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Transgender History (Seal Studies)



Synopsis

Covering American transgender history from the mid-twentieth century to today, *Transgender History* takes a chronological approach to the subject of transgender history, with each chapter covering major movements, writings, and events. Chapters cover the transsexual and transvestite communities in the years following World War II; trans radicalism and social change, which spanned from 1966 with the publication of *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, and lasted through the early 1970s; the mid-1970s to 1990s; the era of identity politics and the changes witnessed in trans circles through these years; and the gender issues witnessed through the 1990s and 2000s. *Transgender History* includes informative sidebars highlighting quotes from major texts and speeches in transgender history and brief biographies of key players, plus excerpts from transgender memoirs and discussion of treatments of transgenderism in popular culture.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Just when it seems like more and more publishers are publishing fewer and fewer books, and even less and less queer titles, Seal Press persists---thank goodness!! Having had the chance on a few occasions to hear Stryker speak at various events, and being familiar with other work of hers, I wasn't surprised by her ability to engage me as a reader, or by the overall readability of *Transgender History*. True, when you cram "history" (trans or not) into 153 pages, there are several things that you can focus on, and many other things you cannot. But, as primer/introductory text, *Transgender History* has a lot to offer. People will certainly be drawn to the first chapter, "An

Introduction to Transgender Terms and Concepts." While I am much more hesitant to provide my students with readings that present a list of terms and definitions (preferring instead that they encounter them in context, often in contradictory contexts that reveal their nuances), a general reading public will certainly appreciate the way in which Stryker is able to succinctly give them a working understanding of so many terms. The second chapter, "A Hundred Years of Transgender History" is an amazing condensation of a lot of information. I have previously encountered much of the information that Stryker presents, but to have it all gathered here and in less than thirty pages is a feat! I particularly appreciated Stryker's attention to the ways in which medical science (and legislation over it) has increasingly played a central role in our everyday lives. Chapter 4, "The Difficult Decades" highlights Transgender History's usefulness for contemporary Women's Studies and Gender Studies courses. Most importantly, throughout the book there is a strong focus on critically analyzing the role of state policies and institutions in controlling those who go against social norms. At times, these moments may be too subtle for novice readers, but the book definitely has a lot to offer.

Something that I continue to find disappointing, in discussions of gay/lesbian or transgender issues, is the extent to which there is an overfocus on political-sociological and deconstructionist-philosophical issues, and a paucity of mythological offerings on the subject. The result is that people's gender/sexual identities are being "thought to death", mentated to a great degree, wheeled around in endless circles of intellectual analysis, --- yet these are people's lives we are talking about, interesting lives, colorful lives full of pain and sadness, joy and surprise, heartache and loneliness, or community and comradeship. Lives are full of anecdotes, stories, tales with tricksters, riddles or paradox. People's lives are not instances of philosophical or political points proven, which it sometimes seems that books with a political-sociological focus, like this one, would make them be. I begin to wonder whether even conceiving of subjects such as transgenderism as historical, rather than, say, simply anecdotal or mythological, already begins to orient events and lives in an overly abstract, detached and linear way, and to view people's intimate lives as valuable primarily for the historical-political-philosophical theories which require them as evidence. What if we didn't care to make any particular political points, to use rational arguments or stories of oppression to convince anyone of anything, but instead were more interested in what archetypes were involved, and what symbols or myths could be accessed and used to assist us in attaining fulfillment and wisdom? For what are our lives for, if not to grow towards wisdom? I came of age in interesting times, in the 1980's in the SF Bay Area when many of the transgender organizations and

communities were starting and flourishing. I knew or met Lou Sullivan, Gayle Rubin, Jamison Green, Kate Bornstein and others mentioned in this book. I attended some early FTM meetings in San Francisco in the late 1980's. I watched as the coming decades brought increased acceptance for gay, lesbian and transgender people, but I also observed with concern as I saw some folks' simple desire for civil rights, be subsumed into a massive identity politics project which seemed to swallow up the color of anecdote and the richness of paradox, in favor of the smug self-satisfaction of political correctness, and an unhealthy obsession with victimization. What encourages me is that the "third wave" of feminism to which Stryker refers, is surely not the last wave. As the Buddhists know, change is inevitable, and there will be continuing waves and insights revealed, as gender and sexuality issues are explored ever more deeply and subtly, not just with the intellect (so often, a particularly inept and dull tool), but with the heart, the body, the earth -- and with intuition and the imagination. Indeed it is my hope that the richness of the imagination, which was so beneficial in past ages, will become very significant once again, as a vehicle by which gay/lesbian and transgender individuals can explore their own experience, and bring forth the mythology so much needed for our times.

For readers interested in contemporary transgender history in the United States, this short and sweet book is an excellent introduction to the topic, covering all of the major political struggles, victories, backlash, and debates from the years just following World War II to the present day. In this book, you'll learn about important but little known transgender protests such as the riots outside Cooper's Donuts in LA in 1959, Dewey's lunch counter in Philadelphia in 1965, and the Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco in 1966, as well as the famous Stonewall Riots of 1968. Along the way, we meet transgender activists like Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson, Leslie Feinberg, Dean Spade, Imani Henry, Riki Wilchins, Lou Sullivan, Kate Bornstein, Beth Elliott, and many others, and political organizations like S.T.A.R., Transsexual Menace, and the Queens' Liberation Front. In addition, Susan Stryker explores the transgender movement's relationship to feminism and gay and lesbian activism, discussing subjects like feminist transphobia amongst second-wave feminists, third-wave feminist inclusion, the impact of queer theory on the transgender movement, and the genderqueer phenomenon. Thank you Susan Stryker for this wonderful celebration of transgender history. It was both a joy to read and very educational!

Written well for general information as well as utilizing it in the classroom. It is a very good resource for basic understanding. Wish that they had printed the material in a larger print format for the book.

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