people, the street homeless people, and anybody that needed help at that time"[5]. Keeping other transgenders off the streets was the primary goal of STAR. Many transgenders face violence on the streets from intolerant people. Marsha referred to anyone brought off the streets into the STAR homes as "children." "

Sylvia Rivera

" Rivera was a 17-year-old Puerto Rican drag queen on the night of the riot. According to one [biography](#) , Rivera was in the crowd that gathered outside of the bar as anger in the West Village

neighbourhood swelled. "I'm not missing a minute of this," she yelled. "It's the revolution!" She's cited as one of the first bystanders to throw a bottle, a big deal given the power dynamics of the situation with police.

After Stonewall, Rivera became an outspoken activist who rallied against racism, sexual violence and, after she began identifying as a woman, transphobia. In a 1973 Christopher Street Liberation Day Rally, Rivera, a sexual assault survivor, spoke about the complacency she saw in the LGBT community after gay, lesbian and transgender people were arrested, thrown in jail for their activism and assaulted by male inmates in the years after the Stonewall Rebellion. "Do you all do anything for them?" she demanded of the crowd at a 1973 rally in New York City. "No! You all tell me to go and hide my tail between my legs. I will not put up with this" "

Session B: Stonewall- accounts from the night/Viewpoints on what actually happened

A strange new myth has arisen about the origins of the gay movement. This myth, fervently endorsed by some trans activists, holds that the gay and lesbian movement was, essentially and pivotally, the work of their group, the transgender people. The transgender folk were in the vanguard, gay men and lesbians followed meekly after. This bizarre claim is the opposite of the truth.

Let us then be honest. If we are to speak of a "transgender" contribution we must restrict ourselves to drag queens. They were the only transgender folks around in those days. None of them in fact made a major contribution to the movement .

– [Wayne Dynes](#) , [Mattachine Society](#), 12/16/2009

"I was not in the Stonewall bar on the night of the actual raid, when patrons fought back, but I do want to recall for you and with you that the particular patrons, or at least the people who were on the street immediately outside the bar who initiated the fighting, were in fact street people and drag queens. The early gay movement appreciated their role in the gay struggle and frequently made mention of it. But the early years of the gay movement should not be confused with the gay movement that soon supplanted it." - Outweek , June 26, 1989

"I had a most unusual beginning — an initiation to the riots. I was asleep! I was across the street... my childhood sweetheart was fixing to start his first year at Columbia University — he was a psych major. I was spending the summer with him, and I was upstairs in his apartment — sound asleep; and his apartment was right across the street from Stonewall Inn. He comes running upstairs saying "Roy! Roy! The queens are rioting across the street! The queens are rioting!"

So I go running down, following him.... By the time we got down there, the paddy wagon had just pulled up. The queens were just starting to come out and someone had just thrown a high heel. There may have been coins or whatever, but I was there within a couple minutes after the festivities started. I did see high heels flying! The queens — the transgenders or the crossdressers — were yelling something from across the street by the paddy wagon; they were yelling at the cops. We were cheering on the transgenders — the crossdressers — it just sort of snowballed from there. The Mattachine Society was a group of self-hating, self-loathing gay folks who felt that we were all emotionally underdeveloped or something — sub-human in some way. These were a bunch of yellow-bellied cowards who were frightened in little comers, who didn't want us to upset the apple cart. " - Roy McCarthy

Questions

" Do we know conclusively who threw the first brick or punch that night?

We know nothing conclusively. Besides, it's wrongheaded to be overly concerned with pinning

one clear-cut act on one identifiable person, in a misguided attempt to say that so-and-so rather than so-and-so “started” Stonewall, and that therefore history teaches us that X rather than Y is true. A heterogeneous street crowd started the resistance at Stonewall, not a particular person.

Are there reliable accounts and historical records from that night?

The most we are ever likely to be able to say about the origin of the riot is that, according to newspaper reports and eyewitnesses, there were a couple of hundred patrons inside the bar when police raided it, and as police attempted to make arrests and load people into the transport vehicles, an agitated, resistive crowd of several hundred more formed on the street. At some point members of the crowd began to hurl bricks, bottles, coins and garbage at the police, and the situation escalated from there." Ernesto Londoño , New York Times