



LAVENDER CAUCUS

SYLVIA RIVERA

Sylvia Rivera, a Latina, born to a Puerto Rican father and Venezuelan mother in New York City spent her entire life fighting for protections for all queer people. Sylvia, with her close friend Marsha P. Johnson, founded Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) which focused on services and advocacy for homeless queer youth. Rivera was key in getting New York to pass the Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act. While she was not present for the Stonewall uprising, Sylvia was instrumental in many other aspects of the gay rights fight from participating in action with the Gay Liberation Front's Drag Queen Caucus, ACT-UP, to being an active member of the Metropolitan Community Church of New York. She focused not just on gay and trans rights, but fought against systemic racism, poverty, and homelessness. From the age of 10, when she left home, until the day she died, Sylvia fought for the protections of marginalized groups and spoke out strongly against anyone that would try to sideline the contributions of her community.

FRANK KAMENY

'Gay is Good'

Born in New York City in 1925, his college education was placed on hold while he served in World War Two. In that global war, he served as a private in the European theater. When he returned stateside, he resumed his education and earned degrees in physics and astronomy. He continued to work for the US Army and the federal government until he was fired from his job.

In 1957, he was fired from his job with the Army Map Service solely on the basis of his homosexuality. Due to Executive Order 10450, which effectively banned gay men and lesbians from federal employment, he could not find any work once he was fired. This was partly due to the fact homosexuality was classified as a mental disorder and widely believed to be a security risk, in addition to being viewed as morally derisive. When he was asked by the government if he was a homosexual, he responded that it was none of their business. Instead of being defeated, he fought back.

He sued the federal government in 1958, making him the first out gay man to do so. The courts denied his appeal, when, in 1961, the Supreme Court denied his petition. Finding no recourse from the courts, he turned his energies toward activism. He led the first gay rights protest in front of the White House in 1965. In addition, he co-founded the Mattachine Society of Washington, D.C., a group that sent letters to every branch of the government including every member of Congress.



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In 1971, he became the first openly gay candidate to run for the US Congress. By 1973, he and Barbara Gittings were successful in having homosexuality declassified as a mental disorder. His tireless work for dignity and justice continued for decades and into the new century. In 2010, he was present when President Obama repealed Don't Ask, Don't Tell. The following year, he passed away, having seen massive strides in equality.

In June 2016, he was honored into the Department of Labor's Hall of Honor. His bravery made life better, not just for federal workers and workers in general, but for all people.

MARSHA P JOHNSON

"You never completely have your rights, one person, until you all have your rights."

Marsha P. Johnson was one of the most prominent figures in the gay rights movement in the '60s and '70s in New York. Johnson was Black and described herself as gay, transvestite, and a drag queen. She was born in New Jersey and moved to New York after graduating high school. She did not have a permanent home and had difficulties obtaining stable employment, so she turned to sex work, waiting tables, and performing in drag shows. Shortly after moving to New York, at seventeen years old, she met eleven year old Sylvia Rivera and took the young girl under her wing.

She was on the front lines of the resistance at The Stonewall Inn in 1969, and led a series of protests with Rivera in its wake. Johnson was involved with the beginnings of organizations such as the Gay Liberation Front and Gay Activist Alliance, but grew frustrated with their lack of inclusion of the trans community and people of color and actively spoke out against transphobia in the gay rights movement. In 1970, Johnson and Rivera cofounded Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), "an organization dedicated to sheltering young transgender individuals who were shunned by their families", and STAR House, which worked to provide a safe place for transgender youth to stay.

Despite mental health struggles, Johnson continued her work in the gay rights movement throughout the '70s and '80s and rode in the lead car of the Gay Pride Parade in New York City in 1980. She also attended ACT UP protests and meetings, and revealed she had been HIV positive for two years in 1992. Shortly after, her body was found in the Hudson River; initially ruled a suicide, many of her friends suspected this was not the case and her death was reclassified as a drowning from unknown causes but not investigated further. Her death was also not widely covered by press outlets. This sparked outrage in the community, and hundreds of people attended her funeral. Her case was reopened in 2012 and remains an active homicide investigation.



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In 2019, The Marsha P. Johnson Institute was established by Elle Moxley. Its mission is to defend and protect the rights of Black transgender and gender nonconforming communities.

MARY KAY HENRY

"We need to throw the doors of the labor movement open and welcome people in."

Serving from 2010-2024, Mary Kay Henry is a life long organizer and the first LGBTQ+ and female president of SEIU. Henry was instrumental in driving SEIU's bold organizing strategies that created new models to organize workers who had previously been excluded from organizing. Henry helped lead SEIU's Fight for \$15 and A Union that launched in 2010 with over 200 fast food workers striking in New York City.

Henry was a founding member of the SEIU Lavender Caucus, a group of members dedicated to uplifting LGBTQ+ workers in our union and workplaces.

ACT UP

ACT UP (AIDs Coalition to Unleash Power), founded in March of 1987, is a diverse, non-partisan group of individuals, united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis. Its determined advocacy and highly-focused actions supported by visuals fundamentally shifted the perception of people living with AIDS and queer people. On March 24th 1987, ACT Up held its first action on Wall Street to protest the profiteering of pharmaceutical companies on AIDs Drugs. These actions paved the way for a national movement that advocated for anti-discrimination laws and health care justice for those living with HIV/AIDs.

LESLIE FEINBERG

"This Is What Solidarity Looks Like"

Leslie Feinberg, who identified as an anti-racist white, working-class, secular Jewish, transgender, lesbian, female, revolutionary communist, died on November 15, 2014. Hir impact on mass culture was primarily through hir 1993 first novel, Stone Butch Blues, widely considered in and outside the U.S. as a groundbreaking work about the complexities of gender.



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At the time of hir death, Leslie Feinberg was preparing the 20th anniversary edition of *Stone Butch Blues*. Zie/she worked up to within a few days of hir death to prepare the edition for free, open access on-line.

Organizing and Workers World Party

In hir early twenties Leslie Feinberg met Workers World Party at a demonstration for Palestinian land rights and self-determination. She/zie soon joined WWP through its founding Buffalo branch.

Feinberg was a member of the National Writers Union, Local 1981, and of Pride at Work, an AFL-CIO constituency group. Zie/she received an honorary doctorate from the Starr King School for the Ministry for hir transgender and social justice work, and was the recipient of numerous other awards, including the Lambda Literary Award and the American Library Association Gay and Lesbian Book Award.

BAYARD RUSTIN

"We need, in every community, a group of angelic troublemakers."

Bayard Rustin, born in 1912, was a key organizer of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Rustin became an advisor to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr during the Montgomery bus boycott. Early in his career he was arrested for "moral cause" which led to his outing as a gay man.

From 1965–1979, Rustin served as the head of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the AFL-CIO's African American constituency group. During this time, Rustin advocated for the integration of unions and promotion of unions among Black workers.

HARVEY MILK

"Hope will never be silent."

Harvey Milk was the first only gay elected official in the United States winning a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1977. After winning election, Milk became a vocal advocate against Proposition 6, which would have required local school boards to fire LGBTQ+ school employees or any employee who advocated for them. In the late 1970s Milk also supported a successful Teamster-led boycott of Coors beer at neighborhood gay bars, which paved the way for a new alliance between the LGBTQ+ community and Labor in the Bay Area.