



CREATING CHANGE:

LGBTQ+ ACTIVISM IN 1970s & 1980s NYC

CONTENTS

Table of Contents	2	Influence of Legislation	12
About Us	2	Primary Source 3	13
Contributors	2	Primary Source 3 Questions	14
Overview	3-4	Lobbying on a City Level	15
Teacher’s Guide	5-6	Primary Source 4	16
Standards	7	Primary Source 4 Questions	16
Key Words and Phrases	7	Primary Source 5	17
Internal Links	8	Primary Source 5 Questions	18
External Links	8	Primary Source 6	19
Civic Participation	9	Primary Source 6 Questions	20
Primary Source 1	10	Conclusion	21-23
Primary Source 2	10	Culminating Activities	24
Primary Source 1 & 2 Questions	11		

ABOUT US

The mission of the NYC Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS) is to foster civic life by preserving and providing public access to historical and contemporary records and information about New York City government. The agency ensures that City records are properly maintained following professional archival and record management practices. Materials are available to diverse communities, both online and in person. For more information about how DORIS can work with your school, please contact us via email: education@records.nyc.gov or visit our [website](#). Follow us on social media!



[@nycrecords](#)



[@nycrecords](#)



[@nycarchives](#)



[@nycdeptofrecords](#)

Contributors: Karen Dahl, Helena Gelman, Annet Kennady, and Bryant Linton.

OVERVIEW

New York City has played a pivotal role in the fight for rights for LGBTQ+ individuals and communities. Until the 1970s, it was illegal in New York City (and most of the country) to have same sex relations and LGBTQ+ individuals were forced to hide their identities and activities. Some public restaurants and bars catered specifically to gay crowds where people were freer to be themselves and be in community with others. However, these establishments were often targeted by police for discriminatory raids, which left LGBTQ+ people at risk for their safety. In June 1969, an uprising (sometimes referred to as riots or rebellion) took place at the Stonewall Inn, a well-known gay bar in the Greenwich Village neighborhood, that is widely considered to be the start of the modern gay rights movement.

In the wake of the Stonewall uprising, many organizations were founded, including the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA). The Stonewall uprising also inspired protests on its first anniversary, when thousands of people marched from Greenwich Village to Central Park. This rally is now recognized as the inaugural Gay Pride Parade.

The 1970s were also a crucial period in the fight for women's equal rights, and lesbians fought to ensure their voices were heard both within the broader gay rights movement and the women's movement. For instance, in 1970, lesbians protested at the Second Congress to Unite Women, organized by the National Organization for Women (NOW), which had previously been vocally anti-lesbian. The protesters compelled the organizers to revise the agenda to address lesbian rights. This effort led to a 1971 resolution by NOW to acknowledge the additional oppression faced by lesbians compared to heterosexual women. Additional protests included one at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in 1973, where participants advocated for more inclusive exhibits and staffing, among other issues. The efforts of these groups and others expanded the movement and led to increased visibility and

changes in policy and laws that protected LGBTQ+ individuals, and even led to the New York Supreme Court ruling that a transgender woman could play tennis as a woman in the US Open.

Activism thrived in New York City during the 1980s, driven largely by the emergence of the AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) epidemic. The New York Times published its first story about the disease in 1981, describing it as a type of cancer primarily affecting gay men. Larry Kramer, a prominent and polarizing figure in the gay rights movement, founded the Gay Men's Health Crisis in 1981. Kramer and many others fought tirelessly to draw the attention of elected officials, the media, and the public to the AIDS epidemic. In 1985, Kramer wrote and produced the play "The Normal Heart" about the crisis and later founded the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in 1987.

Frustrated by the lack of government response and public attention to the AIDS crisis, LGBTQ+ individuals and organizations led numerous protests in New York City, including demonstrations on Wall Street and at City Hall. Their activism extended beyond marching to include blocking access to workplaces and other forms of direct action. While controversial, these efforts are widely credited with accelerating the approval of medications, improving medical treatment, and influencing life-saving policies related to the AIDS epidemic.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, LGBTQ+ individuals, organizations, and allies in New York City fought strategically and relentlessly for visibility and equal rights. Their efforts resulted in significant policies, laws, and protections, impacting not just New York City but also the United States and the world.

Working with Primary Sources

Primary sources are immediate, first-hand accounts of a topic, from people who had a direct connection to it. Primary sources are key to understanding history. They provide context, look, feel, and language that transports the researcher to the moment being studied. Primary sources also enable the researcher to witness the opinions, biases, and viewpoints of people directly involved in an event or moment in history.

Nonprint (Photo/Illustration/Film/Video) Primary Sources

While many primary sources are written materials, increasingly, there are primary sources that include photography, illustration, film, or video clips of events or actions that bring to life moments or periods in history.

There are many ways to engage with primary sources, both individually and in small groups. Comparing different primary sources can be particularly insightful. For instance, students can examine the commonalities and differences between print and nonprint primary sources. They can analyze how each medium allows the author or creator to convey their perspective and identify any limitations of each format. As with any area of study, understanding students' prior knowledge and experiences related to a particular time period or primary source is crucial to ensure the material is accessible to all learners.

Consider the following questions when working with primary sources:

- Does the language, grammar, or word usage in the source reflect the oral and written language of people living in a particular place and era?
- How does the written or visual account represent the politics, culture, social status, beliefs, and perspectives of people living in specific locations during specific historical periods?

- Is the historical account accurate? How do you know?
- Why is the author's point of view important? What do they want the reader/viewer to believe or feel? What do you believe or feel after engaging with the primary source?
- Are there biases or stereotypes? What points of view might be missing?
- Whose perspective regarding the event or period is reflected in the document or visual?

STANDARDS

[NYSED 12th Grade Social Studies Curriculum Framework](#)

12.G2 CIVIL RIGHTS and CIVIL LIBERTIES

12.G3 RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND DUTIES OF CITIZENSHIP

12.G4 POLITICAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

12.G5 PUBLIC POLICY

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

Activism

Assembly

Heterosexual

Homosexual

LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual)

Petition

Policy

Protest

INTERNAL LINKS

[For the Record: The Battle for Gay Civil Rights](#)

EXTERNAL LINKS

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/02/a-glimpse-into-1970s-gay-activism/284077/>

<https://www.history.com/topics/gay-rights/history-of-gay-rights>

<https://www.weteachnyc.org/resources/resource/hidden-voices-lgbtq/>

<https://news.wfsu.org/2020-02-27/how-to-demand-a-medical-breakthrough-lessons-from-the-aids-fight>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/27/us/larry-kramer-dead.html>

<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/>

<https://static.bklynlibrary.org/prod/public/documents/brooklyn-collection/connections/>

What Are the Different Methods of Civic Participation and How Can We Gauge Their Effectiveness?

The rights and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in the United States have advanced significantly due to active civic participation in many movements. Over the years, various techniques have been employed. Evaluating their efficacy, while challenging, is essential for assessing progress and planning future actions. Key methods of civic participation include:

1. Advocacy and lobbying efforts to influence policymakers and promote LGBTQ+ friendly legislation;
2. Protests and demonstrations raise awareness and create a visible presence;
3. Voter outreach efforts to LGBTQ+ individuals and allies;
4. Litigation, filing lawsuits to challenge discriminatory laws or policies through the judicial system;
5. Educational campaigns to challenge stereotypes and reduce discrimination;
6. Community organizations and support groups;
7. Corporate activism encourages corporations to support LGBTQ+ causes through inclusive policies, sponsorships, and public statements;
8. Media and social media engagement using mainstream and social media to share LGBTQ+ stories, raise awareness, and mobilize support;
9. Allyship and intersectional movements build alliances with other social justice movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter, Women's Rights).
10. Conducting surveys and research studies to collect data on LGBTQ+ experiences, discrimination, and needs.

PRIMARY SOURCE 1

Watch [this video](#) of a Gay Liberation demonstration at 7th Avenue and West 53rd Street on March 3, 1973.

PRIMARY SOURCE 2

Watch [this video](#) of a Gay Liberation demonstration at the New York City Board of Examiners on 70th Street and East 10th Street on October 2, 1971.

PRIMARY SOURCE 1 & 2 QUESTIONS

The effectiveness of civic participation can be assessed using both **quantitative data** (such as legislative changes, election results, and public opinion polls) and **qualitative data** (such as individual accounts, recommendations, and first-hand accounts). Long-term patterns and societal changes frequently reflect the influence of civic engagement strategies on the LGBTQ+ revolution.

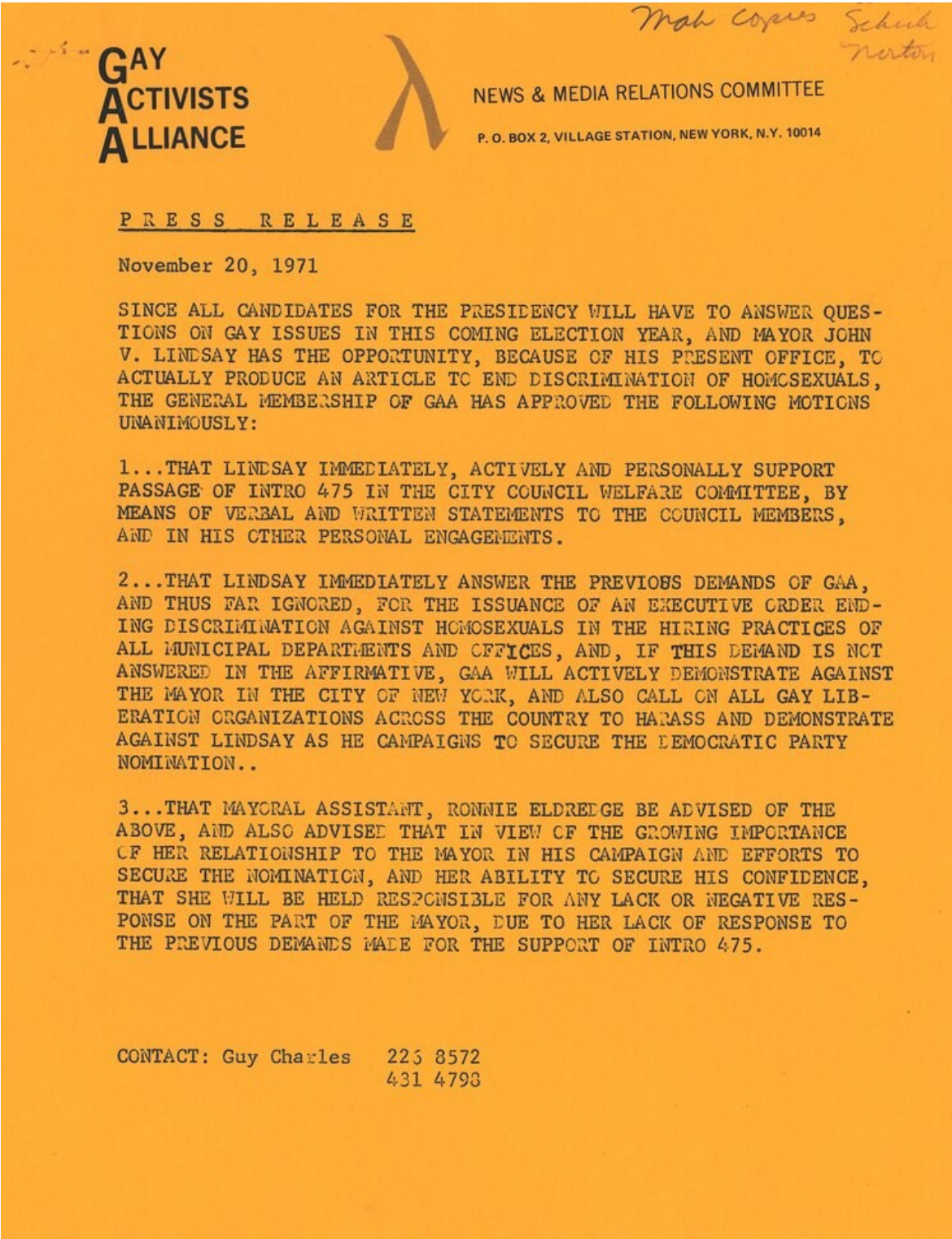
1. Why do you think that civic engagement, like protests and action, was crucial to the advancement of LGBTQ rights in the 1970s and beyond? Do you think it is comparable to other advocacy strategies?
2. What factors do you believe are crucial to consider when assessing how well civic engagement has advanced LGBTQ rights?
3. What obstacles did LGBTQ activists encounter in the late 1960s and 1970s as they attempted to participate in civic life? How did they overcome these obstacles?
4. Are there lessons from their experiences that are still relevant today?
5. How does the video show the protesters expressing themselves? How do you know?
6. Where did these protests take place? What impact is their demonstration having?
7. How does reading the media collection description prepare you for viewing the footage?
8. Why might the police be recording the protesters?

How does Civic Participation Influence the Passing of Legislation?

Of the rights the First Amendment grants us, arguably the least famous are the rights to **petition** and **assembly**. Petition is the right to seek a redress of grievances, which means that any person in the United States may ask the government to pass a law, change a law or its enforcement, or simply disagree with the government. The right of assembly is the right to gather, which may be an expression of the right to petition. These rights have not always been respected, but their protection is key to promoting civic participation in the legislative process. The vote is the most important individual civic tool, but often for laws to be considered, other actions are necessary.

The Gay Activists Alliance was a single-issue political action group founded in New York City in December 1969 and dissolved in 1981. They ran non-partisan campaigns for equal civil and human rights regardless of sexual orientation. In November 1971, this organization put pressure on New York City Mayor John Lindsay to aggressively support the gay rights bill and issue an executive order to find discriminatory hiring practices against homosexuals in city positions illegal. The Gay Activists Alliance threatened to create gay alliance organizations throughout the country to protest against Mayor Lindsay's stance as he campaigned to get reelected.

The following primary source is an example of how the Gay Activists Alliance petitioned for the passage of Intro 475, which would compel the City Council to protect "homosexual civil rights."



Gay Activists Alliance Press Release, which was issued after the Intro 475 bill was introduced in committee.

PRIMARY SOURCE 3 QUESTIONS

1. What is a press release?
2. Describe what the GAA wants Mayor Lindsay to do. Why might they be addressing him even though he does not have a vote on the City Council Welfare Committee?
3. What is the goal of issuing a press release rather than talking to the mayor directly?
4. What do they threaten to do if Mayor Lindsay does not comply?
5. What does the press release reveal about the GAA as an organization?

What Might the Process of Lobbying for a Bill Look Like at the City Level?

When we discuss the history of the LGBTQ+ civil rights movement in New York City, we must discuss the lobbying fight for legal protection. By establishing protection as a minority group with legal protections against discrimination, the LGBTQ+ communities could more easily thrive and seek public acceptance without fear for careers, housing, or their lives.

A bill for legal protection from discrimination, like 1971's "Intro 475 Clingan-Burden Bill", also known as the 'gay rights bill' only could come to pass through a variety of means including: public protest, community organizing, and focused political pressure on politicians, city advocates, and corporations. Year after year it was introduced and voted down. With the persistence of groups like the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) which lobbied for the passage of legislation, change was finally seen.

Church Storm Rocks Gay Rights' Boat

By WILLIAM REEL

The political clout of the Catholic Church has landed hard on the City Council and could doom the homosexual rights bill pending there.

"I'm seeing monsignors in my dreams," one councilman said late last week as he took phone calls and opened mail from constituents hostile to the bill.

Only a week ago, gay rights advocates and many councilmen were predicting passage of the bill, which would ban discrimination against homosexuals in jobs and housing. Similar laws have been enacted in a dozen cities in recent years.

But a bombshell statement last weekend by officials of the Archdiocese of New York that the bill is "a menace to family life" because among other

objections, it would expose children to homosexuals, has galvanized opposition to the legislation.

Orthodox Jews, parent and tenant groups and spokesmen for child-care organizations have taken a cue from the archdiocese and are suddenly voicing opposition to the bill, several councilmen said.

Councilman Monroe Cohen (D-Brooklyn), a sponsor of the legislation, has announced he will now vote against it. And Councilman Morton Povman (D-Queens), an ardent supporter until last week, is wavering.

Troy Thinks Bill Will Lose

"All of a sudden I'm getting quite a few calls from parishioners," said Povman, whose district includes heavily Catholic Flushing. "So many voices have been raised that I'm rethinking my vote. Opponents say it's a disservice to people to give legal recognition to deviant sexual behavior, that

it will tend to corrupt the moral fiber of the community."

"I think the bill will lose," said Councilman Matthew Troy Jr. (D-Queens), who opposes it. "The opposition of the church, and also the firemen, has given a lot of guys the excuse they were looking for to vote against it."

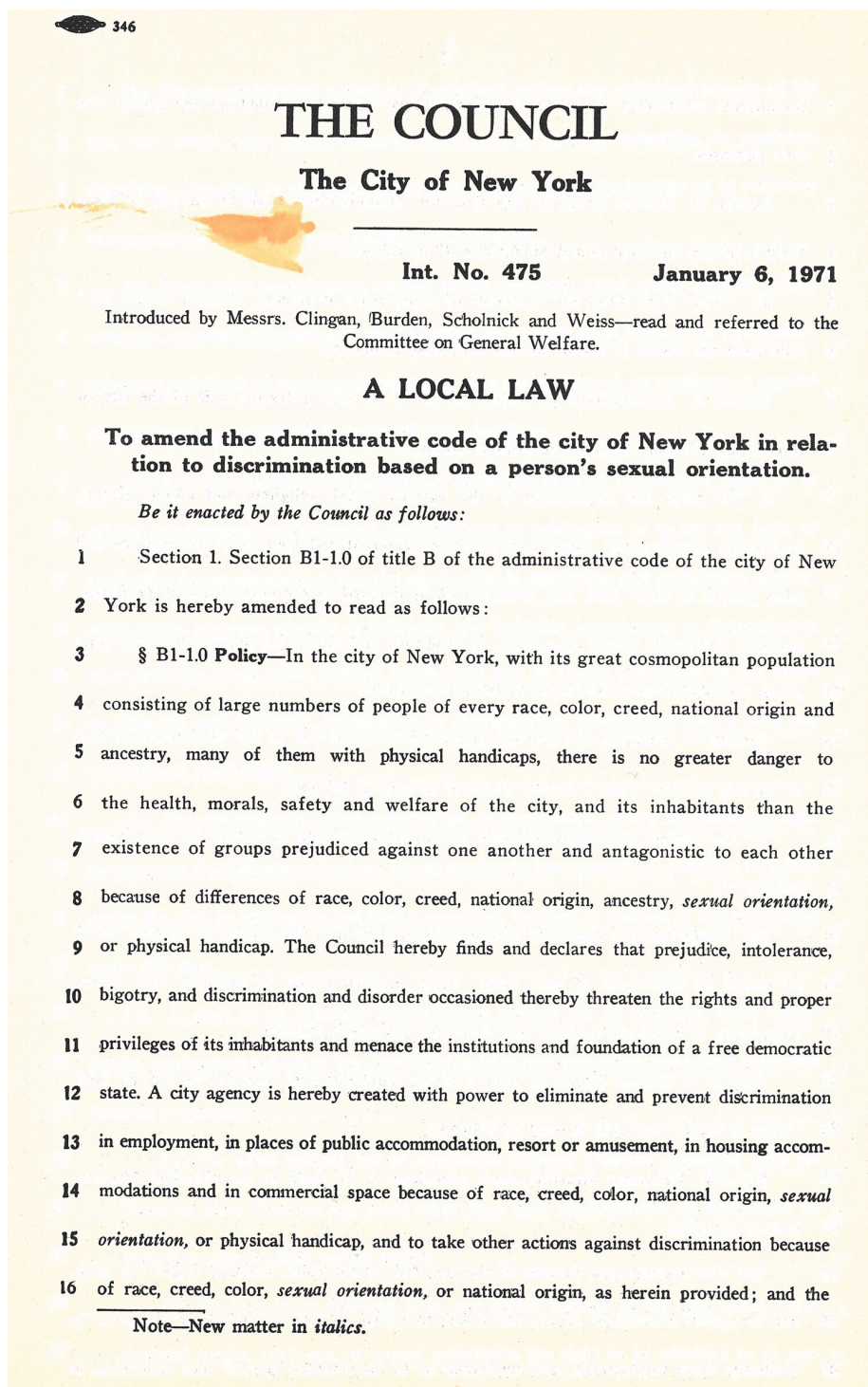
"The chancery is presuming that all homosexuals are perverts who want to grab kids and hurt them, which is a horrible accusation," said Councilman Louis Gigante (D-Bronx), a priest of the archdiocese and a sponsor of the bill. He complained that the chancery took its position without consulting the priests' senate of the archdiocese.

Meanwhile, an organization of gay Catholics called Dignity, which claims 150 members in New York, announced yesterday "a peaceful protest" at 12:30 p.m. tomorrow outside St. Patrick's Cathedral.

This 1974 news clipping discusses the lobbying fight over the passage of the gay rights bill (Intro 475) and how religious constituents and religious organizations applied pressure to political figures to combat the bill.

PRIMARY SOURCE 4 QUESTIONS

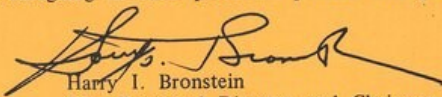
1. How did the writer, William Reel, get the reader's attention?
2. What was the reason given for lobbying against the gay rights bill?
3. What were the major distinct groups using their political power to fight the bill?
4. What were the methods constituents used to lobby against and for the gay rights bill?
5. In this article, what was the writer's point of view? How do you know?



1971's Intro 475, also known as the "gay rights bill", New York City's first anti-discrimination bill for LGBTQ+ people. The text outlines protection for all types of discriminated groups, but highlights "sexual orientation."

PRIMARY SOURCE 5 QUESTIONS

1. What two words are repeated throughout the bill in italics?
2. How would adding these words amend the law?
3. Why was this amended bill considered the first of its kind in the United States?

ISSUE NO. 2-72	THE CITY OF NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL	CLASS NO. 016-1
PERSONNEL POLICY and PROCEDURE BULLETIN		
TO: DEPARTMENT AND AGENCY HEADS	DATE: February 7, 1972	
SUBJECT: Policy Barring Discrimination in Appointment and Promotion Processes		
<p>It has been a long-standing policy of the City of New York to provide equal opportunity in employment in the service of the City on the basis of merit and without discrimination because of race, color, religion, or national origin. Other discriminatory bars to employment have been eliminated in recent years.</p> <p>The Department of Personnel and the City Civil Service Commission are committed to policies and procedures that assure equal opportunity in all aspects of their operations, and accordingly set forth their policy as follows:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"It is the policy of the Department of Personnel and the City Civil Service Commission, in the conduct of civil service examinations and investigations and in the processing of appointments and promotions in the civil service (except where restrictions are established pursuant to law), not to consider such factors as sex, private sexual orientation, age, race, color, religion, national origin, political or personal convictions of the individual."</p> <p>Agencies should be guided by the foregoing in their personnel policies and practices.</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 20px 0;">  Harry I. Bronstein City Personnel Director and Chairman City Civil Service Commission </div>		
INQUIRIES:	Office of Executive Assistant (566-7703)	
SUBJECT CODE:	016 - Discrimination in C.S. Appointments and Promotions	
DISTRIBUTION:	H-PO-ALT-T&L-AO	

This internal personnel memo from the City of New York in 1972 outlines a change in policy to specify that discrimination against civil service appointments or promotions based on a number of factors including "private sexual orientation," is not permitted.

PRIMARY SOURCE 6 QUESTIONS

1. Who created this bulletin and why?
2. What distinguishes this bulletin for the protection of LGBTQ+ people?
3. Who was the intended audience of this bulletin?
4. Why did the author choose to include the word “private” before “sexual orientation”?
5. Was this policy bulletin created and distributed before or after the Gay Rights Bill’s passage? How do you know this?

CONCLUSION

Through these sources of LGBTQ+ liberation history from the NYC Department of Records and Information Services, we have looked at how the movement fought and continues to fight for equality and acceptance.

Primary Sources 1 and 2 explore methods of civic participation and the measurement of effectiveness. The efforts shown in the sources can largely be classified as advocacy, lobbying and demonstrating, where public protest raises awareness of the issues at stake. For example, voter engagement, corporate activism, and research might all fall roughly into the first category, while allyship and intersectionality (collaborating with other movements to reach a common goal) fits better into the second. Community organization, media engagement and litigation might apply to both categories, and show how blurred the boundaries between different kinds of civic participation are.

It is also often difficult to determine exactly which moments of activism lead to legislation, or which lead to lasting societal change. This determination requires both qualitative measures, such as personal narratives, and quantitative measures such as health outcomes data. However, even if causation is not always clear, this aid shows the collection of events within the LGBTQ+ movement that have all led to greater equality in this city. Hopefully it will encourage thought on how these methods of civic participation can be applied to the present, and to a variety of issues.

Primary Sources 1—3 address the importance of civic participation in the passage of legislation. Civic participation takes many forms and can have a great impact on the legislative process. Today, we often think about voting as one of the basic tools of civic participation in American society. However, in a democracy, citizens often vote for the people who they think will pass legislation that they agree with, not for the laws themselves. For a bill to become a

law, it must first be introduced in the local city council, state legislature, or U.S. Congress. Activists and advocacy organizations must work hard to promote their ideas and agendas for bills to be introduced into a legislative body by an elected official and voted on by that body.

The primary resources on display in Section III are illustrative examples of the diverse ways in which individuals and groups took action to publicize their ideas widely and, in doing so, put pressure on elected officials to support their agendas. In the press release, the Gay Activists Alliance directly addressed Mayor Lindsay, who had rebuffed earlier attempts to get him to act, during a pivotal moment in his political career as he aspired to be nominee for President. While the press release was addressed to him, it was made public to gain the most attention possible.

The video clips show a different strategy in action. Here demonstrators protest outside and in the lobby of City Councilmember Saul Sharison's apartment building on two separate occasions. Sharison was targeted specifically because he was chair of the General Welfare Committee and had taken no action on the proposed bill. This was disruptive and gained immediate attention. These two examples represent a multitude of civic participation efforts that together led to passage in New York of legislation protecting the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Primary Sources 4—6 discuss the arduous task of lobbying for the Gay Rights Bill on the city level in the 1970s. To fight against such strenuous opposition required public protest, community organizing and political pressure. The Commission on Human Rights remained staunch supporters of this legislation. The Gay Activists Alliance who thought the mayor in 1971-72 was all talk-no action, applied tremendous pressure resulting in the creation of anti-discrimination laws in municipal employment. A small step, but one in the right direction for city workers.

Years passed and disappointment continued as New York City awaited the passing of a civil rights bill which would protect those in the LGBTQ community in employment and housing. In 1974, a majority in the City Council approved of the bill only to be struck down by such powerful groups as the Uniformed Firefighters Association and the New York Archdiocese. We saw the power and influence of such groups in the article, “Church Storm Rocks Gay Rights Boat,”

DORIS’ collections show how organizations such as the NYC Commission on Human Rights, Gay Activists Alliance, Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights, and American Civil Liberties Union’s actions blazed the trail to finally, after fifteen years, pass a bill that became a law. This law banned discrimination in housing, employment, and places of public accommodation based on a person’s sexual orientation. This achievement serves as merely one example of the effort needed to end discrimination of marginalized citizens in NYC.

CULMINATING ACTIVITIES

Questions:

1. Even with the support of organizations like the GAA behind Intro 475, a bill protecting LGBTQ+ rights only passed in 1986. How might this activism have had an impact in other ways?
2. What else do you think led to the bill's eventual passage?

Class Discussion:

The NYC Gay Rights Bill, though first submitted for a City Council vote in 1971, took 15 years to pass. The bill was passed during the height of the AIDs epidemic in 1986. It has been 37 years since its passage. Discuss the reasons for the opposition and success of this mission in New York City.