

Pat Cordova-Goff Answers Questions About The Stonewall Boycott

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Abstract

Pat Cordova-Goff, an 18-year-old college student and Trans Youth Justice Organizer for TRUTH (a position jointly funded by GSA Network and Transgender Law Center) started a petition on the GSA-Network's website entitled Boycott 2015 "Stonewall" Movie. The petition, which currently has over 22,000 signatures, begins by stating: To: the potential viewers of STONEWALL To all [...]

Article



Pat Cordova-Goff, an 18-year-old college student and Trans Youth Justice Organizer for TRUTH (a position jointly funded by GSA Network and Transgender Law Center) started a petition on the GSA-Network's website entitled Boycott 2015 "Stonewall" Movie. The petition, which currently has

over 22,000 signatures, begins by stating:

To: the potential viewers of STONEWALL

To all considering watching the newest whitewashed version of queer history,

It is time that black and brown transwomyn and drag queens are recognized for their efforts in the riots throughout the nation. From the preview alone, we know that will not be happening. Majority of characters casted are white actors, cis men play the role of transwomyn, and folks who began the riots do not seem to be credited with such revolutionary acts.

WE ARE CALLING A BOYCOTT OF STONEWALL. Do not throw money at the capitalistic industry that fails to recognize true s/heroes. Do not support a film that erases our history. Do not watch Stonewall.

Tell your own history! Use social media to recall what you know to be true of Stonewall. Film your own short films. Make videos, write poems, sing songs. CONTINUE TO TEACH TRUE HISTORY.

The next section of the petition is entitled Why is this important?, and the all-caps answer begins with "OUR HISTORY WILL NOT BE WHITE/CIS-WASHED."

On behalf of The TransAdvocate, I asked Pat Cordova-Goff a series of questions about the petition, why she submitted it, and whether she'd see the film if the producers or distributors arranged for her to attend a screening in an attempt to change her mind about the film.

Autumn Sandeen: The movie Stonewall caught your attention prior to its general release, and you obviously you believe there are problems. Can you tell me what you believe the problems are with the film are?

Pat Cordova-Goff: The Stonewall movie caught my attention, like so many other folks, because I was excited to see a core piece of queer history finally hitting the silver screen. Visibility to so vital to our community (LGBTQ+), I was speechless and hopeful for the release. Yet, after watching the trailer, it held my attention for different reasons that I had first imagined. I was speechless (again, for a different reason) while watching the trailer. Instead of admiring the characters of Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, and other folks I was waiting to see... all I saw was a white cis gay character I had never heard of. The lack of focus on the trans folks and folks of color also set me off. I think I lost it however, during the trailer scene when Danny (the main character) is shown throwing the brick. Regardless of how actually threw the first item during Stonewall (since it's still continuously debated), offering the role of a white character perpetrated the white savior complex I am too tired of seeing.

[Figure] Pat Cordova-Goff(Photo: Facebook)

AS: Have you seen the trailer for the film, and if you have what's your impression of the trailer?

PCG: Yes, I've watched the trailer close to 20 times, always before talking to new folks about the petition. I want to make sure I know what I am speaking of every time. With that, every new time I watch the trailer, I am reminded of the white and cis-washing of this film. Regardless of the debate whether white cis gay men lead Stonewall... the mere fact that trailers are meant to highlight the best

and most attractive parts of films, and this trailer highlighted a white cis gay man epitomizes the fact that in our society, we still jump to assume the standard of attraction is just that: white, cis.

In addition, the lack of focus on other characters brings the question up in my mind: why isn't the highlighting of the trailer focusing on marginalized characters? Even the trans girl featured seemed to only be a supporting actress. I would hope that the powerful roles and stories of folks of color are only used as supporting pieces to the plot line.

AS: You started a petition on the GSA Network website where you called for a boycott of the film Stonewall, a fictionalized account of the Stonewall Riots. Over 20,000 people have signed the petition so far. What prompted you to post the petition, and did you expect such a large response?

PCG: While ranting on Facebook, since that's my habitual action, I mentioned how angered I was to see this trailer. With the current social discussions of racial justice, trans erasure, and so on, this trailer was the last thing I wanted to see white/cis focused. A GSA Network co-worker jokingly commented on my status, "petition." And well, that's what I did. Of course, I hoped for this to begin discussion and gain support... and when we hit 1,000 I could not believe it. Then 2,000.... 5,000... 10.... 15... 20.... and tonight we are a little over 21,500 and I am amazed to see the support. Numbers speak, and this goes to show, 1) I am not the only angry person and 2) this needs to be a discussion. Folks refuse to see another privilege-centered narrative of our queer history.

AS: What do you think about Sylvia Rivera being essentially combined with Ray Castro into a single composite character for the film?

PCG: Being that both Sylvia Rivera and Ray Castro are brown trans queer folks, I take much pride in knowing their involvement with the beginning of our revolution. As a brown trans queer girl, these essentially are my ancestors and my hero. To know they will basically be combined as one character, however, is at the very least frustrating. I understand, "this is Hollywood," but there needs to be a level of respect when considering who gets airtime. To essentially erase these brown folks and combine them is to say, their roles in this action are not significant enough, not deserving enough of individual parts. I would hope these were not the intentions and reasoning behind casting... but I cannot help but grow hurt and angry at this fact. Every brown life matters.

AS: Let me play devil's advocate for a moment. Given how much of the audience for the film probably will be white, gay, cisgender men, can't one can say that having a young, white, cisgender gay man as a central character of this film may make the film more accessible for that gay audience? And since this is a fictionalized account, what's wrong with adding that accessible character?

PCG: Let me try to explain my thoughts on this one. The initial reason why I was upset was because the story of Stonewall that I was told and learned of did not center around white cis gay men. Although they were present, I hadn't learned of them having a leading role. So that's the main reason. But as I discussed my issues, I grew upset for an additional reason. Realizing this IS Hollywood and Hollywood is here for entertainment and profit... I began to ask, WHY is it a fact that if white cis gay men are centered, the film becomes more attractive? Basically, I am addressing the bigger picture of racism as a system. I grew angry because I knew no matter what I said, the reality is, this film is move mainstream supported because of the decision to center white men. So yes, I say they made a wise (PR and Profit) decision centering Danny. Was that respectful to our history? Hell no, it was not. Am I okay with it?

Um, not at all. Do I understand why? Well, yes. Capitalism and white supremacy. As for the fictional character, again, I know why they did that. It's about bringing in the viewers. I just wished if this story was going to be made up, it would've been done so with PoCs and trans folks.

AS: If the producers and distributors of the film invited you to a screening of the film in an attempt to show you your impression of the film was incorrect, and in an attempt to have you call for an end the boycott, would you accept?

PCG: Funny you ask this. I've already sent a message to the general Stonewall Facebook account with this proposition. With that, yes. I am willing, almost wanting, to view this film before the premiere. Please know, my intention was never to crush the work of my queer family. It sucks that that is happening as a result. With that, I would love if I was wrong and this is a great film. I would love to call off the boycott. But I cannot and will not do that unless I know this film is what they say it is. With that, if [Roland] Emmerich is reading this, send me an email. Allow me to watch this film and have the opportunity to trust your work. If you were right, I would be more than content to call this all off and promote your work. After all, we are in this together. If not, as activists dedicated to the liberation of our people, we will continue.

AS:: Thank you Pat, for your time.

Autumn Sandeen signed the petition because Sylvia Rivera wasn't included as her own character in the film. Specifically, Sandeen didn't believe a film with Rivera relegated to a portion of a composite character could rise to an adequate representation of the Stonewall Riots.

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