June 7, 2017

Not just a parade: a brief history of LGBT Pride Month

Montana Hotard
montanahotard@aol.com

In celebration of LGBTQ+ Pride month, many cities across the country hold an annual Pride Festival or the better known Pride Parade. The origins of holding a vibrant, rainbow-themed march through city streets every June are not as well known, though. Many people, even members of the LGBTQIA+ community, do not know that transgender women of color are to thank for these parades, festivals and, in particular, the LGBTQ+ rights movement as a whole.

In the 1970s, New York was a place of tension for LGBTQ+ people. Discrimination by police officers was a common fact of life for most in the LGBTQIA+ community. “Gay” and “lesbian” clubs were raided frequently, and patrons were often abused and arrested. Club and bar owners of these establishments were forced to pay bribes to keep their businesses open and safe, and even then were still treated unfairly and raided without cause.

This type of mistreatment and discrimination led to what is known as the Stonewall Riots. Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera were two of the leading protesters in these riots. These two transgender women of color, who were some of the powerhouses behind the initial fighting during the first night of the riots, led the protests in the days following. Rivera has been cited as one of the initial bystanders outside of the Stonewall Inn to instigate the throwing of bottles and eventually larger debris at the police and the buildings police had barricaded themselves in.

Pride is a time to celebrate the progress the U.S. has made toward the rights and improvement of the overall treatment of the LGBTQIA+ community. It is also a time to commemorate and show respect for the ones who took risks and fought to get us to where we are today. Knowing the history, and the people, who laid out the...
foundation for LGBTQIA+ rights is just as important as attending your local Pride Fest or Pride Parade. It is also an important time to learn and remember that Pride Month is about more than those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. It is for people who are born intersex. People who are asexual, demisexual, graysexual, questioning, polysexual, hypersexual, pansexual, gynesexual or androsexual. People who identify as genderfluid, genderneutral, bi-gendered, two-spirited, three-spirited, four-spirited or agender. People who are polyamorous, bi-romantic, panromantic or homoromantic. It is to recognize that the “+” part of LGBTQIA+ are important, that they matter and that they deserve to be just as proud of themselves as the rest of the community, and that the community is ever expanding, but that is not an excuse to ignore it.

Please enjoy Pride Month responsibly and remember that the best way to show your support is to be educated, and to speak up when possible against discrimination.