



The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle

Lillian Faderman

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The sweeping story of the modern struggle for gay, lesbian, and trans rights from the 1950s to the present—based on amazing interviews with politicians, military figures, legal activists, and members of the entire LGBT community who face these challenges every day.

The fight for gay, lesbian, and trans civil rights—the years of outrageous injustice, the early battles, the heart-breaking defeats, and the victories beyond the dreams of the gay rights pioneers—is the most important civil rights issue of the present day. Based on rigorous research and more than 150 interviews, *The Gay Revolution* tells this unfinished story not through dry facts but through dramatic accounts of passionate struggles, with all the sweep, depth, and intricacies only an award-winning activist, scholar, and novelist like Lillian Faderman can evoke.

The Gay Revolution begins in the 1950s, when law classified gays and lesbians as criminals, the psychiatric profession saw them as mentally ill, the churches saw them as sinners, and society victimized them with irrational hatred. Against this dark backdrop, a few brave people began to fight back, paving the way for the revolutionary changes of the 1960s and beyond. Faderman discusses the protests in the 1960s; the counter reaction of the 1970s and early eighties; the decimated but united community during the AIDS epidemic; and the current hurdles for the right to marriage equality.

In the words of the eyewitnesses who were there through the most critical events, *The Gay Revolution* paints a nuanced portrait of the LGBT civil rights movement. A defining account, this is the most complete and authoritative book of its kind.

The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle Details

Date : Published September 8th 2015 by Simon Schuster (first published September 7th 2015)

ISBN : 9781451694116

Author : Lillian Faderman

Format : Hardcover 816 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Lgbt, Politics, Gblt, Queer, Gay

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From Reader Review *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* for online ebook

V. Briceland says

Most attempts to narrate a history of LGBT activism in the United States might be thwarted not only by the movement's lack of a single, galvanizing historical figure around whom to base it—a Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, or a Susan B. Anthony—but also by a general disorganization born of the LGBT population's sheer diversity and often clashing goals. Faderman makes her history effective by focusing on the threads of multiple individuals, then weaving them into a much broader tapestry. By connecting injustices of discrimination and inequality to the human faces who have suffered under them, she fashions an engaging, exciting, and often tense story out of what could easily have read like a collection of dates and a plethora of court cases.

The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle not only hits the expected beats and does so with thorough research and documentation, but manages thoroughly to intertwine many seemingly disparate endeavors in the LGBT struggle to seize control of public perception and to labor for equality over the last eighty years. I found the book remarkably moving in spots. It's admirable that Faderman makes a convincing case that the seeds planted by the movement's earliest crusaders have, with cultivation, borne remarkable fruit.

Michael says

My full review, as well as my other thoughts on reading, can be found on my blog.

Concise but broad in scope, *The Gay Revolution* is a sweeping overview of the postwar fight for LGBT civil rights. Lillian Faderman seamlessly stitches together interviews, biographies, archival research, and scholarship into a compelling story of how, over the course of six decades, America transformed from a nation that cast all “homosexuals” as crazy, criminal, and immoral to one on the brink of granting full civil rights to all gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans people. As always, Faderman’s prose is lucid and her storytelling engaging, but the book has a couple of glaring flaws. The author doesn’t adequately address the contributions of people of color to the movement, concerning both its assimilationist and radical strains; she also avoids considering why trans identity has formed and exploded in public consciousness since the 1990s. A sense of absence pervades the book, especially in its last third, which myopically focuses almost exclusively on judicial and legislative battles. The book is still excellent as a wealth of information, notes, and sources, but the argument the author makes about LGBT equality in America feels incomplete.

Nancy Regan says

Compellingly clear and thoroughly readable. It's organized by "struggle", with the stories of movement heroes interwoven. I learned what precipitated the Stonewall Inn actions and Edith Windsor's backstory. I had been a little intimidated by the length, but it's "only" 635 pages, with the rest being notes. A bracing ode to civil rights fighters.

MeriBeth says

Book received from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

I wanted to like this book. I really, really wanted to like this book because I thought it would be a wonderful addition to GLBTQ scholarship based on the blurb I read when I selected this book at NetGalley. However, I could never really connect to the anecdotes told in the book as examples of the struggle for equality in the GLBTQ movement. There was, for me at least, little to no context to the stories told in the book nor was there much emotional impact. Again, for me. Another reader may respond differently. I do not know if this is a drawback of the writing style, the way the book was put together or just me. For all I know, it's just me as I don't have - as the saying goes - a dog in the hunt.

I read this book as an academic interested in the history of the gay civil rights movement. Perhaps, that is why I had trouble with it. I kept expecting more context or explanation to the anecdotes told, perhaps to show how they advanced the movement, yet often felt like it was just a collection of stories sorted by era. Additionally, there seemed to be a slight disconnect between one example and the next - something that began with the prologue where we had a story from the 1940s and then popped to 2012 with little connecting the two. It took me three tries to read this book. I never did fully finish it. I finally gave up since, as much as I liked some of the anecdotes told, I had no context for them nor did I often understand why those particular anecdotes were chosen. Perhaps someone deeper into the movement or into the academia surrounding the GLBTQ equality movement will better connect with or enjoy this book. It just wasn't for me.

Karen says

I'd call this a masterpiece, although I have some criticisms. Faderman handles the large scope of the book well, reminding us about incidents from previous chapters when necessary, and managing to make it read like a mostly coherent narrative. I wished there was some theory to it, e.g. a stance on whether major changes happen because of individual leaders or combinations of forces. And I wish she'd stated more deliberately that this is a history of legal rights (and secondarily of formal organizations). Public opinion and pop culture are mentioned by the wayside (see Joe Biden's crediting of Will & Grace with changing social attitudes), but only as they intersect with happenings in Congress or in courtrooms. While the history was fascinating, by the time I got near the end I was missing a sense of what it was actually like to live as a gay person in each of the eras she described. Also, as the narration got to the 90s, Faderman's own beliefs became too clear (she supports gradual legislative changes that often look timid to ordinary people who aren't politicians), and that felt frustrating. Still, I never got sick of reading, despite the length of this book (or should I say brick), and I learned a lot.

Carey Hanlin says

The Gay Revolution was interesting and informative enough, but definitely overbloaded, and for no particularly good reason. The title would also more appropriately be "The Gay Assimilation" because it only clearly and thoroughly represents the narratives of wealthy white assimilationist gay and lesbian folk at the expense of radicals, queer people of color, and trans people altogether. While it will occasionally – especially

in the chapter about marriage and military inclusion – bring up radical arguments against the focus on marriage and military inclusion, it's clear in both cases that Faderman doesn't take these radical critiques seriously. She always gives the final word to the assimilationists, and presents radical arguments as pesky new-wave trends flying in the face of original gay and lesbian mainstream goals, which isn't true.

For example, Faderman references "lesbian feminist" thought on the military as being a "stronghold of male-chauvinist piggery" which leads me to believe she doesn't critically examine the military, or military inclusion as a noble goal. Similarly, her final word on William Dobbs' criticisms of the military-inclusion movement is that those criticisms were "gibberish" to the gays and lesbians who had ~actually~ served in the military, as if their point of view was more righteous than his, and that his opinions were out of touch.

Faderman also seems out of touch with trans language and movements. She references a genderqueer figure with "genderqueer" in quotes twice, as if genderqueer isn't just as real an identity as gay or lesbian. She also refers to Matthew Shepherd as "cisgendered" again in quotes and with the unnecessary suffix. It makes me wonder if she keeps up with trans language in the same way she keeps up with gay and lesbian language. The book comes off as pretty trans exclusive either way. In general, Faderman only pays periodic lip service to trans-led movements in the same cursory way she only pays lip service to radical movements altogether. The Stonewall riots turns away from the points of view of the rioters – and only briefly brings up Marsha P. Johnson or Sylvia Rivera – to focus on the perspectives of cis white outsider journalists. Absolutely an inexplicable (to the point of bizarre) narrative decision.

The book largely erases bisexuals folk, queers, people of color and trans folk from the narrative, and almost completely leaves out the stories of "unpresentable" or "less palatable" queer and trans folk.

The book also really clumsily evokes comparisons between black civil rights and gay civil rights without critically examining those comparisons or the ways in which the movements are different, and without looking into the perspectives of the people caught at the intersection.

This all might sound nitpicky, but it's important when telling queer history to make sure we aren't telling whitewashed or ciswashed queer history, because all history we get taught is already whitewashed and ciswashed. But Faderman's book continues that trope and continues to give us one sided history. Overall an interesting read, but disappointing in its scope.

Kevin says

Lillian Faderman, six-time Lambda Literary Award-winning historian of gay and lesbian history and literature, vividly brings to life the fight for LGBT rights in the United States with *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*. This mammoth undertaking runs more than 800 pages, but it is highly readable, superbly researched and filled with fascinating stories.

While many believe the history of LGBT rights in the United States began with the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City, Faderman (*My Mother's Wars*) begins her chronology with Henry Gerber forming the Society for Human Rights in Chicago in 1924. That short-lived organization inspired Harry Hay to create the Mattachine Society for gay men in 1950, and Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon to create its lesbian counterpart, the Daughters of Bilitis, in 1955. Although both organizations were fraught with infighting, power struggles

and legal troubles (they were formed at the height of the McCarthy witch-hunt era), they helped members find self-esteem during very repressive times.

Post-Stonewall, Faderman delves into the prickly relationship between lesbians and the homophobic early leadership of the National Organization for Women (NOW); the rise and fall of Anita Bryant and her Save Our Children campaign; the election and assassination of Harvey Milk; and the AIDS pandemic and the creation of ACT-UP, with its savvy media committee. Faderman enlivens the courtroom gains and losses in the new millennium with first-hand testimonies of the backstage drama.

This is an essential guide to the gay and lesbian movement, brought to life by a meticulous historian who is also a natural storyteller. Discover the fascinating people and their heroic actions behind decades' worth of gradual change in the fight for LGBT civil rights in the United States.

David says

This wonderful book is too long for me to read at the moment, but I read enough of it to know that it's a great read, so I look forward to reading it all at some point. After reading the prologue and the epilogue, I dipped in here and there, and am very impressed. I had never read about Dore Legg's "four horseman" concept of our enemies (back then): The Social, the Scientific, the Religious, and the Legal. And it was great to read about a series of early engagements that put us on the way to the amazing progress that has been made in my lifetime. Plenty still to do, of course, but we really have come an amazingly long way in a very short time. Another part of the story that I read was about Lesbian Feminism, and it was fascinating (Chapter 14). I'm taking it back to the library now, so others can read it, satisfied that it will be there for me to pick up again, when I have time for such a major tome. Highly recommended, based on what I read so far!

Alex says

A comprehensive history of the struggle for gay civil rights in the US from the 1940s to present-day. Faderman has a gift for history--in all the times I put the book down and wandered over to something else, I was able to keep track of all the players she mentioned, rather than coming back in confusion. ("Who is Frank Kameny, anyway?") The book itself is well-written and, at times, shocking--having such a comprehensive review made me realize just how many gains have been made over my lifetime. Having the timescale really helped.

Do note that the focus in this book is gay & lesbian, bisexual, and then transgender/other--in that precise order. It's called the *gay* revolution for a reason. I don't fault Faderman for writing what she knows, but it would've been nice to have an additional chapter at the end detailing modern trans struggles and the ongoing fight for those civil rights. It was somewhat glossed over in other chapters--Brandon Teena's mentioned in the context of hate crimes, but that's a separate fight that's definitely nowhere close to being finished. Acknowledgement of all that's yet to come would've been helpful.

The other thing I had a minor qualm with was the organization. For the first half of the book or so, everything was chronological. Around section seven or eight, it broke off into subject-specific focuses, which was sort of nice but then each of those went chronologically, so you'd end one section in 2003 and begin the next back in 1970. Not sure how else I would've organized it, but those occasional shifts would be

a wee bit jarring.

Still, if you're looking for a good primer/comprehensive review on the subject, this looks to be your best bet. I'd say use this as a springing-off point, after which you can read more detailed histories about some of the various subjects afterwards.

Mike says

In the interest of brevity, *The Gay Revolution* documents the separate threads of the radical versus incrementalist sects of the gay civil rights movement with an exhaustive acuity and yet with a certain breeziness. As a sort of epic survey that unites these separate chapters of the movement, it's astonishing: I disagree with Faderman's detractors that she gives short shrift to the radical movements and champions incrementalism in the courts, and find that her coverage of the radical theatrics of the Gay Liberation Front demonstrates its efficacy in certain areas (e.g., the stunning Anita Bryant chapter) whereas the painstaking waiting game of the Lambda Legal Defense Fund reaped its benefits elsewhere. This push and pull is my favorite part of the book, and it serves as an excellent primer as to why radicalism versus incrementalism can be characterized either as a conflict or as a toolbox of strategies that can unite a cause via different mechanisms. I'm also glad that Faderman shows equanimity in her portrayal of gays and lesbians as being "opposed" to each other; she gives gay men their due for their misogyny when working with lesbians, but also shows the non-committal mission of the Daughters of Bilitis. There are fabulous nuggets of information about how communities ranging from the now-heralded Democratic Socialists were highly discriminatory toward homosexuals, to the eerie resemblance of Bryan's rise to Trump's, to the stunning radicalism of unsung hero Dan Choi.

By the book's end, however, the chapters start to show the wear and tear of Faderman's repeated formula: every saga is a short autobiographical snippet followed by the forming of a coalition to fight - repeatedly - every contention for gay civil rights in the courts. The appeal - reject - appeal - yes - contest - yes saga indubitably paints a picture of the frustrating stubbornness of democratic institutions, but I was surprised that a writer as gifted as Faderman wasn't able to imbue more life into the back-half of the book. I was beginning to feel that she was as bogged down by the repetition of these arcs herself.

My copy is ruthlessly highlighted with names of icons I should've learned a long time ago. This book is a much needed education and a highly recommended stepping stone. I hope this inspires more people to read into the more diverse, niche areas of the community as well. Now, off to Club Mattachine in DTLA. Godspeed, Harry Hay. Godspeed.

Hadrian says

For those of you familiar with LGBT history, the basic outline of the story is familiar - arrests in the 1940s and 1950s, attempts at respectability with the Mattachine Society, gay pride parades and Harvey Milk, removal from the DSM, Anita Bryant, AIDS, culture wars, hate crimes law, *Lawrence v. Texas*, Proposition 8, marriage.

Faderman's story is filling in the gaps. For an earlier example, the Mattachine Society's flirtation with the radical left compared to its tack towards 'respectability' politics. There are also early lesbian organizations,

like the Daughters of Bilitis. Their story follows sometimes a divergent and often parallel trajectories with other organizations for gay men. There's also not really enough on trans people, but those who make their presence most known (e.g. at Stonewall) are given their due.

This is a story of individuals, of the clashes of personality, of their triumphs and defeats, and how they endured. There's less of a focus on organizational development, but more of a human element to understanding LGBT politics.

Life for us is better than it's ever been in the United States, but the 'revolution' is in no sense over. There is still no non-discrimination law on a federal scale, the 'religious freedom' bills in denying us service are still persistent, and there is still far too much violent homophobia. Not to mention all of the other things trans people need, which take up far too much space for me to list here.

Still, I can only be impressed with this book. The interviews date back 40 years, Faderman digs through archives from the federal government to the police at Stonewall. It is a culmination of a life's work, and is, in my view, a necessary book.

Michael says

Absolutely incredible. A stunning work that reflects the love and devotion of the author to the issue. The research she must have done to create this book is mind boggling. I cannot recall reading such an impressively researched and written book since I discovered John Boswell's opus magnus more than 25 years ago. This book ranks up there with that one in its thoroughness.

Faderman had succeeded in doing what I think needs to be done -- she has put faces of real people to the history of the gay struggle. She tells the stories of people who have been bullied, in some cases to death, simply for being who they were born to be. She tells the story of a retired admiral in the US Navy who was reactivated just so he could be kicked out and have his benefits taken away -- even though he had been retired for more than 10 years. She tells the story of a highly respected college professor who was admired by his students, colleagues, and everyone who came in contact with him, until he was accused of being gay. Then he lost his job, his career, his identity, his friends, everything.

She tells the stories of the founders of the Gay Activists Alliance in late 1969. Here is where I must fault Faderman. She did such an impressive job researching this book so I wonder how she missed one of the original founders, Tom Doerr. Tom's name and story should have been included since he was the person who gave us the lambda symbol, first as the "brand" of GAA and then as a symbol of gay pride worldwide for generations. This story should have been included. It could have been condensed to a couple of paragraphs, but it should have been included.

Probably everyone has stories that could have been included because sadly there have been many casualties along the road to the revolution. And despite the progress we've made, the struggle goes on and will go on. Faderman has given us a rich history to help us see the people who came before us, on whose shoulders we are standing now.

Well done, Dr. Faderman. Well done and thank you for this impressive history. For anyone thinking of reading it, stop thinking and just pick it up and read it. You will be enriched by the experience.

Maureen says

This book is an incredible resource for the LGBTQ community regarding our history and progress in the United States. Limited to the last century, and at times, overly focused on homosexual identified men and lesbian women (rather than non-binary/bisexual/trans folx) this book still illuminates quite a bit.

I learned so much from this book. Standout chapters for me were the ones on the history of the political group Lavender Menace and the Lesbian separatist movement, the Stonewall riots, the Harvey Milk assassination, the AIDS crisis, LGBTQ history of the military, the murders of Matthew Shepard and Brandon Teena, the Edith Windsor / Thea Spyer case, and a few others. This book is not comprehensive, but it certainly covers much of known queer history.

Be forewarned, however- there are graphic writings about the history of queer people- their murders, abuse, psychological violence (conversion therapy, lobotomies, etc.) and suffering. But it is also a story of hope and determination and the diversity of the movement. It was extremely useful to me.

Kellye says

Quite lengthy, but very eye opening. Really digs deep into the gay fight for equality.

Rambling Reader says

great
