

## Pride, Inc.

In the summer of 2019, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, WorldPride was held in New York City, in conjunction with the city's own annual Pride festival. It would become the biggest LGBT event in history, attracting roughly 4 million attendees. Despite this seeming success, however, some members of the LGBTQ+ community boycotted the event, organizing an alternative pride celebration which they dubbed the Reclaim Pride Coalition (RPC). The alternative event gathered 45,000 attendees. RPC's stated mission is to "march against the exploitation of our communities for profit and against corporate and state pink-washing, as displayed in Pride celebrations worldwide, including the NYC Pride Parade."<sup>1</sup> "Pink-washing" describes marketing or promotional strategies undertaken by companies or states in order to obscure their negative behavior where LGBTQ+ rights and issues are concerned. As Pride festivals have continued to become more mainstream, they have received increasing levels of corporate sponsorship with each passing year. Many events, once considered a form of countercultural resistance against legal LGBTQ+ discrimination, are now comprised of floats, booths, promotions, and targeted product placements from mega-corporations like CapitalOne, Walmart, Verizon, etc.<sup>2</sup>

Those who are concerned about the greater corporatization of Pride events often argue that corporations only participate in this form of advocacy in order to sell more of their own products (often in specially-promoted and rainbow-themed varieties<sup>3</sup>). Furthermore, many critics argue that the same corporations joining in on Pride celebrations simultaneously fund anti-LGBTQ+ causes. For example, in the same year that Adidas featured a thematic merchandise line called "Pride Pack," they were a major sponsor for the World Cup in Russia, a country with wantonly discriminatory and harmful anti-LGBTQ+ laws. Conflicts of interest like these lead many to believe that corporate support is largely aimed at the bottom line. While some companies promise to donate some portion of the proceeds from Pride products to LGBTQ+ charities, many companies often obscure what that portion is and where it goes. Additionally, critics worry that corporate sponsorship encourages "slacktivism," where the general population feel as though they are contributing to the cause by purchasing these products while it remains unclear whether these efforts contribute to any substantive changes for LGBTQ+ people.

On the other hand, some Pride officials say that corporate sponsorship is necessary in providing supplies, equipment rentals, insurance, security, and other important services for their events.<sup>4</sup> Sponsorship also lightens the financial burden on advocacy groups and community nonprofits, who often struggle with ballooning costs. Moreover, others have argued that the corporatization of the LGBTQ+ movement isn't a problem and is actually a necessary step in its advancement. As Harvard scholar Michael Bronski contends: "what we're seeing in terms of corporatization and consumer influence is... a completely logical outcome of a gay rights movement that was predicated on a series of reforms... all [geared toward] acceptance... Full citizenship in America has always been predicated on the ability to consume. So why would it be different for LGBTQ people?"<sup>5</sup>

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What role, if any, should private corporations play in social justice movements? Why?
2. Is purchasing or promoting popular Pride-themed products sufficient to make one an ally to the LGBTQ+ community? Why or why not?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://reclaimpridenyc.org/why-we-march>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.vox.com/2018/6/25/17476850/pride-month-lgbtq-corporate-explained>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/these-30-brands-are-celebrating-pride-giving-back-lgbt-community-1441707>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/20/nyregion/nyc-pride-march.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.them.us/story/corporate-pride>

