

SYLVIA RIVERA

7/2/1951 – 2/19/2002

Gay civil rights pioneer Sylvia Rivera was one of the instigators of the Stonewall uprising, an event that helped launch the modern gay rights movement.

Sylvia Rivera, then a 17-year-old drag queen, was among the crowd that gathered outside the Stonewall Inn the night of June 27, 1969, when the New York police raided the popular Greenwich Village gay bar. Rivera reportedly shouted, "I'm not missing a minute of this, it's the revolution!" As the police escorted patrons from the bar, Rivera was one of the first bystanders to throw a bottle.

After Stonewall, Rivera joined the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) and worked energetically on its campaign to pass the New York City Gay Rights Bill. She was famously arrested for climbing the walls of City Hall in a dress and high heels to crash a closed-door meeting on the bill. In time, the GAA eliminated drag and transvestite concerns from their agenda as they sought to broaden their political base. Years later, Rivera told an interviewer, "When things started getting more mainstream, it was like, 'We don't need you no more.'" She added, "Hell hath no fury like a drag queen scorned."

Born Ray Rivera Mendosa, Sylvia Rivera was a persistent and vocal advocate for transgender rights. Her activist zeal was fueled by her own struggles to find food, shelter and safety in the urban streets from the time she left home at age 10. In 1970, Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson co-founded STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) to help homeless youth.

The Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP), an organization dedicated to ending poverty and gender identity discrimination, carries on Rivera's work on behalf of marginalized people.

In 2005, a street in Greenwich Village near the Stonewall Inn was renamed in Sylvia Rivera's honor.



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