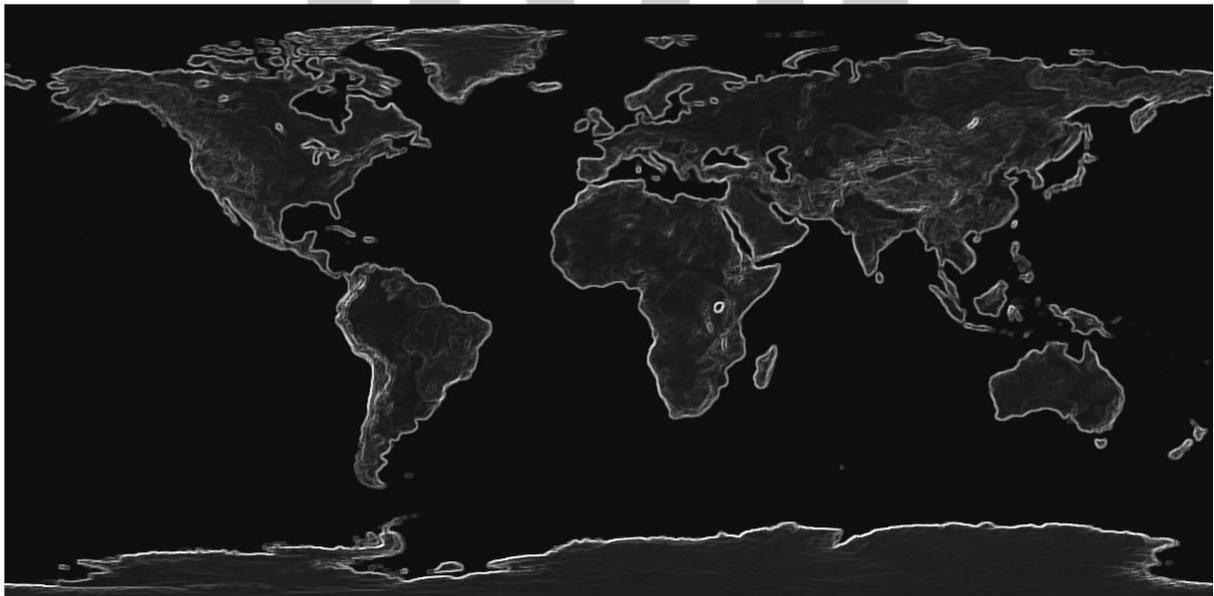




**IN SOLIDARITY: THE
CONVERGENCE OF PRIDE AND
BLACK LIVES MATTER IN 2020**

Veritas et Aequitas



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June is observed as Pride Month across the world, in celebration of the monumental achievements of the gay rights movement towards equality. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, however, several Pride celebrations in the US and across the world were cancelled. Many have lamented the cancellation of these celebrations and most members of the community had resigned to a Pride month marked by social media rainbow campaigns and advertising.

This time, Pride Month has witnessed the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement with protests across America and many parts of the world against police brutality, rampant anti-blackness and exclusion embedded in the fabric of contemporary society. LGBTQIA+ activists are now reinventing Pride to be about elevating the voices of the Black Lives Matter movement and being allies to those who find themselves at the intersection of being a person of color and a member of the LGBTQIA+ community.

2020 marks the 50th anniversary of Pride and the Stonewall Uprising. While it is a historic event in the fight for LGBTQIA+ equality, activists and communities are now coming together to unite for the Black Lives Matter movement and kick starting conversations on white supremacy, racial inequality and police brutality. In light of this movement, several non-profit initiatives that organize Pride events have chosen to use their platforms to amplify the message of Black Lives Matter through protests and marches in solidarity. “The LGBTQ community needs to honor that heritage by standing today with those who are protesting continued police brutality,” Kevin Jennings, head of LGBTQIA+ advocacy group Lambda Legal, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. The Black Lives Matter and Black Trans Lives movement has managed to focus public energy toward the violence and discrimination faced by black people, especially black LGBTQIA+ people. The solidarity shown through the merging of several Pride Month events with the BLM movement is seen by many LGBTQIA+ activists as a return to their roots, a step away from the commercialized elements of Pride and back to its legacy of resistance.

The History of Pride: Black LGBTQIA+ Activists as Pioneers

Pride began as a resistance movement, and protest has been the most successful strategy in the fight to LGBTQIA+ equality. During the 1950s and 1960s, police brutality against the LGBTQIA+ community was widespread, and the community faced discrimination and oppression in various aspects of life. During this time, homosexuality was still labelled as a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association. In June 1969, riots and protests broke out at Stonewall Inn in New York against police harassment of patrons based on their sexual orientation. The riots, known as the Stonewall Uprising, became the catalyst for a strong push toward equal rights for the LGBTQIA+ community. The protestors at Stonewall included members of the black LGBTQIA+ community, such as Marsha P. Johnson, a black trans activist who went on to become a founding member of the Gay Liberation Front, an early protesting organization. Another black trans woman who pioneered the fight for gay rights was Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, who went on to become an activist and a leader in the transgender community, especially for women of colour. LGBTQIA+ activists continued protests during the AIDS epidemic, and nationwide protests resulted in the repealing of Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriage in California. In his letter to the New York City Pride organizers,



state senator Brad Hoylman wrote, “The first Pride was a riot and an outpouring of anger and frustration, led by transgender women of color who threw bricks at police and sparked the beginning of the queer liberation movement.” The practice of organizing and taking to the streets demanding change has been intrinsic to the gay rights movement. As senator. Brad Hoylman mentions, Pride is a legacy of black LGBTQIA+ icons, who were instrumental in thrusting the movement into national focus and spoke for those who had long been ignored.

The LGBTQIA+ community has also been involved in the fight for racial equality, with the earliest gay activist organizations like the Gay Liberation Front also protesting for the end of racism. The convergence between these two civil rights movements is not a new phenomenon in 2020, and throughout history, black LGBTQIA+ leaders have contributed to the fight for both communities, while facing the stigma and discrimination that both their identities are subjected to.



The Merging of Pride and Black Lives Matter, 2020

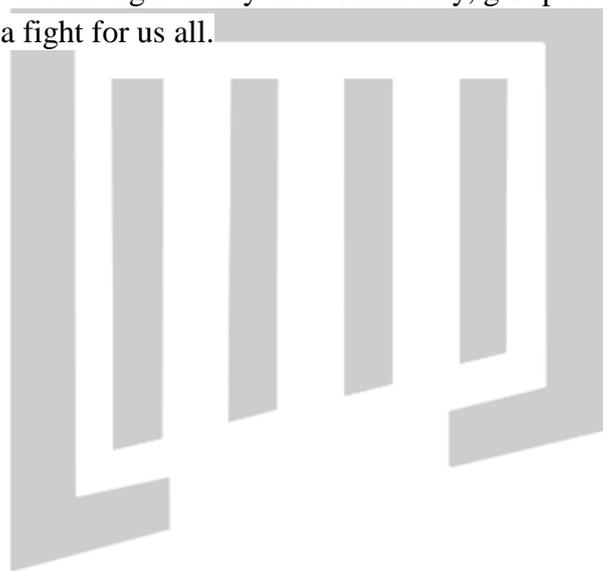
By tracing the history of Pride, it is evident that it has always been a protest, an agitation against the inhuman treatment of the LGBTQIA+ community globally. It is the legacy of resistance that has paved the way for the gay rights movement, and Pride as we know it today is a celebration of the victory of these protests. It is fitting in a way that the Black Lives Matter movement has galvanized national and worldwide protests in the 50th year of Pride, another movement with a legacy of combating oppression, inequality and police violence. The connection between the two movements is easy to make, given the historic examples of the black LGBTQIA+ involvement in Pride and the Black Lives Matter protests. The LGBTQIA+ community has been supported, uplifted and given a voice by black LGBTQIA+ leaders, and it is only right that this year’s Pride Month is about solidarity to the black community. Several LGBTQIA+ activists, especially black community leaders, have long critiqued that the movement of Pride has over the years become a mere celebration of what has been achieved over the past 50 years, with parades and corporate advertising dominating the identity of Pride. The intersection of Pride and Black Lives Matter is a symbol of the ‘radical resistance’ which Pride began as, and although parades and celebrations have been cancelled, the spirit of Pride Month lives on in its support to the Black Lives Matter protest.

The fight for equality led by the Black Lives Matter movement seeks equality, better treatment, non-discrimination, and safety of all black people – including those who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Therefore, it is not just the shared history of protest and struggle for equality that unites Pride and the Black Lives Matter movement, but rather the fact that the fight against racism is automatically a fight to protect the LGBTQIA+ community. Additionally, violence against trans women of color, especially black trans women over the years has increased. It is only with the surge of Black Lives Matter since 2016 that black LGBTQIA+ and trans activists have found solidarity and general public attention and have been able to highlight the horrific treatment of black trans people. In the 50 years of its existence, Pride has gradually shifted from being a grassroots defiance to anti-discrimination laws and reform. Subsequently, modern Pride is seen by many LGBTQIA+ activists as a mere



commercial celebration of the community's progress, while sidelining those at an intersection of identities; Michael Bronski, professor of media and activism at Harvard University put succinctly that Pride has now become a "predominantly white, middle-class, cisgender movement." In 2020, hopefully with the convergence of these two movements, members of the black LGBTQIA+ will finally get to reclaim their space in the Pride movement and initiate a campaign in solidarity of black trans rights.

While Pride Month celebrations may have been cancelled due to the current public health emergency, it is still an opportunity to show support to the black community. The Black Lives Matter movement is a critical historic movement on its own. But it is also deeply intertwined with racial and LGBTQIA+ history not just in the United States, but globally. Taking to the streets and protesting was what guided the struggle to achieve LGBTQIA+ rights, and while the Black Lives Matter is a fledgling in comparison, the two movements have enough shared history, indignation and courage to create a coalition of solidarity. Global celebrations of Pride every year, and worldwide protests in support of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 are evidence of just how much history, emotion and identities know no borders. What is important to remember is that while the month of June has passed, neither struggle is over. The march still continues, and it is not the fight of any one community, group or identity. It is a challenge we all face, and hence a fight for us all.





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