

It has long been known that American Indian youth, specifically Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) youth, have faced challenges in their communities related to their marginalized identities. Issues of violence and cultural erasure have often sparked movements for visibility and justice for all. Fifty-one years ago, members of the LGBTQ community fought back against a police raid at the Stonewall Inn in New York City, after continuous police harassment and social discrimination suffered by many LGBTQ in the 1960s. It has come to forever be known as the Stonewall Riots. This event marked a significant protest, calling for equal rights for the LGBTQ community. This inspired future gay pride celebrations and in 1999, June was officially declared "Gay and Lesbian Pride Month" by President Bill Clinton. Later in 2009, it was expanded to LGBT Pride Month by President Barack Obama.

The Stonewall Riots helped amplify the voices of Black and Brown queer activists within the LGBTQ community. Marsha P. Johnson, a Black trans woman and Sylvia Rivera, a Puerto Rican drag queen, were both critical figures during the Stonewall Riots. They each spent their lives advocating for LGBTQ rights and later co-founded the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) that sought to help homeless transgender and queer youth by providing services and advocacy in New York City, Chicago and various parts of California.

While not much has been documented specifically about the effects of Stonewall in American Indian communities, there is no doubt that these events began the shift for visibility and liberation of our Two Spirit and LGBTQ community. One of the first Two Spirit groups organized in the wake of the Stonewall uprising was Gay American Indians (GAI) in July 1975 in San Francisco. Other groups formed in Minneapolis, notably American Indian Gays and Lesbians, which in 1988 sponsored the Basket and The Bow, the community's first international gathering.

Curtis Harris-Davia, an enrolled member of the San Carlos Apache Nation and Executive Director of the American Indian Community House in New York City reflects on what Stonewall did for him as a closeted gay high school student living on his reservation, in this anthology of short essays.

Hyland, Theoren. "Stonewall at 50: A Roundtable." The Gotham Center for New York City History, The Gotham Center for New York City History, 27 June 2019, www.gothamcenter.org/blog/stonewall-at-50-a-roundtable.

Wren Walker-Robbins, a trans activist of Mohawk descent also reflects on the impact of Stonewall in this article.

Walker-Robbins, Wren. "As a Young Native American, I Internalized This Country's Homophobia." The Nation, 27 June 2019, www.thenation.com/article/archive/stonewall-trans-native-american-two-spirit/.

It is evident that across the country, with the current acts of resistance, change is happening, just as it did 51 years ago. Folks are lifting up the names of Black and Brown queer and trans relatives who are leading the overlapping struggles for racial justice and queer and trans liberation. In our tribal communities, we can begin or continue to have conversations about the issues of racial justice and raise consciousness about intersectional identities and oppressions. We can support our young LGBTQ relatives who are struggling to be accepted and elevate their voices. We can return to traditional and cultural teachings about the roles that our LGBTQ ancestors and relatives played within our tribal societies. Our tribal governments and tribal led philanthropic organizations can elevate the work of non-profit and grassroots organizations providing critical services to our Two Spirit and LGBTQ communities.

If we can come together to form or expand this framework that supports and affirms our Two Spirit and LGBTQ relatives, especially for the youth throughout Indian Country, this can be an essential part of addressing the health and economic challenges we face.

For more information on how you can support and uplift the voices of our LGBTQ and Two Spirit youth, please check out this 2020 report by the Center for Native American Youth (CNAV) and the GLSEN Research Institute, "Erasure and Resilience: The Experiences of LGBTQ Students of Color, Native and Indigenous LGBTQ Youth in U.S. Schools" <https://www.glsen.org/research/native-and-indigenous-lgbtq-students>.