

# Rainbow Story

## NEW BOOK CHRONICLES THE RISE AND FALL ... AND RISE OF PRIDE IN BOSTON

Daniel Joseph Gonzalez remembers his first Boston Pride vividly. It was 2008, and he had just come out as bisexual a few months earlier. Marching with The Theater Offensive's True Colors program, Gonzalez found himself swept up in unapologetic celebration and wrapped in the loving unity of the rainbow. "Seeing everybody marching solidified my love of not only Pride," he recalls, "but of the whole community at large." That day, surrounded by joy and resistance, he began to see how powerful the simple act of showing up could be.

The longer history of Boston Pride itself, however, is too complex to be captured in a single snapshot-like memory. That's exactly why Gonzalez has documented and immortalized it so thoroughly in his new book, *"The Rise and Fall of Boston Pride: The Rise of a Movement, The Fall of an Organization."*

His deeply researched chronicle traces the evolution of Boston Pride from its grass-roots origins through subsequent decades of massive societal change for LGBTQ people. It grew into one of the largest Prides in the country, then dissolved in 2021 when simmering tensions between Boston Pride organizers and volunteers boiled over. Today, a refreshed vision of the parade and festival is produced by Boston Pride for the People, an organization that was founded in part by former Boston Pride committee members.

The Rise and Fall of Boston Pride captures this sweeping narrative of a movement. It was a big topic for Dr. Gonzalez, a Massachusetts native who works in early childhood education, to tackle for his first book. He first became interested in the topic of Boston Pride after reading a news article about its fractious breakup. What started as a casual curiosity morphed into a full-scale research project. "Before I knew it, I was all the way back in the 1970s," he says. "I had no idea I was writing a book. I just wanted to understand."

What Gonzalez found was a story of Pride in Boston that was born out of the momentum of Stonewall and matured into a vital and cherished piece of the city's cultural fabric. At the same time, Pride everywhere has always been characterized

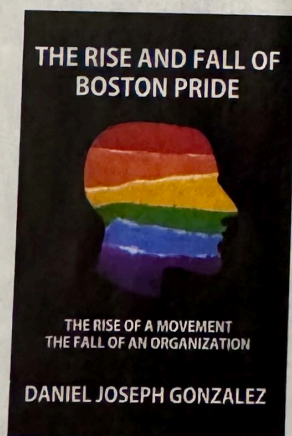
by a "push and pull between assimilation and rebellion," says Gonzalez, pointing to fierce debates over issues like policing, commercialization and inclusion. In the end, Boston Pride, which some committee members accused of being unresponsive to concerns about

institutional racism, ultimately came undone amid the racial reckonings of the Black Lives Matter era.

Boston Pride left a long legacy, but Gonzalez says it was difficult to piece the whole story together. "The history was incredibly fragmented," Gonzalez says. "A lot of it wasn't well archived, especially the last 20 years." Early coverage



Daniel Joseph Gonzalez



from local gay newspapers like Gay Community News proved invaluable, as did a small historical summary from The History Project, a nonprofit that preserves and records the artifacts and stories of LGBTQ New England. But more recent materials — especially from the committee that ran Boston Pride in the years leading up to its collapse — were hard to come by. "They were very tight-lipped," he says. "I think they just wanted to move on."

"Controversy has always been a part of Pride," says Gonzalez. For every unity-rousing speech there have been moments of political provocation, he adds, such as a 1977 protest where activist Charlie Shively burned a Bible, a dollar bill and his Harvard diploma in a Chinese wok as a symbolic rejection of oppressive institutions. "And then drag queens stomped out the fire," Gonzalez says,

laughing. Other discoveries he made in the course of his research, like the influence of the Socialist Workers' Party in the early '70s or the community's pushback against corporate sponsorship and police presence, highlight how different perspectives and approaches to activism have always led to at least some amount of infighting, as well as collaboration, in Boston Pride's story.

Right now, with Boston Pride for the People writing new chapters at the hand of a new generation of leadership, Gonzalez sees a bright future ahead. It's all part of the life cycle of a long movement, he says. "I think Pride is very much like a rainbow," he says. "It starts from the ground. It hits a crescendo. Then it goes back down for a couple years. But another rainbow comes back." ■

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