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## **Why I'm Skipping Stonewall 50**

David Thorstad

The 1969 Stonewall Riots changed my life. As I stood along New York's Sixth Avenue for the first Christopher Street Liberation Day march a year later watching the several thousand gay people go by, I knew my life would never be the same. I had enjoyed homosexual experiences since age nine. Yet, during twelfth-grade social-studies class, I asked a classmate, "What is a homosexual?" Despite years of sex play with other boys (and a few girls), I was beginning to suspect that I might be different. Same-sex exploration came naturally. Identity had nothing to do with it. Homosexual behavior—even though we didn't have a word for it—was just part of being a boy in rural Minnesota in the 1950s.

After college, I left for the big city of New York a month before Stonewall—not to escape to a gay paradise or to seek a freer milieu, but to immerse myself in radical left politics. But when homosexuals fought back against the police at the Stonewall Inn, everyone I knew was talking about it. "The homosexuals are fighting the cops!" exclaimed a socialist colleague. The news stirred in me excitement that a new group was joining the tumultuous struggles of the 1960s—one that especially resonated within me. I came out a year after Stonewall and soon became a gay activist, first in the socialist movement, and then in the gay movement. I was delighted by the camp humor and militancy of the Gay Liberation Front leaflet "Do you think homosexuals are revolting? You bet your sweet ass we are!"

So, why am I not going to New York for the fiftieth anniversary of such a life-changing event?

By the early 1990s, I had already soured on New York's corporatized "pride parade" and went on long bike rides instead. By the twenty-fifth anniversary of Stonewall in 1994, I regarded the gay movement as already mostly dead, although the commemorations did include some radical venues, such as the large "Spirit of Stonewall" alternate march. By then the gay movement had been taken over by marketing and corporate interests. Repeal of sodomy laws—the movement's most important demand—had long been put on a back burner because it focused—uncomfortably for some—on sex acts instead of identity and liberal "rights" and because it challenged religious superstition and the oppressive Judeo-Christian

tradition that underpinned the laws. Instead, the “LGBT movement” was pushing for marriage, hate-crimes laws, and the right of gays to serve openly in the imperialist military. The Supreme Court’s 2003 ruling throwing out sodomy laws was the most important victory for the gay and lesbian movement. Since then, the other demands have also been won, none of which advance the cause of sexual liberation. The former liberation movement is now mired in genderism and assimilationism.

By 1994, the hateful, antigay word “queer” was increasingly being used to describe same-sex love. Things have only gotten worse since then, with “queer” widely used, even by the straight media, despite its being a vile, self-hating term that threatens violence. The struggle for sexual liberation has been diluted by a focus on dozens of fanciful and questionable genders and has resulted in a virtual erasure of gay males and lesbians. Sex is not even part of the alphabet-soup vocabulary. Highlighting victimhood is in. Instead of fighting social injustice, the LGBT goal is to assimilate into a heterodominant capitalist system, aping its failed institution of marriage, promoting monogamy (a bit player in the mammalian heritage), and espousing patriotism, militarism, and conventionality. Gay Inc. has swallowed up the original “liberation day” marches and turned them into billboards for the profit motive. Even the main U.S. spy agency, the NSA, commemorates “pride” by lighting up its headquarters in the rainbow flag colors. The LGBT movement has jettisoned the goal of liberating the repressed sexuality of everyone, including heterosexuals, in favor of seeking mere “equality.” Equality is a low common denominator that does not challenge heterosupremacy. It is the goal of a movement that has been tamed and lost its spirit of radical struggle.

In the 1970s, one could hear a gay youth contingent in a gay pride march chant this playful provocation: “2, 4, 6, 8, How do you know your husband’s straight? 3, 5, 7, 9, Hey, lady, your husband’s mine!” Today, such a chant would be unimaginable.

This degeneration is widely recognized by older activists, less so by the younger set. As a result, this year another alternative march is planned for New York City to the official Heritage of Pride corporate sponsor. The Reclaim Pride Coalition (RPC), organizer of the alternate event, condemns the inclusion of floats and is marching “against the exploitation of our communities for profit and against corporate and state pinkwashing,” and in “resistance against police, state, and societal oppression.” OK so far.

But RPC has a serious flaw: astonishingly, it is calling its “alternative” event a “queer liberation march.” That’s an insult to gay men especially and belies its claim to inclusivity. Nothing could drag me to a march that bills itself as “queer.” That is antithetical to the “spirit of Stonewall” and to gay pride. It is viscerally offensive.

RPC criticizes HOP for not addressing the “urgent continuing needs” not of gay men and lesbians, but, in a reordering of myriad oppressed categories, presumably by order of importance, of the “Trans, Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay, Queer, Intersex, Two-Spirit, Asexual, Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming and related communities.” What a mouthful!

And it promotes a mind-numbing collection of politically correct causes: “We March in opposition to transphobia, homophobia, biphobia, racism, sexism, xenophobia, bigotry based on religious affiliation, classism, ableism, audism, ageism, all other forms of oppression, and the violence that accompanies them in the U.S. and globally.”

As a former president of Gay Activists Alliance, I would nevertheless have headed for New York if a GAA reunion were planned, as one was twenty-five years ago. But this time, the will and energy to organize one are lacking, so I’m staying home and will hoe my garden instead.

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