



# SOUNDTRACKS

## SONGS THAT DEFINED HISTORY

### “Y’all Better Quiet Down”: Black and Latinx LGBTQ+ Pioneers

#### OVERVIEW

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did Black and Latinx people in the LGBTQ+ community take initiative in the Stonewall Inn rebellions, Gay Liberation Movement, and in the preservation of LGBTQ+ history?

#### OVERVIEW

**Note to Teacher:** *The primary sources used in this lesson contain strong, derogatory, and outdated language. Teacher discretion advised. Before teaching this class, teachers might consider familiarizing themselves with current LGBTQ+ terminology, which can be found at: GLSEN Gender Terminology ([www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/Gender%20Terminology%20Guide.pdf](http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/Gender%20Terminology%20Guide.pdf)), GLAAD “Ally’s Guide to Terminology” ([www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/allys-guide-to-terminology\\_1.pdf](http://www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/allys-guide-to-terminology_1.pdf)).*



Photo: New York Public Library

On June 28th, 1969, the Stonewall Inn was raided by the New York City Police Department. Police raids were fairly common amongst venues such as the Stonewall Inn, which catered to LGBTQ+ patrons—however that summer night was different. This time, the patrons at the Stonewall Inn decided to fight back against the aggressive police officers, sparking several nights of protests. While often referred to as the Stonewall Riots, some witnesses and Stonewall veterans object to calling it a riot, like Stormé DeLarverie, who once stated, “It was a rebellion, it was an uprising, it was a civil rights disobedience—it wasn’t no damn riot.”

In the fifty years since, The Stonewall Rebellion has been considered the catalyst to the Gay Liberation Movement. The rebellion have been remembered through books, articles, interviews, television specials, and museum exhibitions. The Stonewall Inn itself was even made a National Landmark by former president Barack Obama in 2016. But in becoming an historical moment, critics have highlighted how Black and Latinx LGBTQ+ individuals—especially those who are lesbian or transgender—have all too often been erased from the story, and not included in larger discussions about the Gay Liberation movement prior to and after the Stonewall Rebellion.

Well before the Stonewall Rebellion, singer Stormé DeLarverie performed as an emcee and drag king with the traveling variety show, the Jewel Box Revue. DeLarverie, who identified as a lesbian, frequented gay spaces outside of her work with the Jewel Box Revue, one of those spaces being the Stonewall Inn. Not only was she present the night of the rebellion, but she was one of the first to fight back after being apprehended and struck by a police officer. Also present was Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, who ended up in a scuffle with a police officer who served a blow

to her head. When news of the raid traveled through the grapevine, more people headed to the Stonewall Inn, including drag queen Marsha P. Johnson with her friend Sylvia Rivera, who arrived shortly after a fire started at the Stonewall Inn.

DeLarverie, Griffin-Gacy, Johnson, and Rivera would go on after the rebellion to become leaders in providing care and support for their fellow Black and Latinx queer and trans women, who were often excluded from predominately white gay spaces.

In the decades following the Stonewall Rebellion, Discos became one of the prominent spaces for activism and liberation for the Gay Liberation Movement. In these spaces, Sylvester's 1978 hit "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)" became a kind of anthem for the LGBTQ+ community due to its identity-affirming message. Coming from an African-American family, Sylvester was known for his work as a drag queen in Los Angeles and San Francisco before becoming a Disco star. Throughout his career, he maintained his gender-bending style and his decision to live openly as a proud gay man, which solidified "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)" as an anthem of pride and defiance for the LGBTQ+ community.

In this lesson, students will investigate the work and legacies of Black and Latinx pioneers often ignored in larger discussions about LGBTQ+ history, by collaborating with other students in analyzing primary source documents. Students will also explore the ways city governments and activists are working to combat the erasure of Black and Latinx trans women and the broader whitewashing of the Gay Liberation Movement.

## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

### 1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The life and work of Black and Latinx LGBTQ+ activists that were involved in the Stonewall rebellion, including Stormé DeLarverie, Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera and Miss Major Gracy-Griffin
- The importance of Disco and Sylvester to the LGBTQ+ community
- The concept of "whitewashing," and how it excludes marginalized voices from history
- Initiatives and actions commemorating the legacies and work of early LGBTQ+ pioneers, especially Black and Latinx trans women

### 2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE

- Students will be able to explore the legacies, work, and struggles of Black and Latinx LGBTQ+ pioneers of the Stonewall Rebellion and the Gay Liberation Movement.

## ACTIVITIES

### MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Tell students that in June 2019, the government of New York City held a press conference to announce plans to build a monument dedicated to trans activists Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera. The monument will be erected near the famous Stonewall Inn, which many consider to be the birthplace of the Gay Liberation Movement. Display **Image 1, Chirlane McCray Quote**, and explain to students that this was a quote by the First Lady to New York City, Chirlane McCray, who spoke at the press conference. Ask students:
  - Based on the quote above, why might New York City be building a monument to Silvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson?
  - Why are monuments important? What do they represent?
  - McCray mentions that the monuments counters “whitewashing” of history. What does she mean by this? What is at risk when history is whitewashed?
  - Can you think of another moment, movement, event, topic, space, or otherwise that has been “whitewashed”? How does this particular form of whitewashing exclude other perspectives?
  - How might the issue of same-sex marriage arrived before the Supreme Court? Generally, how does a case come before the Supreme Court?

### PROCEDURE:

1. Play **Clip 1, The Stonewall Riots**. Ask students:
  - What happened at Stonewall?
  - What is the significance of the Stonewall Rebellion? How is it presented in the clip?
  - Do you think this clip relates to McCray’s argument that the remembering of the Stonewall Rebellion has been “whitewashed”? Why or why not?
2. Tell students that they will be learning about some of the pioneers who are often neglected in the history of the Stonewall Rebellion and the Gay Liberation Movement. Pass out to each student **Handout 1 - Stonewall Pioneers**.
3. Separate the students into groups, and hand out to each group one of the document sets below:
  - **Document Set: Stormé DeLarverie**
  - **Document Set: Marsha P. Johnson**
  - **Document Set: Sylvia Rivera**
  - **Document Set: Miss Major Griffin-Gracy**
4. Ask students to go over the document sets as a group, and be prepared to present what they learn to the rest of the class. Then ask each group to share a summary of the documents they read. Students not presenting or sharing their findings to the class should take notes for the figures they did not read about on Handout 1.

5. Play **Clip 2, "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)"**.

Ask students:

- What are the origins of discos? What kind of spaces did disco dancing occur in according to the clip?
- For the LGBTQ+ community, what might have been the message of Sylvester's chorus, "You make me feel mighty real?"
- In the clip, David Mixner describes Sylvester as a symbol of "defiance." What about Sylvester and his music might support this statement? What might Sylvester be defiant against?

- In his book, *The Fabulous Sylvester*, author Joshua Gamson mentions that "disco moved gayness, camp, and androgyny even closer to the American mainstream" How might have disco becoming mainstream affected the LGBTQ+ community at the time?

6. Pass out to students **Handout 2 - Sylvester Biography**. Read the handout out loud, and have students take notes on Handout 1 in the appropriate column.

## SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Show **Image 1, Statement on Happy Birthday Marsha!** Tell students that the text displayed is a statement by directors Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel on their short film *Happy Birthday Marsha!*, which depicts the life of trans activist Marsha P. Johnson in the hours prior to the Stonewall Rebellion. Have students read the statement silently or out loud as a class. Then ask:

- What was Tourmaline and Wortzel's motivation to make *Happy Birthday Marsha!*?
- According to their statement, why is it important to revisit stories from the past?
- How does work like *Happy Birthday Marsha!* combat erasure?
- How did the work of activists like Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, Stormé DeLarverie, and Miss Major Griffin-Gracy pave the way for others? (*Encourage students to draw upon the notes they made on Handout 1.*)

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

1. Read Tourmaline's Op-ed for *Vogue* magazine, "Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson's Fight to Free Incarcerated Trans Women of Color Is Far From Over" ([www.vogue.com/article/tourmaline-trans-day-of-action-op-ed](http://www.vogue.com/article/tourmaline-trans-day-of-action-op-ed).) Write a summary that includes additional research on one of the organizations Tourmaline lists in the op-ed.
2. There has been criticism of the inclusion of police officers and corporate businesses at Pride who use rainbows and LGBTQ+ people in their marketing only for the month of June. On June 30, 2019, the Queer Liberation March, an alternative march to World Pride, was held to honor the original principles and efforts of early LGBTQ+ organizers and activists. Read the Reclaim Pride Coalition's "Why We March" ([reclaimpridenyc.org/why-we-march](http://reclaimpridenyc.org/why-we-march)) and their "History Statement" ([reclaimpridenyc.org/history-statement](http://reclaimpridenyc.org/history-statement)). Write a paper exploring the need for an

alternative march and comparing the two events. Students may also incorporate other articles, such as Diana Tourjée's op-ed "Pride Has Betrayed Us" ([www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/neaayz/pride-history-rainbow-capitalism-reclaim](http://www.vice.com/en_us/article/neaayz/pride-history-rainbow-capitalism-reclaim)) or social media content such as tweets or Instagram posts relating to the topic.

3. Have students do research on a person from a marginalized community that has been historically ignored. Then, design a monument that represents that person's contributions and legacy.
4. Watch "Happy Birthday Marsha!" by Tourmaline and Sasha Wortzel. Write a summary of the short film, incorporating additional research into the life and work of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera
5. Watch the 10 minute short about Miss Major Griffin-Gracy from *Vice* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h20CdEnFTUI>). Write a one page summary or response.
6. Research other Transgender, Gender Nonconforming (GNC), or Non-Binary activists or public figures of color. Write a paper on their work, contributions, and causes they advocate for. Some activists, public figures, etc. such as:
  - Victoria Cruz
  - Janet Mock
  - Chella Man
  - Alok Vaid-Menon
  - Raquel Willis
  - Jennicet Guterrez
  - Phillipe Cunnigham
  - Andrea Jenkins
  - Aaron Phillip
  - Ceilia Chung



## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading (K-12)*

Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Craft and Structure 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 10: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing (K-12)*

Text Types and Purposes 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Text Types and Purposes 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Production and Distribution of Writing 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge 7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge 8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge 9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.



### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language (K-12)*

Language 1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Language 2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Language 3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in a word meaning.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening (K-12)*

Comprehension & Collaboration 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Comprehension & Collaboration 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Comprehension & Collaboration 3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Presentation of Knowledge 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

## **NATIONAL CURRICULUM STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)**

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 3: People, Place, and Environments

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions



Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION – NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSIC EDUCATION (NAFME)**

### *Core Music Standard: Responding*

Interpret: Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators' and/or performers' expressive intent.

Evaluate: Support evaluations of musical works and performances based on analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.

### *Core Music Standard: Connecting*

Connecting 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.





## RESOURCES

### VIDEO RESOURCES

- *CNN Soundtracks* - The Stonewall Riots
- *CNN Soundtracks* - "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)"

### HANDOUTS

- Handout 1 - Stonewall Pioneers
- Handout 2 - Sylvester Biography
- Document Set: Marsha P. Johnson
- Document Set: Miss Major Griffin-Gracy
- Document Set: Stormé DeLarverie
- Document Set: Sylvia Rivera