

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Virginia Apuzzo

gay rights activist, presidential adviser

“Seeing so many young people being so relaxed in their sexuality, so free to express their right to be who they are—I celebrate that enthusiastically!”



Background Information

Born: June 26, 1941

Virginia Apuzzo was born in the Bronx, which is in New York City. She attended State University of New York at New Paltz, graduating in 1963 with a focus in education and history. After graduating, she became a teacher. She also served as a chair of Social Studies in Marlboro School District. Apuzzo taught at a convent and a local Catholic high school, before becoming a professor at Brooklyn College and City University of NY until 1986.¹

Apuzzo’s Resistance

Apuzzo grew up in the Catholic Church and she was a nun in her 20s. However, Apuzzo is a lesbian, and she knew that she was attracted to other females since the age of ten. She stopped being a nun just two days after the Stonewall Riots in June of 1969. The riots began when the New York City police violently raided a popular gay club in New York. This motivated Apuzzo to join the newly created gay rights movement. She has spent her life advocating for the LGBTQ+ community through her activism. Apuzzo is now regarded as a leading gay rights and AIDS activist.² Apuzzo’s activism continues in many aspects of her life to this day.

Achievements

Following her activism of the 1960s, Apuzzo continued to celebrate and advocate for the gay rights movement. Apuzzo was a leading civil rights lecturer, an executive director for the LGBTQ Task Force, and was one of the first openly gay delegates to the Democratic Party. As an advocate for people with AIDS, Apuzzo created a telephone hotline that provided education and resources about AIDS during the peak of the epidemic. In 1997, Apuzzo worked alongside President Bill Clinton as Assistant to the President for Management and Administration. Apuzzo was the most senior member of the Clinton administration that was openly gay.³ Apuzzo advocated for the queer community, and continues to fight for equality through her everyday resistance.

Essential Questions

1. What major life change did Apuzzo make after the Stonewall Inn raids and riots? Do you think that was hard for her?
2. Why is it important to have people from the LGBTQ+ community working with the President of the United States?
3. ***“Seeing so many young people being so relaxed in their sexuality, so free to express their right to be who they are—I celebrate that enthusiastically!”***
 - a. Are people free to express themselves at your school? If not, how can you help support them be themselves?

¹ Items From the Archives: A Rare Childhood Photo of Activist Virginia Apuzzo. (1970, November 11). Retrieved from <https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/news/photo-of-activist-virginia-apuzzo>.

² Gessen, M. (2019, June 28). Coming Out, and Rising Up, in the Fifty Years After Stonewall. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/essay/coming-out-and-rising-up-in-the-fifty-years-after-stonewall>.

³ Forum, E. (2016, October 3). Meet LGBT History Month icons Virginia Apuzzo, Josephine Baker, and Xavier Bettel. Retrieved from <https://sdgln.com/causes/2016/10/03/meet-lgbt-history-month-icons-virginia-apuzzo-josephine-baker-and-xavier-bettel>.