

## Impact Statement

Angel Chasco, Grade 12.

***Pay It No Mind***, 2017.

Ink, watercolor on paper, 20 x 30 Inches.

Communications High School, Wall, NJ

Ungsung Hero: Marsha P. Johnson

It was in the very early hours of the morning on June 28, 1969, when it happened. Marsha P. Johnson, a street queen and a regular patron of the Stonewall Inn, was enjoying the night out with her friends. However, at 1:20 a.m., six police officers and two detectives arrived. They were the Public Moral Squad with direct orders from the mayor to shut down the Stonewall Inn and other bars in the area that were suspected of providing a safe space for the LGBT community. The detectives ordered the patrons to line up to have their IDs verified, but they refused. Other members of the LGBT community gathered outside, and Johnson realized that the community was far larger than she had originally thought. The riots that occurred that night and in the following days would spark the gay liberation movement, and the movements that Johnson herself led to fight for rights for gay men, lesbians, transvestites, drag queens, and transgender people. Her most well known group, the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), was cofounded with Sylvia Rivera, another activist. Johnson would go on to participate in gay liberation marches, radical political actions, street activism, charity, and later became a respected organizer for the group ACT UP. Her actions are largely uncredited and often passed over, most likely because she was a radical African American street queen. She died under strange circumstances in 1992, but her work to improve the lives of millions of people in the LGBT community have outlasted her and continue to grow.

As a transgender person, I was of course drawn to Johnson's story. While she was a self identified transvestite, given the difference of vocabulary from 1969 to today I believe that she would now identify as a transwoman and be an advocate for the transgender community, as I am. Her strength and courage allowed her to put her life on the line in a time when it was extremely radical to even publicly identify as part of the LGBT community. She was a radical in a time when it was needed, and without her efforts the LGBT community would not be where it is today. Now, when I am frustrated by how slowly society is allowing the LGBT community to obtain basic rights, I will remember how far we've come, and what Marsha P. Johnson did to fight for what was, and is, right.

The frame of the piece, the banner, is a reference to Johnson's middle initial, P. She always introduced herself as Marsha P. Johnson, consistently including the P, and was sometimes asked what it stood for. Her response: Pay It No Mind. This evolved to become her trademark and a sort of rallying call for her circle of friends. Therefore I decided to include it as a visual base of my piece. Behind the subject of the piece, I placed a drawing of the Stonewall Inn. As mentioned earlier, the Stonewall Inn Riots served as a jumping point for the gay liberation movement, and was when Johnson became deeply involved in activism. To show this I placed it in the background to show that it a central part of her past. The flowers encompass the piece, both framing it and filling it with color. Each flowers was chosen carefully for its intended meaning, as well as its color. The red rose for passion and love, the orange marigold for

passion and success, the yellow black-eyed susan for encouragement and passion, the blue forget-me-not for remembrance, the indigo delphinium for reaching goals, the violet heather for protection and admiration, and the green of the leaves and stems for growth and life.

Altogether, the colors of the flowers compose the colors of a rainbow, the iconic insignia of the LGBT movement. The final element of the piece is the portrait of Marsha P. Johnson. I illustrated her in the wig and fur coat she commonly wore to rallies and events, with a neutral expression other than her almost upturned mouth. According to friends, Johnson was full of life and energetic, but also experienced moments of quiet contemplation. I wanted to illustrate her in that moment, thinking of the future. I think that part of her, the part that looked forward to what was to come, was the most heroic part of her.