

I've learned three core lessons, among several, from mentors and elders in doing the work of changemaking, whether it was community organizing or policy advocacy.

1. Systems do not change until the relationships between people in the system change.
2. The myth of exceptional individuals paralyzes our ability to cultivate true change.
3. Our liberation is tied together (because our oppression is, too).

Seeing as it's Pride month, I'll talk about Marsha Johnson, the black, disabled, trans woman who participated 53 years ago in the Stonewall Riots in Greenwich Village, New York City, as an example to examine these lessons.

Marsha is credited with effectively disrupting a system of trans- and queerphobia the night of June 28th, 1969. And, Marsha didn't spark a movement for queer rights, at least alone. Stormé DeLarverie, a butch lesbian who was assaulted by a policeman as he broke a bottle over their head, cried for onlookers to act, inciting the riot to start. But even most queers don't know who Stormé is when I mention them. Marsha wasn't actually present when the Stonewall riots began. She did join that night and in the following month showed up as a fierce and fabulous presence for her community as the movement for queer rights built power, and needed to shield their most vulnerable from harm. Sylvia Rivera, another patron saint of the queer liberation movement, worked with Marsha to start STAR, Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, in 1971, which housed, clothed, fed, and loved queer folk, a vital part of liberation work. Both Marsha and Sylvia were also active in the Black Liberation movement before their work in the Gay Rights movement. But, not one of these people alone, nor all three collectively, carried the enormous labor of liberation work during the Stonewall Uprising nor in the larger Gay Rights movement.

Marsha and Sylvia are remembered not because they threw the first bricks at Stonewall, but because they continued to show up for their community. They changed the relationships between folks in their community (both straight and queer) by building safe spaces and by holding accountable the decision-makers in their city. Sylvia and Marsha, also, knew that the same sources from which their oppression for Blackness came, so came their oppression for transness and queerness and disability.

As we launch the New School, I recognize that we are in a different environment, ecosystem, place than Marsha and Sylvia. In many ways, our systems are more complex. And in many ways, we are still struggling against the same systems of oppression. Liberation work is not always, or even often, as notable and large-scale as was the Stonewall Uprising. Anti-oppression happens in the micro and macro. Always in relationship. Personal and population liberation happens because people choose to love others through the tough times—feed 'em, cloth 'em, and show up with 'em.

While there is a growing need for more people to feed and cloth folk, we started the New School out of a want to (continue to) show up with others during our current collective leadership moment. And to do that in a way that transforms systems, builds power to create equitable change, and cultivates conditions for radically imagined regenerative futures. Our vision for an

equitable future, and the one we are working to build, is a bold one that pursues equity, and one we believe has a place for everyone.

That's why we're inviting you to join us in this exciting journey. The New School focuses on nurturing leaders and cultivating *collective* leadership, because it's going to take us all to solve the social and environmental crises we face. We equip changemakers with the tools to foster shared power and harness that to build "change infrastructure" that's going to create change that outlasts them in the communities they already know so well.

Our hope is that the New School becomes more than an educational space, transformed by the folks who show up with us into a community for ongoing learning, reflection, and support. I hope you'll join us at the New School and share it with others as we prepare to invite the first group of folks to learn and grow with us in September.

Cheers and Happy Pride, y'all!

Atlas