The Stonewall rebellion was a defining moment in the history of the gay rights movement. That uprising awakened gay men and lesbians to the idea that they were being attacked as a group. That, in turn, awakened them to the idea that they needed to organize as a group. Advocacy and lobbying groups mushroomed after Stonewall, and now include everything from nonprofit groups mounting anti-discrimination advertising campaigns to political action committees to housing and health-related initiatives.

It was on the night of June 27, 1969, that a routine police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a Christopher Street hangout for gays, run by the Mafia, prompted not cowed obedience from the customers but uncharacteristic fury and outrage. It was not unusual for the police to raid gay bars, and they did so regularly, to arrest transvestites and harass the customers. What made the raid of the Stonewall Inn unusual is that the gay and lesbian patrons spontaneously fought back, tossing beer cans, bricks and anything else in reach at the police officers, who responded by beating many of the protesters and arresting dozens of others.

Just why Stonewall's patrons fought back is anybody's guess now. Some say it was the heat of the night. Others say it had something to do with the death of Judy Garland five days before in London. Whatever the reason, patience had run out.

More protests followed in the days after the raid, marking a cultural shift at a time when few people were willing to be publicly identified as homosexual. In the aftermath of the melee, gays and lesbians left closets, never to return. At the end of the decade that had witnessed marches on Washington on behalf of civil rights for blacks and protests against the war in Vietnam, gay pride was born. Its time had arrived.

Since 1970, the Stonewall uprising has been celebrated with an annual gay pride march down Fifth Avenue and across Christopher Street.

The Stonewall Bar at 53 Christopher Street, the site of the Stonewall Inn uprising of June 27-29, was designated a national historic landmark in June 1999. While Christopher Street is still a focal point for gays, New York's main gay hub has moved up to Chelsea.

In April 2009 New York City officials hoped to capitalize on the 40th anniversary of the uprising, this June, by promoting the city as a gay tourist destination. Announcing a new marketing campaign under the slogan "Rainbow Pilgrimage" on April 7, tourism officials said they would seek to portray a visit to New York "as a 'rite of passage' for the gay and lesbian traveler."