

Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth

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This article examines why the Stonewall riots became central to gay collective memory while other events did not. It does so through a comparative-historical analysis of Stonewall and four events similar to it that occurred in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York in the 1960s. The Stonewall riots were remembered because they were the first to meet two conditions: activists considered the event commemorable and had the mnemonic capacity to create a commemorative vehicle. That this conjuncture occurred in New York in 1969, and not earlier or elsewhere, was a result of complex political developments that converged in this time and place. The success of the national commemorative ritual planned by New York activists depended on its resonance, not only in New York but also in other U.S. cities. Gay community members found Stonewall commemorable and the proposed parade an appealing form for commemoration. The parade was amenable to institutionalization, leading it to survive over time and spread around the world. The Stonewall story is thus an achievement of gay liberation rather than an account of its origins.

On the evening of June 27, 1969, New York police raided the Stonewall Inn, a homo-

sexual bar in Greenwich Village. This was not unusual; police raids of homosexual bars were common in New York and other American cities in the 1960s. This time, however, bar patrons fought back instead of passively enduring humiliating treatment. Their response initiated a riot that lasted into the night. The Stonewall riots are typically viewed as the spark of the gay liberation movement and a turning point in the history of gay life in the United States (Duberman 1993; Teal [1971]1995; Carter 2004), and they are commemorated in gay pride parades around the globe (D'Emilio 2002). Writing about homosexual activism, historian Marc Stein (2000:290) quoted an activist who claimed, "No event in history, with perhaps the exception of the French Revolution, deserves more [than the Stonewall riots] to be considered a watershed." President Clinton made the Stonewall Inn a national historic landmark (Dunlap 1999). It is common to divide gay history into two epochs—"before Stonewall" and "after Stonewall" (D'Emilio 1992a).

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Claims about the historical importance of Stonewall continue, even though historians of sexuality have challenged the novelty of the events at the Stonewall Inn. The Stonewall riots

did not mark the origin of gay liberation (D'Emilio 1983; Stryker and Van Buskirk 1996; Denny 1997; Epstein 1999; Armstrong 2002). They were not the first time gays fought back against police; nor was the raid at the Stonewall Inn the first to generate political organizing (Murray 1996; Bernstein 2002; Stryker 2002). Other events, however, failed to achieve the mythic stature of Stonewall and indeed have been virtually forgotten.

Why did the events at the Stonewall Inn acquire such significance, while other similar events did not? Addressing this empirical question provides insight into theoretical issues in the study of collective memory. Collective memories are "images of the past" that social groups select, reproduce, and commemorate through "particular sets of practices" (Olick and Robbins 1998:106).¹ As Wagner-Pacifici (1996:302) argues, collective memories are "never formless. . . . The fact of embodiment is what all collective memories share." How memory is embodied varies within and between societies. Carriers of memory may include books, statues, memorials, or parades.

Studies of collective memory have attended more closely to struggles over *how* particular events are remembered than to *why* some events are remembered and others are not.² We conduct a comparative-historical analysis of the factors affecting the creation of collective memory by comparing the Stonewall riots with four similar events that occurred in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York in the 1960s which were not remembered.

Stonewall is remembered because it is marked by an international commemorative ritual—an annual gay pride parade. Accounts of other events are confined almost exclusively to books

by historians of sexuality. Explaining Stonewall commemoration is central to understanding its privileged position in gay collective memory. Stonewall was not the first of the five examined events to be viewed by activists as *commemorable*. It was, however, the first commemorable event to occur at a time and place where homosexuals had enough capacity to produce a commemorative vehicle—that is, where gay activists had adequate *mnemonic capacity*. That these conditions came together in New York in 1969, as opposed to in other cities at earlier times, was a result of historical and political processes: time and place mattered. Gay liberation was already underway in New York before Stonewall, which enabled movement activists to recognize the opportunity presented and to initiate commemoration.

Not all proposed commemorative vehicles are successful. The second part of our analysis explains the success of Stonewall commemoration. We found that the *resonance* of the Stonewall story, the appeal of a parade as a commemorative form, and the fit between the Stonewall story and the parade contributed to commemorative success. Timing mattered: while Stonewall was not the first riot, Stonewall activists were the first to claim to be first. Not all successful commemorative vehicles survive. Stonewall commemoration not only survived but also grew and spread. Features contributing to *institutionalization* included its annual design, compatibility with media routines, cultural power, and versatility.

Our findings suggest a rethinking of the role of Stonewall in gay movement history. This research suggests that the claim that Stonewall "sparked" gay liberation was a movement construction—a story initiated by gay liberation activists and used to encourage further growth. The Stonewall story is thus better viewed as an *achievement* of gay liberation rather than as a literal account of its origins. We conclude with a discussion of the general relevance of the concepts developed.

CONDITIONS FACILITATING COMMEMORATION

We build on collective memory and social movement research to outline how commemorability and mnemonic capacity facilitate the initiation of commemorative activities, and how

¹ See Olick and Robbins (1998), Swidler and Ardit (1994), and Zelizer (1995) for reviews of research on collective memory. Olick (1999:332) distinguishes between "the aggregation of socially framed individual memories" and the "social and cultural patterns of public and personal memory." This article focuses on public commemorative rituals. Recently, Griffin (2004) and Schwartz and Schuman (2005) have investigated the relationship between individual memory and public commemorative ritual.

² Vinitzky-Seroussi (2002:49) concludes her recent study by recommending the study of "commemorative failures."

resonance and potential for institutionalization contribute to commemorative success.

COMMEMORABILITY

Scholars of collective memory recognize that the production and maintenance of collective memory requires human activity (Halbwachs 1950:84; Wagner-Pacifci and Schwartz 1991; Zerubavel 1996). Actors are unlikely to engage in "memory work" unless they identify an event as worthy of commemoration (Irwin-Zarecka 1994). Events defined as commemorable by one group may not be defined as such by others. Groups are more likely to find an event worthy of memory if they view it as dramatic, politically relevant, or newsworthy. Disruptive, violent, large-scale events are more likely to be viewed as newsworthy (Oliver and Myers 1999). Direct participation or perception that an event caused a change (for better or worse) in the fate of a group also enhances commemorability (Pennebaker and Banasik 1997). Events that fit into existing genres may be viewed as more commemorable, at least initially, than events that mesh less well with familiar genres (Jacobs 1996). For example, Irwin-Zarecka (1994) argues that initial silence about the Holocaust was in part a result of a lack of words to make sense of such horrific evil. Victories may be especially commemorable, but according to Irwin-Zarecka (1994:58), pure success stories are not as compelling as "mixed narratives" that combine "a shared memory of oppression" with victory.

MNEMONIC CAPACITY

Commemorability alone does not ensure commemoration. Symbolic entrepreneurs must engage in mobilizing activities similar to those undertaken by social movement activists. They must frame the event (Snow et al. 1986; Benford and Hunt 1992; Benford and Snow 2000; Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002) and deploy resources to persuade others to approve, fund, and participate in commemoration (McCarthy and Zald 1977; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). Sociological research on collective memory has generally assumed that groups have the skills and resources needed to build commemorative vehicles, perhaps because of a focus on commemoration by well-resourced states (Wagner-Pacifci and Schwartz 1991; Vinitzky-Seroussi

2002; Olick 2003). Social movements, corporations, and other non-state actors, however, also commemorate. These groups vary with respect to the skills and resources needed to create commemorative vehicles, what we call *mnemonic capacity*. Like other capacities for collective action, it is shaped by political, organizational, and cultural opportunities (McAdam 1982; Morris 1984; McAdam et al. 1996).

A group's mnemonic capacity is closely related to its general organizational capacity; the development of shared memories tends to coincide with identity and community formation (Schwartz 1982:375; Bellah et al. 1985:153). Organizational and mnemonic capacities are not, however, identical. Groups may have the capacity for some forms of action and still lack the resources and skills needed to commemorate. For example, a group may be able to organize a march but still lack the publishing facilities or media connections needed to preserve its message.

Groups also vary in their orientation to the past. Those more concerned with the past are more likely to develop sophisticated technologies of memory. Technologies of memory and commemorative forms vary historically and among cultures (Lang and Lang 1988; Taylor 1996; Olick and Robbins 1998). By commemorative forms we refer to cultural models for commemoration. Groups with access to a broader repertoire of commemorative forms—to richer cultures of commemoration—are more likely to commemorate salient events (Wagner-Pacifci and Schwartz 1991). Cultures vary in their assessments of what categories of things should be commemorated, the circumstances under which commemoration is appropriate, and who may propose commemorative rituals. Some groups may be restricted by law from the use of commemorative technologies. They may not be authorized to build memorials or schedule public events. In contemporary societies, groups with low media access are disadvantaged because media coverage serves as raw material for commemoration.

RESONANCE

If sponsors consider an event commemorable and have adequate mnemonic capacity, they may propose a commemorative vehicle. A commemorative vehicle involves a justification for

commemoration and includes a plan for how, when, and by whom an event should be commemorated. The reaction of audiences to a proposed commemorative vehicle shapes its fate. We borrow the term “resonance” from the framing literature to refer to how strongly a commemorative vehicle strikes a “responsive chord” with the intended audience (Snow et al. 1986:477). If audiences disagree with sponsors about the commemorability of the event, the commemorative vehicle is likely to fail.

Resonance also depends on the commemorative form proposed: forms familiar to an audience and seen as appropriate are more likely to resonate. Perceived consistency between content and commemorative form also influences resonance (Wagner-Pacifici 1996). Both the form and content of cultural objects convey meaning (Bourdieu 1984; Berezin 1994; Clemens 1996; Jacobs 1996), and not all content fits with all forms. Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz (1991) demonstrate that commemoration is a challenge when the event to be commemorated fits uneasily with existing commemorative forms.

Audiences do not react to commemorative vehicles in isolation. Just as other cultural objects gain attention by “displacing others or by entering into a conversation with others,” so do commemorative objects (Schudson 1989:164). The resonance of a new commemorative vehicle may depend on other demands for the attention of potential audiences (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988:55). A new commemorative vehicle is more likely to be seen as fulfilling an important symbolic purpose in an arena with available symbolic, physical, or temporal space (e.g., a free weekend for another parade, ground for another monument). A crowded arena, however, does not always condemn a commemorative vehicle to failure. If a new commemorative vehicle builds on existing memories, it may succeed. Arenas for memory are constantly in flux because new events demand an ongoing reorganization of a group’s relationship to the past; paradigm shifts or other ruptures may create “niches” for new memories (Olick and Robbins 1998).

COMMEMORATIVE FORM AND POTENTIAL FOR INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Even highly resonant commemorative vehicles may not survive if their design does not facili-

tate institutionalization. Recognizing this, entrepreneurs often erect monuments intended to survive for hundreds of years. Embedding commemorative ritual in the recurring, routine activities of a group also promotes survival (e.g., designating a day each year for commemoration). Ritual provides the opportunity to rehearse memories (Pennebaker and Banasik 1997). Designing public commemorative rituals to fit with media routines may also contribute to survival by ensuring periodic revisiting of the story (Oliver and Myers 1999).

Physical endurance does not ensure the survival of memory—commemorative objects and rituals may become taken for granted and lose meaning. Griswold (1987:1110) argues that cultural objects able to sustain multiple interpretations have more “cultural power.” High cultural power may enable vehicles to retain salience over time. Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz (1991:417) suggest that openness to innovation may keep commemoration fresh: “[T]he Vietnam Veterans Memorial’s enduring visibility has something to do with its unfinished, constantly moving, and expanding form.”³

Actors with high mnemonic capacity are better positioned to create and institutionalize resonant commemorative vehicles. They have the power to label events as interesting, access to a wider repertoire of commemorative forms, and the resources to achieve a good fit between form and content. Resonance may also matter less because actors with high mnemonic capacity can use their authority to assert that an event will be remembered in a particular way. They can coerce or bribe people to participate. In contrast, actors with low mnemonic capacity depend more on voluntary participation, and, thus, on the resonance of the proposed commemorative vehicle.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Our goal was both to identify general conditions contributing to commemoration and to develop a specific explanation of why these conditions were more present in the case of Stonewall. Comparative-historical methodologists suggest joining multiple strategies of causal inference to achieve the dual goals of theory building and

³ See also Spillman (1998).

particularistic historical explanation (Quadagno and Knapp 1992; Mahoney 1999).

We employed what Griffin (1992) refers to as *contextual* logic through the identification of comparable cases and the examination of how possible explanatory factors co-varied with the outcome of interest. Sewell (2005) refers to this as “experimental temporality.” We identified the times and places most likely to have produced similar confrontations, scoured primary and secondary sources for events that resembled the Stonewall riots, coded them on factors suggested by existing literature, and compared them to determine which conditions distinguished the outcomes. We worked inductively as well as deductively, delving deeply into the cases and moving between the development and application of concepts (Sewell 2005).

This comparative approach helped us identify general conditions facilitating commemoration. This approach, however, did not explain why these conditions were present at a sufficient level only in one time and place. For this we employed what comparative-historical methodologists refer to as a *narrative* strategy of causal inference (Griffin 1992; Stryker 1996; Mahoney 1999). This approach employs an eventful concept of time (Sewell 2005), which directs attention to the location of events in historical time and geographic space. In this case, where and when the events took place—in relationship to the New Left, the civil rights movement, and other political developments—mattered. This concept of time also kept us attuned to the interconnections among events, including ways that they were part of the larger case of the development of the gay movement in the United States. This allowed us to see that the commemoration of Stonewall relied on organizational infrastructure developed in response to earlier raids. An eventful approach also suggests that historical outcomes are a result of “conditions peculiar to the circumstance” (Sewell 1996:862). A conjuncture occurred in Greenwich Village, New York, in 1969, creating conditions that enabled activists to commemorate Stonewall (Sahlins 1981; Gieryn 2000; McAdam and Sewell 2001).

DATA

COMPARABLE CITIES AND TIME FRAME. Homosexual communities were (and still are)

concentrated in major metropolitan areas. New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles were obvious for inclusion—New York as the site of Stonewall, and San Francisco and Los Angeles as the other cities most important to gay movement development in the United States. We also collected data on Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Chicago, because they were also important sites of homophile activity. (In the 1950s and 1960s, organizing on behalf of homosexual rights was referred to as homophile politics.) January 1959 served as a start date because earlier occurrence of viable contenders for commemoration seemed implausible. We included events in the year after the Stonewall riots, because other events might have claimed the spotlight before the successful commemoration of Stonewall’s first anniversary.

THE DECISION TO FOCUS ON CONFLICTS WITH POLICE. Most homophile activity in the 1950s and 1960s was in response to police repression. Bars were “the primary social institution” of homosexual life after World War II (Bérubé 1990:271). They provided places to meet friends and sexual partners, and shaped individual and group identity (Kennedy and Davis 1993). As the most public aspect of homosexual life, they were frequently raided by police (Klages 1984; Chauncey 1994; Loughery 1998:chap. 9). Bar raids tended to follow a predictable pattern: police entered the premises, stopped activity, and arrested patrons (Loughery 1998:181). Sometimes newspapers published patrons’ names, and sometimes this public exposure led to job loss (“8 Area Educators” 1964).

Homosexuals were aware of the scripted nature of the bar raid. In a July 1970 *Mattachine Midwest Newsletter* article, activist Bob Stanley explained that “[w]hen the New York police entered and closed the Stonewall Club during the early morning hours of June 28 a year ago, it must at first have seemed like a rerun of a segment of that old, worn-out Official Harassment Story” (Stanley 1970). Experience with bar raids primed homosexuals to appreciate the transformation of the “worn-out” story into one of heroism and pride. Police raids of homosexual bathhouses, hotels, and costume balls also followed this script. We focus our attention on situations where homosexuals saw police as villainous and themselves as innocent, courageous, and triumphant—where police acted

Table 1. Conditions Facilitating Commemorative Effort

	San Francisco 1965–1966		Los Angeles 1967–1968	New York 1969–1970	
	New Year's	Compton's	Black Cat	Stonewall	Snake Pit
Commemorability	High	Low	Low	High	Low
Mnemonic capacity	Low	Low	Low → High	High	High

against homosexuals and homosexuals challenged official authority.

COLLECTING DATA ON EVENTS. We located events by systematically reviewing primary and secondary materials related to homosexual movements. Secondary materials included books by historians, journalists, and other scholars who have documented the history of gay communities in the United States. Homosexual and mainstream newspapers provided most of the primary materials, which we supplemented with documents located in gay archives.⁴ Relying on newspaper coverage and existing scholarship to develop the list of events eliminated occurrences not given salience by either activists or historians. Since we were interested in occurrences most likely to be commemorated, the selection bias of our source materials was not a liability (Earl et al. 2004).

While a preliminary list of possible events included more than a dozen candidates, comparison enabled us to focus on the five events characterized by the most confrontational response on the part of homosexuals. San Francisco's most viable candidates were a response to a police raid of a New Year's ball on January 1, 1965, and a riot in response to police action at Compton's Cafeteria in August 1966. In Los Angeles, the Black Cat Raid of January 1, 1967, provoked public street protests several weeks after the initial raid. In addition to the Stonewall riots of June 27, 1969, New York saw a large protest in response to a March 8, 1970 raid of the Snake Pit Bar.

We consulted primary and secondary sources to develop analytical narratives of each of these

events.⁵ We detailed the amount and type of police force, perceived legitimacy of police action, the constituency of the bar, number of arrests, duration of the event, the kind and timing of political action taken (i.e., legal challenges vs. street protest, immediate vs. delayed action), perceived importance of the event, how actively media coverage was sought, and coverage in the press.

PRESENTATION OF THE ARGUMENT

The results of the contextual analysis are presented through analysis and comparison of each event in turn. Table 1 summarizes the level at which conditions facilitating commemoration were present.

We discuss assessments of commemorability and levels of mnemonic capacity in each case, and show how they facilitated the sponsorship of a commemorative vehicle only in the case of Stonewall. To develop insight into commemorative success, we then focus on efforts to commemorate Stonewall. The evidence suggests that resonance and potential for institutionalization are important factors in commemorative success.

The eventful analysis is developed through the ordering of the cases. A chronological organization enables us to show the growth of mnemonic capacity throughout the 1960s, in part as a result of responses to police raids. Treating each city in turn allows a focus on city-level variation in gay movement development. We discuss San Francisco first, focusing on 1965 and 1966, when its most viable contenders for commemoration occurred. Los

⁴ Primary and secondary sources are cited parenthetically in the text, and are listed separately in the references at the end of the article.

⁵ A list of primary and secondary sources consulted for each raid, including sources not cited, is included in Table S2 of the online supplement (<http://www2.asanet.org/journals/asr/2006/toc053.html>).

Angeles is discussed second, as its most viable event took place in 1967. New York in 1969 and 1970 is discussed third. This organization helps us highlight the ways that time and place matter.

SAN FRANCISCO

NEW YEAR'S BALL RAID, JANUARY 1965

Six homophile groups agreed to organize a New Year's Day costume ball on January 1, 1965, as a fundraiser for the Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH), a new organization founded by homophile activists and progressive heterosexual religious leaders (Boyd 2003:233). Organizers informed the police of the upcoming event and thought that police had agreed not to raid. Despite these efforts, sponsors saw what the *Mattachine Review* described as "the most lavish display of police harassment known in recent times" ("After the Ball" 1965:8-9; D'Emilio 1983:194). Police officers "stalked the area around California Hall, with police cars and paddy wagons in full view" (D'Emilio 1983:194). Photographs were taken of everyone entering and leaving the hall. The police demanded entrance, but lawyers asked for a search warrant. Three lawyers and the ticket taker were arrested on charges of "obstructing an officer" (D'Emilio 1983:194). Nancy May, the ticket taker, explained that entering the ball "took a degree of bravery," as people knew that "there was a possibility that their bosses would get pictures." She described feeling "like an historic event was happening" (Marcus 1992:141).

A COMMEMORABLE EVENT. The next issue of the *Vector*, a San Francisco homophile publication, covered the raid on its first page:

Remember January 1! On January 1st the Vice Squad openly declared war on the local homophile community. A task force of 55 was ordered to intimidate, harass and make arrests; and to in any fashion destroy the ball held by the Council on Religion and the Homosexual. This they did, in the most brutal and ugly manner, yet in contrast, 600 ticket holders behaved with exemplary courage and personal pride in the face of this outrage. ("Private Benefit Ball" 1965:1)

Homophiles viewed the ball as significant even before it was raided because of its scale and the level of intergroup cooperation. The raid

and the courageous reactions of organizers and attendees made it even more newsworthy.

The raid mobilized San Francisco's homophile movement. Organizations were eager to go to court to "establish the right of homosexuals and all adults to assemble lawfully without invasion of privacy" ("Private Benefit Ball" 1965:1). The ACLU defended the victims; before the defense had even presented its case, the trial judge instructed the jury to return a verdict of not guilty (D'Emilio 1983:194). Homosexuals also won in the court of public opinion. Heterosexual allies, who rarely witnessed intimidation of this sort, organized a press conference on January 2 "in which they ripped into the police" (D'Emilio 1983:194; Martin and Lyon [1972] 1991:261-62). The ball radicalized the newly formed CRH (Sweet 1975:170-73; Wolf 1979; Boyd 2003), which initiated a study of law enforcement practices and began sponsoring candidates' nights for local politicians to present their views to homosexual voters ("A Brief of Injustices" 1965; D'Emilio 1983:202). These actions led to meetings between homophile activists and the police, who "abruptly halted [their] harassment of gay bars" (D'Emilio 1983:202). Activists defined the event as newsworthy and as the catalyst for improvements in the situation of San Francisco homosexuals. As Table 1 indicates, San Francisco activists viewed this raid as highly commemorable.

THE LIMITATION OF LOW MNEMONIC CAPACITY. High commemorability alone is not enough to ensure commemoration. San Francisco's homophile activists did not attempt to commemorate the event. As the most developed of the homophile movements in major U.S. cities in the early 1960s (D'Emilio 1983; Armstrong 2002; Boyd 2003), San Francisco's homophiles could have organized a small local commemoration. They had at their disposal the central offices of the only two national homophile organizations, and two of the three nationally distributed homophile publications (D'Emilio 1983; Streitmatter 1995; Boyd 2003).

While organizational capacity was sufficient, the local movement lacked a culture of commemoration. They had neither the idea that a homosexual event could be commemorated nor any model of how to do so. Additionally, their moderate political approach did not lend itself

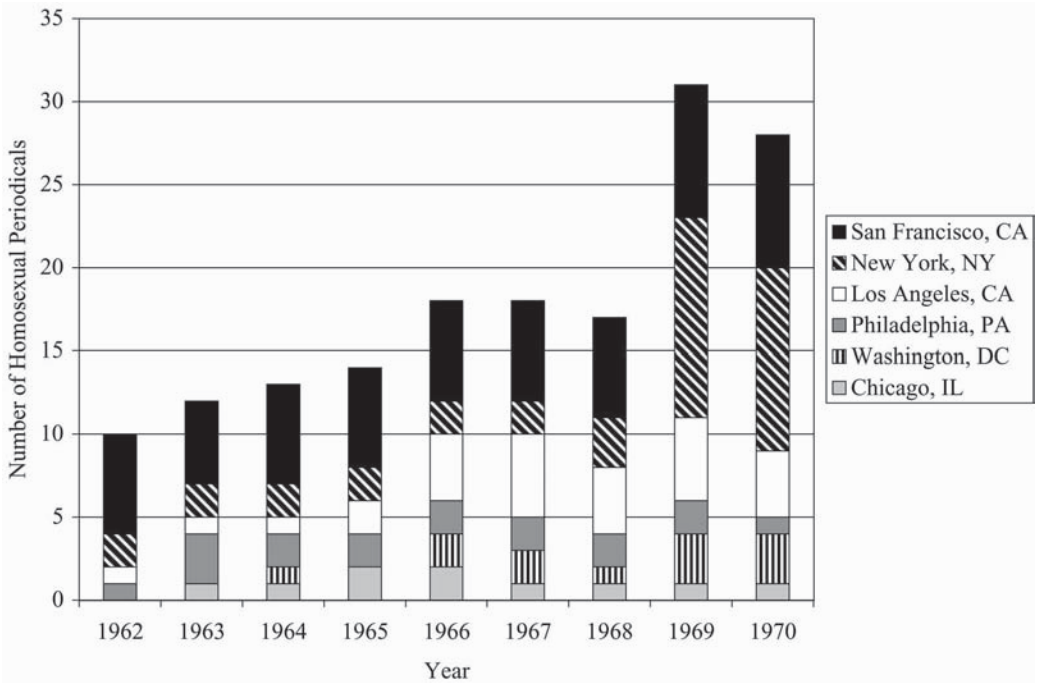


Figure 1. Homosexual Periodicals in Six Cities, 1962–1970

to generating the idea of a commemoration. Their accommodating approach was shaped by the city's relatively liberal political culture (Boyd 2003). Homosexuals in San Francisco had greater political access and encountered less routine opposition than homosexuals elsewhere at that time (Bernstein 1997). Becker and Horowitz (1971) described San Francisco as characterized by a "culture of civility," with an "accommodation" between police and "deviants." According to Becker and Horowitz (1971:12), by treating "deviants" well, authorities in San Francisco provided homosexuals with a "stake" in the community that constrained their behavior.

At this time, the civil rights movement was at its peak in the South (McAdam 1982). Its influence was rippling through the country, contributing to Berkeley's 1964 Free Speech Movement (Gitlin 1987). San Francisco's homophile activists resisted these radicalizing influences, though, because their moderate approach achieved modest successes. They saw the ball raid as evidence of a local problem with the police, to be addressed through private meetings with authorities instead of public protest. Later we see how that willingness to engage in

public protest facilitated the development of the idea of gay commemoration.

In addition, enlisting other cities in multi-city commemorative ritual was unthinkable in 1965. It was barely possible to disseminate news of the event to homosexuals elsewhere. Figure 1 displays the number of homosexual periodicals in San Francisco and other U.S. cities through the 1960s.⁶

Only three of the 13 periodicals published at the end of 1964 were national in scope; none had a circulation of more than a few thousand. *The Ladder* had a circulation of around 1,000; the *Mattachine Review*, 500; and *ONE Confidential*, 3,000.⁷ Publications that would bridge homophile politics and gay liberation—*Vector* (San Francisco), *Drum* (Philadelphia), *Homosexual Citizen* (D.C.), and, most impor-

⁶ A list of all homosexual periodicals included in Figure 1 can be found in Table S1 of the online supplement (<http://www2.asanet.org/journals/asr/2006/toc053.html>).

⁷ Circulation estimates are from Streitmatter (1995:357). Figures are based on activist interviews.

Table 2. Newspaper Articles Published within the First Year, by Type of Periodical

	San Francisco 1965–1966		Los Angeles 1967–1968	New York 1969–1970	
	New Year's	Compton's	Black Cat	Stonewall	Snake Pit
Local Homosexual	8	0	5	7	9
Mainstream	7	0	1	12	4
Alternative	0	0	2	11	1
Nonlocal Homosexual	0	0	0	9	2
Total	15	0	8	39	16

tantly, *The Advocate* (Los Angeles)—were either in their infancy or not yet founded.

Table 2 reports the number of articles about the New Year's Ball (and the other events discussed later) published in four different types of media venues within the first year of the event.⁸ Though the New Year's Ball received strong coverage in the local homophile and mainstream press, true national coverage was not possible.

Thus, in 1965 in San Francisco, the "situation was too unique, gay men and lesbians in the rest of the country still too isolated and invisible, for [an event there] to have anything more than a local effect" (D'Emilio 1992b:84).⁹ As Table 1 indicates, the commemoration of the New Year's Ball was impeded by the low mnemonic capacity of the homophile movement in San Francisco and the rest of the nation.

REVIVING THE NEW YEAR'S BALL RAID. A partial revival of the New Year's Ball raid years later provides additional evidence that low mnemonic capacity explains the lack of commemoration of the ball raid. A dramatic nationwide expansion in gay mnemonic capacity occurred in the early 1970s, generating an explosion in the documentation of gay life. In this context, San Francisco homophile activists Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon published a 1972 memoir describing their movement activities. They referred to the New Year's Ball raid as "infamous" and to January 1, 1965 as "a date

that will be long remembered in the history of the homophile movement" (Martin and Lyon [1972] 1991:239–40). Subsequent histories of homosexual San Francisco also defined the ball as pivotal in the city's gay history (Sweet 1975; Wolf 1979:54; D'Emilio 1983, 1992b; Stryker and Van Buskirk 1996; Armstrong 2002; Boyd 2003). Some accounts even referred to it as San Francisco's Stonewall (Hughes 1989; Ness 2000). Survival in the historical record, however, is not the same as public commemoration. By the time the ball was resuscitated, the myth of Stonewall as movement origin had already taken root. The New Year's Ball is currently remembered mostly by historians of sexuality and by some gay San Franciscans.

COMPTON'S CAFETERIA DISTURBANCE, AUGUST 1966

The easing of police harassment after the New Year's Ball raid limited opportunities for San Francisco's homosexuals to exhibit the heroism that lends itself to movement mythology—an irony noted by historians of gay San Francisco (D'Emilio 1992b; Stryker and Van Buskirk 1996:53; Boyd 2003:203). Still, San Francisco produced one more contender for collective memory.

In August 1966, police raided Compton's Cafeteria, an all-hours coffee shop popular with "gay hustlers, 'hair fairies,' queens, and street kids" (Stryker 1998:355; Silverman and Stryker 2005). Unlike the dignified response to the New Year's Ball, this event involved a small riot in San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood. According to activist Raymond Broshears:

[W]hen the police grabbed the arm of one of the transvestites, he threw his cup of coffee in the cop's face, and with that, cups, saucers, and trays

⁸ All articles included in Table 2 are listed in Table S2 of the online supplement (<http://www2.asanet.org/journals/asr/2006/toc053.html>).

⁹ In this passage, D'Emilio refers to the limited symbolic potential of events taking place in San Francisco in 1961. This was still the case in 1965.

began flying around the place and all directed at the police. They retreated outside until reinforcements arrived, and the Compton[’s] management ordered the place closed, and with that, the Gays began breaking out every window in the place, and as they ran outside to escape the breaking glass, the police tried to grab them and throw them in the paddy wagon, but they found this no easy task for Gays began hitting them “below the belt” and drag queens [started] smashing them in the face with extremely heavy purses. A police car had every window broken, a newspaper shack outside the cafeteria was burned to the ground and general havoc [was] raised that night in the Tenderloin. The next day drag queens, hair fairies, conservative Gays, and hustlers joined in a picket of the cafeteria, which would not allow the drags back in. (Broshears 1972; Stryker 1998:356, 2002)

According to Stryker (2002), the altercation was enabled by the new influence of the civil rights movement and the counterculture. People often justify Stonewall’s unique place in gay collective memory by claiming that it was the first homosexual riot. It was not.

LACK OF COMMEMORABILITY. Despite the fact that Compton’s involved a pre-Stonewall street riot (albeit a small one), it was not viewed as newsworthy or politically relevant by San Francisco’s homophile establishment. There was no press conference, no legal challenge to police behavior, no change in policing practices, and no commemoration. The event was not even mentioned in the homophile press (see Table 2), except for one article in *Cruise News and World Report* describing earlier picketing at Compton’s (“Young Homos Picket” 1966). It was not mentioned in the mainstream press, police reports, or other public records (Stryker 2002). If rumors spread, they left no documentary trace. Several years later two retrospective accounts emerged: one by drag queen Sandy Green in a 1973 issue of *Gay Pride Quarterly* and one by Raymond Broshears in the June 1972 San Francisco gay pride program (Broshears 1972; Green 1973).¹⁰ These accounts failed to generate further interest.

Compton’s was located in the Tenderloin, the turf of prostitutes and transgender individuals

(Stryker 2002). Homophile activists were mostly white, middle-class, gender-normative older men with more social resources than the patrons of Compton’s (Valocchi 1999). Broshears claimed that “conservative Gays” joined the picket, but there is little evidence. Still, homophile activists could have defined the event as significant. Historian Stryker (2005) argues that “homophile activists definitely knew about the tensions at Compton’s.” Homophile activists were, however, ambivalent about the behavior of Compton’s patrons because it threatened homophile accommodation with the police.

Lack of interest in the Stonewall riots several years later suggests that homophile disdain for rioting ran deep. In 1970 San Francisco’s homophile establishment ignored New York appeals to commemorate the Stonewall riots (Lee 1970; SF Historical Society 1996:Condit). A prominent San Francisco homophile activist, Bill Beardemphel, explained in a 1997 interview that he viewed the Stonewall riots as a pointless outburst of a frustrated movement that “couldn’t get anywhere” due to poor relationships with authorities (SF Historical Society 1997a: Gabriel). Another San Franciscan explained his lack of participation in the first Stonewall commemoration (organized by radicals outside of the homophile establishment): “I did not think a riot should be memorialized” (SF Historical Society n.d.:Pennington, 3).

Thus, Compton’s was not commemorated in part because potential sponsors did not see it as commemorable (see Table 1). Low mnemonic capacity also contributed to its fate. Unlike the New Year’s Ball raid, Compton’s was not resuscitated in early histories of gay San Francisco. It was nearly lost to history because homophile activists did not cover it in their newspapers. Stryker’s archaeological efforts recovered this event for the historical record. The response to the events at Compton’s Cafeteria suggests that riots are not inherently commemorable.

LOS ANGELES

THE GAY MOVEMENT AND THE LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT

In contrast to San Francisco, the homophile movement in Los Angeles had virtually no access to institutional channels to address their concerns and had a much more hostile relationship with the police. In 1967 the gay move-

¹⁰ Oral history interviews collected by Stryker confirm Broshears’s story (Silverman and Stryker 2005).

ment in Los Angeles was weak compared to its counterparts in cities such as San Francisco, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. In a May 1968 letter to *The Advocate*, East Coast activist Frank Kameny observed, "If there is any large city in the country whose homosexual community has done more than its share of crying (with good cause) and less than its share of remedial acting, it is Los Angeles" (Kameny 1968, cited in Clendinen and Nagourney 1999:36). Clendinen and Nagourney reported, "In 1969 alone the Los Angeles Police Department made 3,858 arrests under the category of crime it used to prosecute homosexuals" (1999:34). Police entrapment, mass arrests, and police violence were common in Los Angeles into the 1970s (Thompson 1994). In a notice for the first Gay Liberation Front meeting held in 1969, activist Don Jackson wrote, "LA gays have been foundering; stunned by the reign of terror which the LAPD has brought on them" (Clendinen and Nagourney 1999:37–38).¹¹ Not only were police aggressive, but also, Los Angeles newspapers rarely covered homosexual issues. They did not provide the forum for discussing police practices that the dailies in San Francisco offered.

BLACK CAT RAID, JANUARY 1967

In 1966–67, New Year's celebrations in two neighboring homosexual bars were interrupted by plainclothes officers of the LAPD (The Tavern Guild 1967; Highland 1968). Police grabbed and beat patrons of the Black Cat bar after New Year's kisses. Police followed patrons to the nearby New Faces bar, where they beat the (female) bar owner, the manager, and the bartender, but made no arrests ("Cops Start Bar Brawl" 1967; Highland 1968; Holt 1969). A waiter was beaten in the parking lot badly enough to rupture his spleen, and was booked on a felony charge of assaulting an officer ("Year-old Black Cat" 1968; Highland 1968). Two other less violent raids occurred within the week. Homophile leaders told the *Los Angeles Free Press* (Schmid 1967) that these raids "shattered a two-year-long de facto truce between the Los Angeles Police Department

and the city's homosexual bars." They also noted that the raids happened at the same time as the swearing in of Republican Governor Ronald Reagan (Schmid 1967).

FAILURE AS NOT COMMEMORABLE. The Black Cat raid aroused anger and "galvanized the homosexual community into action" (Highland 1968:6). Activists arranged for NBC Television News to interview the waiter who had been beaten (Highland 1968:6). The local Tavern Guild put out a press release (The Tavern Guild 1967) and set up a legal defense fund (Highland 1968). Activists organized a protest of police brutality on February 11 outside the Black Cat bar. Four hundred demonstrators, including "Negroes, Mexican Americans, and Sunset Strip Youths," protested police brutality at six locations (Bryan 1967). Occurring not long after the Watts riots of August 1965, this cooperation was motivated by shared resentment of the LAPD (Garcia 1997:3). Joining forces in this way was unprecedented, and it might have been framed as a breakthrough in efforts to fight police violence.

Movement responses to the Black Cat raid were not, however, seen as successful. While movement actions prompted an Internal Affairs Bureau investigation (Highland 1968), the investigation resulted in no reprimands. Six people were found guilty of lewd conduct. Their cases were appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which declined to hear the case (Thompson 1994:4). The two bars later closed because of increased police presence (Highland 1968; Teal [1971]1995:25). One year after the Black Cat raid, activist Jim Highland lamented,

It looked as if this was what was needed to weld the homosexuals of one city into a unit with the purpose and the strength to make their civil rights a reality. But the excitement passed. Time passed. People forgot. If the forgetters had kept up their interest, kept up their contributions. . . . [n]ext New Year's eve might have been different. Now who can say it won't be the same? (Highland 1968)

In Highland's view, the raid had failed to build the movement. He was not the only activist to call the Black Cat a failure. In the January 1969 issue of *The Advocate*, two years after the raid, another activist revisited the event:

Two years ago New Year's eve an incident occurred which reverberated throughout the homosexual

¹¹ Notice originally published in *Los Angeles Free Press*.

community—the Black Cat raid. . . . Those who remained after the last police car departed were in a state of shock, which soon turned to anger. . . . We felt a sense of frustration at our helplessness to aid those who were arrested. . . . Will it happen again? . . . Will the homosexual community be prepared? Do we have a solidified homophile movement in the city that will stand up to unprovoked police excess in its relations with the homosexual community? (Holt 1969:17)

The event was framed as important: it was a famous night; it resonated. But it evoked feelings of shock, anger, frustration, and helplessness. The event did not feel like a triumph when it happened, and the failure of movement actions to change police practices did not change that sentiment. The event did not motivate an interest in commemoration. We code the Black Cat raid as “low” with respect to commemorability in Table 1.

REPRESSION AND THE BUILDING OF MNEMONIC CAPACITY. The movement also lacked mnemonic capacity. In 1967 the Los Angeles gay movement had yet to develop the idea that commemoration was appropriate. Over the next two years, homosexual efforts to challenge the LAPD built mnemonic capacity (a change we note in Table 1 by shifting mnemonic capacity from “low” to “high”).

The Advocate—which would be an important source of news about Stonewall—was founded in September 1967 by activist Dick Michaels. The Black Cat raid served as the impetus for Michaels to transform an existing newsletter into the first national mass circulation gay newspaper (Streitmatter 1995:87; Alwood 1996:77). By September 1969, *The Advocate* had a circulation of 23,000 copies and distribution in Chicago, New York, Boston, Washington, Miami, and Los Angeles, and it reported gay news from around the globe (Streitmatter 1995).

Though it was difficult for Los Angeles activists to see, their movement *was* growing. A police raid of the Patch nightclub in August 1968 provoked an immediate challenge from bar patrons (Michaels 1968; Perry and Swicegood 1990:32; Thompson 1994:6).¹² After police left with those arrested, the owner, Lee Glaze,

encouraged the remaining bar patrons to band together and fight back. He offered to buy out a flower shop owned by a patron and suggested that the group descend on the police station with flowers. Twenty-five or so people went to the police station and, borrowing from the civil rights movement, sang “We Shall Overcome” while they waited for the patrons to be released (Perry and Swicegood 1990:33; Thompson 1994:6).

At the time of the Black Cat raid, only tiny newsletters existed to report it (see Figure 1 and Table 2)—but with *The Advocate* to cover it, news of the Patch raid reached a larger audience (Michaels 1968, 1969c; Loughery 1998:305). Editor Dick Michaels was in the Patch when it was raided and wrote an article titled “‘Patch’ Raids Police Station.” He highlighted the bravery of Glaze and the patrons and proclaimed that “if the reaction of the customers there that night is any indication, a new era of determined resistance may be dawning for L.A.’s gay community” (Michaels 1968:5). He described the response as a “solid display of defiance” (1968).

But the Patch raid was still not viewed as a definitive success. The police “made it sheer hell” for customers leaving the Patch, and the bar soon closed for good (Michaels 1969c; Loughery 1998:304). Police brutality continued. On March 9, 1969, the police beat a homosexual man to death in a parking lot outside the Dover Hotel in front of witnesses (“Witnesses Say” 1969; Michaels 1969a; “Gays Remember” 1970). A jury later gave a verdict of “excusable homicide” (Michaels 1969b). On March 8, 1970, activists commemorated the Dover Hotel death with a 120-person rally and a march to the police station (“Gays Remember” 1970). Having no success to mark, they commemorated an instance of extreme police brutality. This first West Coast commemoration, in the form of a public rally, demonstrated Los Angeles’ readiness to commemorate.

Continued police aggression primed Los Angeles homosexuals to respond sympathetically to the Stonewall riots. One Los Angeles activist, writing in 1967, complained that homosexuals were placid when compared to assertive

¹² The Patch raid is not treated separately because it does not offer additional analytical leverage. Like the Black Cat, it suffered from low commemorabil-

ity due to failure and the low mnemonic capacity of the movement.

blacks, noting that, "with the homosexual, the police know they have safe game. 'These guys won't fight back.' The police say that over and over. We wonder how long they can count on it? . . . Shall we all lie down on the sidewalk—and wait to be taken in?" ("RAID" 1967). This anger at police brutality, and the mnemonic capacity created through efforts to fight it, would motivate the biggest one-year commemoration of Stonewall outside of New York.

NEW YORK

GAY LIBERATION IN NEW YORK BEFORE STONEWALL

The gay movement in New York in 1969 was different than the movement in San Francisco in 1965 or Los Angeles in 1967. Between the Black Cat raid and the Stonewall riots, protest activity in the United States grew more militant (Gitlin 1987). The country saw massive antiwar protests, riots in Detroit and Newark, and the summer of love in San Francisco. Homosexual activists from both coasts attended the Democratic Convention in Chicago in August 1968, and they returned home inspired to radicalize their own movement (Armstrong 2002; Carter 2004:111). New York gay activists founded a radical group in Greenwich Village in early 1969 (Carter 2004:122), and discussed the gains of "gay power" in their periodicals (Rodwell 1968). This new gay liberation approach borrowed liberally from the civil rights, black power, women's, and New Left movements (Kissack 1995; Valocchi 2001; Murray 1996; Armstrong 2002; Stryker 2004). By spring 1969 Los Angeles and San Francisco were also sites of gay liberation activity (Stryker and Van Buskirk 1996; Armstrong 2002).

Gay liberation in New York was particularly vibrant because of the political culture of the city and the history of its homophile movement. While San Francisco's movement had been moderated by a liberal climate, and Los Angeles' choked by relentless repression, New York's movement had radicalized in response to an inconsistent political environment. On the one hand, in the mid-1960s homophile activists had successfully organized to block police use of mass arrests and entrapment (Kinsey Library n.d.) and to force the New York Liquor Authority to acknowledge that liquor licenses could not be revoked simply because homosexuals fre-

quented an establishment (Carter 2004:115). On the other hand, in 1966 the mayor initiated a crackdown on homosexual bars in Times Square and Greenwich Village (Alwood 1996:58).

As part of movement radicalization, activists adopted public protest as a strategy. Beginning in the spring of 1965, East Coast Homophile Organizations (ECHO) organized a series of ground-breaking public pickets (Marotta 1981:32; D'Emilio 1983). These pickets spawned the idea of using public ritual to commemorate homosexual events. After one of the early pickets, activist Craig Rodwell, who loved the pickets and did not want to see them end, suggested an annual July 4 demonstration in front of Philadelphia's Independence Hall: "We can call it the Annual Reminder—the Reminder that a group of Americans still don't have their basic rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" (Duberman 1993:113). The first Annual Reminder, sponsored by the Mattachine Societies of New York, Washington, and Philadelphia, and organized by Frank Kameny, took place in July 1965 with 44 participants wearing conservative clothing and carrying carefully worded protest signs (Kameny 1965; Marotta 1981; Duberman 1993; Stein 2000). The Annual Reminder was held each year in July through 1969. This early East Coast experience provided a model for commemoration of Stonewall.

The radicalization of New York's movement in the mid-1960s also produced aggressive gay efforts to develop media contacts and get mainstream press coverage. As a result of the efforts of Randy Wicker and others, by 1969 homosexual issues had received serious coverage in the *New York Times*, *New York Post*, *Village Voice*, and *Harper's* (Marotta 1981:27).¹³ Given the national distribution of these New York publications, the movement's ability to gain access to these venues was particularly significant.

STONEWALL, JUNE 1969

The Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street was a busy place, but seedy.¹⁴ It served alcohol with-

¹³ See also D'Emilio (1983:159–160, 206) and Alwood (1996:chaps. 2 and 3).

¹⁴ For book-length treatments of Stonewall, see Duberman (1993) and Carter (2004).

out a liquor license, it had no running water, its patrons and workers were often on drugs, and it had mafia ties (“The Stonewall Riots” 1969; Leitsch 1969a, 1969c). Customers included homeless teens, queens, and others not welcome elsewhere. It was raided about once a month. On Friday June 27, around 1:20 a.m. (officially the 28th), police raided, planning to seize illegal liquor and arrest management and workers. As they started checking identification, kicking people out, and making a few arrests, a crowd of ejected patrons, nearby residents, and passers-by gathered outside. This was unusual; people usually tried to slip away from bar raids (Carter 2004:143; Duberman 2004:191–93). The growing crowd posed a problem for the police (Carter 2004:147). As they loaded the van with arrestees, the crowd grew angry and started throwing pennies, bottles, and bricks. With no backup, the police barricaded themselves inside the bar (Duberman 2004). The crowd escalated its attacks, trapping the police inside (Carter 2004:168). When backup arrived, the police began loading the wagon again.

Riot police arrived around then, and tried for hours to disperse the crowd. The narrow one-way street in front of the bar, and the layout of surrounding streets, enabled rioters to block the street and halt traffic in front of the Inn, and go around the block to taunt police from behind (Carter 2004:176).¹⁵ Violence continued until the streets were finally cleared, at about 3:30 a.m. (“The Stonewall Riots” 1969; “4 Policemen Hurt” 1969; “Police Again Rout” 1969; Smith 1969; Truscott 1969; Duberman 2004:192–202). Papers reported nearly a thousand rioters and several hundred police (Leitsch 1969a). Four policemen were hurt and thirteen people were arrested (“4 Policemen Hurt” 1969).

EXPLOITING THE RAID. By gathering on the street outside the bar, people deviated from the script. That they felt motivated to gather and safe to do so was a consequence of the location of the bar in time and place, which was not only in New York, but also in the heart of Greenwich

Village, a densely populated, pedestrian-friendly neighborhood at the heart of the city’s gay life. It was the home and playground of an array of gay men and lesbians—including some of the most radicalized, skilled, and visionary gay activists in the country. Friday June 27, 1969, was the first hot night of the summer, school was out, and people were on the streets (Carter 2004). In contrast to Compton’s, those on the scene included both marginalized and more privileged elements of the homosexual community.

A gay liberation orientation led activists to be attuned to the political possibilities of the developing situation. Some activists stumbled across the events in process. Craig Rodwell was on his way home when he “saw the crowd gathered in front of the Stonewall Inn” (Carter 2004:146). He stayed because of a feeling “that something was about to happen” (Carter 2004:146). Rodwell later claimed, “I immediately knew that this was the spark we had been waiting for for years” (Carter 2004:167). John O’Brien, a radical with experience fighting police in the streets, ran across the unfolding riot during “his usual Friday night recreation of debating politics while cruising” (Carter 2004:164). O’Brien helped escalate the riot by sharing his “knowledge of street-fighting tactics” with others (Carter 2004:178). This escalation contributed to the drama of the event.

Activists immediately began to construct the significance of the event: Rodwell called media contacts at the New York daily papers. Perhaps due to Rodwell’s calls, the press showed up and the event received extensive coverage in the local newspapers the next day. The treatment was generally homophobic, ranging from sensationalist (i.e., the *New York Daily News*, the *Village Voice*) to short, sterile, and deeply buried (i.e., the *New York Times*) (Alwood 1996:85). Still, the coverage was unprecedented, and it brought people out the next day to see the ruined bar and its gay power graffiti.

The gathering crowd provided Rodwell and Mattachine-New York an opportunity to distribute flyers with gay liberation messages (Carter 2004:183). Community members had fun and shouted gay power slogans. Riot police arrived in the evening, and a second night of rioting started. Activist Dick Leitsch reported a crowd of nearly 2,000 people (Clark and Nichols 1969; Leitsch 1969c; Duberman 2004:202–5).

¹⁵ Zhao (1998:1493) argues that student mobilization during the pro-democracy movement in 1989 in Beijing was facilitated by the “ecology of university campuses in Beijing.”

That night, activists blocked off the entrance to Christopher Street—Stonewall Inn’s street—and shouted that “Christopher Street belongs to the queens!” (Leitsch 1969b; Carter 2004:186). This extended territorial claims from the bar to the neighborhood.

On Sunday morning, Rodwell coordinated the distribution of thousands of copies of a flyer he had designed. This flyer stated, “The nights of Friday, June 27, 1969 and Saturday, June 28, 1969 will go down in history as the first time that thousands of Homosexual men and women went out into the streets to protest the intolerable situation which has existed in New York City for many years” (Clark and Nichols 1969; Teal [1971]1995:8). Rodwell’s bold claims arose out of a feeling of participating in a historic moment (Carter 2004:196). Many who were there reported (at least in retrospect) sharing this feeling. Other early accounts used similarly grandiose language. For example, Leitsch’s account, published the month after the riots in the *New York Mattachine Newsletter*, was titled “The Hairpin Drop Heard around the World” (Leitsch 1969b). These claims were plausible at this time because they provided a useful explanation for sudden, dramatic movement growth. The forces actually generating movement growth were complex and invisible to activists. These bold assertions became a self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton 1948).

Stonewall’s location in Greenwich Village also attracted reporters from the alternative press. *Village Voice* reporters Howard Smith and Lucian Truscott were drawn from their nearby offices and a local bar, and both produced vivid firsthand accounts (Smith 1969; Truscott 1969; Carter 2004:144). Truscott’s article referred to rioters as “fags” and “blatant queens” (Alwood 1996: 88). These derogatory references provoked more violent rioting on Wednesday night (Duberman 2004:208).

Accounts of the riots continued to be published in a variety of venues over the coming months (see Table 2). New access to local mainstream, local alternative, and national gay news outlets made this possible (see Table 2 and Figure 1). Coverage in *The Advocate* was extensive (Jackson 1969; Leitsch 1969a; Clark and Nichols 1969). Access to these venues was important because New York’s local gay press was not well developed before Stonewall. Thus,

the national scope of gay mnemonic capacity aided in the dissemination of news of Stonewall.

ESTABLISHING STONEWALL COMMEMORATION. Activists viewed the riots as highly commemorable (see Table 1). And five years of experience with the Annual Reminders made commemoration of such a salient event logical. Stonewall was the first such dramatic event to occur in a context with a well-developed notion of gay commemoration. This was an important aspect of the mnemonic capacity of the New York movement. Activists drew on this prior experience as they began planning for commemoration of Stonewall.

The fifth Annual Reminder was on July 4, a few days after the Stonewall riots. As usual, Rodwell made the trip to Philadelphia for the event. Rodwell was more frustrated than ever, however, by Kameny’s insistence on maintaining a “respectable” image (Duberman 2004:205–9). Kameny’s conservatism convinced Rodwell that the Annual Reminder needed to be updated (Marotta 1981:166).

At a November 1–2, 1969, Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations (ERCHO), Rodwell had friends in NYU’s Student Homophile League introduce a resolution. The text read as follows:

RESOLUTION #1: that the Annual Reminder, in order to be more relevant, reach a greater number of people, and encompass the ideas and ideals of the larger struggle in which we are engaged—that of our fundamental human rights—be moved both in time and location.

We propose that a demonstration be held annually on the last Saturday in June in New York City to commemorate the 1969 spontaneous demonstrations on Christopher Street and this demonstration be called CHRISTOPHER STREET LIBERATION DAY. No dress or age regulations shall be made for this demonstration.

We also propose that we contact Homophile organizations throughout the country and suggest that they hold parallel demonstrations on that day. We propose a nationwide show of support. (Minutes of the Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations, November 1–2, 1969, MSNY files, quoted in Marotta 1981:164–65; Teal [1971]1995:300)

This resolution—and one forming the Christopher Street Liberation Day Umbrella Committee—passed despite the objections of moderate homophile delegates (Marotta

1981:164–65; Teal [1971]1995). The resolution made claims about what happened, why and when it should be remembered, and by whom. Plans for commemoration to be annual and national were important to its long-term impact.

Co-optation of the Annual Reminder was not difficult: few people participated and it did not commemorate a specific event or individual. Replacing an abstract rationale with a vivid, celebratory one was clever, as was abandoning July 4, a day already loaded with significance to Americans.

SNAKE PIT BAR RAID, MARCH 1970

The raid of the Stonewall Inn was not the only police raid protested by gay liberationists in New York. Nine months after Stonewall, on Saturday, March 8, 1970, police raided the Snake Pit, a gay after-hours bar operating without a liquor license (Marotta 1981:153; Duberman 1993:304; Carter 2004:238). Unable to distinguish management from customers and anxious to avoid a repeat of the Stonewall riot, Inspector Pine called for police wagons and arrested all 167 customers, bringing them to the station house (“New York Controversy” 1970). This decision contradicted police policy—followed at Stonewall—which was to arrest only management and those lacking appropriate identification. At the police station, Alberto Diego Vinales, an Argentine national, panicked and tried to escape by jumping out of a second-story window. He landed on the fence outside, embedding six 14-inch spikes in his leg and pelvis (“New York Controversy” 1970). He was charged with resisting arrest and disorderly conduct.

Later that day, the Gay Activists Alliance organized a phone-in and distributed 3000 fliers announcing a 9 p.m. march on the police precinct (Martello 1970; Carter 2004:240). Nearly 500 people marched, shouting gay pride and gay power slogans (Martello 1970). Police behavior was criticized by Representative Ed Koch, who asserted that the mass arrests were illegal (Rosen 1980–81). Mattachine brought false arrests suits for all 167 people (“Three Gay Clubs Raided” 1970) and most of these charges were dismissed. As a result of criticism of police behavior, Police Commissioner Howard Leary resigned in September 1970 (Rosen 1980–81).

EVENT SEQUENCE AND COMMEMORABILITY. The Snake Pit raid was dramatic: someone almost died. It received media coverage (see Table 2) and resulted in a clear political victory. Some even claim that it “galvanized more heretofore quiescent gay men into gay liberation than the Stonewall raid had” (Murray 1996:64–65). While the Snake Pit did “take on some of the symbolic importance of the Stonewall riots” (Duberman 1993:303–4, n12), it did so only temporarily. Not only had New York activists already initiated plans to commemorate Stonewall, but they also justified these plans on the basis of claims about the uniqueness of Stonewall. A New York activist urged participation in Stonewall commemoration by referring to the “now famous landmark Gay riots” that marked the “first time ever that homosexuals had taken massive street action” (Gunnison 1970). Because the Snake Pit was not “first,” it did not receive the same attention. Thus, the Snake Pit was not viewed as commemorable, because it occurred after activists had already framed Stonewall as the origin of gay liberation. This provides an example of how the fate of an event is shaped by its relationship to other contenders for memory.

This zero-sum logic of commemoration was not inevitable. Other movements rely less on claims about origins for justification of commemoration. For example, the civil rights movement justifies commemoration by claiming that figures and events were important in influencing change (Meyer 2006). This logic of justification had consequences: it positioned other events—like the Snake Pit—as competitors for the status of the single most salient movement event. This logic militated against the integration of multiple events into a more complex narrative of movement origins.

COMMEMORATING STONEWALL

Now that we have explained why Stonewall was the only event receiving commemorative attention, we focus on the role that resonance and potential for institutionalization played in the fate of these efforts. Commemorative plans do not always succeed. The proposed plan was ambitious and might well have failed. By calling for a national event, New York activists set themselves the task of persuading peers in other cities to participate. This required activists else-

where to agree that gay commemoration was appropriate, that Stonewall was commemorable, and that hosting a public event was the way to do it. Agreement was not inevitable—and because public gay events were still of dubious legality, staging the event required courage and the commitment of movement resources. Other cities had to have the ability to stage a public protest. We later show that Los Angeles and Chicago agreed to deploy their new mnemonic capacity to stage commemorative events, while San Francisco ignored the requests of New York activists. As a consequence of the resonance of Stonewall and the power of the parade as commemorative form, the first commemoration was successful even without San Francisco's sponsorship. Success motivated repetition and expansion. By 1972, even San Francisco felt compelled to participate.

SUCCESS IN LOS ANGELES, CHICAGO, AND NEW YORK

New York activists promoted commemorative plans through homophile media, organizational mailings, phone calls, and flyers. New York's gay press reprinted the ERCHO resolution reported on preparations, proclaimed Stonewall's importance, and urged participation (Homophile Youth Movement 1970; Teal [1971]1995:300). A letter dated March 1, 1970, from the Christopher Street Liberation Day Umbrella Committee addressed to "All Midwestern and Western Regional Homophile Organizations," asked homophile organizations to "take advantage of this unparalleled opportunity for action and publicity and make of it a truly national reminder day" (Gunnison 1970). Without the existence of homophile organizations elsewhere, many of them founded only in the late 1960s, a national event would have been unthinkable. Contacting these organizations required the existence of a list of mailing addresses; the construction of this list was a product of prior movement organization.

After Morris Kight in Los Angeles got a call from a New York activist, he convened a group of key Los Angeles activists to plan a commemorative parade (Christopher Street West Association n.d.). Activists in Los Angeles identified with New York frustration regarding police, and, unlike their counterparts in San Francisco, they had no qualms about souring

relations with police and thus no misgivings about gay rioting. They recognized that Stonewall represented a victory over police that they had not yet achieved. They had arrived at the idea of commemoration, were willing to engage in public protest, and had built the infrastructure necessary to organize public protests. In 1970 hosting a gay parade was indistinguishable from a gay protest or political demonstration: a public gathering of homosexuals was perceived by authorities as confrontational and by homosexuals as a courageous display of political commitment. When Los Angeles activists applied for a parade permit, the Chief of the Los Angeles Police reportedly told them, "Granting a parade permit to a group of homosexuals to parade down Hollywood Boulevard would be the same as giving a permit to a group of thieves and robbers" (Christopher Street West Association n.d.). After sustained legal challenges over months, the California Superior Court issued an order for the parade permit and required police to provide protection ("Big LA Christopher" 1970; Teal [1971]1995:333).

Activists in Chicago were also enthusiastic about sponsoring a commemorative event. Chicago had no claims to vanguard status; the request to commemorate served as an opportunity to jumpstart their fledgling movement. Jim Bradford, president of *Mattachine Midwest*, had been active in New York's *Mattachine*, as well as in the antiwar movement and the New Left. He helped build support for Gay Pride Week in Chicago (Sprague 1980). Activists used a local newsletter to inform lay homosexual men and women about the commemoration, asking people to "join in for this week of celebration" ("A Call" 1970). Announcing the upcoming celebration in the June 1970 issue of the *Mattachine Midwest Newsletter*, Chicago activists revealed that they were not convinced by New York's claim to be the source of gay liberation. They were, however, willing to go along with the story, explaining to their readers that: "although the beginnings of Gay Liberation had already been seen in Berkeley and San Francisco, the single historical event of the Christopher Street riots had come to be seen as the 'official' start of Gay Liberation" (Kelley 1970:1).

Events in all three cities were successful. In an article entitled "Gay Pride Week Huge Success!" the *Chicago Gay Liberation*

Newsletter reported that “Sunday, June 28th, was notable across the nation for two reasons—a number of marches were held celebrating Gay Pride Week, and the news of them also penetrated the jock-strap curtain to be fully reported in a number of newspapers” (Larsen 1970:1). Even though New York’s Gay Pride Week suffered some glitches—some poorly attended events and a double-booking with the pro-Castro Venceremos Brigade—the parade itself surpassed all expectations (Larsen 1970:1; Tucker 1970; Teal [1971]1995:302, 311). Conservative estimates ranged from 2,000 to 5,000 marchers and up to 20,000 men and women at the park afterward (“1200 Parade” 1970:1; Tucker 1970). Organizers handed out a flyer informing bystanders and participants that they had “worked closely with the New York City Police Dept. and . . . have received their full cooperation to insure an orderly and successful march” (Teal [1971]1995:305). Police were present to help manage the event. The July 1970 *New York Mattachine Newspaper* reported that “it was the first cooperative effort of its kind; it was the largest gay demonstration ever held; it received the greatest media coverage of any gay event (“1200 Parade” 1970). The event received front-page coverage in the *New York Times* (Fosburgh 1970).

Christopher Street West in Los Angeles was smaller, with about 1,000 marchers and 15,000–20,000 spectators, but more colorful (“1200 Parade” 1970; Larsen 1970; Michaels 1970; Teal [1971]1995:311–12). As a result of the court order, the LAPD not only had to provide protection, they even had to pay the overtime to the officers (Teal [1971]1995:311). The novel sight of police protecting homosexuals was perhaps as much a sign of change as the “gay power” signs carried by marchers. The success of Christopher Street West legitimated the claim that the Stonewall riots were of national significance.

Chicago hosted a week of events, culminating in a 200-person rally and demonstration (Stanley 1970; Stienecker 1970; Teal [1971]1995:310). *The Advocate* editorialized that, “considering the degree of oppression in that Midwestern bulwark of conservatism, [the smaller Chicago march] required even more courage than in liberal Hollywood” (Michaels 1970; Teal [1971]1995: 310).

SAN FRANCISCO RESISTANCE TO STONEWALL COMMEMORATION

In contrast, San Francisco opted out. San Francisco’s moderate homophile activists disdained rioting and public protest. They considered themselves to be at the forefront of the movement nationally and did not look to events elsewhere to explain the origins of their local movement. In the first year after Stonewall, San Francisco’s homophile press published only one short article about the riots. This article, buried in *Vector’s* news updates from around the world, explained that “after several arrests were made on various occasions, the patrons became involved in a ‘protest.’ The scene resulted in several arrests and injuries, and a great deal of publicity in the New York papers” (“Homophile news” 1969). The *Vector* did not mention commemorative plans in the months leading up to the anniversary.

San Francisco radicals attempted to participate in Stonewall commemoration anyway. Gary Alinder, newly arrived from New York, passed out “tens of thousands of leaflets,” but only about 100 people attended. The event was modeled after a New Left “be-in.” Lacking appropriate permits, the event was not legally protected and was dispersed by police. San Francisco also saw an unrelated march of 20 to 30 “hippies and drag queens.”¹⁶

Even after the success of the first parades in New York and Los Angeles, San Francisco activists continued to reject both the idea of a commemorative parade and New York claims about the importance of Stonewall. The *Vector* dismissed the first commemoration of Stonewall in Los Angeles as ineffectual and in bad taste:

What it will achieve in the way of less raids on bars and baths and in better relations with the police is questionable—just as some of the hastily-put-together floats bore signs that were also questionable, such as referring to homosexuals “murdered by the pigs.” (Buckley 1970)

¹⁶ This paragraph is supported by documents in the San Francisco Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, particularly interviews with Alinder by Gabriel and Condit, Greg Pennington’s unpublished history of gay parades in San Francisco, and the Bois Burk papers. See also Teal ([1971]1995:311), Pukas (1970), and “SF March” (1970).

San Francisco held out until 1972. By then, the success of the parade elsewhere made it clear that they could not continue to opt out without missing an opportunity to demonstrate the vitality of their local movement. Still ambivalent about ceding vanguard status to New York, they attempted to link the 1972 event to the Compton's Cafeteria disturbance (Broshears 1972). Later in the 1970s, San Francisco parade organizers removed mention of Stonewall from parade materials, referring simply to "gay pride." These efforts ultimately failed, and San Francisco, like other cities, ended up hosting celebrations that explicitly referred to the Stonewall riots. The Stonewall riots, in and of themselves, meant little in San Francisco. The success of the parade was what forced San Francisco activists to contend with it.

COMMEMORATIVE FORM IN THE SUCCESS AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE PARADE

With the notable exception of San Francisco, activists around the country were thrilled by the unprecedented success of the parade. New York activists began "[l]ooking forward to next year's" parade almost as soon as the articles on the first were published ("Gay Liberation Day" 1970). In Los Angeles, too, "[t]he success of the 1970 parade led immediately to talk of doing it again in 1971, and maybe even of making the parade an annual event" (Christopher Street West Association n.d.). In 1971, New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles hosted larger events, and Dallas, Boston, Milwaukee, and San Jose hosted their first celebrations.¹⁷ The year 1972 saw new events in Ann Arbor, Atlanta, Buffalo, Detroit, Washington, D.C., Miami, and Philadelphia. Parades continued to grow and spread to cities around the world including London, Paris, and Berlin (Tatchell 2002; Hekma 2004; Hunnicutt 2004). By the tenth anniversary of Stonewall, around 200,000–250,000 people turned out for San Francisco's parade ("Homosexuals' Parade" 1979).

¹⁷ See Table S3 of the online supplement (<http://www2.asanet.org/journals/asr/2006/toc053.html>) for brief descriptions of (and sources for) commemorations taking place in American cities in 1970, 1971, and 1972.

The immediate success and long-term survival of the parade were facilitated by its form. Parades are ephemeral and require the participation of many people—features that would seem to make them fragile. In this case, however, the parade as a form meshed with the emotional needs and political goals of the gay movement. Activists discovered that bringing homosexuals together in public had a magical emotional impact—the ritual created collective effervescence by visually and experientially counteracting the view that homosexuality is private and shameful (Durkheim 1965; Sewell 1996). The most emotional moment the first year in New York occurred when marchers entered the Sheep Meadow in Central Park and turned to look at the oncoming parade. Robert Liechti, writing in *Gay Scene*, described the following:

Wave on wave of gay brothers and sisters, multi-bannered, of all sizes and descriptions were advancing into the meadow, and spontaneous applause seized the early marchers. . . . For all of us who have been slowly climbing for years toward our freedom, this one last hill which let us look across our dear brothers and sisters was a cup running over. (Liechti 1970, cited in Teal [1971]1995:307)

A parade proved to be ideal for the affirmation of gay collective identity and for the production of feelings of pride central to the emotional culture of the movement (Taylor and Whittier 1995). The emotional impact granted the parade lasting cultural power.

The parade also proved to be an excellent way to advance other movement goals. Parades inject gay presence into public urban space. By requiring police protection and official permits, gay parades force cities to accommodate gay existence. Large, colorful, public celebrations are news. The first year the parade received positive front-page coverage with a photograph in the *New York Times* (Monday, June 29), a recap in the *Sunday Week in Review*, and coverage in the *New York Daily News* (Teal [1971]1995:309–10). News of the event went out on the Associated Press wire and was picked up even by the Youngstown [Ohio] *Vindicator*. The parade was covered in *The New Yorker*, London's *New Statesman*, *Time Magazine*, and *Mademoiselle* (Teal [1971]1995:310).

Parades also allow for expansion and varied levels of participation, including watching from the sidelines. They are versatile: participants

can design new floats each year, and bystanders never know exactly what they will see. Parades can also be adapted to different contexts. Routes can be restricted to gay neighborhoods or go through central business districts. Parades can be more or less sexual, or more or less political. The form allows contingents to stake out differing, even conflicting, political positions.

Repetition of the parade was eased by the fact that it was designed to be annual. Parade committees formed around the country to routinize parade planning, and, as celebrations grew, gay men and lesbians came to organize summer travel plans around participation. News coverage was ensured by the way in which predictably colorful pride parades mesh with news routines (Oliver and Myers 1999), and it continues to be a key prompt for revisiting the Stonewall story. In 2005 nearly 40 percent of the 65 references to the Stonewall riots as the origin of the gay movement in the mainstream press were directly tied to coverage of the parade.¹⁸

DISCUSSION

COMMEMORATIVE SUCCESS AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Over the years, the success of the parade enabled the Stonewall story to become common knowledge among those familiar with gay politics. Other commemorative vehicles have joined the parade as carriers of the story: the claim of Stonewall as movement origin is now ingrained on a plaque outside the Stonewall bar in New York, repeated in newspapers, embedded in history books, and mythologized in documentaries. What many people assume to be a basic fact about the gay movement—that it started with Stonewall—is a story that the movement successfully promoted.

The success of this story has crowded out more complex stories of movement development. Collective forgetting began before the first parade, but its success expedited this process. We previously showed that in June 1970—before the first parade—Chicago gay activists were aware that the “official” story did not accurately describe the development of

the movement. This nuance disappeared by the post-commemoration July edition of the periodical, which reported that the riots “marked the first time that large numbers of gay people stood up against repression. For this reason the Stonewall Riot is regarded as the birth of the Gay Liberation Movement” (Stanley 1970:1).

The success of the Stonewall story has not pleased everyone. Academic historians and some activists have worked to discredit it. Historian of sexuality Terence Kissack (1995:105) claimed that “almost the entire corpus of gay and lesbian history can be read as an attempt to deconstruct the Stonewall narrative.” Activists have also offered challenges. For example, in 2005 activists asserted that the 1965 Annual Reminder in Philadelphia was the origin of the contemporary gay movement (Podsada 2005). These challenges have, for the most part, been ignored outside of academic circles.

The resiliency of the Stonewall story in the face of new historical information is interesting, if not altogether surprising. Discrepancies between popular and scholarly stories are common, as movements often find simple stories to be more useful than “messier” accounts (Polletta 1998a; Meyer 2006). A story may survive not only because of its political utility, but also because of its “charisma” or resonance (Spillman 1998). Successful commemorative vehicles certainly contribute to the resilience of movement stories. Movement accounts of their own origins, successes, and failures have implications for future mobilization, and thus are important, often neglected, social movement outcomes (Meyer 2006; Polletta 1998b; Voss 1998; Tilly 2003).

While the Stonewall story continues to be politically useful to gay movement, it impedes academic explanation of the movement. The story conceals the fact that gay liberation existed prior to the Stonewall riots. This is causally important, as gay liberation was a precondition for the recognition of the political potential of the situation at the Stonewall Inn. Without a radical political approach, activists would not have responded by escalating the conflict. They would not have created or circulated grand narratives of its importance, nor would they have planned commemorative rituals.

The Stonewall story also conceals that the contemporary gay movement did not originate

¹⁸ Count constructed through a search of Lexis/Nexis.

in New York. Movement development in multiple cities was a precondition for national commemoration of Stonewall. If Stonewall had not been successfully commemorated outside of New York the first year, it is unlikely that it would have acquired national significance. Instead, it might have suffered the fate of San Francisco's New Year's Ball. Los Angeles activists, by participating in Stonewall commemoration the first year, played a crucial role in the survival of the Stonewall story. Ironically, the fact that Stonewall occurred late in a series of police/homosexual conflicts contributed to the success of its claim of being first.¹⁹

The notion of Stonewall as the "spark" of gay liberation cultivates a "wildfire myth" of movement development. People often suggest that the riots "ignited" gay liberation, which spread spontaneously across the United States. Other movements, including the civil rights movement, have also been described as "spontaneous" (Polletta 1998a). These accounts, according to Meyer (2006:213), make activism seem "inevitable or mystical," possibly undermining future mobilization. Gay liberation did not spread like wildfire—it spread through the numerous, deliberate activities of individuals and groups.

The popular account does not distinguish between the processes generating riots and those attributing significance to them. This conflation conceals complex class, race, and gender dynamics in the development of gay politics. Street queens and hustlers—marginalized by class, gender-presentation, and often race—were more willing than others to confront police, and were important in the riots at both Compton's and the Stonewall Inn. What Stonewall had, and Compton's did not, were activists able and willing to capitalize on such rioting: high-resource, radical gay men. This hints at the role that variation in social resources has played in gay movements more generally. More affluent, educated, and politically connected gays have supplied and mobilized resources, run newspapers, and engaged in extended legal challenges. Less-privileged individuals have often served as a source of innovation and a "radical flank" of the movement (Haines 1984). At Stonewall, the openness of

white gay men to radical ideas enabled them to recognize a riot as an opportunity. These radical impulses moderated quickly, however, as the movement coalesced around a gay rights/gay pride political agenda (Armstrong 2002). Moderation was already underway by the first parade, which was framed as a display of cultural pride. As the movement took shape, it centered the experience of middle-class white gay men and marginalized the concerns of less-privileged individuals.

Finally, the notion of the Stonewall riots as "spark" conceals the role that Stonewall commemoration played in gay movement development. It is often assumed that Stonewall is commemorated because of its impact on the movement. This suggests that commemoration is secondary to the movement. In fact, Stonewall made its impact on the gay movement *through* its commemoration. The first commemoration of Stonewall was gay liberation's biggest and most successful protest event.

While the Stonewall riots did not literally spark gay liberation, they were important to its growth. The police raid provided gay liberationists with a political opportunity, which they brilliantly exploited. Successful commemoration a year later announced an important shift in how the gay movement understood itself and its goals. It was through the riots and planning for commemoration that the gay movement *recognized* that a new era of gay activism had begun. This sea change in the gay movement's self-understanding did not mean the end of bar raids, other police repression, or other forms of discrimination—just the beginning of a new era of struggle.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This comparative analysis illustrates general processes contributing to commemoration and suggests avenues for future research. Our research demonstrates that events are not inherently commemorable, but they become commemorable by being defined as such. Homosexual activists separated by a few years, geographic location, and political perspective disagreed about whether a homosexual riot was commemorable. At the same time, we found that drama is relevant to an event's fate. It mattered that Stonewall involved more people and

¹⁹ The authors thank Tom Gieryn for this insight.

lasted for days as opposed to hours. These findings situate us in a middle-ground position in an ongoing debate about the extent to which collective memory is constrained by inherent properties of events (Spillman 1998; Schwartz 1991). Future research investigating puzzling variation in commemorative outcomes might provide additional insights into the relative importance of commemorability, mnemonic capacity, and the properties of events. For example, scholars might investigate why some cases of genocide in the twentieth century are more commemorated than others.

Our research also illustrates that meaning-making is constitutive of events—people simultaneously participate in and interpret events. The drama of Stonewall was in part a result of activist efforts to escalate and frame the incident. The day after the initial riot, activists passed out flyers influencing participant understandings and heightening the desire to participate. Media became part of the event they covered when *Village Voice* coverage fueled an additional night of rioting. The role of on-the-ground production and dissemination of meanings has, in all likelihood, grown more significant with the revolution in communication technology that has occurred in the intervening years. Research into the way new communication technologies are changing the production and preservation of collective memory would be interesting.

Commemorability is not enough to ensure commemoration. In the case of the New Year's Ball in 1965, the movement did not have the mnemonic capacity necessary to define the event as nationally significant. In contrast, by 1969 activists around the country had developed this capacity and were able to create commemorative ritual. By developing the concept of mnemonic capacity, and by highlighting its role in the production of memory, we hope to stimulate systematic research on how differential access to technologies of memory has shaped what societies remember about their pasts. For example, under slavery, African Americans in the United States were systematically denied access to technologies of memory. Recuperating African American history has gone hand-in-hand with the empowerment of African Americans. Researchers might trace the growth of African American mnemonic capacity, the production of African American collective memory, and societal responses to these efforts.

Movements often appeal to the state to participate in commemoration and to legitimize their claims about the past. Sometimes, as in the case of the American civil rights movement, states agree (Meyer 2006) and introduce movement memories into the collective memories of a society. Yet we know little about the interplay among movement, state-sponsored, and popular accounts of movements. Polletta (1998c) suggests that the relationship among these accounts may be uneasy. Furthermore, it is not only groups within societies that vary with respect to mnemonic capacity, but also whole societies. It would be interesting to examine how varying levels of state mnemonic capacity affect success in sponsoring transnational commemorative events.

States may also present obstacles to commemoration. The right to public assembly, protected in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, is a precondition for gay pride parades. We would not expect to see Stonewall commemoration in countries without protection of the right to public assembly, or where it is selectively denied to homosexuals. For example, proposed gay pride parades in 2004 and 2005 in Warsaw were banned by Lech Kaczyński, then city mayor and now Poland's president ("Polish Mayor" 2005). In Krakow, a Polish gay rights organization hosted a gay festival and a march in 2004, but only with help from international organizations (Harley 2004). Plans for a march in 2005 were cancelled after the Pope's death ("Report on Cracow" 2005). In March 2006, Warsaw police permanently closed a club friendly to homosexuals, but only after a six-day occupation of the club by patrons who refused to leave. This event has been referred to as a Polish Stonewall, suggesting both the continued resonance of the Stonewall story and vast differences in gay movement development (Ireland 2006a, b). Systematic research on the global diffusion of Stonewall commemoration and gay public protest more generally could yield interesting insights.

This case suggests that commemorative form matters. The parade as a commemorative form was appealing, and it fit the Stonewall message. Other possible forms may not have worked as well. A memorial at the Stonewall Inn would not have allowed for the participation of multiple cities, and a private commemorative ceremony would not have attracted media attention.

Had the parade occurred only once, the Stonewall story would likely not be repeated today, suggesting that the amenability of a commemorative form to institutionalization also matters. Research might profitably compare the fates of similar events commemorated in different ways, or compare multiple efforts to commemorate the same event.

Memory depends on the survival and continued relevance of commemorative vehicles. Neither the physical survival of commemorative objects nor the repetition of commemorative ritual, however, guarantees the survival of original meanings: memory is fragile. As the Stonewall riots recede into the past while gay pride celebrations flourish, there may come a time when the parades lose their connection to the commemoration of Stonewall. The vehicle may outlast the memory itself. More research could show the conditions under which commemorative objects retain, lose, and acquire meanings.

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