



Gay America: Struggle for Equality

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Milestones of gay and lesbian life in the United States are brought together in the first-ever nonfiction book published specifically for teens.

Profusely illustrated with archival images, the groundbreaking *Gay America* reveals how gay men and women have lived, worked, and loved for the past 125 years. Gays and lesbians play a very prominent role in American life today, whether grabbing headlines over political gains, starring in and being the subject of movies and television shows, or filling the streets of nearly every major city each year to celebrate Gay Pride. However, this was not always the case, and this book charts their journey along with the history of the country.

First touching on colonial times, the book moves on to the Victorian period and beyond, including such historical milestones as the Roaring '20s, the Kinsey study, the McCarthy witch hunts of the 1950s, the Beat generation, Stonewall, disco, AIDS, and present-day battles over gay marriage. Providing a sense of hope mixed with pride, author Linas Alsenas demonstrates how, within one century, gay women and men have gone from being socially invisible to becoming a political force to be reckoned with and proud members of the American public living openly and honestly. The book includes a bibliography and an index.

Gay America: Struggle for Equality Details

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From Reader Review Gay America: Struggle for Equality for online ebook

Terri says

I was a child of the 60s, so I thought I knew quite a bit about the sexual revolution (from hearing and reading about it, not through personal experience!), but I knew virtually nothing of the history of gay rights. Oh, I know the headline stories and the more recent gay marriage issues, but there is so much more that was foreign to me. From the get-go let me admit to being a conservative Christian. But that does not mean I believe we should withhold information from our young people.

Alsenas presents an introductory history of homosexuality in America in a readable style that is neither condescending nor preachy. An index, notes, and bibliography contribute to casual browsing and research and invite further investigation. Six chapters span roughly twenty-years each and present the people, struggles, and major events of the periods in brief essays and photographs. The author focuses primarily on the twentieth century, and begins each chapter with an anecdote that humanizes and adds immediacy to the information that follows. Alsenas does not look at scientific or sociological theories of homosexual behavior but instead looks at the gradual coming out of gays and lesbians from the closets of American life.

The author is open in discussing sexual practices when it is necessary for the reader's understanding of situations or events. While this may discomfort some adults, teens whether gay or straight, will find this an interesting and often compelling read. The URL contains a 30-second clip of Sean Penn's Academy Award-winning performance in *Milk* and will make an excellent introduction to this outstanding volume that should be in all high school collections and most middle schools as well.

Jaimie says

I thought this book was fascinating. It follows couples through different time periods to show what it is like to be gay in America. We see many struggles documented ahead of the current time period. The photos included in this book are somber, yet beautiful.

Carrie says

Very good history of the gay community in the United States, from the pre-WWI days that Chauncey covers in *Gay New York* to Massachusetts legalizing same-sex marriage. The text is very straightforward and readable, and there are lots of photos. Published and cataloged as a young adult title, but works equally well as an introduction to gay history for adults who don't want to wade through the academic-ese of *Gay New York* or *Out of the Past*.

Minor quibbles? There are these ridiculous fictional scenarios that open every chapter that are just... bad. I think it was an attempt to make it relatable for the young folk that just doesn't work. There could have been a tad more editing so sentences make sense and don't repeat themselves. And as usual, the lesbians make occasional appearances, but it's mostly about the dudes.

Angela says

Excellently done look at lesbian and gay history in America - my biggest nitpick is I can't really call this an "LGBT" book because transgendered people are completely ignored, and bisexuals are mostly alluded to when mentioning women who had relationships with other women, but were also married to men.

The layout was done extremely well making the whole history easy to read.

Crystal says

This seemed like a fairly comprehensive history. The title includes the word Gay, so it wasn't surprising that it seemed to have more information about men, but I'd still like to see a revision with a little more emphasis on women. A revision would be great too because it was published before the end of Don't Ask, Don't Tell and DOMA. Also, the foreword explains that the book leaves out some sections of the gay community due to space limitations, but still, that's disappointing.

The style is somewhat conversational at times and the chapters open with brief stories. Both of these choices are likely and attempt to keep it interesting for a teen audience, but I am not sure I liked that aspect. The stories were based on real events, but those moments of historical fiction in the middle of a detailed history weren't my favorite.

Aaron says

This was a pretty good read. I had bought it for my old library, and I just got around to reading it after pulling it off the shelf of my new library. It is not an exhaustive history, but that is not surprising as it is written for teens. It really is a collection of vignettes that highlight some important people, events, and trends of life for GLBTQ folks throughout history. The book starts with some brief informational details from Colonial and Early America as well as the standing of alternafolk in native tribes in North America

One of the really good things is that this is the first book I have seen on the topic that included a really strong balance of information for lesbians and gay men. While the book did not dive into a great deal of depth, I can definitely say that I learned quite a bit while reading it, particularly with regard to the lesbian side of history. I also did not realize how many authors have been gay or lesbian, particularly those from the early 20th century!

I often have trouble with these over-sized non-fiction titles since a lot of the time the graphics that are sprinkled throughout often do not go directly to the text references of the same topic, but rather they are pages off. This avoided that problem, though it was still unwieldy at times.

The author also held no punches with regard to sex and sexuality. While he is not graphic, he is frank and honest with his discussion of what is done. It is all done frankly and with little aplomb.

The book is a couple of years old, and it also made me realize some of the great strides we have made in the

last year alone! It references Don't Ask, Don't Tell and the marriage equality movement. While our fight for equality is not complete, it made me realize that it was factual when the book was written, but some of that is now moving into history of what was, which is a good thing!

Lindy says

Short entries and lots of photos and illustrations make this history book easy to dip in and out of. The index appears to be thorough; I used it to refer back to material I'd previously read. The origin of the lambda symbol is an example of something I went back to, because this is a question that has been asked of me in the past and I don't remember being satisfied with the answer I found. (And it was so long ago that I don't remember what that answer was, anyway.)

The Gay Activists Alliance adopted the lambda as their logo in the 1970s. "The official reason was something about it symbolizing a 'complete exchange of energy' - but really, the designer had picked it because he thought it looked cool." According to the notes, the quote within the excerpt from Gay America is from Out for Good by D. Clendinen and A. Nagourney. I would still like to know more about the lambda logo - who was the designer, for example - so I'm pleased to have this lead on another source.

I noticed only one slip (page 123) where the author used language in a way that may not be understood outside of the GLBTQ community of a certain age: "even the crunchy Olivia Records company had shifted gears." 'Granola' in the lesbian context isn't explained anywhere in the text, so 'crunchy' (from crunchy granola) may seem an odd usage.

This book should appeal to readers in Grade 6 all the way up to adults.

Marilyn says

A good introduction to the history of gays in the US. I felt overall that the writing was informed, if not a bit agenda-driven. I find that reading non-fiction written for young adults is the perfect way for me to learn about a subject that I might skip reading about in an adult non-fiction format. This book embodied that for me; not overly detailed but enough information presented both clearly and simply that it was an easy, enjoyable read. I also learned some things I hadn't known before.

Keeana Villamar says

Gay America by Alsenas is an amazing book. The title of the book really captured me and was very intriguing to me when I first saw it. In the book, it starts off in the 1950's and during that time, homosexuality was first being introduced to society. Alsenas explains how homosexuality is compared back in the 1950's and also in society today. It truly shocked me how different it is from past to present. The LGBTQ community has come a long way from being treated like the dirt beneath people's shoes, to still being treated unfairly in present time. Being a part of the LGBTQ community and reading this book hits me harder than it should have because it reminds me that this community is still not accepted by 180 countries. It is mindblowing that only 26 countries allow same-sex marriage. This makes me think that the world has lost all of its humanity. Out of 206 countries, only 26 accept the idea that one person can love whoever they want.

This saddens me, but I am also grateful the America is one of the 26 countries that accepts true love.

This book is amazing because it teaches all audiences that there is no shame in loving whoever a person wants to love. I believe that it is beautiful that this book was written to highlight the struggles and trials that people in the LGBTQ have gone through. Throughout the different time periods, society has not accepted gay people and the sensitivity of the issue. I have never seen any book like this before. This hit me emotionally, and the photos within the book made it even more beautiful. If I had to rate this book, it would be a solid 10/10 because of the message of acceptance that is displayed for people of all ages. Truly beautiful.

Trent says

Written for so-called young adults--the publishing industry's term for kids 12-18--this is a cogent and concise history of lesbian and gay people in the United States from the 19th century to the present day. Most of us adults would learn something we didn't know already from its clear, forthright, occasionally cheeky prose. But the main point is how wonderful it is that this book exists, and is available to teens who are coming out, or who are questioning their feelings.

Gay America: Struggle for Equality was a finalist for the 2009 Randy Shilts Award for Gay Nonfiction, presented by the Publishing Triangle

Wade says

As novice of gay and lesbian history, this was an excellent beginner book. I was introduced to many subjects that I would enjoy following up on. This book does not talk about transgender history, however, so be aware of that. And the history only goes up to the beginning of Obama's presidency (2008), so I am interested in finding out what has happened in the last ten years to bring about marriage equality.

Andy says

As someone who has been a freshly minted gay activist, this is a welcome and engaging book. The design of the book, images, and white space is particularly suited to teenagers. The writing is accessible and neutral in tone. This is an excellent choice for libraries and for discussion groups. I recommend giving this book to your local libraries, youth centers, LGBT centers, anywhere that teens might be looking for LGBT information. I clearly remember the first LGBT reading list published by the American Library Association that was all of 1 page. Barbara Gittings was the editor and one of the hero's mentioned in this book. I hope to meet the author should he come to the SF Bay Area for a reading.

Hannah says

This is an excellent book for people who haven't read much about the history of the gay rights movement, especially high school students. It was the first book I've ever read about that topic, and I liked it a great deal.

Gay America doesn't go into detail about certain important events - like Stonewall, which only had two pages of coverage. However, it provides an overview of the history of homosexuality in America, from Colonial times to 2008, the year the book was published.

It was comprehensive, informative and presented the information in an entertaining way. I checked this book out of my school library, and I read it in three days. I couldn't put it down, it was like my cocaine. Although I had a general idea that gays and lesbians have existed for as long as humans have existed, I didn't know much about our past. I knew as much about Stonewall as I could find on Wikipedia, I knew a little bit about AIDS, I knew who Harvey Milk was, I knew about the butch/femme roles of the 1950s, I knew about DADT, and I knew about anything Leslie Feinberg mentioned in Stone Butch Blues because I've read that book far too many times, yet it never gets old.

However, there was an entire world of knowledge that I hadn't known existed. This book showed me the rich and varied history of the gay community, but more importantly, it showed me that I have a past. People like me have been living and loving in America for at least several hundred years, and the fact that I haven't learned about it in school doesn't change that.

With the new achievements made, like repealing DADT, this book is already dated. However, it is still a valuable resource to anyone that wants an interesting, comprehensive overview of the history of the gay rights movement. I highly recommend it.

Charltyn Hannon says

Gay America: Struggle for Equality is a beautiful story that must be read by everyone. The history of the LGBTQ+ society is heartbreaking but so influential and powerful. The beginning of the book starts in the 1950's with homosexuality first being brought to society's attention and ends with today's conditions on the struggle for legal rights and social acceptance. Today, it is important to know that same-sex marriage is legal in only 26 out of 206 countries, America being one of the 26. The other 180 countries that do not allow same-sex marriage leave LGBTQ+ members feeling afraid, unaccepted, and ashamed. You should never have to feel ashamed about loving someone, no matter the gender, race, or religion. This book gives vital information that can be used to better the social acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community. Personally, I have never seen a book like this in my local bookstore. The fact that this book is written for basically all audiences is important in the development of access to information and inclusivity of education for everyone.

Brian Saul says

I found this book on the NEW BOOKS shelf at the local library, a favorite haunt of mine! A quick and easy read of a very complex, sad history of homosexual men and women and demonstrates how a very large group of people worldwide (though focused on the USA), within only one century, went from socially invisible to becoming a major political force to be reckoned with and proud members of the public living openly and honestly. Clearly, this book was written for readers who are NOT gay that they might understand a bit better how their neighbors, their children, their brothers & sisters have struggled to be recognized and treated as equals. While the gaps left in this account are glaring (such as the treatment of "pink triangle" men during the Third Reich, the contributions -no, the creation of culture in all forms made by gays all

throughout history, the people of 'Stonewall'), it does not try to clobber the reader over the head with dozens of examples of injustices to the gay community. Rather, as a brief overview of Gay America this book goes a long way to present in a positive light those who came before us and paved the way in a struggle for equality. Richly illustrated with tasteful, if not fully representative, images. Oscar Wilde's famous quote, taken from his 1895 trial for 'gross indecency' leads the first chapter: "The 'Love that dare not speak its name' in this century...is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect....It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it....That it should be so the world does not understand. The world mocks at it and sometimes puts one in the pillory for it." Jesus Christ is not quoted in this book, but one may call to mind He said, "Owe no man, but to love one another." One of the most disturbing images in the book, for me, is the reproduction of a news article from the San Francisco Chronicle(p.74) entitled "Cops Invade Homosexual Benefit Ball". Even at the time it was published (Jan.2, 1965), the report of the incident must have made the average American reader's blood boil. "The affair was conducted by the Council for religion and the Homosexual, which has been established by Episcopal, Methodist, Lutheran and United Church of Christ leaders to try to integrate homosexuals into the Christian community." Plans were discussed in advance with the police chief. Nevertheless, officers arrive at the venue and photograph those entering. They are met by two attorneys for the council, advising the (police) inspectors they had no right to inspect the private party without a search warrant... The attorneys were arrested on charges of interfering with police officers in the performance of their duty, and taken to Northern Station..."

Now, there's 'democracy' in action!
