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Mark Bingham: The Making of a Gay Hero and Queer Remembrance After 9/11

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the author recounts some of the events that occurred on September 11, 2001, when four doomed airlines crashed after being hijacked by 19 Al-Qaeda terrorists, resulting in the deaths of 2,977 people in New York, New York, at the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, and on an empty field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. It is at this latter location, where United Flight 93 crashed killing everyone onboard, including 31-year-old Mark Bingham, an openly gay businessman and member of a small group of people who, it is believed, wrested control from the hijackers and brought the plane down. In the years post-September 11, Bingham has become known as a modern-day hero by the various queer communities, while also garnering a high level of notoriety among many mainstream people as well. The author maintains, however, that Bingham's hero status simultaneously contributes to the dismissal and erasure of countless other queer people, primarily Black, Brown, and transgender, who have also performed heroic acts throughout modern U.S. history. Without diminishing the actions Bingham and the others took on board United Flight 93, the author questions why this particular gay man is remembered, while countless other queer/trans people of color remain largely unknown.

KEYWORDS

queer; Mark Bingham; Marsha P. Johnson, transgender, LGBTQ, 9/11

Introduction

The horrific events of Tuesday, September 11, 2001, are well documented and seared into the memories of many people across the United States and around the globe. On this fateful day, Al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked and crashed American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175 in New York City and a third plane, American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon, located in Arlington, Virginia. Given the media coverage of the two planes that crashed into the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center, those images—the moments of impact, the explosions, and subsequent collapse of both buildings—are etched into the collective memories of this nation. For some, these memories are centered on family members, friends, and even perfect strangers whose lives abruptly ended that day. We cringed as we imagined the sense of panic turned quickly into hopelessness as thousands realized that they were going to die. We watched in agony as individuals jumped from the burning towers in a desperate attempt to avoid the smoke and flames. For others, the shock of an attack on U.S. soil and the impending fear of what might happen next embody the memories of that day. And then there are those individuals, fellow U.S. citizens, who remember September 11 as the day they became the target of hate-driven, anti-Muslim speech and actions because far too many people in the United States equated Muslim (and even the perception of that identity) with "terrorist."

Given these collective memories, people can still vividly recall where they were and what they were doing—some twenty years later—when they first heard about and later watched on television what had taken place just minutes earlier. And for some, what they witnessed was in real time, given the seventeen-minute time span between American Airlines Flight 11 crashing into the North Tower at 8:46 a.m. (EST) and the collision of United Airlines Flight 175 into the South Tower at 9:03 a.m. The third plane, American Airlines Flight 77, slammed into the southwest side of the Pentagon, located in Arlington, Virginia, at 9:37 a.m., killing 184 people working there (Bergen & Levy, 2011). The final plane, United Flight 93 crashed into an empty field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, at 10:03 a.m. just minutes after the South Tower of the World Trade Center collapsed. Unlike the previous three airplanes, United Flight 93 did not reach its intended target—believed by many to be either the White House or the U.S. Capitol—because of the actions of several passengers onboard who seized control from the hijackers and brought the plane down. When the dust settled, some 2,977 individuals had died on September 11, leaving millions of people living in the United States shocked by the audacity of an attack on U.S. soil, saddened by the loss of life, and fearful over what might happen next. In the days following the tragedy, however, a sense of unity coalesced among communities across the United States when a common enemy, Osama bin Laden, was identified as the mastermind behind the attacks. Regardless of one's gender, race, or sexual orientation, bin Laden's image became a symbol of evil, while the actions he ordered provided a rationale for the anti-Muslim sentiments that swept across the U.S. landscape.

Unable to avoid—and equally complicit in—the waves of anti-Muslim sentiment that emerged, many individuals within the various lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities felt this sense of unity as well.[1] They shared feelings of fear and sadness alongside others, and many who identified along the queer spectrum died that day.[2] Among them were David Charlebois, first officer onboard American

[1] Though I most often use "queer" to fully represent the vast array of possibilities across gender identities and sexual orientations, "LGBTQ" signifies the manner in which most of my sources for this paper referred to these various identities in 2001. Gay refers to male-identified individuals with a sexual attraction to other men, the identity Mark Bingham self-proclaimed. It is not my intention to ignore or erase people who possess more nuanced gender and sexual identities.

[2] While the exact number of LGBTQ people who died on September 11, 2001, can never be known, Rawles (2019) provides the reader a list that offers some sense of the gravity of the loss that fateful day. He also discusses Angelfire.com, a site dedicated to "The Lovers Who Awaken Each Morning without Their Gay Patriot & Hero beside Them."

Airlines Flight 77 that crashed into the Pentagon; Father Mychal Judge, a gay Catholic priest and chaplain for the New York City fire department, who was killed by flying debris while he ministered to first responders (Baume, 2020); Sheila Hein, a resident of Maryland who died at the Pentagon while working for the U.S. Army's finance and budget office; Eugene Clark who worked for a consulting firm on the 102nd floor of the South Tower, who left a voicemail to his partner of nearly 14 years, Larry Courtney, saying, "Don't worry, the plane hit the other building. I'm OK. We are evacuating" (Heath, 2019); Daniel Brandhorst, Ronald Gamboa, and their young son, Daniel, who were returning home to Los Angeles from a vacation at Cape Cod when United Airlines Flight 175 slammed into the South Tower; and the list of LGBTQ people who lost their lives that day goes on and on (Rawles, 2019). But among the many LGBTQ people who died on September 11, 2001, one person has become a symbol and representative of those LGBTQ Americans who died, Mark Bingham. In this essay, I focus on who Mark Bingham was and how he became the "gay hero" remembered in the wake of September 11. In addition, I indicate how Bingham's remembrance as hero is problematic because the image he portrays essentially ignores and dismisses large portions of present-day LGBTQ people and their determination to remain visible – namely queer people of color and those who identify as non-binary or transgender. For these individuals, another (s)hero must also be remembered.

Who Was Mark Bingham?

He has become perhaps the first openly gay, great American patriotic idol, and certainly an emblematic figure in the gay community. — Ed Vulliamy, December 1, 2001

Born May 22, 1970, Mark Bingham was only 31 years old at the time of his death on September 11, 2001. Known early on as "Jerry" after his estranged father, he later changed his name to Mark when his mother and greatest fan, Alice Hoagland, gave him the opportunity to do so when they left Miami for a cross country move to Redlands, California, in 1980. After a few years of bouncing from place to place as work for Alice and places to live became available, Bingham found himself enrolled at Los Gatos High School in Los Gatos, California, an affluent area where as a sophomore, he took up rugby as his sport of choice.[3] The high school rugby team afforded Bingham the opportunity to travel overseas, and in the ensuing years, he was recruited to play his beloved sport at the University of California, Berkeley, where he and his teammates won two national championships. While in college, Bingham joined and later became president of Chi Psi fraternity and was known to all as the life of the party. Barrett (2018) reported that, "Friends say that he had a Clintonian ability to bring people out of their shells, to make them feel like no one else was more important. He made a concerted effort to be both the life and the lifeblood of all his social circles" (p. 43). It was also during these college years that Bingham revealed to his closest inner circle of friends and to his mother that he was gay. Upon graduation in 1993 with a degree in the social sciences with an emphasis on International Relations, Bingham landed a job with Alexander Communications, a high-tech public relations firm in San Francisco and later with 3Com, another public relations firm in the area. Given his successes working for these two firms, Bingham founded his own company in 1999, the Bingham Group, a public relations firm based in San Francisco, and by May 2000, had secured a private office space on Lafayette Street (Milton, 2020).

During this period when his business ventures were booming, Bingham still found time to participate in rugby, and while he was initially against the idea of pulling together an all-gay rugby team for fear it would not be accepted by the rugby union, the San Francisco Fog coalesced and had its first practice in October 2000. During the summer of 2001, the Northern California Rugby Football Union accepted the Fog as a permanent member. Upon learning this, Bingham wrote the following email to his teammates:

> When I started playing rugby at the age of 16, I always thought that my interest in other guys would be an anathema — completely repulsive to the guys on my team — and to the people I was knocking

[3] Part of the Silicon Valley, Los Gatos is located in the San Francisco Bay Area at the southwest corner of San Jose in the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains.

> the shit out of on the other team. I loved the game, but KNEW I would need to keep my sexuality a secret forever. I feared total rejection…. Now we've been accepted into the union and the road is going to get harder. We need to work harder. We need to get better. We have the chance to be role models for other gay folks who wanted to play sports, but never felt good enough or strong enough. More importantly, we have the chance to show the other teams in the league that we are as good as they are. Good rugby players. Good partiers. Good sports. Good men. (Regents of the University of California, 2002, para. 7–8)

Despite the tone of this email, Bingham did not consider himself a gay activist. His former partner of six years, Paul Holm, told *The Advocate*, "Mark was very proud of being a gay man, but it wasn't the first thing he would define himself as" (Barrett, 2018, p. 45). Politically, Bingham supported Senator John McCain during his 2000 presidential bid, knowing that McCain opposed hate-crimes legislation and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. While Bingham maintained these particular political leanings, his personal life saw him enjoying the dating scene as he looked to the east coast to open a new satellite office for the Bingham Group in New York City (Barrett, 2018). In fact, he spent the evening of September 10, 2001, at the residence of Matt Hall, a man Bingham had met a few months earlier and with whom he was solidifying a new relationship. The next morning the couple overslept, and following a harrowing drive to the airport, Bingham was the last person to board United Flight 93 for the trip back to San Francisco. Hall reported, "He called me at 7:40 a.m. and said, 'Hi, thanks for driving so crazy to get me here. I've made the plane, I'm sitting in first class, and I'm drinking a glass of orange juice'" (Barrett, 2018, p. 46). Hall wished Bingham a good trip and ended with, "Give me a call when you get there." Given how that particular morning unfolded, Mark Bingham never made that phone call.

United Flight 93

Unlike the three other airlines that hijackers used as flying missiles to bring down the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and to crash into the Pentagon, the fourth airplane, United Flight 93, did not reach its intended target. Instead, it crashed into an empty field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Evidence obtained from both the cockpit voice recorder and the flight data recorder, in combination with the official report delivered from the 9/11 Commission indicate the series of events that took place once Bingham hurriedly found his seat. The flight was delayed because of airline traffic at the busy Newark Airport and sat on the tarmac for some 41 minutes before finally taking off at 8:42 a.m., just four minutes before the North Tower was hit just a few miles away in New York City (Vulliami, 2001). Approximately 30 minutes later, the flight was hijacked by four terrorists, and from the 37 phone calls made from onboard the airline between 9:28 a.m. and 10:03 a.m., we have an accounting of what took place. From the various passengers onboard, we know that the hijackers wielded knives, had a bomb, stormed the cockpit, and forced the passengers to the back of the airplane (Flight 93 National Memorial, 2015). One passenger and one flight attendant were killed and two other individuals – likely the captain and first officer – lay dead on the floor. We also know that the passengers were aware that the World Trade Center and the Pentagon had been attacked. At 9:37 a.m., Mark Bingham called his aunt because he knew his mother was staying there. The call lasted 2 minutes 46 seconds, and Bingham shared the following:

> [to his aunt] This is Mark. I just want to tell you I'm on a plane and it's being hijacked. [moments later talking to his mom after confirming that he was on United Flight 93] This is Mark Bingham. I want to let you know I love you. I love you all. I'm on a flight from Newark to San Francisco and there are three guys who have taken over the plane, and they say they have a bomb. I'm calling you from the air phone. (Flight 93 National Memorial, 2015)

At moments during this call, Bingham was distracted by what appeared to be people speaking to him nearby. Perhaps it was in those few minutes the plot was formed to (re)take control from the hijackers. What is known for sure is that at 9:57 a.m., Bingham, with fellow passengers Tom Burnett, Jeremy Glick, and Todd Beamer, stormed the cockpit. The cockpit voice recorder captured the struggle that endured for about six minutes before the plane crashed at 10:03 a.m.

The Creation of a Gay Hero

I feel that in general the average American doesn't have any idea who Mark Bingham is. Everyone knows Todd Beamer because he had a wife, he was heterosexual, he had a story, the great American family. But we just didn't hear that much about Mark Bingham.

— Michelangelo Signorile, a gay journalist, January 16, 2002

In the days and weeks following the crash, it was not Bingham who stood out among the four individuals who stormed the cockpit; instead, it was 32-year-old Todd Beamer, who famously uttered the words, “Let’s roll” before he and the others executed their plan. At the time, those words were often repeated and symbolized the heroic actions that followed. Vulliamy (2001) reported, “The words [were] everywhere. They have become America's favorite, bittersweet and articulate bumper sticker. They were used by President Bush to dispatch his bombers to the mountains and deserts of Afghanistan—but they resonate further than that.” The thirteen-minute conversation between Beamer and telephone switchboard operator, Lisa Jefferson – the same call on which Jefferson overheard, “Let’s roll”—reveals that Beamer was a religious man, a father of two, and that his wife was pregnant with their third child. In fact, Beamer is said to have called Jefferson at GTE phone company instead of calling his wife because he did not want to upset her. Beamer was in fact, the epitome of the hero the United States needed at the time—a straight, White, family guy who was a God-fearing Christian. One news outlet described Beamer as “a family man from rural New Jersey with a Lord's Prayer bookmark in the Tom Clancy novel he had onboard” (Vulliamy, 2001). The following July (2002) all four men were awarded the Arthur Ashe Courage Award presented by ESPN, complete with a moving voiceover from actor Tom Hanks (Associated Press, 2002). While this national event did not overtly reveal the sexual orientation of any of the recipients, it is noteworthy that the widows of both Todd Beamer and Jeremy Glick spoke at the event, solidifying their esteemed heterosexual status. There was no one present to represent Bingham and his identity as a gay man went unspoken and unknown by the vast majority of the nationwide audience. The erasure of Bingham’s gay identity had begun and would have likely continued without some type of intervention.

That intervention came in the form of friends, family, and teammates back in San Francisco campaigning to keep Bingham’s memory alive. Bingham’s mother, Alice Hoagland,[4] became an outspoken activist as the San Francisco Fog, Bingham’s former rugby team, successfully lobbied the International Gay Rugby Association and Board (IGRAB) to host an international rugby tournament that soon was named the Mark Kendall Bingham Memorial Tournament. This biennial event attracted eight teams in the inaugural 2002 event that took place during Gay Pride Weekend in San Francisco. The event garnered nationwide attention including coverage on ESPN and was won by the San Francisco Fog. Bingham’s mother presented the team with the winning trophy. The Fog were repeat champions in 2004 and by 2006, the tournament saw continued growth with 22 clubs from six countries competing for the prestigious Bingham Cup. Though cancelled in 2020 due to COVID-19, some 148 teams representing 20 countries from around the globe had planned on competing in this rugby tournament that stands as a living legacy of Mark Bingham’s life.

In many ways this international rugby tournament and the annual reminders by gay media outlets keep Bingham’s heroic actions and his gay identity in the foreground, but primarily within LGBTQ communities where he is most holistically remembered. Within the mainstream collective consciousness, his name may be associated with the group that helped take down United Flight 93, but Beamer’s “Let’s roll” certainly garners far more recognition because it provokes heroic feelings for not giving in to the demands of a deadly enemy, while simultaneously placing the wellbeing and lives of others before your own – the very definition of a hero. Some may even question the importance of remembering that Mark Bingham was a gay man, and at the time various pockets of the gay community expressed ambivalence. Said gay journalist, Michelangelo Signorile, "On the one hand they [gay community members] say: 'Why focus on it?' And, on the other hand, they say, 'We want people to know' " (Nieves, 2002). But Bingham’s sexual orientation along with the LGBTQ identities

[4] Alice Hoagland died on December 22, 2020, at her home in Los Gatos, California, from complications caused by Addison’s Disease. She was 71 years old.

of the many other queer victims of 9/11 is completely relevant when one recalls that in 2001, openly gay men and lesbians did not live equal lives in the United States: they were unable to marry, unable to adopt children, and openly gay people were barred from military service. The importance of identifying gay heroes became especially important, gay advocates say, when the Rev. Jerry Falwell and the Rev. Pat Robertson asserted just two days after the attacks that an angry God had *allowed* the terrorists to succeed because the United States had become a nation of abortion, homosexuality, secular schools and courts, and the American Civil Liberties Union. Said Judy Wiedern, editor in chief of *The Advocate*,

> When you ask what difference does it make if the heroes [who died on September 11] were gay, I say I agree with you. That's precisely my point. They were just like everybody else. So, we ask, why is it that when they died, they were equal to everyone, but had they lived, they would not have the same equality as heterosexuals?' (Wiedern, 2001)

But Why Mark Bingham?

Mark knew how to use his size and would get into situations without thinking about it – which used to amuse us and scare us. I think he knew himself that was not anyone's idea of a typical gay man.

– Hani Durzy, friend of Mark Bingham, September 11, 2017

Mark Bingham boarded United Flight 93 on September 11, 2001, an accomplished gay businessman with a zeal for life and a love for rugby, and he died later that same morning as a modern-day gay hero. His sacrifice cannot be understated, and the visibility he and the stories about him have afforded LGBTQ communities should never be ignored. In a seemingly prophetic email Bingham wrote to his San Francisco Fog teammates just weeks before he died, he says in part:

> Gay men weren't always wallflowers waiting on the sidelines. We have the opportunity to let these other athletes know that gay men were around all along – on their little league teams, in their classes being their friends. This is a great opportunity to change a lot of people's minds, and to reach a group that might never have had to know or hear about gay people. (Schofield, 2020)

And whereas I agree with Schofield (2020) that the image of Mark Bingham disrupts certain long held, and incorrect, stereotypes that *all* gay men lack athletic abilities, physical strength, and are effeminate in their demeanor, one must still question why Mark Bingham and his particular body—6 feet 4 inches, weighing 225 lbs.—represents gay heroism. One must wonder how his particular White, masculine, athletic body and his particular ways of expressing his (cis)gender has become a preferred way of being for so many of us who identify as gay and male. Without question, a certain brand of queerness is reified in the image and heroism of Mark Bingham, while other possibilities remain unseen and consequently undesirable. To be perfectly clear, just as Todd Beamer's famous quote, "Let's roll," gained such tremendous traction because he embodied a particular (and preferred) image—straight, White, husband, father, Christian—so too does Mark Bingham's story. Various sectors of the gay community and gay media outlets have uplifted and maintained a specific way to enact one's gayness because of its proximity to being straight just as the larger, mainstream community uplifted a specific brand of heterosexuality because of its proximity to the ideal American. Accordingly, it seems apparent that "straight, White American" remains an idealized identity, one that should be revered and one that deserves to be remembered as "hero" within the United States.

Heroism of Black/Brown and Trans Bodies

The truth is that transgender women of color were leading the fight, not the generic white knight invented in a recent film version of the events. – The Equality Archive in reference to Stonewall

As long as gay people don't have their rights all across America, there's no reason for celebration.

– Marsha P. Johnson (August 24, 1945 – July 6, 1992)

Despite the narrowly defined type of gay hero personified by Mark Bingham, many people who did not look like him have performed heroic acts over the years. And while there are any number of faceless, nameless individuals of color who have made the ultimate sacrifice for the benefit of others, the focus here will be on one particular historical moment and one individual whose story stands as one among many that remain untold and unknown. The moment to which I am referring centers on the police raid that took place on June 28, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn, one of the few bars in Manhattan where people of the same gender could (usually) dance and socialize together without harassment from the police.[5] On this particular night, a police raid occurred with the intention of openly shaming the patrons who were present, but this time the folks inside fought back, sparking days of protest and marking the beginning of what has become known as the modern LGBT Liberation Movement. From this moment on Christopher Street was also borne the annual celebration of Gay Pride activities, now celebrated on an international stage. Though some modern films depict the most prominent actors of this rebellion as White, cisgender men, the true sheroes were Black and Brown drag queens who often performed at the Stonewall Inn. One of these individuals was Marsha P. Johnson.

First known as Malcolm Michaels Jr., Marsha P. Johnson was born on Aug. 24, 1945, in Elizabeth, New Jersey, to working class parents. Her father worked the assembly line for General Motors, while her mom worked as a housekeeper and attended to her six siblings. In interviews Johnson gave before her death, she reported that she was wearing dresses by the age of 5 but gave that up after being sexually assaulted by a 13-year-old boy in the neighborhood. Johnson graduated from high school in 1963 at the age of 18 and promptly moved to New York City, where she then began to drop "Malcolm" and use Black Marsha, a persona she created as a drag performer, activist, and survivor on the streets of Greenwich Village. Later, she adopted the surname "Johnson" in recognition of a favorite Howard Johnson's restaurant where she liked to hang out and her middle initial P stood for "pay it no mind." Tall and slender with dark brown skin, full red lips, and a knack for commanding attention, Johnson often wore colorful outfits that were assembled from what others discarded, "red plastic high heels; slippers and stockings; shimmering robes and dresses; costume jewelry; bright wigs; plastic flowers and even artificial fruit in her hair" (Chan, 2018). One can imagine the flare with which she confronted police officers that June night at the Stonewall Inn, a night where she and others like her demanded that their space be protected, and their identities recognized as fully human.

Despite the historical whitewashing that has taken place, in the immediate years following Stonewall, Johnson's local notoriety soared. In 1970, Johnson and good friend Sylvia Rivera[6] co-founded the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), a group dedicated to helping homeless young drag queens and trans women of color. Together, they were known as pillars of the gay liberation movement, and their radical actions for LBGT justice in New York City – at City Hall and on Wall Street – were important precursors for AIDS activism in the 1980s, especially for the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). According to Susan Stryker, professor of gender and women's studies at the University of Arizona,

> Marsha P. Johnson could be perceived as the most marginalized of people—black, queer, gender-nonconforming, poor. You might expect a person in such a position to be fragile, brutalized, beaten down. Instead, Marsha had this joie de vivre, a capacity to find joy in a world of suffering. She channeled it into political action, and did it with a kind of fierceness, grace and whimsy, with a loopy, absurdist reaction to it all. (Chan, 2018)

Johnson, in direct contrast to Bingham, did not embody the physical attributes typically expected of heroes. She was transgender, Black, and physically unremarkable, while also perceived as poor and downtrodden – certainly not in close proximity to the idealized "American hero." In other words, Johnson may have acted

[5] David Carter's (2010) book, *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution*, is considered by many to be the most complete and historically accurate rendering of the events at Stonewall in 1969.

[6] Sylvia Rivera was a 17-year-old Puerto Rican drag queen who, like Marsha P. Johnson, was present and led the rebellion at the Stonewall Inn. A long-time activist in New York and good friend to Johnson, Rivera spoke out loudly against racism and sexual violence. She died in 2002 at the age of 50.

bravely and with conviction when she confronted police at the Stonewall Inn and later as she advocated for the homeless and trans women of color, but she did not look like a "hero."

Whose Body Will Be Remembered?

Twenty years have passed, and one must not forget or take lightly the heroism of Mark Bingham or the sacrifices of those many other queer individuals whose lives were taken on September 11, 2001. But I ask that we also honor the life of Marsha P. Johnson and the *many* others who share her Black/trans identity as we remember Stonewall and her early advocacy for Black and Brown trans people, which paved the way for AIDS activism in the early 1980s. This is particularly significant given what happened on July 6, 1992: Johnson's body was pulled from the Hudson River, near the Christopher Street piers. Though authorities quickly ruled her death a suicide, those who knew and loved her questioned this finding and the cause of death was reclassified as a drowning by undetermined causes. In 2012, authorities decided to take a fresh look at the case, and it remains officially open.

Mark Bingham's sacrifice took place publicly, and he is remembered in large part because of the strong advocacy from his mother, his rugby teammates, and the International Gay Rugby Association and Board, which paved the way for annual remembrance when this country commemorates 9/11. Meanwhile, Marsha P. Johnson's sacrifice occurred quietly, without fanfare, and without the support of an international organization. But equally significant, Bingham is remembered as a hero given the particular images and feelings that are evoked when one imagines the essence of "hero." Though she was unpacking the meaning of what it means to be human in the following quote, Sylvia Wynter's (2015) words are instructive when we extend the question to, "What does it mean to be a hero?"

> The problem of the Human [or Hero] is thus not identity-based per se but in the *enunciations* of what it means to be Human—enunciations that are concocted and circulated by those who most convincingly (and powerfully) imagine the "right" or "noble" or "moral" characteristics of Human and in this project their own image-experience of the Human into the sphere of Universal Humanness. The Human is therefore the product of a particular epistemology, yet it appears to be (and is accepted as) a naturally independent entity existing in the world. (p. 108)

Though Johnson's life is now receiving some recognition,[7] social studies education must do more to highlight the pivotal role she played and work toward disrupting and undoing harmful master narratives that dictate who counts as a hero and who is worthy of being remembered. Further, the field must do more to bring to light a modern-day social ill that Johnson's untimely demise represents. Her death reminds us of the many nameless, faceless people wrapped in Black, Brown, and trans bodies that are still vulnerable and all too often considered unmemorable and disposable. In a report the Human Rights campaign titled, "A National Epidemic," the group cited the recent murders of over 150 transgender people in the United States with the vast majority of them – some 91 percent – identifying as Black transwomen. We must end the silence that consumes recognition of these tragedies and take an active stand against the continued, senseless murders of Black and Brown transwomen here in the United States and around the world. The memory of Marsha P. Johnson demands no less.

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[7] In 2017, David France directed the documentary film, The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson, which chronicles Johnson's participation in the Gay Liberation and transgender rights movement in New York in the 1960s and 1970s.

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