# Pride Month sees corporate pullback amid grassroots resurgence



As Pride Month unfolds, the atmosphere has shifted significantly from previous years, highlighting evolving dynamics within the celebration of LGBTQ+ identity and commercial support. David Lauterstein, CEO and co-owner of the LGBTQ+ clothing brand Nasty Pig, has keenly observed these changes through decades of personal and professional experience within the community. Reflecting on the origins of Pride, he notes that it was never intended to become a marketing spectacle. Rather, it began as a defiant act of protest against systemic oppression faced by queer individuals, particularly following the pivotal events at the Stonewall Inn in 1969. “Pride was born out of protest,” he asserts, acknowledging that its roots lie in the fight for dignity and justice.

In recent years, however, corporate America has increasingly commodified LGBTQ+ identity, showcasing rainbow logos and merchandise as part of a seasonal marketing strategy. Yet, this year's celebrations have seen many companies retreating from such displays. Major brands like Target and Nike have notably reduced their Pride-themed activities, responding to safety concerns and backlash from conservative groups. Target has limited the range of Pride merchandise available, particularly in stores that have faced hostility from anti-LGBTQ+ activists, showcasing how external pressures can influence corporate engagement with the community.

The retreat from visible support raises critical questions about authenticity and commitment among corporate allies. While some brands continue to engage with the community, many are opting for a more subdued presence, focusing on consistent advocacy rather than promotional feats limited to June. Observers like Karen Tongson, a professor at the University of Southern California, argue that the political urgency surrounding LGBTQ+ issues has not been matched by many corporate responses, leading to concerns about the meaningfulness of their involvement.

This year's Pride not only reflects a backlash against overt commercialisation but also signals a potential shift towards deeper allyship. As some corporations withdraw from flashy displays, there is an indie resurgence of grassroots organising. Community-led efforts are taking centre stage, with fundraising initiatives and local events empowering LGBTQ+ individuals to celebrate their identities authentically and without the veil of corporate influence. Lauterstein emphasises that true visibility should not be confined to a month; it is a daily commitment and an essential part of survival for many within the queer community.

At the same time, the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community continue to mount, with over 520 anti-LGBTQ+ bills introduced in various states. This legislative climate stands in stark contrast to the progress made over the past fifty years, drawing attention to ongoing threats against the rights and dignity of queer individuals. Amidst these societal chipper changes, Lauterstein calls for solidarity within the community and gratitude towards true allies who show consistent support beyond mere consumerism.

Pride, as Lauterstein and many others in the community assert, is intrinsically tied to the ongoing struggle for equality and doesn’t simply fade with the passing of June. While merchandise may be less visible this year, the essence of Pride persists—rooted in resilience, shared identity, and a collective demand for recognition. Thus, as many corporations retreat into silence, the message remains unaltered: "We are still here. We are still queer. And we are not going anywhere."

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMicEFVX3lxTE9jYlNOOVZDcUFrQ19VbnVPN0RXV0d4akZOdU4ycVIzZzlqaEYtUDVHOXlycjZObkhsVnFjU1dlc1RRQWdRNkh3cHFaaFlzQWFxUlY1c2VtNnRXRVpLS0pYUW9CVWxsQ3pHSnRYbDlmNTk?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/0d0ade0c3ba9766884a9ed7ad92f31fe)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://www.axios.com/2023/06/01/pride-month-target-bud-light-backlash-commitment), [[4]](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/rainbow-capitalism-raises-questions-about-corporate-commitments-and-pride-months-purpose)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinkwashing_%28LGBTQ%29), [[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rainbow_capitalism)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/0d0ade0c3ba9766884a9ed7ad92f31fe), [[7]](https://tulanehullabaloo.com/57497/intersections/rainbow-capitalism-commodifies-pride/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMicEFVX3lxTE9jYlNOOVZDcUFrQ19VbnVPN0RXV0d4akZOdU4ycVIzZzlqaEYtUDVHOXlycjZObkhsVnFjU1dlc1RRQWdRNkh3cHFaaFlzQWFxUlY1c2VtNnRXRVpLS0pYUW9CVWxsQ3pHSnRYbDlmNTk?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en), [[3]](https://www.axios.com/2023/06/01/pride-month-target-bud-light-backlash-commitment)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMicEFVX3lxTE9jYlNOOVZDcUFrQ19VbnVPN0RXV0d4akZOdU4ycVIzZzlqaEYtUDVHOXlycjZObkhsVnFjU1dlc1RRQWdRNkh3cHFaaFlzQWFxUlY1c2VtNnRXRVpLS0pYUW9CVWxsQ3pHSnRYbDlmNTk?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/0d0ade0c3ba9766884a9ed7ad92f31fe> - As Pride Month progresses in the U.S., retail support and marketing for LGBTQ+ communities are notably subdued compared to previous years. This shift reflects retailers' cautious responses amid extreme cultural divisions and recent legislation affecting LGBTQ+ rights. Major brands like Target and Nike have scaled back their Pride-themed activities after facing backlash. Target, for example, has reduced the number of stores offering Pride merchandise following confrontations and safety concerns in past years. Nike, opting for ongoing support over seasonal collections, is also pulling back. Despite these changes, some LGBTQ+ advocates see a potential positive outcome, suggesting that less seasonal and more consistent allyship could emerge. Corporate partnerships have noticeably decreased, as reflected by declines in collaborations with LGBTQ+ brands and influencers. Retailers like Macy's, Walmart, and American Eagle Outfitters continue to support Pride, though with perhaps less fanfare, focusing on sustained efforts rather than single-month promotions. The broader trend points to a move towards authenticity and continuous support rather than periodic commercialized displays.
3. <https://www.axios.com/2023/06/01/pride-month-target-bud-light-backlash-commitment> - Corporate America's commitment to LGBTQ+ causes and products is under intense scrutiny during Pride Month 2023. Companies like Target and Bud Light, which faced right-wing backlash for LGBTQ-themed products, are experiencing significant pressure despite years of supporting Pride events. In the past, companies have been accused of "rainbow washing" by superficially promoting Pride without substantial commitment. This year, companies must choose between maintaining their pro-LGBTQ+ values or yielding to anti-LGBTQ organized efforts. Conservative opponents have introduced over 520 anti-LGBTQ+ bills targeting issues from transgender rights to healthcare restrictions. GLAAD notes no decrease in corporate commitments, but highlights the polarized expectations of the public: Americans expect companies to completely support or entirely avoid social issues. For companies, supporting Pride in 2023 has become more significant and challenging.
4. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/rainbow-capitalism-raises-questions-about-corporate-commitments-and-pride-months-purpose> - Corporate America has made itself a part of that, too, by increasingly tapping into Pride Month and trying to showcase its efforts to increase diversity and inclusion. But there are concerns Pride has lost some of its political focus and important issues are not being addressed. Lisa Desjardins has our conversation. Judy, companies not only celebrate the month, but actively market around it as well. There's a term for that, rainbow capitalism. Walmart and Target have Pride-related ads. Ikea has Pride-themed love seats. And Capital One Bank had this feel-good, splashy video. But, for many LGBTQ individuals, it's hardly good times. Several states, including Florida, have passed new restrictions, including on transgender athletes. Hate crimes remain too frequent. Murders of trans individuals are at a new high. It's leading to questions about the purpose of Pride Month. Karen Tongson is an author and professor of gender and sexuality studies at the University of Southern California.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinkwashing_%28LGBTQ%29> - Pinkwashing in the United States, according to author Stephan Dahl from the University of Hull, is centered around pride merchandise created and sold by companies that do nothing for queer people. This encourages a "big business-small community" relationship and seems beneficial when in reality there is nothing changing legally for queer people through this practice. A campaign to develop public support for the Keystone Pipeline, which would transport Canadian oil through the United States, has been accused of pinkwashing for its argument that the project deserves support based on a comparison of Canada's record on LGBTQ rights compared to that of other oil-producing nations. In Australia, concern has been raised about the commodification of gay rights by major corporations. LGBTQ Nation states that "many brands that engage in pinkwashing are guilty of using the LGBTQ community to boost their PR and incur capital from 'pink money', all while maintaining unjust labor practices, discriminatory hiring processes, and supporting anti-LGBTQ organizations".
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rainbow_capitalism> - Rainbow capitalism (also called pink capitalism, queer capitalism, homocapitalism or gay capitalism) is the involvement of capitalism, corporate capitalism, and consumerism in appropriating and profiting from the LGBT movement. It developed in the 20th and 21st centuries as the LGBT community became more accepted in society and developed sufficient purchasing power, known as pink money. Early rainbow capitalism was limited to gay bars and gay bathhouses, though it expanded to most industries by the early-21st century. Marketing to the LGBT community has played a major role in promoting social acceptance of LGBT people, including increased LGBT representation in media and advertising, though it has also perpetuated stereotypes of gay men. LGBT people are often poorer than heterosexual people when adjusting for other factors and often have more difficulty finding and securing work, though increased protections for LGBT individuals work to counteract this in some countries. Some governments and politicians use LGBT rights to support their foreign policy, either by supporting pressure on other countries to adopt LGBT protections or by opposing immigration from these countries. Capitalism incentivizes corporations to promote LGBT rights to increase worker satisfaction, expand the consumer base, and maintain a positive public image. Many CEOs of corporations support LGBT rights through personal belief. Some companies in the United States have been criticized for expressing nominal support for the LGBT community while also supporting anti-LGBT politicians. LGBT people can also be victims of gentrification. Opponents of corporate pride include right-wing and left-wing activists, who believe that corporate support for LGBT rights goes too far or not far enough, respectively. 76% of LGBT Americans support corporate presence in Pride parades.
7. <https://tulanehullabaloo.com/57497/intersections/rainbow-capitalism-commodifies-pride/> - Every year, Pride Month, which is celebrated in June, rolls by drenched in rainbow themed products and services disguised as LGBTQ+ allyship and support. Corporations use the month of June as a business opportunity to sell LGBTQ+ products and make a profit off of the celebration of gender and sexual diversity. It is important to recognize that LGBT History Month in essence may appear the same, but it is not. LGBT History month is not only quieter and less commodified but celebrates what came before, while Pride celebrates what happens next. When Pride is approaching, I feel a mix of excitement and dread. Excitement for having a month to celebrate LGBTQ+ pride around the country, and dread for seeing all of the business advertisements for pride products that are profit-driven and ingenuity. The impact that commodification has on pride has negative effects on LGBTQ+ people across the nation because many companies take advantage of pride and donate to politicians and organizations that are not in complete support for LGBTQ+ legislation. Some companies do use the profits they make off of LGBTQ+ merchandise to pro- LGBTQ+ organizations. Skittles donated $1 to The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation per pack of pride skittles they sold, which totalled to up to $100,000. Additionally, DocMartens donated $100,000 to The Trevor Project, which aims to end suicide among LGBTQ+ youth. It is also important to recognize the smaller organizations that are owned by LGBTQ+ people and seek to benefit the queer community. Loyalty Bookstore, located in Washington D.C., is owned by a Black, queer woman named Hannah Oliver. The store works to diversify literature to benefit queer communities of color. Gc2b, is a transgender and Black owned business that sells clothing specifically designed for transgender people.