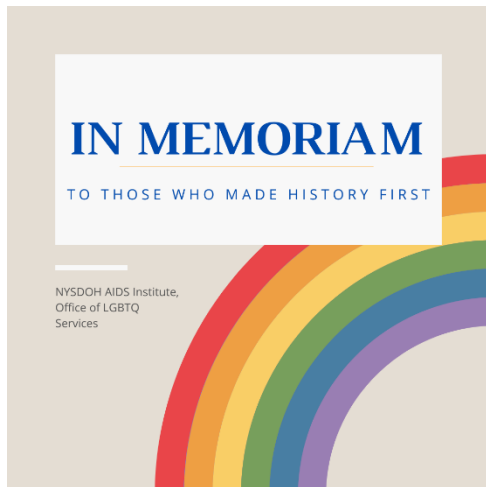


Gone, but not forgotten.



Many voices have led the LGBTQ rights movement here in New York and across the nation. However, as time passes, some of their stories may be lost in history. As a tribute to those who came before us igniting the fight for equality and civil recognition, we share the stories of five remarkable LGBTQ New Yorkers: Vito Russo, Brenda Howard, Craig Rodwell, Stormé DeLavarie, and Carmen Vázquez.

Equality is a one-way road, and we can only keep moving forward if we acknowledge those who made history first.

Warning: Historical quotes may evoke emotions; they are intended for context and historical accuracy.

Vito Russo grew up in East Harlem and was involved in every key moment of the first 25 years of the modern LGBTQ movement. Graduating from NYU in June 1968, he plunged straight into the Stonewall rebellion the next year, was active in the Gay Activists Alliance, participated in the 1970 Christopher Street Liberation Day March, and was instrumental in the founding of both ACT UP and GLAAD. He was also the author of *The Celluloid Closet*, the landmark appraisal of lesbian and gay representation in film. A witty, thoughtful man, Vito delivered an insightful and impassioned speech titled “Why We Fight” at an ACT UP demonstration in Albany in May of 1988, two years before his death. Thirty two years later, it is still a stirring work and can be read here:

<https://actupny.org/documents/whfight.html>

Brenda Howard grew up on Long Island and was an advocate for bisexual people at a time when the movement was focused on gay men and lesbians. She was a chair of the Gay Activists Alliance and spearheaded the 1970 Christopher Street Liberation Day March on the last Sunday in June. The march inspired communities in other cities to mount their own marches the following June, dubbing them Gay Pride Parades. Today annual Pride events happen in every part of the world; in June 2018, even Antarctica had its first Pride event! Brenda, who died in 2005, founded the New York Area Bisexual Network and was active with ACT UP, but is remembered as “The Mother of Pride.”

Craig Rodwell grew up in Chicago but came to New York City in 1958 to attend the School of American Ballet. While studying, he became active with The Mattachine Society, where he and Frank Kameny planned the Annual Reminders, gay and lesbian protests every Independence Day in front of Independence Hall in Philadelphia. The first Annual Reminder was July 1965; the last one was July 1969, less than a week after the Stonewall Rebellion. Craig participated in pre-Stonewall Mattachine actions at the Military Recruiting Station in Times Square in 1964 to protest gay exclusion, and at the United Nations to protest Cuban internment of gays in work camps intended to make them “real men.” In 1967, he opened the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop, which served as a de facto early community center. When the Stonewall Rebellion erupted, Craig was there, prepared from his years of organizing and protesting, and led the crowd in chants of “Gay Power!” In 1993, Craig Rodwell sold his landmark bookstore shortly before he died of stomach cancer at the age of 52. In 2009, the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookstore closed its doors for the final time.

Stormé DeLaverie was the only female member of the troupe of gender illusionists that toured the country performing in the Jewel Box Review. In years when it was a crime to wear clothes not corresponding to one's assigned gender, the Jewel Box Review attracted big crowds in supper clubs and theaters from Los Angeles to Albany. The show featured up to two dozen glamorous female impersonators with Stormé playing the male emcee. In June of 1969, she was working the door at Henrietta Hudson, a lesbian bar a few blocks from the Stonewall Inn. On the night of June 27, she came upon three police officers beating a patron of the Stonewall. When Stormé rushed in to help the young man, one of the officers shoved her, shouting "move faggot!" In response, Stormé hauled off and slugged the cop in the jaw, knocking him to the ground. Though the details of the story may be lost in the fog of history, she is widely credited with landing the first punch of the Stonewall Rebellion. Stormé DeLaverie's legendary status was affirmed upon her death at the age of 93 in 2014, when her funeral services were attended by several hundred admirers.

Carmen Vázquez was born in Puerto Rico, grew up in Harlem, came of age in San Francisco, and died in Brooklyn on January 27, 2021, leaving a remarkable legacy. In San Francisco, she was the Founding Director of The Women's Building, Founding Director of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, and Coordinator of Lesbian and Gay Health Services for the San Francisco Department of Public Health. Back in New York City, she was Director of Public Policy for the LGBT Community Center, Deputy Director for Empire State Pride Agenda, and the first Coordinator of the LGBT Health and Human Services Unit of the AIDS Institute. And that was just her paid work! She also served on the boards of directors of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, the Funding Exchange's OUT Fund, and the Woodhull Freedom Foundation. Carmen was also a gifted speaker who addressed countless gatherings in far-flung places as well as an incisive writer whose essays were published in books, magazines, professional journals, and digital platforms. Carmen Vázquez did it all with a relentless focus on the intersectionality of human struggles for justice and equity. She was a proud "lesbian, feminist, socialist, Butch Boricua." Her feisty star now shines on us all.