INTRODUCTION

The Stonewall Riots of 1969, when thousands of people protested in the streets in response to a police raid on a Greenwich Village gay bar, have long been identified as the most important event in U.S. lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) history. Whether they are understood as the starting point or turning point in the history of LGBTQ activism, the riots are justifiably viewed as a key moment in the mobilization of one of the most transformative social movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. They also have become an iconic symbol of resistance to oppression and an inspirational example of empowerment for the dispossessed. Each year, millions of people around the world participate in pride parades and protests that commemorate the rebellion on or near its anniversary. In a distinctly memorable invocation that linked the uprising to other aspirational struggles for social justice, U.S. President Barack Obama declared in his 2013 inaugural address: “We, the people, declare today that the most evident of truths—that all of us are created equal—is the star that guides us still, just as it guided our forebears through Seneca Falls, and Selma, and Stonewall.”

Despite the widely recognized significance of the riots, most people know little or nothing about what happened at the Stonewall Inn in 1969. Nor do they know much about the earlier developments that contributed to the eruption of protests that summer, the changes experienced by the movement in the weeks and months that followed, and the ways in which the rebellion influenced the city, country, and world. In high school, college, and university classrooms, many teachers address the uprising, but they do so without a substantial collection of primary sources that can encourage students to explore the uprising for themselves. There are scholarly works, museum exhibits, public history websites, and oral history projects that address the rebellion, but none offers the breadth and depth of the documentary materials collected in this volume. By providing an introductory essay, transcripts of two hundred primary sources, and a selection of maps and photographs, _The Stonewall Riots: A Documentary History_ hopes to promote new interpretations, innovative analyses, and original explorations by everyone who examines these materials.

WHAT HAPPENED?

So what exactly happened during the Stonewall Riots? This is an impossible question to answer—we can never re-create or revisit the past. Even if we could travel back in time and transport ourselves to the Stonewall Inn in the
early morning hours of 28 June 1969, our experiences and accounts would likely differ based on our cultural identities (including our age, class, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, nationality, race, religion, and sexual orientation), social roles (as police officers, bar owners, club managers, bartenders, bouncers, patrons, neighbors, tourists, or passersby), communication networks, and physical absence or presence over the next several days. Our experiences and accounts would also be influenced by our abilities and disabilities (related, for example, to health, language, mobility, sight, and hearing); our consumption of food, water, alcohol, and drugs; and countless other factors. In addition, our narratives would vary if we were asked in the midst of the uprising, the days and weeks that followed, or the months and years that came later.

None of this means that we cannot interpret and analyze the riots. It simply means that we should have a little humility about making definitive pronouncements about what happened. It also means that we should try to remember that every account of the rebellion—whether produced at the time or later—is just that: an account. A single person’s narrative does not and cannot provide us with the authoritative truth of what happened. But if we put together a collection of documents and sources, assess their plausibility and credibility, consider their standpoints and perspectives, and evaluate their value and meaning, we can develop compelling interpretations and persuasive analyses. Borrowing from the language of the courts, we can reach some conclusions that are beyond a reasonable doubt, develop other interpretations that are consistent with the preponderance of evidence, and make other meaningful comments based on standards of proof that fall short of what might be required in a court of law.

The Stonewall Inn, located at 51–53 Christopher Street, occupied two adjacent buildings constructed in the 1840s to serve as horse stables. In 1914, no. 53 was converted for use as a bakery on the first floor and an apartment on the second. In 1930, the two buildings were combined, allowing for expansion of the commercial and residential spaces. Four years later, the Stonewall Inn (also known as Bonnie’s Stonewall Inn), which had been operating as a speakeasy at 91 Seventh Avenue South since 1930, moved into the commercial space, where it functioned as a bar and restaurant. In 1965, real estate investor Joel Weiser purchased 51–53 Christopher Street along with several nearby properties. The original Stonewall Inn Restaurant closed shortly thereafter, following a fire that damaged the business, but in 1966 four men with organized crime affiliations, at least one of whom was gay, decided to open a gay bar at the site.

When the new Stonewall Inn opened in 1967, it did so as a bottle club. Officially, bottle clubs admitted only members and their guests; members were expected to bring their own bottles of alcohol, which would be served by waiters. In reality, this was a mechanism commonly used by organized crime to circumvent liquor laws. On most nights, the Stonewall’s doorman admitted most people who wanted to enter as long as they were perceived to be gay, trans, gender-queer, and/or interested in same-sex sex; admission was $1.00
on weekdays and $3.00 on weekends. Some patrons complained about high prices, watered-down drinks, dirty glasses, and unclean facilities, but the bar’s relatively large size, eclectic mix of patrons, and reputation for dancing, drugs, camping, cruising, and go-go boys made it a popular destination. Many accounts suggest that the patrons were diverse in terms of class and race. Most were probably white; a significant number were African American and Puerto Rican. Most were probably middle or working class; some were poor and/or homeless. The large majority identified as men, a small number as women. Many likely saw themselves as gay, bisexual, or homosexual; a small minority probably viewed themselves as lesbian; others may have enjoyed same-sex sex without claiming a distinct sexual identity; some probably identified as straight or heterosexual. There was a significant and visible presence of gender-queer people, some of whom identified as butches, drags, queens, transsexuals, or transvestites. Some were hustlers or prostitutes. Most patrons were in their teens, twenties, or thirties.

The pivotal raid on the Stonewall (the second in one week) began in the early morning hours of Saturday, 28 June. Some accounts suggest that the police targeted the bar because it was unlicensed, unsanitary, and suspected of violating liquor laws. Others claim that the main cause was a breakdown in the system whereby the owners paid off the police (approximately $1,200 per month) to minimize raids and closures. Still others point to official or unofficial investigations into police corruption, male prostitution, and blackmailing rings that targeted men who had sex with men. There was also the upcoming mayoral election; many public officials believed that antigay crackdowns were politically advantageous because it made them appear morally virtuous and tough on crime.

Armed with a warrant authorizing them to search the Stonewall for evidence of illegal alcohol sales, the police began their operation. Shortly after midnight, four undercover police officers—two men and two women—and an inspector from the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs entered the bar to observe the scene and gather evidence. A short while later, the two undercover policemen exited the bar and met up with four officers waiting nearby. At approximately 1:20 a.m., five of the six policemen outside the bar entered the building, announced their presence, and demanded to see identification cards. Several sources indicate that there were approximately two hundred people in the bar when the raid began. The police detained several bar employees, patrons without identification, butches, transvestites, and people who talked back or fought back; they told everyone else to leave. As the latter exited the bar, they joined others to form an angry and agitated crowd on the nearby streets and sidewalks.

When the police emerged from the bar with several patrons and employees in their custody, the multiracial crowd began to erupt. According to some accounts, a lesbian was the first to fight back; multiple accounts emphasize the distinctively aggressive defiance of trans people and street youth. Soon the
Figure I.1. President Barack Obama designated the Stonewall National Monument in 2016. Credit: National Park Service.
crowd, which included straight allies, was shouting at the police and throwing coins at the building. As the police, now joined by other officers from their precincts, attacked the protesters and the protesters fought back, several prisoners were liberated or liberated themselves from the police wagon. The officer in charge then ordered the wagon to leave with those who had been taken into custody, which it did, but the crowd forced the remaining police to retreat into the bar. The crowd subsequently shattered some of the Stonewall’s windows; attacked the building with bricks, stones, cans, and bottles; tried to break down the front door with an uprooted parking meter; and attempted to light the bar on fire. Eventually police reinforcements arrived and members of the Tactical Patrol Force, specialists in riot control, tried to clear the streets. Over the next several hours, thousands of people rioted in the streets with campy courage and fierce fury. Thousands rioted again on Saturday night and Sunday morning. The situation calmed down on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday nights, but a third night of major protests took place on Wednesday.

This is just a broad overview; after all, the point of this book is to encourage readers to develop their own interpretations. Overall, the preponderance of evidence indicates that approximately thirteen people (including several bar employees) were arrested on the first night; three or four on the second; and five on the third. Many more were detained. Police records from the first night reference six of the people who were arrested. Judging by the names, one was a woman and five were men; one was folk singer Dave Van Ronk (believed to be straight and white); one was Raymond Castro, who identified as Puerto Rican and gay. Several police officers and a larger number of protesters were injured. One protester reportedly lost two fingers when his hand was slammed in a car door; another required ten stitches from injuries sustained when he was clubbed in the knees; many more were battered and bloodied by police violence. One of the officers was hit in the eye with flying glass; another fell and broke his wrist; many more suffered bruised egos. As for the Stonewall Inn, the exterior of the building and the interior contents suffered extensive damage; the bar closed in October 1969. By this time, the riots had inspired the formation of the Gay Liberation Front and Queens Liberation Front in New York, the transformation of the LGBT movement, and the mobilization of thousands of new activists. Over the next several decades, as the rebellion was commemorated in pride protests and parades in and beyond New York, the building where the uprising began was used for various commercial purposes. In 2016, President Obama officially designated the Stonewall National Monument at the site of the Stonewall Inn.4

HISTORICAL TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

Keeping in mind that there is always more to the story, what sources have historians used when constructing their accounts of the Stonewall Riots? In history classrooms, we typically distinguish between primary and secondary
sources. The former consist of materials from the historical moment. The latter, produced later, are materials about the historical moment, including studies by academic and nonacademic historians. This introduction is a secondary source; the documents that follow are primary. To be more precise, much of this chapter is a specific type of secondary source, a work of historiography, meaning that it provides an overview of different historical interpretations (a history of history). There are also sources that do not fit neatly into these categories. Depending on how they are used, for example, oral histories can be treated as primary or secondary sources; the same is true of autobiographies, memoirs, and works of popular memory, including historical landmarks, public monuments, and other types of creative work such as films and novels.


Secondary sources reveal what others have concluded based on their primary research. They also help us see that interpretations change over time and are influenced by the historical moments in which they are produced. If we want to develop our own interpretations, however, it is vital that we do primary research. For the Stonewall Riots, historians generally rely on six types of primary sources. Perhaps the most widely used are media accounts, including coverage in the mainstream media (such as the *New York Times*), the alternative press (such as the *Village Voice*), and LGBT periodicals (such as the *Matta-chine Society of New York Newsletter*). Second, there are ephemeral materials, including fliers, pamphlets, posters, and graffiti. Third, there are police reports, which historians Michael Scherker, Jonathan Ned Katz, and David Carter acquired through public records requests.6 Fourth, there are gay bar guides and other sources that reference the Stonewall Inn. Fifth, there are photographs taken on the streets of Greenwich Village before, during, and after the uprising. Sixth, there are oral histories, autobiographical works, and other oral, written, and audiovisual accounts by participants and observers.7

Constructing a clear and concise account of what happened during the Stonewall Riots is possible using these and other primary sources, but doing so does not provide a rich and revealing discussion of why the riots occurred when and where they did, what earlier developments influenced and shaped the rebellion, and what were the later effects and results of the uprising. In considering these questions, historians have to make choices about which contexts
to emphasize and how to move back and forth between texts and contexts. The stories we tell will vary depending on which of the following (or other) contexts we emphasize:

- Greenwich Village, New York City, and other U.S. cities
- Law enforcement, organized crime, and urban policing
- Gender and sexuality (normative and nonnormative)
- Anti-LGBT discrimination, prejudice, oppression, and violence
- LGBT bars, businesses, cultures, and communities
- LGBT activism, politics, protest, and resistance
- Urban riots, social movements, and political activism, including African American, feminist, antiwar, student, and countercultural activism
- Local, state, and national political developments, electoral politics, political parties, and political cultures
- Transnational developments, influences, and inspirations

Our stories will also vary based on whether we prioritize lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer history (and how we conceptualize each of these); whether we emphasize class, race, (dis)ability, and other factors that intersect with gender and sexuality (and how we define each of these); and whether we focus on the immediate context (the summer of 1969), the medium term (the years immediately preceding and following the riots), the longer term (the decades surrounding the uprising), or the longest term (from the beginning of time to the present).

INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORKS: INFLUENCES AND INSPIRATIONS

What best explains why the Stonewall Riots happened when and where they did? Some of the obvious factors should not be overlooked. LGBT people were structurally and systematically oppressed in American society, commonly treated as criminals by law, sinners by religion, diseased by science, defective by business, deviant by popular culture, and faulty by family and friends. Police officers routinely engaged in acts of anti-LGBT hate, harassment, discrimination, and disrespect, especially against people of color, immigrants, poor people, sex workers, and gender-queers. Police raids on gay bars, many owned, operated, and “protected” by organized crime, were common. Bars were especially vulnerable when they did not pay off the police and when politicians wanted to present themselves as paragons of virtue, opponents of vice, and proponents of law and order. New York City was home to the largest LGBT communities in the United States and an even larger world of queer desires and acts. Greenwich Village, longtime hotbed of cultural bohemianism and political radicalism, was a center of LGBT life. It is thus not surprising that the rebellion occurred in the context of a police raid on a Greenwich Village gay bar. But why did the uprising begin in June 1969 rather than earlier or later? And why did the patrons and passersby riot rather than respond in other ways?
One of the most popular interpretations—often criticized as a myth by historians—is that the rebellion was a spontaneous eruption of anger and an unprecedented explosion of resistance. Furious that the police were yet again raiding a popular gay club and targeting the most vulnerable members of their communities, the Stonewall’s patrons and their allies on the streets fought back and started a revolution. Those who claim that the gay movement began at Stonewall—an assertion made by gay liberationists in the aftermath of the riots, repeated subsequently during pride marches, and now invoked commonly in the mainstream media—typically view the rebellion as unprecedented. They sometimes go so far as to claim that the riots were the first time that LGBT people fought back against oppression. From this perspective, the dark and dreary world of homosexuality in the pre-Stonewall era suddenly disappeared in June 1969 and was replaced by the light and bright universe of gay liberation. A campy version of this interpretation places emphasis on the fact that the funeral of Judy Garland—the actress and singer whose triumphs and tragedies had been followed by many LGBT fans and whose rendition of “Somewhere over the Rainbow” had inspired queer hopes for better futures—took place just hours before the riots began and contributed to their emotional intensity.

The notion that the Stonewall Riots were the first time that LGBT people fought back had little support from older movement veterans in the rebellion’s aftermath. Longtime activists Dick Leitsch, Jim Kepner, and Randy Wicker, for example, all rejected this idea in articles they published in 1969–73, with Wicker doing so in an article titled “The Stonewall Myth: Lies about Gay Liberation.” The notion that the LGBT movement began at Stonewall (or the slightly modified claim that the “modern” movement began there) also has had little support among historians. Studies of pre-Stonewall history have demonstrated convincingly that at the time of the riots there were long traditions of LGBT resistance and protest and that these traditions influenced both the rebellion and the mass mobilization that followed. It may have served the interests of Stonewall and post-Stonewall radicals to present themselves as making a revolutionary break with the past, but historians typically find both continuity and discontinuity when studying revolutions—they often see signs of change in the periods leading up to revolutions and evidence of the limits of change in postrevolutionary eras. This is what they have found when examining the Stonewall Riots, which has led to the development of alternative frameworks for thinking about why the uprising occurred when and where it did.

One of the most influential of these frameworks argues that the uprising was the culmination of two decades of organized LGBT movement activism in the 1950s and 1960s. This interpretation was first put forward by movement veterans in Stonewall’s aftermath, but it was developed more fully by historian John D’Emilio in his 1983 book *Sexual Politics.* According to D’Emilio, developments in the 1940s and 1950s—principally national mobilization during World War II and political repression during the McCarthy era—led to the emergence of an organized “homophile” movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Founded by
Los Angeles leftists in 1950–51, the Mattachine Society was soon joined by ONE, Incorporated, in Los Angeles (founded in 1952), the Daughters of Bilitis in San Francisco (founded in 1955), and other homophile groups elsewhere. These organizations lobbied and litigated for reform, supported research and education, and achieved important successes in the pre-Stonewall era, including a 1958 U.S. Supreme Court victory that established the constitutional rights of these groups to publish their periodicals. While they sometimes criticized gay bars and presented themselves as respectable alternatives, homophile groups also published informative bar guides, challenged discriminatory police raids, rejected unfair liquor control practices, provided valuable legal advice, and supported courageous litigation by bar patrons, workers, and owners. More generally, they laid the foundations for the riots by changing the consciousness of the community and country, challenging the gender and sexual oppression of U.S. society, and promoting the notion that LGBT people were entitled to freedom, equality, and justice.

Many who see the riots as the culmination of two decades of LGBT political organizing place special emphasis on the movement’s increased militancy and radicalism in the second half of the 1960s (before Stonewall). Some accounts of homophile activism skip over this period, focusing instead on the movement’s leftist origins in the early 1950s and its retreat to respectability a few years later. These narratives, which typically describe the pre-Stonewall movement as small and accommodationist, miss the fact that LGBT activism changed significantly in the mid-1960s. While the Daughters of Bilitis continued to be the country’s leading lesbian organization and the Erickson Educational Foundation (founded in 1964) emerged as a key supporter of transsexual and transgender empowerment, the Mattachine Society dissolved its national structure in 1961 and stopped publishing its magazine in 1967. By the mid-1960s, much of the movement’s vanguard consisted of autonomous local groups, not local chapters of national organizations. These included the Mattachine Societies of New York and Washington, D.C.; Mattachine Midwest in Chicago; the Janus Society, Homosexual Law Reform Society, and Homophile Action League in Philadelphia; Personal Rights in Defense and Education (PRIDE) in Los Angeles; and the Society for Individual Rights (SIR), Vanguard, and Committee for Homosexual Freedom (CHF) in San Francisco. In fact, CHF leaders claimed in the months following the Stonewall Riots that their Bay Area protests in the spring of 1969—against businesses that had fired known or suspected homosexuals and against police who had shot and killed a man accused of soliciting sex from an undercover officer—inspired the uprising in New York. They asserted then and continued to assert for decades that their demonstrations, rather than the Stonewall Riots, launched the new gay liberation movement.11

More generally, the radicalizing local LGBT groups of 1965–69—more assertive about LGBT rights and freedoms, more oriented to direct action and sexual liberation, and more supportive of “gay power” and the “gay revolution”—were responsible for a wave of more than thirty pre-Stonewall
demonstrations, sit-ins, and riots. These included protests at the United Nations in New York, Independence Hall in Philadelphia, and the White House, Pentagon, and Civil Service Commission in Washington, D.C.; a sit-in at Dewey’s restaurant in Philadelphia; two major demonstrations against police raids on Los Angeles gay bars (one with more than four hundred participants); and a riot at Compton’s Cafeteria in San Francisco. The scale of these (measured by the number of participants) was much smaller than the Stonewall Riots; they did not receive extensive national publicity in the mainstream press; and they did not lead to mass mobilization. Still, the wave of LGBT protests from 1965 to 1969 makes it clear that the riots were not unprecedented.

There are compelling reasons to accept this interpretive framework and see the Stonewall Riots as the culmination of two decades of LGBT movement activism. Critics of this framework, however, argue that the pre-Stonewall homophiles of the 1950s and 1960s had limited success in attracting large numbers of participants, garnering significant public attention, and achieving major social reforms. They point out that much of the homophile movement—even in the second half of the 1960s—was ambivalent about gay bars and critical of disreputable clubs like the Stonewall. Most homophile activists supported the constitutional rights of gay people to gather in bars and were critical of discriminatory police raids and liquor control practices, but many embraced the politics of respectability. This led them to criticize gender and sexual practices that they commonly associated with gay bars, including casual sex, sexual promiscuity, sex work, public sex, erotic expression, and gender transgression.

Critics of this framework also point out that the demographic characteristics of homophile activists were quite different from those of the Stonewall rioters—the former were older, whiter, more middle class, less politically radical, less countercultural, and less gender-transgressive. In addition, while it is true that the LGBT movement radicalized in the years leading up to the rebellion, few homophile activists believed that rioting was an effective or desirable form of protest. These points can easily be overstated—countless homophiles were strong defenders of gay bars, many were sexual and gender liberationists, and some were demographically similar to the Stonewall protesters. Comparative analyses of pre-Stonewall homophiles and Stonewall rioters nevertheless suggest that there are good reasons to question the notion that the Stonewall uprising is best understood as the culmination of LGBT movement activism in the 1950s and 1960s.

These limitations have led to the development of a third influential framework. Instead of seeing the rebellion as the product of LGBT political organizing in the 1950s and 1960s, some historians argue that the riots are best understood as the outgrowth of a much longer tradition of bar-based resistance practices. Perhaps the most influential historical studies of LGBT bar cultures are Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis’s 1993 book *Boots of Leather*, which explores lesbian bars in Buffalo from the 1930s to the 1960s, and George Chauncey’s 1994 book *Gay New York*, which addresses gay bars
from the 1890s to the 1930s. These works and others that consider different locations show that bar owners, managers, workers, and patrons had developed multiple ways of responding to anti-LGBT policing in the decades leading up to the riots.12

Bar-based resistance practices had a long history in the United States, where national alcohol prohibition from 1920 to 1933 had been replaced by new forms of local, state, and federal liquor regulation. In the context of multiple legal and extralegal obstacles, gay bar owners and managers, for example, made careful choices about where to locate their establishments, blocked or darkened their windows to minimize public scrutiny, and restricted entry and access through a variety of mechanisms. They paid off the police, collaborated with organized crime, and developed early warning systems to alert their patrons in times of trouble. They strategically permitted and policed transgressive sexual expression, including touching, kissing, and dancing, and subversive gender expression, including drag performances and transgender clothing. They made deliberate choices about segregation and integration based on race, class, and gender. And they challenged the actions of local and state authorities in court, winning partial victories, for example, in a series of California gay bar cases in the 1950s.13 As for patrons, some argue that the very act of going to a gay bar in these circumstances was a form of resistance. Many resisted in other ways—by escaping, running, and hiding during raids, defending themselves and criticizing the police, coming together to provide mutual assistance and support, challenging the charges they faced in court, and fighting back with words and other weapons. From this perspective, the Stonewall Riots are best understood as the culmination of decades of resistance practices that LGBT people had developed in response to police repression.

Further support for this framework comes from studies that emphasize the importance of consumer culture in general and gay consumer culture in particular during this era. Civil rights historians have long noted that the sit-in movement of the 1960s started as an effort by African American youth to gain access to a Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. Other protests by racial and ethnic minorities focused on their exclusion from, segregated access to, and discriminatory treatment by other consumer-oriented businesses, including bars, restaurants, movie theaters, amusement parks, and department stores. The United States had become, in the words of historian Lizabeth Cohen, “a consumers’ republic,” and historian David Johnson’s recent book Buying Gay demonstrates that gay Americans increasingly demanded the same rights to consume that others took for granted or fought to exercise. In this context, we should not be surprised that the Stonewall’s patrons, lubricated by alcohol and drugs, erupted when the police interfered with their rights to consume.14

There is much to recommend the notion that the Stonewall Riots were the outgrowth of bar- and consumer-based resistance practices that had developed over decades. This framework, however, does not explain the unprecedented
scale, intensity, and militancy of the response to the police raid on the Stonewall. Nor does it help us understand the mass political mobilization that occurred afterwards. The long history of bar-based resistance practices helps us appreciate one of the key historical contexts for the riots, but more is needed to understand why the rebellion erupted when and where it did and why the LGBT movement changed as much as it did in the aftermath.

The limitations of the interpretations presented thus far have led to the development of another framework, one that situates the riots in relation to the general radicalization of political activism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This explanation, that the riots were inspired and influenced by other social movements, was favored by many post-Stonewall gay liberationists, who saw themselves as part of a broad-based social justice coalition, and it has been mentioned or emphasized by many historians who have written about Stonewall. Perhaps the greatest inspiration was the African American movement, which increasingly adopted a “black power” orientation in the mid-1960s. We see this influence in the pre-Stonewall use of slogans like “Gay Is Good” and “Gay Power,” which were adaptations or appropriations of “Black Is Beautiful” and “Black Power,” and in the LGBT movement’s adoption of direct action tactics, including demonstrations, sit-ins, and riots. The 1965 Watts Rebellion in Los Angeles, when African Americans rioted in response to police racism and economic impoverishment, and subsequent riots against racism in 1966, 1967, and 1968 directly inspired the Stonewall rebellion.

LGBT radicalization in the second half of the 1960s was influenced by changes in other social movements as well. In this period, red, brown, and yellow power activism grew, radical feminism strengthened, protests against the Vietnam War escalated, and U.S. leftists increasingly saw themselves as part of a global revolution against colonialism. Countercultural activism celebrated “sex, love, and rock ’n’ roll” and critiqued bourgeois culture, capitalist consumerism, and suburban conformity. LGBT people were influenced by all of these developments and by the growth of a sexual liberation movement that challenged multiple forms of erotic repression. These influences were not just intellectual and theoretical—LGBT people moved between and among these movements, becoming agents of inspiration and vectors of transmission in the “movement of movements.” From this perspective, the Stonewall Riots happened because of the radicalizing effects of other social movements on LGBT activism and resistance.

There is a fifth framework that may be useful in thinking about why the riots occurred when and where they did. As was the case with the preceding framework, this one considers the larger political context and pays attention to evidence of temporal synchronicity, but rather than focus on the radicalizing influences of other movements, this framework concentrates on the radicalizing effects of rising expectations and dashed hopes. A few months after the riots, gay journalist Don Jackson addressed the politics of disillusionment in an article about the rebellion’s “sociological implications.” According to Jackson,
“Experts in group behavior say that tensions in a minority group become most acute at times when the minority group members see their status suddenly take a turn for the worse after a long period of improvement. This exactly describes the situation in New York, preceding the riots.”

Jackson did not specify what he meant by the “long period of improvement,” but he might have been thinking about the reforms achieved by the LGBT movement in the years leading up to the riots. In 1966 and 1967, for example, homophile activists had convinced New York City’s mayor and police commissioner to limit the use of police entrapment practices and the enforcement of sexual solicitation laws. In 1967 and 1968, New York State activists had helped secure a new law that further constrained police entrapment practices and a court decision that provided increased protection to gay bars. The New York Times Magazine in 1967 and Wall Street Journal in 1968 had published major articles that seemed to predict further advances in LGBT rights. Just weeks before the Stonewall Riots, the city’s Civil Service Commission had agreed to end its ban on hiring homosexuals in most city government jobs.

There were also signs of improvement elsewhere. In 1967, a federal district court in Minnesota had ruled in favor of a major gay publisher in an obscenity case. In the same year, England and Wales had decriminalized private and consensual same-sex sex among adults over the age of twenty-one, except for those in the military. In the early days of 1969, the Los Angeles Police Commission dropped its prohibition on cross-gender impersonation by entertainers. In the first week of June 1969, Connecticut’s legislature voted to make that state the second (after Illinois) to repeal its sodomy law. Around the same time, San Francisco’s Committee for Homosexual Freedom declared victory in its fight to secure the reinstatement of a fired record store worker. West Germany partially decriminalized sodomy three days before the Christopher Street riots began and Canada did so just hours before the police raided the Stonewall. Though they could not have known this when the uprising began, the San Francisco Chronicle began a groundbreaking four-part series on lesbians on 30 June and gay activists won a major federal court ruling against employment discrimination by the U.S. Civil Service Commission on 1 July.

If all of this sustains the notion that LGBT people had reasons for perceiving major improvements in their status in the years leading up to the rebellion (and that New Yorkers had reasons for feeling frustrated because some of this did not apply to them), are there grounds for thinking that they might have seen the raid on the Stonewall as part of Jackson’s “turn for the worse”? Much of the country had grown darkly pessimistic in the preceding eighteen months. In 1968, the Tet Offensive had raised the prospects of an escalation of the Vietnam War in January and February; civil rights leader Martin Luther King was assassinated in April; Democratic presidential candidate Robert Kennedy was assassinated in June; and Chicago police violently attacked protesters at the Democratic Party convention in August. For many observers, these were
bloody new chapters in the long and brutal history of American violence. In November 1968, Republican Richard Nixon won election as U.S. president on a law and order platform that promised to reverse the reforms of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations; he was inaugurated in January 1969. For New Yorkers, this was the first time since 1903 that they had a Republican mayor, governor, and president. Governor Nelson Rockefeller (elected 1959) and Mayor John Lindsay (elected 1966) may have been known as liberal or moderate Republicans, but Nixon’s election seemed to threaten the future of progressive reform and Lindsay was defeated by a more conservative candidate in the Republican primary on 17 June.28 Fears about the future of reform were confirmed in May, when Nixon nominated conservative Warren Burger to replace liberal Earl Warren as chief justice of the Supreme Court. Burger took office five days before the riots began.29

This was not all. In the weeks and months leading up to the Stonewall Riots, a series of police raids on New York bars and bathhouses, including one on the Stonewall Inn just a few days before the one that sparked the riots, had inspired new anger and frustration about anti-LGBT oppression. Some blamed the raids on the upcoming city elections, but the crackdown caught many by surprise, since they had come to expect better treatment from Mayor Lindsay. In May, local, state, and federal prosecutors used obscenity laws to force the closure of one of the country’s most popular gay periodicals, the Philadelphia-based Drum magazine. In the weeks leading up to the Stonewall Riots, vigilantes in Kew Gardens (a neighborhood in Queens, one of New York City’s five boroughs) initiated a campaign of harassment against men who cruised for sex in a local park; when those efforts failed, axe-wielding men chopped down several dozen of the park’s trees just a few days before the riots began. Also in June, the Mattachine Society of New York Newsletter reported on three recent killings of gay men. In New York, police had discovered the body of a man strangled to death in March; his corpse was found in the Hudson River near a popular gay cruising spot. In Los Angeles, police had violently attacked and killed Howard Efland during a March raid on a gay hotel. In the Bay Area in April, Frank Bartley had been shot and killed by an undercover policeman who sexually entrapped him in a Berkeley cruising park.30 Then, on 21 June, Philip Caplan died after a public toilet beating by vice squad officers in Oakland, California.31 We cannot know whether the Stonewall rioters knew about these developments, whether they were part of a larger trend of increased hate and hostility, or whether the media stories that reported on these incidents reflected or produced increased public attention to antigay violence, but if we try to imagine the mood in the bar and on the streets during the raid on the Stonewall, the situation seems to fit Jackson’s profile of a revolutionary situation, when “minority group members see their status suddenly take a turn for the worse after a long period of improvement.”

All of these frameworks help us to understand why the Stonewall Riots occurred when and where they did. Some aspects of the uprising were
spontaneous and unprecedented. The homophile movement of the 1950s and 1960s and its radicalization in the second half of the 1960s created the pre-
conditions for revolt. The long history of bar-based resistance practices created a repertoire of rebellious responses. Other social movements provided revolutionary inspiration and influence. And the combination of heightened expectations and dashed hopes that many felt as the country transitioned from a period of liberal reform to one of conservative backlash—and that LGBT people experienced in the context of a new wave of police raids, violent killings, and local vigilantism—created an explosive situation that erupted on 28 June.

INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORKS—RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS

When interpreting the Stonewall Riots, historians have addressed more than just the influences and inspirations; they also have considered the results and implications. On this issue, it is useful to remember that correlation is not the same as causation. Just because something happened after the riots (correlation) does not mean that it happened because of the riots (causation). Popular discourse might suggest that virtually everything that happened in LGBT history after the rebellion happened because of it, but we could just as readily attribute these changes to pre- or post-Stonewall developments, including shifts in science, religion, law, and politics; transformations in social and cultural activism; and modifications in race, class, gender, and sexual politics. A distinctly important argument to consider is that it was not the riots themselves that led to major social change; it was the political mobilizations and cultural transformations that occurred after the riots. After all, if activists—some from the homophile movement, some from other movements, and some newly politicized—had not seized the opportunities created by the Stonewall rebellion, the results might not have been as significant as they were.

As noted above, one way of thinking about post-Stonewall history emphasizes radical discontinuities between the pre- and post-Stonewall eras:

- From oppression to resistance
- From repression to liberation
- From criminalization to legalization
- From invisibility to visibility
- From privacy to publicity
- From the closets to the streets
- From a small movement to mass mobilization
- From minor liberal reforms to major revolutionary changes
- From sexual respectability to sexual radicalism
- From gender conformity to gender transgression
- From single-issue politics to coalitional and intersectional politics
- From a white and middle-class movement to a multiracial and class-diverse movement.
Those who believe that these are helpful ways to characterize developments before and after Stonewall typically argue that the riots inspired and instigated these shifts. Critics respond that this misses important continuities and exaggerates the situation on both sides of the Stonewall divide. For example, as evidence of pre-Stonewall change and post-Stonewall stasis accumulates, it becomes more challenging to sustain arguments about radical discontinuities. Moreover, it can be difficult to demonstrate that the riots themselves—as opposed to political mobilizations after the riots—led to significant social change. And yet the impression remains that the riots marked a fundamental break in LGBT history.

Another approach—typically embraced by liberal reformers rather than radical revolutionaries—sees the Stonewall era as leading to slow, steady, and linear progress toward universally shared goals. Those who use this framework tend to see the major reforms of the post-Stonewall era—declassification of homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder, LGBT inclusion in the military, decriminalization of sodomy, legalization of cross-dressing, recognition of same-sex marriage, legitimization of LGBT families, and LGBT visibility in mainstream media—as direct outgrowths of the riots. Supporters of this approach often focus on the mass mobilization triggered by the rebellion, which led to the proliferation of LGBT organizations and their engagement in multiple forms of political activism. Critics respond that progress has not been linear; reforms have been partial, limited, qualified, and incomplete; the changes that have occurred should not necessarily be characterized as progress; and the goals that have been achieved are not universally celebrated. Many of the people who participated in the Stonewall Riots and many who joined the LGBT movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, for example, rejected liberal inclusion in U.S. society, favoring revolutionary transformation instead.

When discussing post-Stonewall history, many radicals offer narratives of declension (decline) rather than progress. Those who favor this framework commonly see the Stonewall moment (often conceptualized as lasting from 1969 to 1973) as one of radical potential that was lost as the LGBT movement moderated, mainstreamed, bureaucratized, and institutionalized. For example, many in the Stonewall generation were opposed to the Vietnam War, critiqued organized religion, challenged corporate capitalism, and attacked the nuclear family, whereas the mainstream LGBT movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries celebrates military inclusion, religious acceptance, business support, marriage equality, and LGBT reproduction. Many in the Stonewall generation favored grassroots local organizing and direct-action protests; the mainstream LGBT movement of today is led by powerful national groups that focus on electoral politics, legislative lobbying, and court-based litigation. From these perspectives, the LGBT movement, after taming and tempering the radical politics of 1969–73, picked up where pre-Stonewall homophile activism left off, meaning that the riots only briefly interrupted a movement that generally has been defined by liberal rather than radical politics. Much of this
exaggerates the radicalism of the Stonewall generation and minimizes the complexities of pre-1969 and post-1973 LGBT politics, but there are compelling reasons to adopt and accept narratives of post-Stonewall declension.

A fourth approach rejects linear narratives of progress or decline and instead sees periodic and cyclical eruptions of LGBT radicalism that have interrupted and disrupted the politics of liberal inclusion. This framework works, for example, for those who see the LGBT movement as moderating after the initial radical rush of Stonewall but radicalizing again at later moments. Supporters of this approach argue that LGBT radicalism erupted again in the late 1970s, when LGBT people of color transformed the movement with intersectional and transnational activism; in the late 1980s, when AIDS activists revolutionized LGBT politics; and in the early 1990s, when queer and trans activists reoriented the movement once again.

Since the documents collected in this book do not extend beyond 1973, they do not provide enough evidence to reach firm conclusions about the long-term effects and results of the Stonewall Riots. They can, however, provide the basis for more informed discussions about post-Stonewall developments by promoting stronger foundations of knowledge about the years from 1965 to 1973.

INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORKS: WHOSE RIOTS?

Another set of discussions about the riots concerns who can, who does, and who should lay claim to them. These are based in part on historical questions—who frequented the Stonewall, started the rebellion, participated in the uprising, mobilized afterward, and commemorated the uprising in pride parades and protests? They also are based on genealogical questions—who today claims an identity, identification, community, or culture that leads them to view the riots in ancestral terms? There are important political questions to consider as well—what political affinities and affiliations might lead someone to stake a claim to Stonewall and what are the political echoes and effects of such claims? As the documents in this collection make clear, these debates and discussions are not new; they began in the rebellion’s immediate aftermath.

LGBT people have long staked their claims to Stonewall, but they often have done so in contested and contentious ways. On the historical questions, most accounts of the riots emphasize the participation of gay men; many highlight the roles played by trans resisters and gender queers; some note that lesbians were among the first to fight back; others mention bisexuals and people who identified as neither gay nor straight or as both gay and straight. There have been particularly intense debates about the presence, participation, and prominence of three individuals: Sylvia Rivera, commonly identified as Puerto Rican, gay, and trans; Marsha P. Johnson, commonly identified as African American, gay, and trans; and Stormé DeLarverie, commonly identified as African American, mixed race, butch, lesbian, and trans. Multiple sources on the riots reference these and other individuals, but many accounts are incomplete,
inconsistent, and in conflict about key details. Some argue that it is important that credit be given where credit is due; others complain that many of these discussions are ahistorical and say more about the identity politics of later moments than they do about the Stonewall Riots; still others argue that in historicizing the riots we should place more emphasis on social and structural factors rather than individual actions and activities. In these discussions, there are justifiable concerns about the class, gender, and race politics of questioning some sources more than others. In these contexts, it is challenging to avoid both minimization and exaggeration.

A further complication is that since the words and concepts used in 1969 are not the same as the ones used decades later, it is often necessary to translate when encountering identity-based terms in primary sources about the riots. I have been referring to “gay bars” in this introduction, for example, because at the time of the riots many lesbians, bisexuals, queens, and transvestites called themselves “gay” and many LGBT people referred to places like the Stonewall as “gay bars”; this might not be the case today, when identity borders and boundaries have shifted. At the time of the riots, to take another example, several key individuals referred to themselves as gay transvestites, but today “gay” and “trans” are commonly viewed as distinct identities. Some recent accounts describe the riots as queer because of the heterogeneous character of the participants and the rebellious nature of the uprising, but the meanings of “queer” have changed over the last several decades and there is not much evidence that LGBT people called the riots “queer” then.

There have been other contests and conflicts about who has strong historical bases for claiming Stonewall. With respect to age and generation, young people can lay claim to Stonewall based on the preponderance of teenagers and twenty-somethings during the uprising, but so can Stonewall’s veterans, most of whom are now in their sixties, seventies, and eighties. As for race and class, many middle-class white people lay claim to the Stonewall Riots because of their presence, participation, and prominence in the rebellion and because middle-class white people commonly lay claim to everything. At the same time, street people, poor people, working-class people, and people of color assert their claims to Stonewall based on their presence, participation, and prominence and because of persistent absences and erasures in LGBT history and politics. Careful and critical readings of the documents collected in this book might be a good starting point for assessing these competing and complementary claims, but a more comprehensive approach would require analysis of other sources, including oral histories. Meanwhile, there is a whole set of other questions to ask about when, where, and why there have been such intense conflicts about claiming Stonewall.

In the aftermath of the uprising, the rebellion was commonly invoked in debates and discussions about the movement’s internal divisions. Some lesbian feminists, for example, distanced themselves from the riots as they critiqued misogyny within gay and trans activism, asking why they should commemorate
an event that was dominated by people they viewed as men. Some people of color, poor people, and street youth criticized early Stonewall commemorations because they were dominated by middle-class white people and ignored or downplayed the contributions of other classes and races. Some trans activists invoked the riots—and the fierce resistance of gender queers during the rebellion—when they criticized LGB activists for downplaying trans agendas and rejecting gender-queer priorities. And some queer activists referenced the riots when they attacked the mainstream movement for rejecting radical politics and reducing queer struggles for liberation to LGBT campaigns for inclusion. In these situations, activists were fighting about history, but also using the riots to address post-Stonewall politics.

In the midst of these conversations, there also have been conflicts and contests about local, national, and international claims on Stonewall. As the documents in this book demonstrate, the riots were quickly claimed by more than just New Yorkers; they became central to the ways that the national LGBT movement narrated its history, especially in the context of pride protests and parades. Most New Yorkers did not object to this, conditioned as they were to thinking of their city as the country’s most important. Nor have they objected when the riots have been claimed by the international LGBT movement—LGBT organizations and businesses around the world use the word “Stonewall” and the uprising is commemorated in parades and protests on five continents. For many, the international reach of Stonewall merits celebration, as it points to powerful possibilities for global influence, leadership, and unity. For others, it deserves critique, as it is yet another example of U.S. colonialism, Western imperialism, and international inequality.

Finally, it is important to note that as Obama’s inaugural invocation demonstrates, the Stonewall Riots are now claimed by more than just LGBT people. For Obama, the riots deserve recognition not only because of their importance for LGBT Americans; they deserve recognition because of their importance for all Americans. In his formulation, the “truth” that “all of us are created equal” was the star that guided “our forebears” through Stonewall, just as it guided them through Seneca Falls and Selma. In this passage, Obama staked a national ancestral claim to the history of Stonewall and situated the riots within a broad social justice tradition that included struggles for gender and racial equality. Many LGBT people were deeply moved by this, but it is worth asking what is lost as well as what is gained when a key moment in LGBT history becomes an important moment in U.S. history.

**DOCUMENT SELECTION, ORGANIZATION, AND PRESENTATION**

Before turning to the primary sources, readers might want to consider some of my key decisions about document selection, organization, and presentation. First, I decided to focus on the years from 1965 to 1973. A longer time frame would have allowed for more breadth but less depth; a shorter one would have
had the opposite problem. I begin in 1965 because, as discussed above, the LGBT movement began to radicalize in the mid-1960s. The coverage of 1965–69 allows readers to consider developments that directly preceded the riots. I conclude in 1973 so that the book covers roughly the same amount of time before and after the rebellion. Concluding in 1973 also allows me to address some of the influences of the riots on the LGBT movement, some of the commemorations of the rebellion in the first four years of gay pride parades and protests, and two of the greatest triumphs and tragedies of the post-Stonewall era: the 1973 decision by the American Psychiatric Association to declassify homosexuality as a mental illness and the 1973 Upstairs Lounge fire in New Orleans.

Second, I decided to concentrate primarily on the four largest U.S. metropolitan regions in this era (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Philadelphia) and two other major urban centers with distinct importance for LGBT history (San Francisco and Washington, D.C.). Given the location of the riots, I could have focused more exclusively on New York, which was the approach taken in Duberman’s and Carter’s books, but I wanted to address the rebellion’s larger influences and implications. I could have tried to cover more cities and regions, but this would have sacrificed depth for breadth. Also, notwithstanding the strong arguments that some scholars have made about the urban biases of LGBT history, there are good reasons to be concerned about anti-urban biases as well. In terms of impacts and inspirations, the largest U.S. cities were critically important and dynamically diverse in this period of LGBT history. Another choice I could have made was to offer a more transnational history of the Stonewall Riots, tracing echoes and effects that extended beyond the United States. Here, too, I worried about sacrificing depth for breadth, but I hope this book will encourage further research on the broader geographic and geopolitical dimensions of Stonewall.

Third, I decided to rely primarily on LGBT sources, with exceptions made for pre-Stonewall court decisions about gay bars (in chapter 1), mainstream and alternative press stories about the Stonewall Riots (in chapter 5), and alternative press items (from periodicals like the Village Voice, Rat, and Berkeley Barb) in several chapters. I wanted to include more documents from the African American press, but found few strong and available options that referenced gay bars, antigay policing, or LGBT activism, especially in the period from 1965 to 1969. This is particularly unfortunate given the limited discussion of African American gay bars, antigay policing, and LGBT activism in the homophile press. That said, there are explicit and implicit references to race and to people of color in many of the documents, which hopefully will provide a foundation for further research, and there are times when we cannot assume that a primary source is discussing white people just because there are no references to race.

Initially, I planned to include mainstream media stories (including articles from Time, Life, and Newsweek) in multiple chapters, partly so that readers could use these sources for thinking about straight perspectives on and biases...
about LGBT people in this era. In the end, however, the costs of doing so (because of U.S. copyright law and the decisions of the periodicals I contacted) proved to be prohibitively expensive. This had several unforeseen advantages. Many readers have access to the digital archives of mainstream newspapers and magazines, so they can access these materials for themselves (and I hope they will); fewer have digital or “real” access to the archives of LGBT periodicals. In addition, the focus on LGBT sources means that readers will gain access to a greater diversity of LGBT views and viewpoints. Readers also will be spared the hostile and hateful language that was used in many mainstream media reports during this period, though this is also a disadvantage in that it minimizes the harsh conditions of LGBT life. Wherever possible, I try to provide useful tips about additional sources in my endnotes and there will be a more extensive supplementary online research guide that provides further recommendations.

Fourth, I decided to exclude works of fiction and post-1973 autobiographies, memoirs, and oral histories. With respect to the former, I thought about including fictional representations of gay bars, but in the end decided to leave it to my readers to find these and wrestle with the challenges of interpreting works that do not purport to represent reality. The exclusion of the latter was perhaps my most difficult decision and was based on several factors. I had more than enough written accounts from 1965 to 1973 and found it difficult to choose among them. In addition, some Stonewall-related works of autobiography, memoir, and oral history have been challenged as inauthentic. Indeed, it sometimes seems true that if every person who claims to have participated in the riots was actually there, Manhattan would have sunk. In the context of preparing this book in a timely fashion, it did not seem possible to address the credibility of these sources. Post-1973 first-person accounts also are inevitably filtered through the lens of subsequent developments, which makes them valuable for thinking about later eras but problematic as primary sources. In many respects, they are more like secondary sources, offering retrospective reflections on the riots rather than primary sources from the riots. Finally, more and more works of oral history about the riots are available online, making it less important to present them in this volume. I hope that readers of this book will be inspired to seek out these oral histories and consider them in dialogue with the documentary sources reprinted here.

Fifth, I decided to highlight some but not other aspects of pre- and post-Stonewall LGBT history. This is envisioned as a book about the Stonewall Riots, not a book about LGBT history more generally. Beyond the two chapters that focus on the Stonewall Inn and Stonewall Riots, readers will find one chapter that addresses LGBT bars and policing in the pre-Stonewall era, two on LGBT political agendas and visions (one before and one after Stonewall), two on LGBT direct-action protests (one before and one after Stonewall), and one on post-Stonewall pride marches and parades. I privileged these aspects of LGBT history because the riots were prompted by a police raid on a gay bar;
the rebellion was part of a longer tradition of LGBT direct-action protests; and
the uprising was commemorated in pride marches and parades. I was especially
interested in presenting documents on direct action because this is an under-
studied aspect of the LGBT movement; many historical discussions today focus
on what LGBT activists thought but not on what they did. Moreover, LGBT
direct-action protests in the late 1960s and early 1970s were exceptionally cre-
a-tive, dramatic, and numerous; they may be useful for those searching for ideas
and inspirations in new political struggles. I hope the documents reprinted
here will provide a strong point of departure for identifying and interpreting
primary sources on other aspects of LGBT history, including sex and intimacy,
community and culture, business and work, other forms of LGBT political
activism, and other aspects of queer politics.

My work on this book was informed by my previous research and writing
but also relied on visits to real and digital archives. By real archives I mean the
GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, the History Project in Boston, the
LGBT collections of the New York Public Library, the LGBT Community Cen-
ter National History Archive in New York, the John J. Wilcox, Jr. Archives at
the LGBT Community Center in Philadelphia, and the Canadian Lesbian and
Gay Archives in Toronto. The ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives in Los
Angeles supplied me with additional documents. For readers who have never
been to one of the world’s hundreds of LGBT archives, these extraordinarily
valuable institutions, often highly dependent on volunteer labor and private
donations, collect and preserve materials that make books like this possible.

Just as valuable were digital archives, which allowed me to review hundreds
of documents that might otherwise have been inaccessible to me. Some of the
most useful were EBSCO’s LGBT Life with Full Text, Gale’s Archives of Sex-
uality and Gender, Reveal Digital’s Independent Voices, OutHistory’s Come
Out! collection, the University of Victoria’s Transgender Archives, and the San
Francisco Bay Area Gay and Lesbian Serial Collection at the University of
California at Berkeley library. For researchers who rely on digital archives and
funders who support digitization projects, it is noteworthy that none of these
resources provides full searchable texts for the complete runs of several of the
most widely circulating LGBT periodicals from the 1960s and 1970s, including
Drum, The Advocate, and GAY. For these, researchers still must visit physical
archives or make use of microfilm reels. Although it may not be apparent in
the documents that follow, I also made use of Proquest’s Historical Newspapers
and EBSCO’s Readers’ Guide Retrospective, which provide helpful tools for
searching mainstream periodicals.

The primary sources that follow are organized in three parts. The first,
which focuses on the pre-Stonewall years (1965–69), includes a first chapter
on gay bars and antigay policing, a second on activist agendas and visions,
and a third on political protests. The second part includes a fourth chapter on
the Stonewall Inn and a fifth on the riots. The third part, which addresses the
post-Stonewall era (1969–73), includes a sixth chapter on activist agendas and
visions, a seventh on political protests, and an eighth on pride marches and parades. This structure is meant to facilitate comparative and chronological analysis within each chapter (addressing, for example, the changing nature of protests before Stonewall), comparative analysis within each part (addressing, for example, relationships between agendas and actions), and comparative analysis across the three parts (addressing, for example, differences between the pre- and post-Stonewall eras).

Readers should think carefully and critically about my editorial work. The transcripts published here necessarily take words out of their literal context—you will not see the placement and juxtaposition of media articles on the pages of printed newsletters, newspapers, and magazines; you will not see most subheadings and subtitles; you will not see accompanying photographic images, artwork, and captions. I have silently corrected names and other words that are misspelled and silently modified punctuation and capitalization for purposes of clarity and coherence. Ellipses in the original texts are presented as periods without spaces; my ellipses, which are used to indicate the places where I have deleted words, sentences, or paragraphs, are presented as periods with spaces between them. While most style guides no longer require the use of ellipses at the beginning and conclusion of quoted material, I have used ellipses in such cases so that readers will know when my excerpt does not begin at the beginning or conclude at the conclusion. I have tried to avoid overusing and misusing ellipses, but had I presented all texts in their entirety the book would have been more than 1,000 pages or I would have had to cut more than half of the texts. All bracketed words and endnotes are mine; they did not appear in the originals. I do not provide the birth names of trans people who used different names during the period covered by this book, but I do provide the names (in brackets) of people who otherwise used pseudonyms. In my notes, I briefly identify individuals and periodicals using relevant details from the moment when the document was produced (but not later); the notes also identify authors as people of color when other sources identify them as such. For these and other reasons, advanced researchers are encouraged to examine the original texts.

Finally, I want to offer a few words of advice about critical-reading practices for these types of documents (and more generally for all historical sources). My main suggestion is to remember that there’s always more to the story. Historical documents are representations of reality; they are not reality (other than in the sense that “representations” are “real”). The book is designed so that in part 2 readers will be able to compare and contrast multiple accounts of the Stonewall Inn and Stonewall Riots. In parts 1 and 3, I generally provide one example of a particular viewpoint or one account of a particular event, but other examples or accounts may differ in important ways. In a few cases, I provide citations for alternative accounts; there are many more in the online supplementary guide for further research. In multiple cases, scholars have challenged the “facts” presented in the accounts reprinted here. Also keep in mind
that the words and concepts of 1969 are not the words and concepts of the
twenty-first century; readers will encounter terms in primary texts, including
“Negro,” that are commonly viewed as inappropriate and offensive today.
Another example, still commonly found in histories of the Stonewall Riots, is
“paddy wagon,” which is an anti-Irish slur. Remember, as well, that it was and
is common to misrepresent people in terms of their claimed gender, race, class,
and other identities (or to erase or ignore those identities). With respect to race,
in particular, many sources identified people of color as such, but others did
not. My first and last advice is that in doing historical research it is always a
good idea to be suspicious about all claims about “firsts” and “lasts.” Keep that
in mind as you read about the “first time” LGBT people fought back against
oppression and the “last time” police raided a gay bar.