

The theme of this year's Pride Parade is 'Our History, Our Future'. But from reading the official Mardi Gras promotional literature, you'd think we have no history before 1960 and that our future can only be one of happy, shiny people shopping, getting married and eventually becoming bishops. The lives of earlier generations of queers remind us that our future and freedom don't have to be tied to consumer capitalism. For everyone who doesn't aspire to living in a luxury loft apartment, who can think of nothing worse than getting married and who'd rather ride a bike than take out gym membership – here's a (brief) alternative history of queer life

☠ London has always had its sanctuaries for refugees and outlaws looking for the freedom and anonymity it offers. The possibility of making a community of one's own, away from, and against, traditional ties of family and morality, has been its main attraction, in the seventeenth century as in the twenty-first..

Sex has been the focus of new politics and ethics, of communities based on desire. There are many examples, but eighteenth century London had the Molly House - places where men met for drinking, socialising and sex, with a particular effeminate style: In 1726 the Societies for the Reformation of Manners orchestrated a series of raids on these venues, leading to at least three men being hanged for sodomy at Tyburn. So remember that as you walk past Marble Arch later today – the state murdered faggots there.



The 1950s saw the development of the first gay liberation organisations in the English-speaking world. Mostly these groups strove for respectability, attempting to win the sympathy of middle class liberals. At the height of the Cold War, when queers and commies were being persecuted as the enemies of 'freedom', perhaps that's not so surprising. But, things were about to change.

Gay activism of the late 60s and 70s became more militant. Instead of the earlier gentle attempts to win law reform, defiant activists stressed pride in their sexuality. The Gay Liberation Front (founded in New York in 1969 and in London a year later) was a world apart from the sharp-suited professional lobbyists of today. They wanted sexual liberation, not limited equality within the bounds of straight society. The first gay demo in the UK took place in 1970 at Highbury Fields in north London to protest against police entrapment of cruisers. In August 1971 the GLF held its first march through central London and in July

1972 the first Gay Pride Week was held in London. It culminated in a 2000 strong march to Hyde Park. Throughout the early 70s, radical gay activists built a number of communes and squatted social centres. There was the Radical Queens Commune in Colville Gardens, Earls Court and Bethnal Rouge in the East End. That tradition continues today. In 1998 and 2002, we organised Queerupton gatherings in squatted venues around London to share ideas, visions and practical skills between queers of all sexualities.



A central theme of queer activism down the decades has been resistance to homophobic assaults on our bodies, our lives and spaces.

The GLF was formed in the aftermath of the Stonewall Riots of June 1969, when queers resisted a police raid on the Stonewall Inn in New York. American queers rioted again ten years later, in San Francisco. The 'White Night' riots were a response to the manslaughter verdict given in the trial of Dan White, who shot local gay politician Harvey Milk. That night cop cars burned and dozens of

police were hospitalised. As the American activist group, Queer Nation, used to say "Queers Bash Back!" In Britain, one of the biggest attacks on our lives in the last 15 years was the Thatcher government's introduction of Section 28, which prevented local authorities 'intentionally promoting homosexuality'. The law itself was pretty ineffective, but it represented a massive ideological assault on sexual diversity. It provoked a huge and angry response from queer people. Ten thousand people marched against the law in London and twice that took to the streets in Manchester. On 2 February 1988 a group of lesbians activists abseiled into the House of Lords as they debated the new law. And, on 23 May, the day before Section 28 became law, lesbian activists disrupted a live broadcast of the BBC's Six O'Clock News.

In February 2000, a group of women acting in the name of the Lesbian Avengers took direct action against the bus company, Stagecoach, whose owner, Brian Souter, was personally funding the campaign against the repeal of Section 28 in Scotland. The Lesbian Avengers halted a Stagecoach-owned bus in Piccadilly Circus and redecorated it in shocking pink.



Militant direct action has also been used to challenge government inaction and the corporate greed of the pharmaceutical industry in the face of the AIDS

pandemic. In 1987 People with AIDS and queer activists formed ACT-UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power). The first action in New York was a mass die-in on wall Street during the morning rush hour. On another occasion they disrupted trading on the New York Stock Exchange. In London, ACT-UP blockaded the Department of Health & Social Security and trashed the visa section of the Australian High Commission in protest at discriminatory immigration laws. ACT-UP still exists in the US and elsewhere, as part of the movement for global justice, exposing the ways in which 'free trade' for the big drug companies denies access to the most effective treatments for people in the developing world and poor Black/Latino communities in America.



Queer activism isn't just about sexuality. Queer is about using our creativity and our passions to build a better world. It's about recognising that the term 'LGBT' leaves out as many sexual dissidents as it includes and resisting our identities becoming just another niche marketing opportunity. And it's about having fun as we do it. Of course, radical queers have been doing this for decades. We were at Greenham Common. We were at Seattle, Prague and Genoa. We are in the anti-war movement.

Since 1998 Queers for Reconciliation have been organising in Australia in support of reconciliation with the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities. Since 2001 Israeli queers have been marching in Tel Aviv pride parades against the occupation of Palestine. Last November, in Argentina, a group organised by trans activists marched in the Pride parade under the banner: "No to imperialism, no to war, no to ALCA (the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas)." Their contingent included "piqueteros," the unemployed workers who have been leading the struggle against International Monetary Fund-imposed austerity measures. These are the people we'd rather be marching with, not those rich and powerful gays who use the authority of political office and the boardroom to prop up a society that tolerates 'good' middle class gays at the expense of the multitude of 'disreputable' queers.



Join Us! ☠