

# Ms.

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## **OUT OF THE CLOSET AND ON THE SCREEN.**

On June 27, 1969, a routine police raid of the Stonewall Tavern, a Greenwich Village gay bar, erupted into three nights of rioting that galvanized what is now known as the Gay Liberation Movement. "Before Stonewall: The Making of the Gay and Lesbian Community" is a documentary directed by Greta Schiller (codirected by Robert Rosenberg, and produced by John Scagliotti) that places this movement in a larger historical context.

The film includes lively footage of long-ago Harlem nightlife, touching old photo-album portraits of gay couples, and a campy scene featuring a chorus line in drag from an old movie in which Ronald Reagan briefly appears. We meet, among others, Johnnie Phelps, a former WAC in World War II, who says she told General Eisenhower that yes, she would compile a list of lesbians in the corps if he didn't mind dismissing 99 percent of the most decorated women in the Army, including herself; José Sarria, who ran for public office in San Francisco in 1959 on a gay rights platform; and Ann Bannon, author of a series of lesbian novels that were paperback best-sellers in the 1950s.

Narrated by novelist Rita Mae Brown, "Before Stonewall" illustrates that even before the gay pride movement, lesbians and gays lived and loved as they chose, and built a vital (if underground) community.

—Mary McNamara