

## PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

### SYLVIA RIVERA

LGBTQ+ activist

*“We have to be visible. We should not be ashamed of who we are.”*

Page | 1



#### Background Information

Born July 2, 1951; Died February 19, 2002

Sylvia was born and raised in New York City and is of Puerto Rican and Venezuelan descent. She identified as a drag queen during her youth and as transgender in her later life. She became an orphan at three years old and lived with her grandmother until she was eleven years old. Her grandmother disapproved of the way Sylvia expressed her gender identity, and she began living on the streets. She was taken in by a group of drag queens who gave her the name Sylviai.

#### Sylvia’s Resistance

Rivera’s experience growing up with systemic poverty and racism made her more focused on advocacy for queer people who were low-income and people of color. Because she advocated for drag queens, incarcerated queer individuals, and transgender people, she faced a lot of discrimination from the predominantly white, middle class, gay men who held the most power in queer activismii. Rivera’s fought against the erasure of Black, Latinx, homeless voices in the queer community, which was not welcome at the time. She inspired a more inclusive future for the LGBTQ+ community.

#### Achievements

In 1970, Rivera co-founded the Street Transgender Action Revolutionaries (STAR) with Marsha P. Johnson, to provide resources for queer youth who were homeless. Rivera and Johnson were among the first people to care for communities of marginalized queer people. Later, after meeting Julia Murray, she also fought to enact the New York state Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment, public accommodations, housing, education, and the exercise of civil rightsiii. Her legacy includes the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, which was established in 2002 to provide education, social, health, and legal services for transgender, intersex, and gender non-conforming people.

