



**GENDER EQUALITY**

**WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE:**  
Transgender Activism, 1969-2019



**OVERVIEW**

Through viewing documents, photographs, and objects drawn from the last 50 years of trans activism, students will learn about the important role trans individuals played in the gay liberation movement and the specific challenges trans New Yorkers face—both historically and today.

**STUDENT GOALS**

- Students will learn about the centrality of transgender activism to both the Stonewall uprising and the gay liberation movement of the 1970s.
- Students will consider the specific challenges faced by members of the trans community, including marginalization from groups belonging to the gay liberation and women’s liberation movements.
- Students will discuss the aims and goals of today’s trans activists and create a plan for a monument that honors overlooked LGBTQ activists of the past and their impact on today’s movement.

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6:  
Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).  
(Grades 6-8)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1:  
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.  
(Grades 9-10)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.4:  
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.  
(Grades 11-12)



### GENDER EQUALITY

**WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE:** Transgender Activism, 1969-2019

---

## KEY TERMS/VOCABULARY

- Stonewall uprising
- Christopher Street Liberation Day March
- Transgender
- Cisgender
- Gender Identity
- Gender Expression
- Drag
- Sexual Orientation
- Non-Binary
- Gender Non-Conforming
- Transvestite
- Intersectionality
- Racism
- Classism
- Sexism

---

## ORGANIZATIONS

- Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR)
- Queens Liberation Front
- Audre Lorde Project
- Sylvia Rivera Law Project
- Gay Liberation Front (GLF)
- Gay Activist Alliance (GAA)

---

## PEOPLE

- Sylvia L. Rivera
- Marsha P. Johnson
- Bebe Scarpi
- Lee Brewster
- Miss Major Griffin-Gracy
- Tourmaline



**WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE:** Transgender Activism, 1969-2019

---

## GUIDELINES FOR USING INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

Teachers may find it helpful to consult some of the following guides before using this lesson plan. These guides provide definitions of some commonly used terminology, information about non-binary and transgender identities, and best practices when it comes to using language that is respectful and inclusive of trans and gender non-conforming identities.

### GLAAD Media Reference Guide:

Transgender

<https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>

### GLSEN – Gender Terminology:

Discussion Guide

<https://www.glsen.org/article/gender-terminology-discussion-guide>

### National Center for Transgender Equality:

Understanding Non-Binary People

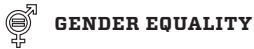
<https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-supportive>

---

## OPTIONAL INTRO ACTIVITY

A key goal for this lesson plan is to guide students through the process of examining their assumptions regarding gender presentation, expression, and identity. Teachers should remind students that they may not always know the genders of historical and contemporary figures they encounter both inside and outside the classroom.

Teachers should have students practice—and model for them—using gender-neutral language such as “they/their.” Teachers may also find it helpful to begin this lesson by first modeling and then having students each share their name and pronoun.



**GENDER EQUALITY**

**WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE:** Transgender Activism, 1969-2019

## TIMELINE

### 1967

- Lee Brewster organizes a drag ball for gay civil rights group Mattachine Society—the first known drag balls date back at least as far as the 1920s in Harlem

### 1969

- Stonewall uprising begins early on the morning of June 28th
- Queens Liberation Front forms
- The first LGBTQ health clinic, St. Marks Clinic, opens

### 1970

- Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) forms
- Christopher Street Gay Liberation Day March (what would become the LGBTQ pride parade) held in New York City on the one year anniversary of the Stonewall uprising

### 1973

- Sylvia L. Rivera ostracized at Gay Liberation Day rally in Washington Square Park; STAR disbands

### 1986

- New York City passes protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation only; earlier versions of the bill had included protections for gender expression and identity but those provisions were removed in the mid-1970s

### 1999

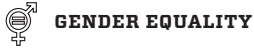
- First Trans Day of Remembrance on November 20 to memorialize lives lost to anti-transgender violence

### 2002

- Trans protections added to New York City human rights law for the first time
- New York State passes protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation

### 2019

- New York State legislature passes the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act (GENDA), offering protections to transgender New Yorkers statewide
- In May, She Built NYC—a city-sponsored public-arts campaign—announces that Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson will be among the first trans women to receive permanent monuments in the world as a statue honoring their legacies will be placed down the street from the Stonewall Inn



**WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE:** Transgender Activism, 1969-2019

---

## INTRODUCING RESOURCE 1:

### STAR Manifesto (Appendix A – Typed Transcript)

**NOTE FOR TEACHERS:** STAR's manifesto uses explicit language that reflects the frustration and pain—as well as violence—that members of the trans community were facing in 1970.

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR READING:** Teachers should read aloud (or have students volunteer) to read aloud the STAR manifesto in stages. First, read aloud the two opening paragraphs, then pause to discuss what STAR is communicating and the language they are using. Teachers should follow this model, reading points 1-4 and then 5-9, and pausing after each grouping for discussion.

In the early hours of June 28, 1969, police raided the Stonewall Inn—an unlicensed, Mafia-owned club popular among a diverse mix of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer New Yorkers. This raid on the Stonewall Inn sparked six days of protests on the streets of Greenwich Village. Advocates for gay rights had been active in the city for decades, but the Stonewall uprising energized a mass movement. Transgender New Yorkers were a vital part of this struggle. Sylvia L. Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson—two trans women of color on the scene at Stonewall—seized upon the urgency of the moment and the subsequent explosion of newly formed gay rights groups to create Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), the first group in the United States to organize explicitly around trans rights and self-determination.

Formed in late 1970, STAR aimed to empower marginalized youth and people of color before the term “transgender” was widely used. Rivera and Johnson, who had both experienced homelessness as teenagers, sought to provide housing and family support structures for other trans youth of color. STAR House, which operated from late 1970 into 1971 on East 2nd Street in the East Village, was the first group shelter in the nation dedicated to serving trans youth. STAR also called for radical change within the gay liberation movement and society at large. The group folded in 1973.

Though Rivera attempted to build support for trans rights within the larger gay liberation movement, she and other members of STAR often faced hostility and discrimination from other groups. In February of 1970, Rivera joined the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), one of two gay political groups (along with the Gay Liberation Front) created in the months after Stonewall that drew upon both the militant energy of the uprising and the tactics of civil rights, feminist, and Third World Liberation movements. Though Rivera found few allies among the membership of the GAA and GLF, she lent her time and energy to its causes, canvassing for signatures and testifying at City Hall in support of Intro 475, a proposed citywide ordinance banning discrimination based on sexual orientation. Despite their commitment to gay liberation, Rivera and other trans activists soon found themselves excluded from both the GAA and its more radical counterpart the GLF. In consultation with elected officials, gay activists ended up removing transgender protections from Intro 475. The bill became law in 1986, but did not include protections for trans New Yorkers until 2002.



## GENDER EQUALITY

**WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE:** Transgender Activism, 1969-2019

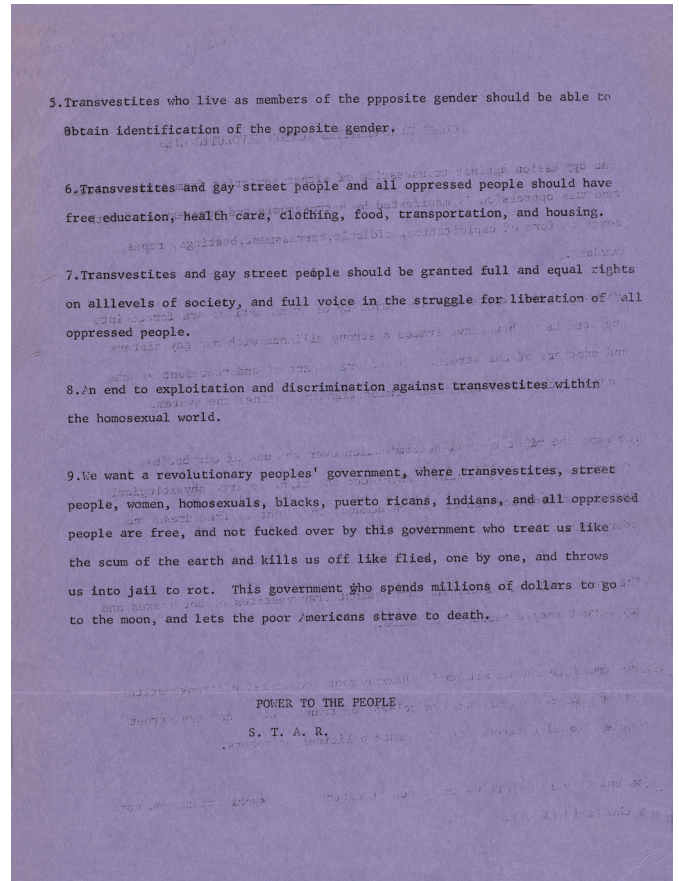
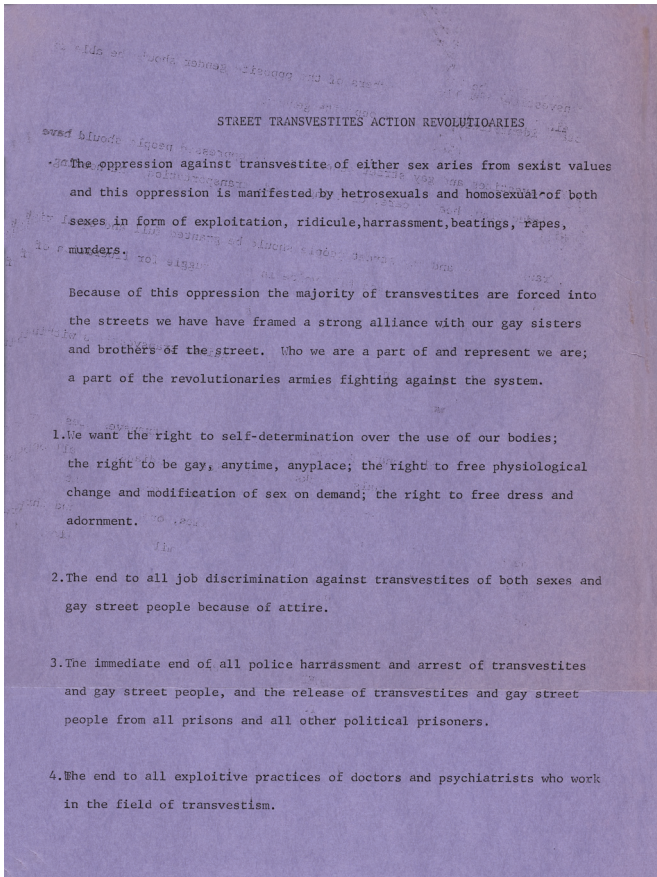
In their 1970 manifesto, STAR called for an end to the oppression of transgender people—at the time most commonly referred to as transvestites. Influenced by other liberation movements and platforms such as the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords, this document details STAR’s mission to provide resources for marginalized trans youth and to call for more government services such as free education and health care instead of the criminalization of trans people.

**Optional:** Teachers may choose to have students read both the STAR manifesto and the flyers “What is the Gay Liberation Front?” and “If you’re gay you have no civil rights protections!” included in the lesson plan “Gay is Good”: Civil Rights for Gays and Lesbians, 1969-2011 found on the Activist New York online exhibition. Teachers should have students compare and contrast all three documents, and ask students to discuss how each reveals the specific challenges trans and gay New Yorkers faced in the 1970s and their visions for a future society.

<http://activistnewyork.mcnyc.org/sites/default/files/LGBTLessonPlan.pdf>

**GENDER EQUALITY**

**WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE: Transgender Activism, 1969-2019**



“Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries,” ca. 1970, courtesy of the Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

**DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS**

1. What does STAR stand for? Why does STAR define itself as a revolutionary group?
2. What challenges might STAR members and other trans or gender non-conforming people be facing based upon this manifesto?
3. What are some of the rights and societal changes STAR is demanding?
4. Why might STAR ask for the release of prisoners, including political prisoners?
5. Does anything surprise you about this manifesto? Can you point to specific demands or statements that drew your attention?



GENDER EQUALITY

**WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE:** Transgender Activism, 1969-2019

---

## INTRODUCING RESOURCE 2:

### STAR Banner at Christopher Street Liberation Day March

Here, Sylvia Rivera and fellow STAR member Bebe Scarpi march with the group's banner at the 1973 Christopher Street Liberation Day March—what would become known as the annual LGBTQ pride parade.

During the rally that followed the march, Rivera encountered resistance as she attempted to speak to the assembled crowd. Rivera took to the stage anyway and delivered a speech, often titled “Y’all Better Quiet Down,” in which she denounced the gay liberation movement for ignoring the violence, harassment, and economic injustice that trans people experienced on a daily basis. Rivera also spoke about the high rate of assault against incarcerated trans people, an issue that persists today.

Jean O’Leary, founder of Lesbian Feminist Liberation, was among the activists who criticized Rivera’s speech at the 1973 rally. O’Leary and her fellow lesbian activists had split from the Gay Activists Alliance earlier that year in protest of what they considered to be the marginalization of women’s voices and lesbian issues. In her statement at the rally, O’Leary declared that drag was insulting to women, and denied Rivera and other trans women’s gender identities, calling them men (O’Leary went on to renounce her earlier transphobia later in life). The 1973 rally was a pivotal moment for Rivera and STAR, which soon disbanded, and epitomized the marginalization that trans people encountered within the gay liberation and women’s liberation movements.



**GENDER EQUALITY**

**WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE:** Transgender Activism, 1969-2019



*Christopher Street Liberation Day, 1973, Sylvia and Bebe Power Salute, Richard C. Wandel, 1973, courtesy LGBT Community Center Archive*

**DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS**

1. Describe what you see in this photograph. What's happening? Where are they?
2. What expressions can you see on the faces of these marchers? Why might they feel that way?
3. What signs and symbols can you find in this photograph?
4. What gesture are the marchers in front making? What might this gesture symbolize? How do you think these marchers felt making it?
5. Can you think of any other groups that used this gesture in protest?
6. Sylvia Rivera and members of STAR faced discrimination and exclusion from other gay liberation groups, but chose to participate in key moments for the movement, such as the Christopher Street Liberation Day March. How does knowing the opposition they faced change your reading of this photograph of STAR marching?



GENDER EQUALITY


**WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE:** Transgender Activism, 1969-2019

---

### INTRODUCING RESOURCE 3:

#### Pronoun Pins

Trans activists have emphasized connections among gender identity, legal protections, and language. Activists have mobilized to ensure that gender pronouns are not assumed, maintaining that how we speak to each other relates to how we treat each other, and that mis-gendering someone can cause harm. Individuals who identify as gender non-conforming have historically experimented with a range of pronouns to describe themselves, including “ze,” “hir,” and most commonly, the gender-neutral singular “they.” In 2017, the Associated Press updated their AP Stylebook—a widely-used reference for journalists in the United States—to include the use of “they” as a singular, gender-neutral pronoun for people.

 GENDER EQUALITY

**WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE:** Transgender Activism, 1969-2019



Pronoun pins, 2018, courtesy Gamut Pins

---

**DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS**

1. Describe the buttons you see. What does each say?
2. Why would someone find it important to create these buttons? To wear them?
3. Why is it important not to assume the pronouns someone uses?
4. How might it feel to wear one of these pins?
5. Why might activists advocate for sharing your pronouns when introducing yourself?



GENDER EQUALITY

**WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE:** Transgender Activism, 1969-2019

---

**INTRODUCING RESOURCE 4:****Marchers at the NYC Trans Day of Action**

In recent years, an intergenerational group of trans activists has renewed a broader push for inclusive language, legal protections, and identity expression, confronting gender binaries and seeking safety, equality, and power. Here the Anti-Violence Project marches on the 2016 NYC Trans Day of Action for Social and Economic Justice, an annual event in June organized by the Audre Lorde Project. Founded in 1994, the Audre Lorde Project focuses on the needs of LGBTQIA people of color in New York City and advocates for community wellness and social and economic justice.

**GENDER EQUALITY**

**WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE:** Transgender Activism, 1969-2019



12th Annual Trans Day, Washington Square Park, New York, June 24, 2016 Photo by Erik McGregor/Pacific Press/LightRocket via Getty Images

**DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS**

1. Describe what you see in this photograph. What's happening? Where are they?
2. What signs and symbols can you find in this photograph?
3. What are these marchers calling for? Can you identify any of their specific demands?
4. Why might marchers be calling specifically for these societal rights and changes?
5. Why do marchers connect these issues? How are these challenges experienced by trans people specifically?



GENDER EQUALITY

**WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE:** Transgender Activism, 1969-2019

### ACTIVITY

Drawing upon the model of the She Built NYC initiative, ask students to design a monument that honors the life and impact of a member of the LGBTQ community that history has overlooked. Teachers may have students work individually or break into small groups to select an individual, research their life, and then create a design for a monument that speaks to their legacy and continuing relevance. Teachers can have students sketch or describe their monument, or bring in materials to build mini-models.

Launched in June 2018, She Built NYC (<https://women.nyc/she-built-nyc/>) is a city-sponsored public-arts campaign that aims to correct the gender imbalance in New York City's current monuments to historical figures by creating new monuments honoring groundbreaking cis and trans women. At the time, only five out of the 150 statues of historical figures in the city depicted women. In June 2019, the city announced that Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia L. Rivera would become the latest New Yorkers to be included in the She Built NYC project, and would be honored with a monument placed near the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village.

If students need help selecting a subject, teachers can present them with a few historical figures to choose from (information on these figures can be found in the **Additional Resources** section below). A few choices might include:

- Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia L. Rivera, founders of STAR and trans activists
- Pauli Murray, African American civil rights lawyer who fought against racial segregation and sex discrimination and was gender non-conforming
- Mary Jones, a black woman arrested in 19th century New York who refused to denounce her gender identity, despite being sentenced to five years in a men's prison
- Jennie June, a gender non-conforming writer and advocate who published one of the earliest memoirs chronicling the experience of someone who today might identify as trans

As students craft their monuments, teachers should ask them to reflect upon the following questions:

- What challenges did this individual face in their lifetime? How did they address them?
- What impact did this individual leave upon their society? How is their legacy felt today?
- What is the most important thing you would want passersby to know about this person?
- What mood or emotion do you want your monument to evoke in those who see it?


**GENDER EQUALITY**

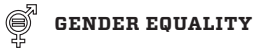
**WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE:** Transgender Activism, 1969-2019

### SOURCES

- Duberman, Martin. *Stonewall*. New York: Dutton, 1993.
- Carter, David. *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004.
- Stryker, Susan. *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution*, Second edition. New York: Seal Press, 2017.
- Ryan, Hugh. "How Dressing in Drag Was Labeled a Crime in the 20th Century." *History.com*, June 25, 2019, <https://www.history.com/news/stonewall-riots-lgbtq-drag-three-article-rule>
- *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle*. New York: Untorelli Press, 2012, <https://untorellipress.noblogs.org/files/2011/12/STAR.pdf>  
(This is a collection of historical documents, interviews, and critical analyses of STAR, originally compiled by the activist Tourmaline. Contained within are pamphlets distributed by STAR, as well as interviews with and speeches by Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson.)

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Sylvia Rivera's 1973 speech at the Christopher Street Liberation Day March is available on Youtube, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jb-JIOWUw1o&t=1s>  
(NOTE: Rivera's speech, often titled "Y'all Better Quiet Down," is powerful and troubling, as Rivera explicitly calls out sexual assault against incarcerated trans people, as well as the gay liberation movement's dismissal of the poverty, violence, and discrimination experienced by the trans community.)
- Chan, Sewell. "Marsha P. Johnson, 1945-1992," *New York Times*, March 8, 2018, [nytimes.com/interactive/2018/obituaries/overlooked-marsha-p-johnson.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/obituaries/overlooked-marsha-p-johnson.html)
- Kasino, Michael. *Pay It No Mind: Marsha P. Johnson*. Documentary, 2012, [youtube.com/watch?v=rjN9W2KstqE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjN9W2KstqE)
- Katz, Jonathan Ned and Tavia Nyong'o. "Peter Sewally/ Mary Jones, June 11, 1836," *OutHistory.org* [outhistory.org/exhibits/show/sewally-jones](https://www.outhistory.org/exhibits/show/sewally-jones)
- Marcus, Eric. *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.
- Schulz, Kathryn. "The Many Lives of Pauli Murray," *The New Yorker*, April 10, 2017. [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/17/the-many-lives-of-pauli-murray](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/17/the-many-lives-of-pauli-murray)
- Sell, Randall and Ted Faigle. "Earl Lind (Ralph Werther-Jennie June): The Riddle of the Underworld, 1921," *OutHistory.org*, [www.outhistory.org/exhibits/show/earl-lind](https://www.outhistory.org/exhibits/show/earl-lind)
- Transy House – NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, [nycgbltsites.org/site/transy-house/](https://nycgbltsites.org/site/transy-house/)  
(This site covers the history of Transy House, a transgender collective and shelter operated by Rusty Mae Moore and Chelsea Goodwin from 1995 to 2008 and inspired by STAR House. Transy House was Rivera's last residence.)



**WHEN EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE:** Transgender Activism, 1969-2019

## INTRODUCING APPENDIX A:

### Transcript of STAR Manifesto

The oppression against transvestite of either sex aries [sic] from sexist values and this oppression is manifested by heterosexuals and homosexual of both sexes in the form of exploitation, ridicule, harassment, beatings, rapes, murders.

Because of this oppression the majority of transvestites are forced into the streets we have framed a strong alliance with our gay sisters and brothers of the street. Who we are a part of and represent we are; a part of the revolutionaries armies fighting against the system.

1. We want the right to self-determination over the use of our bodies; the right to be gay, anytime, anyplace; the right to free physiological change and modification of sex on demand; the right to free dress and adornment.
2. The end to all job discrimination against transvestites of both sexes and gay street people because of attire.
3. The immediate end of all police harassment and arrest of transvestites and gay street people, and the release of transvestites and gay street people from all prisons and all other political prisoners.
4. The end to all exploitive [sic] practices of doctors and psychiatrists who work in the field of transvestism.
5. Transvestites who live as members of the pposite [sic] gender should be able to obtain identification of the opposite gender.
6. Transvestites and gay street people and all oppressed people should have free education, health care, clothing, food, transportation, and housing.
7. Transvestites and gay street people should be granted full and equal rights on alllevels [sic] of society, and full voice in the struggle for liberation of all oppressed people.
8. An end to exploitation and discrimination against transvestites within the homosexual world.
9. We want a revolutionary peoples' government, where transvestites, street people, women, homosexuals, blacks, puerto ricans [sic], indians [sic], and all oppressed people are free, and not fucked over by this government who treat us like the scum of the earth and kills [sic] us off like flies, one by one, and throws [sic] us into jail to rot. This government who spends millions of dollars to go to the moon, and lets the poor Americans strave [sic] to death.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE  
S.T.A.R