

Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation

By Jim Downs

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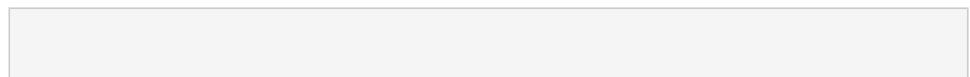
Despite the tremendous gains of the LGBT movement in recent years, the history of gay life in this country remains poorly understood. According to conventional wisdom, gay liberation started with the Stonewall Riots in Greenwich Village in 1969. The 1970s represented a moment of triumph—both political and sexual—before the AIDS crisis in the subsequent decade, which, in the view of many, exposed the problems inherent in the so-called “gay lifestyle”.

In *Stand by Me*, the acclaimed historian Jim Downs rewrites the history of gay life in the 1970s, arguing that the decade was about much more than sex and marching in the streets. Drawing on a vast trove of untapped records at LGBT community centers in Los Angeles, New York, and Philadelphia, Downs tells moving, revelatory stories of gay people who stood together—as friends, fellow believers, and colleagues—to create a sense of community among people who felt alienated from mainstream American life.

As Downs shows, gay people found one another in the Metropolitan Community Church, a nationwide gay religious group; in the pages of the *Body Politic*, a newspaper that encouraged its readers to think of their sexuality as a political identity; at the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookstore, the hub of gay literary life in New York City; and at theaters putting on “Gay American History,” a play that brought to the surface the enduring problem of gay oppression.

These and many other achievements would be largely forgotten after the arrival in the early 1980s of HIV/AIDS, which allowed critics to claim that sex was the defining feature of gay liberation. This reductive narrative set back the cause of gay rights and has shaped the identities of gay people for decades.

An essential act of historical recovery, *Stand by Me* shines a bright light on a triumphant moment, and will transform how we think about gay life in America from the 1970s into the present day.



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Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation By Jim Downs Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

"The sheer act of Downs' acknowledging that not all gay men subscribed to the popular "three Big Bs" of the time—"the Bars, Beaches, and Baths"—and found their identity validated and articulated through the communal practices of Christian worship and cultural hubs (like the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop) is a refreshing and invigorating experience. *Stand By Me* proves a deeply moving read, one that passionately and urgently argues for us to acknowledge some of the forgotten history of gay liberation."

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

"A valuable addition to LGBT and social-change collections."

—*Booklist*

"[A] highly recommended and necessary corrective to the mythology of gay life in the 1970s."

—*Library Journal, Starred Review*

"A great look back at the efforts, activism, and advocacy for gay rights."

—*Washington Blade*

"*Stand By Me* marks a significant contribution to our better understanding of the LGBTQ past. By emphasizing previously underplayed events and individuals, Downs importantly complicates the standard narrative in ways both novel and nuanced."

—**Martin Duberman, Distinguished Professor of History Emeritus, CUNY**

"Intelligent and thought-provoking."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

Praise for *STAND BY ME*:

"Downs infuses great passion and intent in every paragraph, striving to raise the level of discourse even as he's tossing outmoded ideas aside left and right. This is history as it should be told, as complex and as personal as possible."

—*Manhattan Book Review*

"Downs has an instinct for historically relevant stories and he tells them well...In the chapter "Prison Sounds," Downs offers similarly invigorating detective work, digging up aspects of LGBT activism that have eluded most historians."

—*Boston Review*

"[Downs's] concentration is on men, though he frequently describes gay and lesbian partnerships and fissures, as well as the movement's debt to African-American freedom struggles and to women's liberation. He sets out not only to show that the period shouldn't be defined by sexualization, but also to highlight quiet expressions of gay liberation, often activist but not exclusively devoted to "screaming, yelling, and critiquing the state."

—*Critics at Large*

“*Stand by Me* brings the 1970s back to life, not as it is imagined to be, but as it actually was. In compelling prose, Jim Downs has recovered the stories of heroic individuals who risked much to come out, to build community, and to fight for social justice. Some of these episodes are tragic and some inspiring. All of them deserve to be remembered.”

—**John D'Emilio, author of *Intimate Matters***

“From the ashes of a horrific fire that engulfed a gay church in New Orleans in 1973, Jim Downs has rescued the history of gay men in the decade after the Stonewall uprising. As this beautiful, and at times haunting, book makes clear, gay men in this period forged intellectually vibrant, spiritually rich, and nourishing communities that not only sustained them through some harrowing and heartwarming times, but that also grew more powerful as the twentieth century became the twenty-first.”

—**Heather Ann Thompson, University of Michigan**

“In sparking, often moving, prose, Jim Downs rewrites the history of the gay liberation movement in the 1970s. This is an important contribution not only to the history of that struggle but to our understanding of the afterlife of the upheavals of the 1960s.”

—**Eric Foner, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Fiery Trial***

“This book is informative, sometimes horrifying, interesting and, unlike your old high school history books, it's never dry.”

—***Washington Blade***

“Downs capably blends authority and warmth in this thoughtful reexamination of an era.”

—***Boston Globe***

“Downs's book has mass appeal and is written in a way that will satisfy both scholars and casual readers with a colloquial, down-to-Earth tone...A necessary addition to any bookshelf, *Stand By Me* complicates and reimagines the history of gay liberation...The book succeeds in uncovering a forgotten history, but more importantly, *Stand By Me* stands as a reminder that, for people of color who still strive against a society determined to ignore their existence, the fight for equality is far from ended.”

—***Edge Media Network***

“Downs has written an important, thoughtful and entertaining record that shines light on unfamiliar moments in early gay and lesbian history...An important addition to the history of gay liberation in the U.S.”

—***Shelf Awareness for Readers***

“*Stand by Me* includes massacre and tragedy; its opening chapter is an emotional rehashing of the 1973 arson attack...the most lethal targeting of gay people in American history until the June 12 massacre at Orlando's Pulse club—took the lives of 32 men during a religious service... The passages that grab you most...address the 'usable past,' which Downs defines as the facets of history that provide gay people with 'legitimacy, meaning, and, most of all, a genealogy to their plight.' And his passion is infectious.”

—***Public Books***

“*Stand By Me* is not duplicative of other accounts. It is to our movement an equivalent to Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*.”

—***Lambda Literary***

"*Stand By Me* is a laudable, thoroughly researched corrective to the prevalent idea of gay people in the 1970s as uninvolved, unengaged sex-crazed hedonists."

—*A & U Magazine*

"Downs makes a good case for us to remember that the zeal for liberation in the '70s was deeply and directly informed by feminist politics, and thus was only ever in part, primarily or even strongly, about sexual liberation...[A] diverting book with considerable virtues."

—*Gay & Lesbian Review*

About the Author

Jim Downs, is a Mellon New Directions Fellow at Harvard University and an associate professor of history at Connecticut College. The author of the critically acclaimed *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering during the Civil War and Reconstruction*, he has also written for *Time*, the *Huffington Post*, and the *New York Times*, among other publications. Downs lives in Cambridge, MA.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Yolanda Osuna:

The feeling that you get from *Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation* may be the more deep you looking the information that hide into the words the more you get serious about reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to comprehend but *Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation* giving you excitement feeling of reading. The writer conveys their point in a number of way that can be understood simply by anyone who read it because the author of this e-book is well-known enough. This kind of book also makes your personal vocabulary increase well. That makes it easy to understand then can go along with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We highly recommend you for having this specific *Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation* instantly.

Roberto Fetter:

Reading can called thoughts hangout, why? Because when you find yourself reading a book specifically book entitled *Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation* your brain will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in most aspect that maybe mysterious for but surely might be your mind friends. Imaging each and every word written in a guide then become one form conclusion and explanation in which maybe you never get ahead of. The *Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation* giving you yet another experience more than blown away your mind but also giving you useful data for your better life in this particular era. So now let us teach you the relaxing pattern at this point is your body and mind are going to be pleased when you are finished looking at it, like winning a casino game. Do you want to try this extraordinary spending spare time activity?

Nancy Chinn:

The book untitled *Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation* contain a lot of information on the item. The writer explains your girlfriend idea with easy way. The language is very clear and understandable

all the people, so do certainly not worry, you can easy to read it. The book was written by famous author. The author gives you in the new age of literary works. It is easy to read this book because you can read on your smart phone, or gadget, so you can read the book within anywhere and anytime. If you want to buy the e-book, you can open up their official web-site as well as order it. Have a nice read.

Christopher Palmer:

Is it anyone who having spare time and then spend it whole day through watching television programs or just telling lies on the bed? Do you need something totally new? This Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation can be the reply, oh how comes? A fresh book you know. You are therefore out of date, spending your free time by reading in this new era is common not a geek activity. So what these publications have than the others?

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