

The Passion of Martin Duberman: Searing Personal Testimony on Gay History, AIDS, Addiction, Recovery and More

— *Medium*, 2/14/18

“All historical writing is interpretive” —Martin Duberman

There have been few moments of American history more corroborating of leftist perspectives than the present. Throughout the land we are plunged back to the future of privileged white men, of the crassest elitism, racism, sexism, homophobia, harrassment and bullying. As the middle and working classes are raped of our “entitlements,” “homonationalists,” as Sarah Schulman calls them, are increasingly out of their closets of reactionary conservatism and fascism. The gay past that was Joseph McCarthy, J. Edgar Hoover, Roy Cohn and Ernst Röhm is now prelude to a future of far-right conservative support from the likes of finance mogul Peter Thiel and alt-right rabble rouser Milo Yiannopoulos.

Ergo, it has never been more timely to read leftist literature and consider leftist perspectives. In this context, anything from a historian as accomplished and challenging as Martin Duberman will be of moment and interest. Certainly, that’s the case with his new collection, *The Rest of It: Hustlers, Cocaine, Depression and Then Some 1976-1988*, mostly personal reflections on events and issues in his own life and times, from the early period of the AIDS epidemic.

First, some disclosure. Marty and I were close friends during the years covered in the book, and my absence from these accounts is its own window on our overlapping interests and writing on many of the subjects under review here—e.g., AIDS, addiction, recovery, psychiatry, sex research and Christopher Lasch. Because of this friendship, and the personal nature of this collection, I’ve opted to use “Marty” rather than “Duberman” in the appreciation that follows.

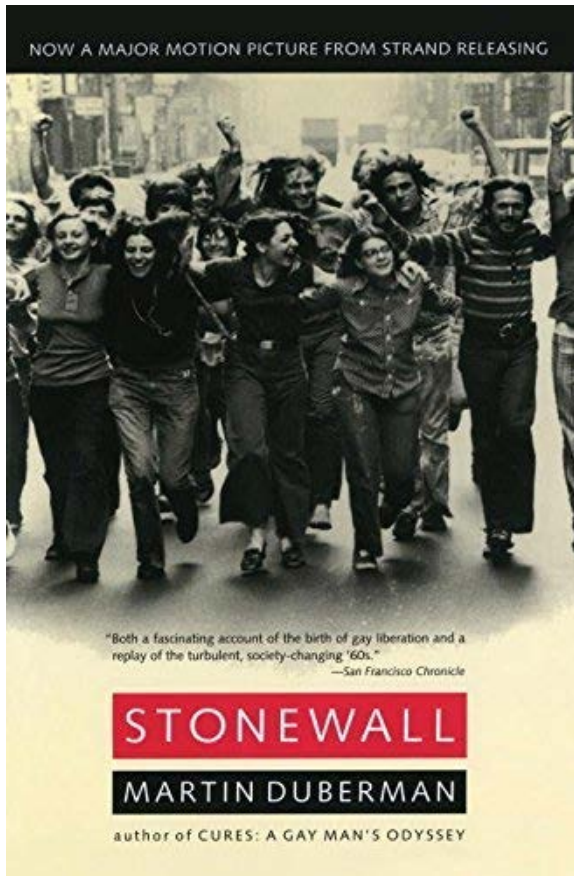


Figure 157 - *Stonewall* by Martin Duberman, paperback book cover photo, penguin-random house, 1993, amazon.com

All history, no matter how erudite or intentionally fair-minded, is selective. In his role as a distinguished historian and scholar, being accountable for selectivity and semi-fictionalization is important and comes naturally to Marty, and so disclaimers and qualifiers addressing this issue are always to be found in the introductions and commentaries of his many dramatizations and semi-fictionalizations as well as his more scrupulously documented scholarly accounts of historical figures and events. Even so, when all is said and done, Marty's historical dramas such as *Visions of Kerouac*, *Mother Earth*, *Stonewall* and other works, including his previous book, *Jews Queers Germans*, can be categorized with, rather than appreciated as somehow qualitatively apart from, such other notably selective and

semi-fictional historical docu-dramatizations of our time as *And The Band Played On*, *The Normal Heart* and *How To Survive a Plague*.

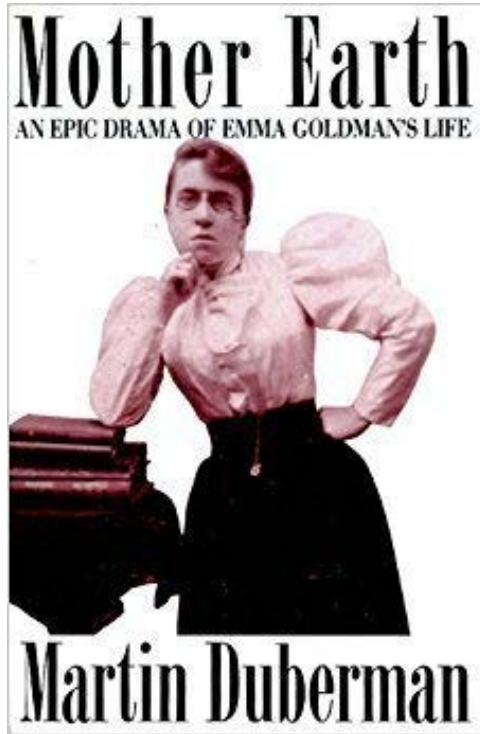


Figure 158 - *Mother Earth: An Epic Drama of Emma Goldman's Life* by Martin Duberman, St. Martin's Press, 1991, amazon.com

Whatever the bottom-line “facts,” history is inevitably and always a kind of Rashomon, a story that is told differently depending on the participant or observer, the “facts” being given different weights, colors, shades and prominence by each storyteller. The Rashomon analogy is mine, not Marty’s, but it’s one I know he would endorse, whatever the qualifiers. As Marty puts it in his essay in *Gay and Lesbian Review*, “Why Auden and Kallman Endured” (*GLR*, 1/18), “all historical writing is interpretive.”

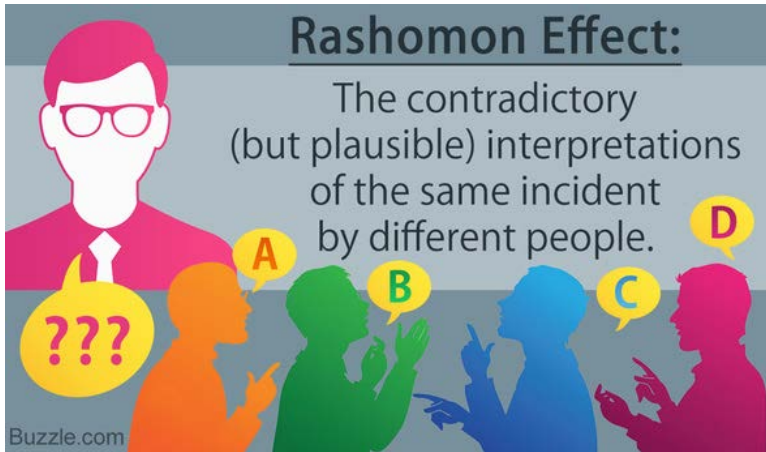


Figure 159 - Graphic image, public domain

In this age of fake news, it's heartening to know that there are writers like Marty, persons of conscience and ethics about their methods and sources. Even when he fictionalizes and dramatizes, he spells out his commitment to credibility and truth, as best he can capture it, and he maintains his scholarly approach with a fluent use of historical resources. For example, though there are no footnotes or indices in *The Rest of It* (likewise in *Jews Queers Germans* and other works) there are contextual references to sources, especially his own diary entries. The Rashomon analogy is pertinent for another reason. For all Marty's skills as a historian and scholar, he is likewise a master of storytelling. Always compelling, his writing can be as difficult to put down as his viewpoints can be to argue with.

It's not likely that anyone will ever catch Marty off-guard about these issues of selectivity, fictionalization and dramatization. Unflinchingly self-critical, there isn't any potential pitfall or vulnerability he himself hasn't weighed and articulated. But that he is consistently careful to acknowledge the possibility of bias in his writing shouldn't inhibit critical scrutiny and perspective. So in the interest of better capturing my subject along lines used by Marty himself, I'm going to proceed with commentary that will make reference to my own memories and subjective impressions alongside those that are less personal.

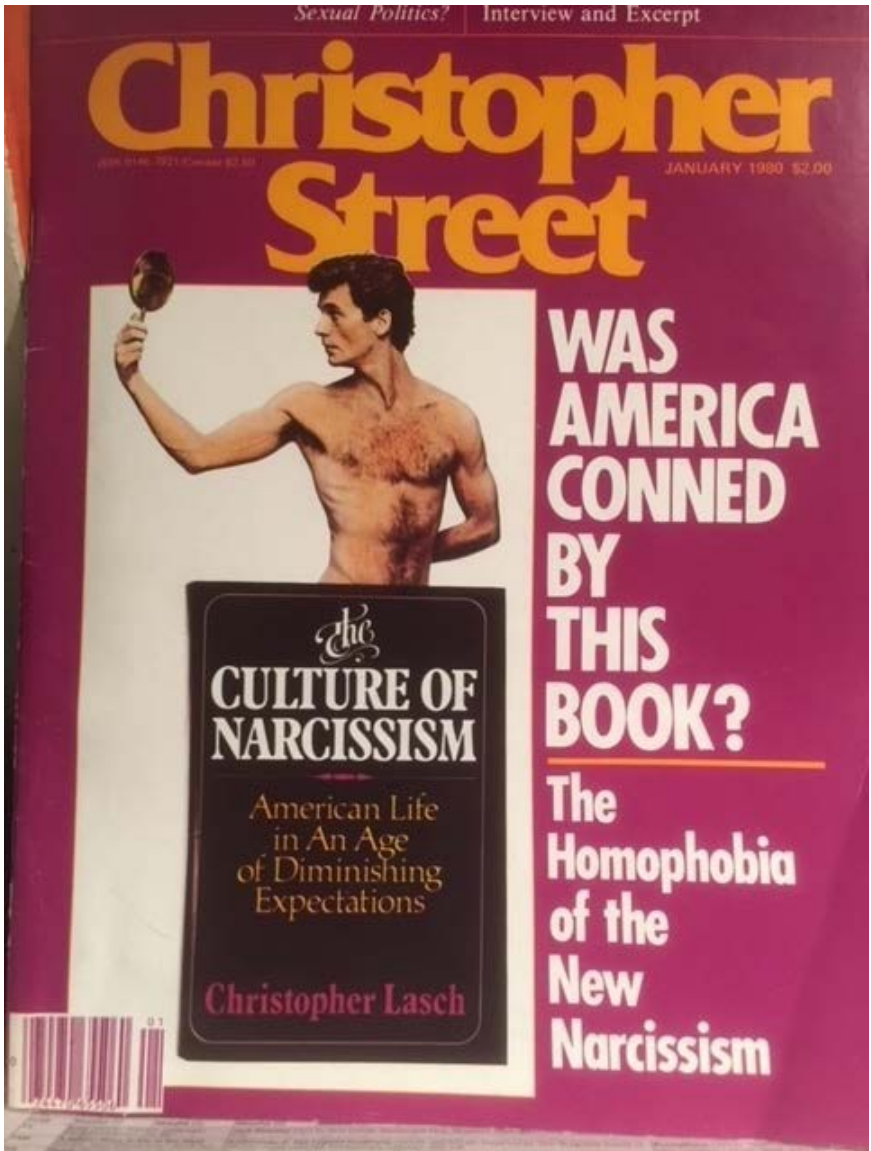


Figure 160 - "The Homophobia of The New Narcissism," cover story of *Christopher Street Magazine*, January, 1980, by Lawrence D. Mass

My essay, "The New Narcissism and Homosexuality: The Psychiatric Connection" was the first cover story of the 1980's of *Christopher Street* magazine. In *The Rest of It*, Marty's discussion of the author of that trendy book, Christopher Lasch, as a figure of the left, is very interesting and revealing, especially of how the

heterosexist ideologues who dominated the intellectual discourse at that time kept relegating and stigmatizing homosexuality. From leftist points of view, and as Marty reprises it in his discussion of Lasch and Eugene Genovese, homosexuality was seen as self-centered (“narcissistic”) and profligate at the expense of maturity and society.

Such judgment was consistent with my own experience when I came out in the late 1960’s at the University of California at Berkeley. While the activism on campus tolerated gay people and accepted our support—not so unlike the way the right does now—the left not only wasn’t there for gay people, it harbored, albeit more tacitly than the right, a lot of prejudice about us. In the film documentaries on Berkeley from that period and later (e.g., Mark Kitchell’s film, *Berkeley in the Sixties*), gay people and concerns are neither visible nor acknowledged. Challenging gay invisibility and confronting anti-gay bigotry among the intelligentsia are key battlefronts on which Marty fought early, bravely and often. The passion of his arguments and efforts is everywhere in the testimony of *The Rest of Us*.

My own take on Lasch and his book was complementary to what Marty has to say here. As I wrote about it, “the new narcissism” discourse embraced by Lasch and his ilk reflected older psychiatric, mostly psychoanalytic jargon and theoretics, especially its newer designations of “pathological narcissism” and “narcissistic personality disorder” (designations I’m now guilty, together with a growing number of psychiatrists, of exploiting to characterize “the president who shall go unnamed”).

These were the new ways that traditionally homophobic psychoanalytic psychiatry was finding to re-pathologize homosexuality following the landmark declassification of “homosexuality” as a mental disorder in 1973-74, a decision that remained as deeply unpopular in older, conservative psychiatric enclaves as Obama’s presidency became among Republicans. Diagnosing social variance and political dissidence as psychiatric disorders is something the Soviets excelled at and became notorious for, as did American psychiatry, especially with its older official diagnostic categories of “homosexuality” and “ego-dystonic homosexuality,” but more indirectly with its newer ones, like “pathological narcissism.”

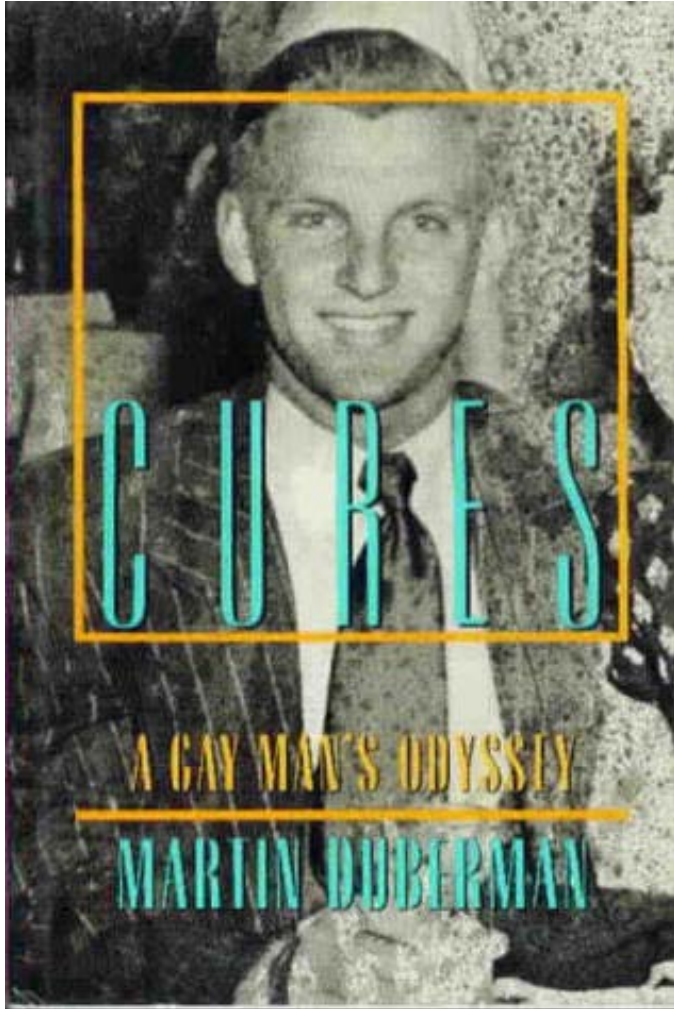


Figure 161 - *Cures: A Gay Man's Odyssey* by Martin Duberman, cover photo of original hardback, Dutton, 1991

Marty knew well of the work I had been doing as a watchdog for what was happening in psychiatry, and it's hard, at least for me, not to feel that his decision not to probe Lasch's seduction by these psychiatric concepts lessens his discussion in *The Rest of Us* of this turning point in American intellectual discourse. As Marty himself notes in that *GLR* essay on Auden and Kallman, "Before meeting Kallman, Auden had considered his erotic life a failure, a narcissistic derangement as he saw it, limited and barren. His attitude reflected, of course, standard psychiatric assumptions of the day." In Marty's

defense, *The Rest of It* makes no claims to being comprehensive. Rather, it recollects moments, situations, personalities and conflicts without a lot of context or exposition, often regarding matters he has discussed in other collections and memoirs.

Some additional notes about our friendship. It was never sexual. Rather, Marty was, like his nemesis Larry Kramer, a mentor and friend in the earliest period of my own writing and activism. I no longer remember how Marty and I met, but I had just written my first piece for the gay press on the homophobia I encountered in coming out during interviews for a residency in psychiatry at leading universities and medical centers in the Chicago area. That essay, "Trial By Ordeal," appeared in 1979 in *Gay Community News*, on the eve of my moving to New York from Boston, where I lived and did my medical training during most of the 1970's.

Thus began my own gay activist journalism, most of it centered on exposing "the shift in credibility of the best medical and scientific thinking about sexuality and homosexuality," as I put it, "from the temples of psychiatry to the laboratories of sex research." In New York I continued my writing, mostly for the gay press—the *New York Native*, *Christopher Street*, which Marty also wrote for, and the *Advocate*. Marty was one of the first people I got to know in the New York City whirl of gay life, activism and writing. We connected strongly on many issues of community and consciousness as well as at a more ineffable level of affection and regard. During this period I published many pieces about psychiatry and sex research, including interviews with key figures like Masters and Johnson, John Money, Thomas Szasz and Marty himself which later appeared in my two volume collection: *Dialogues of The Sexual Revolution*.

Regarding that takeover from psychiatry by sex researchers of the most credible thinking about sexuality and homosexuality, *The Rest of Us* makes telling reference to Marty's critique of the seminal Bell and Weinberg study, *Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity Among Men and Women*. Regarding the gratitude we all felt for this watershed development in the sciences establishing our "normality," Marty reveals here that he had tried to qualify his appreciation, to be more of a spoiler, in his *New York Times* review of the book.

The "liberal" take on homosexuality had been exemplified by the Kinsey Institute's Alan Bell and Martin Weinberg in their book Homosexualities...In the excised section [of Marty's review by the

Times], I'd argued that although most gay people did share the prescribed values and aspirations of mainstream culture, a radical minority, lesbian feminists in particular, did not; that minority firmly rejected the liberal view that our national institutions were basically sound and that a little tinkering here and there around the edges would make them better still...The liberal Kinsey Institute, I argued, champions out of one side of its mouth the vigorous scrutiny of traditional assumptions about sex, but then blindly accepts a set of assumptions about human nature most in need of scrutiny—like the belief that a “maternal instinct” is innate, that recreational sex denotes immaturity or, conversely, that monogamy signifies adulthood.

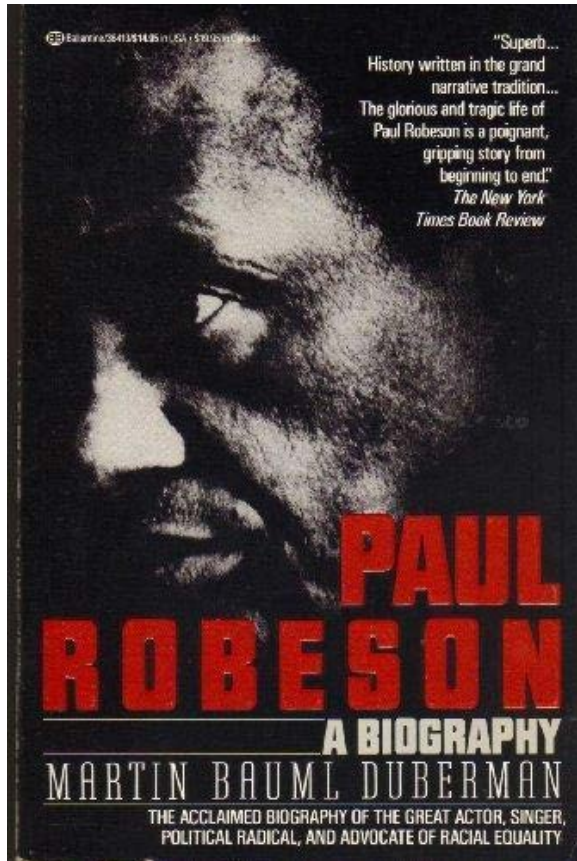


Figure 162 - *Paul Robeson: A Biography* by Martin Bauml Duberman, Knopf, 1989, book cover photo, public domain

There were many dinners and gatherings with Marty over years, some with our mutual friend Seymour Kleinberg. (author of *Alienated Affections*, not mentioned in *The Rest of It*). It was Marty who first explained to me how daunting it is to be a writer doing the kind of writing we were doing. Even his good friend Vivian Gornick, whose work appeared in the *New York Times* and who I got to know a bit through Marty, had to struggle to make ends meet. This insight and advice was something I recalled years later when, on a visit with Marty, I saw a pile of surplus copies of his books alongside the trash bins in front of his home in West Chelsea. He had been cleaning house. With rare exceptions, Marty observed, most writers don't make enough money to live on or gain much recognition or acclaim. It says a lot about Marty's character and integrity that having tasted commercial success (as he recalls in *The Rest of It*, he was given a \$275,000 advance for *Robeson*, and that was 35 years ago!), his oeuvre has mostly consisted of more marginal works written more as personal imperative—for history, ideology and self-expression—at the sacrifice of more popular and financial success. In this and for me, Marty will always be a hero and role model. I had similar feelings about my other writer role model of that period, Larry Kramer. In retrospect, in both cases, I may have been somewhat naive about the roles personal ambition and hopes for commercial success were also playing in their efforts, however primarily inspired by their ideological commitments and passion.

Though I never met Marty's two closest friends from the preceding period, literary and arts critics Dick Poirier and Leo Bersani, the material on them seems consistent with what I recall Marty saying about them. I met others in Marty's circles, like Kate Stimson, founding editor of *Signs*, and was an early supporter of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies (CLAGS). A decade later, I would be a contributor to *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, co-edited by Stimson's partner Elizabeth Wood, Philip Brett and Gary C. Thomas. Alas, the more controversial contribution that was submitted by me—"Musical Closets," about outing and coming out in the music world—was rejected with last-minute cold feet by both Wood and, earlier, Richard Schneider at *GLR*, but was included by Michael Bronski in his anthology, *Taking Liberties*. In its place the editors substituted my previously published interview with Ned Rorem.

I remember the many, ever-worsening scrapes with Paul Robeson, Jr. in the writing of *Robeson*, as recounted here, and Marty's heroic struggle to capture this great figure of culture, politics and world history. *The Rest of It* recaps many highlights of the vast research that was involved on *Robeson*, with riveting vignettes and details such as Robeson's affairs with actresses Peggy Ashcroft and Uta Hagen, and how their chemistry electrified the productions of *Othello* they co-starred in. But Marty is clear that the rumors of Robeson having been bisexual and having had affairs with Sergei Eisenstein and Marc Blitzstein, rumors originally promulgated by Paul Robeson Jr, remain unsubstantiated.

Robeson's ordeals in undergoing ECT for bipolar depression are reviewed and updated with later psychiatric opinion. Marty's interpretation of Robeson's reticence (what critics have called "failure") to renounce Stalin and Stalinism is succinctly and persuasively re-articulated, bolstered by later findings and input, and the passages of time. Hopefully, *Robeson* will be the basis of a quality film. Likewise *Mother Earth* for anarchist Emma Goldman, a figure of social consciousness and activism especially dear to Marty; a love that was always discernible in his love for his Labrador Emma.

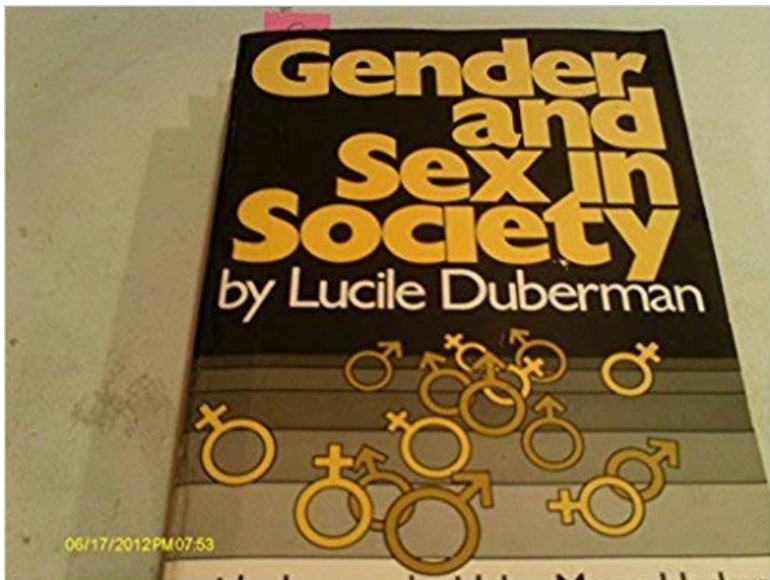


Figure 163 - *Gender and Sex in Society* by Lucile Duberman, 1975, amazon.com

Also via Marty, my life partner Arnie Kantrowitz and I became good friends with Marty's sister, Lucile, who had done intriguing work on the sociology of emotions. Arnie and I spent a summer with her and our cat Sid (Siddhartha) in Woodstock, as our drinking—hers and mine—escalated. Lucile's advice and encouragement about my writing I still revisit. If you write just one page a day, she said with her warm, distinctive voice and smile, at the end of a year you'll have a 365 page book. A day at a time. Little did we know then how important this precept would become in our lives. And deaths. Lucile died from complications of alcoholism in 2006 in New Orleans, where she had been living with her daughter.

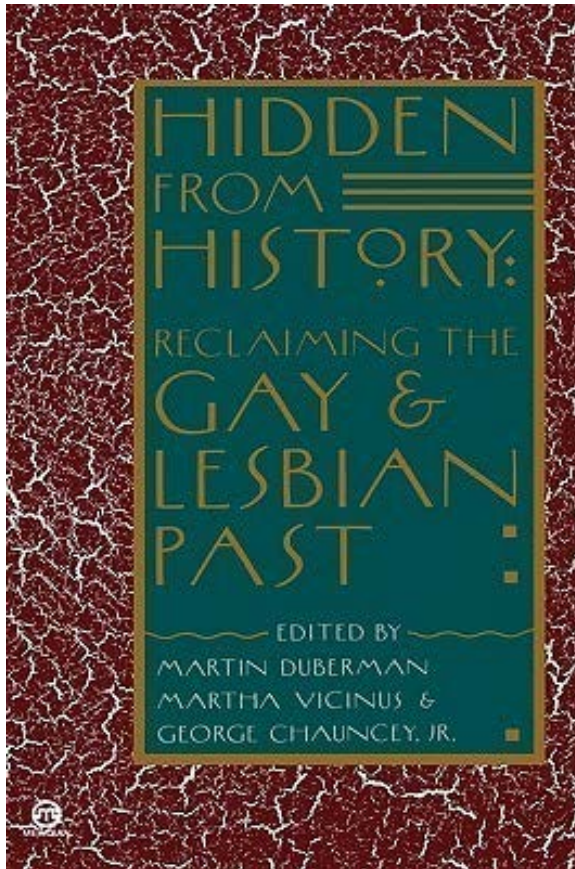


Figure 164 - *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay & Lesbian Past*, edited by Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey Jr., Penguin-Random House, 1990

I also recall friendly (cough) skirmishes between Marty and George Chauncey over the co-authorship sequencing of names (over whose name should come first) of their seminal anthology, *Hidden From History*. Lost in this jockeying, it could seem, was the anthology's other co-author, Martha Vicinus.

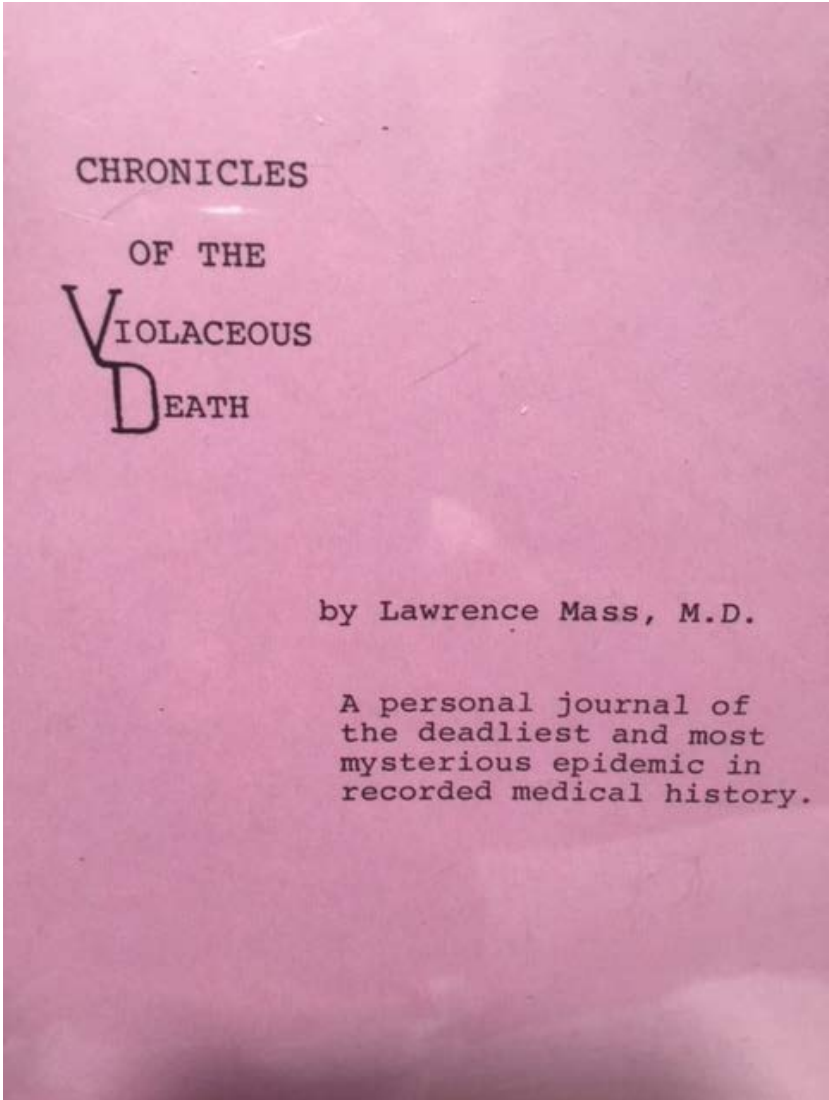


Figure 165 - *Chronicles of the Violaceous Death*, unpublished manuscript by Lawrence D. Mass, 1983, NYPL, LGBT collections (Lawrence D. Mass papers); written in the hedyday of my friendship with Marty and the unfolding of the AIDS epidemic.

I recall Marty's agent, Frances Golden who he writes about here with fondness and gratitude and who proved invaluable in helping Marty deal with Paul Robeson Jr. As the epidemic unfolded in 1981, I was ever-more desperate to find ways of getting my pieces together to better inform the public of what the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) had designated as "the most important new public health problem in the United States." As captured in *The Rest of It*, Marty was unhappy with much of the "privileged white male" discourse about "promiscuity" and the "sex panic" (not Marty's phrase) that was already metastasizing around the epidemic, At my urging and whatever his own misgivings, he asked Fran to have a look at my proposal for a book. What I gave her was a primitive collection of my reports and essays on AIDS, psychiatry, sex research and culture, pieces I culled together as an anthology with the working title of "Chronicles of The Violaceous Death" ("violaceous" was medical vernacular at that time for the purple skin plaques characteristic of Kaposi's Sarcoma and which could seem emblematic of the greater epidemic that was later to become known as AIDS). I had even sketched a logo: an upside-down Lambda on purple paper. Fran's response was swift, summary, and non-negotiable: No! Nor was there any encouragement from these quarters to further develop or direct this effort.

I remember Marty's cocaine and sedative-hypnotics (mostly Placidyl) use and dependence, his depression and insomnia, his ambivalence about admitting that he was an addict, his bottomings out and his experience in recovery, as surveyed in some detail in *The Rest of It*. In those years, the field of addiction medicine (I was among the first group of physicians to be certified by the American Board of Addiction Medicine in 1990) had not yet emerged, nor the SSRI's (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors—Prozac and its analogues) and later anti-depressants. Addiction was still mostly overseen by psychiatrists with vestigial concepts and approaches. Today, people like Marty with complex of symptoms of depression, anxiety and withdrawal from addictive drugs would have been managed by addiction medicine and/or addiction psychiatry, now a subspecialty of psychiatry.

Criticism of 12-step recovery such as that expressed by Marty here is neither unprecedented nor uncommon, especially by those who reject it, which was initially but not ultimately the case with Marty. In

the extent to which recovery insists on being apolitical and not involved in controversy, it can be as vexing to those who do their best to honor its precepts and remain in recovery as to those who choose to throw that baby out with the bathwater. The preamble of Alcoholics Anonymous states that “AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution, does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.” Marty’s impatience and frustration with such apoliticism—where conservatives and liberals are expected to interact in fellowship and service and relegate their judgments for their individual and collective well-being—could be anticipated and is in sync with what I remember of Marty’s viewpoints from this time of entering recovery myself.

Following a denunciation in *The Rest of It* of a neighborhood meeting—in upscale West Chelsea, where Marty has lived all these years (currently the most expensive real estate in Manhattan)—for its predominance of privileged white males, it’s to Marty’s credit that he acknowledges going to other meetings where people of color and underserved communities were a lot more prevalent. Indeed, AA is not allied with any class, nor by any other measure, in terms of the diversity of its members. It cannot be designated as elitist, whatever the cliquishness, statements or peccadillos of individual members.

There are Trumpers in one of my still predominantly liberal home groups, as a result of which recovery can sometimes seem more challenging than ever. Like Marty, I want to question fundamental principles of recovery. I want to ask if Nazis and Jews should make nice together at meetings. Did they do so when AA was founded in 1935? The answer is a rather disturbing if qualified yes. When all is said and done and felt, I have no plans to lose my recovery over the politics of others, out of “the rooms,” or in them. This was more or less Marty’s journey as well.

Whatever his anticipated ambivalence about recovery, I was surprised that in writing of such candor, Marty does not mention a personal and medical decision that was not necessarily crucial to a discussion of the pros and cons of recovery but which was inarguably pertinent to his own experience and later distancing of himself from “the rooms” of recovery he does otherwise pay impressive tribute to. Following his heart attack and into his period of recovery, Marty was advised to consider having two drinks of red wine daily for its

cardiotonic effects. Though alcohol was never Marty's preferred substance, and the alcohol was regarded as medicinal (and there is nothing bogus about the well-established facts of alcohol's cardiac healing effects), making the decision to go with the cardiology recommendation meant that continuing with recovery "in the rooms," which Marty does admit to having been helpful to him, would be challenging.

It's not clear from *The Rest of It* how long and to what extent Marty continued "in the rooms," but there can be no question of the enduring impact and importance of recovery for him. *The Rest of It* closes with the following testimonial:

When I spoke at a Cocaine Anonymous meeting on my fourth anniversary of being "clean and sober," I talked about the comfort—not the supercharged excitement I'd earlier pursued—of my relationship with Eli. I choked up and had to stop for a few seconds. As I later wrote in my diary, "I've had little comfort (as opposed to acclaim) in my life—and feel so grateful to have it at last. I feel haunted with gratitude, surrounded by so much suffering in the world."

I remember Marty's disinclination to travel, which yields some funny and endearing journal entries from a rare excursion to the countryside, in this case Maine. I remember his trigger impatience with some assistants and researchers, as recalled here, and at restaurants with waiters (not recalled here). I remember the realistic but repetitive designation of himself as a "privileged white male." I remember the sexual and romantic misadventures and dysfunction, the hustlers, the treks to Rounds, the upper east side gentlemen's hustler bar, and I remember how Arnie and I became unlikely role models, as a couple, for what would later become Marty's sustained partnership with Eli Zal. As recalled by Marty here, and as I likewise recall, he and Eli experienced real strains in their relationship early on. Comparably, Arnie and I had had our rough periods, yet we prevailed, and what they could see of what we had together Marty and Eli wanted as well for themselves.

Beyond recovery and his partnership with Eli, Marty's journey to greater balance and stability in his personal and creative lives is explored with sometimes breathtaking dexterity in *The Rest of Us*. For me, some of the book's richest passages are those describing the equipoise he comes to feel about all the different needs, impulses,

persons and endeavors competing for his time and energies. Beyond challenges like drug addiction and sexual adventuring, he comes to see that he wasn't a freak, mental case or misfit, after all, even as psychiatry and society kept insisting otherwise. He comes to see and accept that writing, creativity, social consciousness and critical perspicacity were not his liabilities, not his illusions, not his defects and not his escapes so much as his essence and greatest passion, to be nurtured and cherished. Though he might be at once complimented by and aghast at the allusion, Marty is one of those who learned the hard way to proclaim, "I am what I am. I am my own special creation."

I also remember Marty's generous support of my memoir, *Confessions of a Jewish Wagnerite: Being Gay and Jewish in America*, which he blurbed and in fact introduced at a reading at A Different Light Books, owned and managed by my agent, Norman Laurila. I was reminded of this in *The Rest of It*, when Marty endearingly recalls his Orthodox Jewish room-mate at Payne-Whitney ("the loony bin"). Like most self-identified persons of the left, Marty was not deeply attuned to concerns of Jewish identity and anti-Semitism, especially as they were playing out in the Middle East, globally and in leftist discourses in those years. In view of which, and in light of the unremitting hostility of Orthodox Jews to gay civil liberties in New York, I was impressed with Marty's willingness to consider what I had to say as well as other viewpoints that may have felt less personal and compelling or even dystonic to him, while never relinquishing his ferocious commitment to social justice. Apart from his cognizance of the reality, enormity and threat of anti-Semitism in his historical novel *Jews Queers Germans*, and although he would occasionally put himself down for being a "Jewish prince," I don't recall him ever really discussing this aspect of his own background, either in casual conversation or in his writing. In not having ever acknowledged any personal experience of anti-Semitism (none that I recall), he was like Larry Kramer and many other Jews of liberal bent. If I ever knew anything about the Jewishness of his parents, his sister Lucile, Aunt Tedda or other relatives, I can't recall it now. Nor is it in *The Rest of It*.

There was, on the other hand, a telling email exchange between Marty and me following my review of *Jews Queers Germans* for *Huffpost*. Without specifying why, Marty said he identified with Walther Rathenau, the closetedly gay German-Jewish statesman who

served as Foreign Minister during the Weimar Republic, as Germany raced towards Nazism. Rathenau was a philosopher of socialism who eased relations with Russia but who condemned Soviet methods. Inevitably, he incurred right-wing ire as a moderate liberal and Jew. I'm not sure what aspect of Rathenau's life and career Marty identified with most, but what keeps coming to mind for me is how Rathenau seemed relatively unaware of the enormity of anti-Semitism he was up against and that would eventuate in his assassination.

I think Marty and I both accepted the differences between us and our friendship seemed testimony to how those with differing viewpoints could still be good friends.

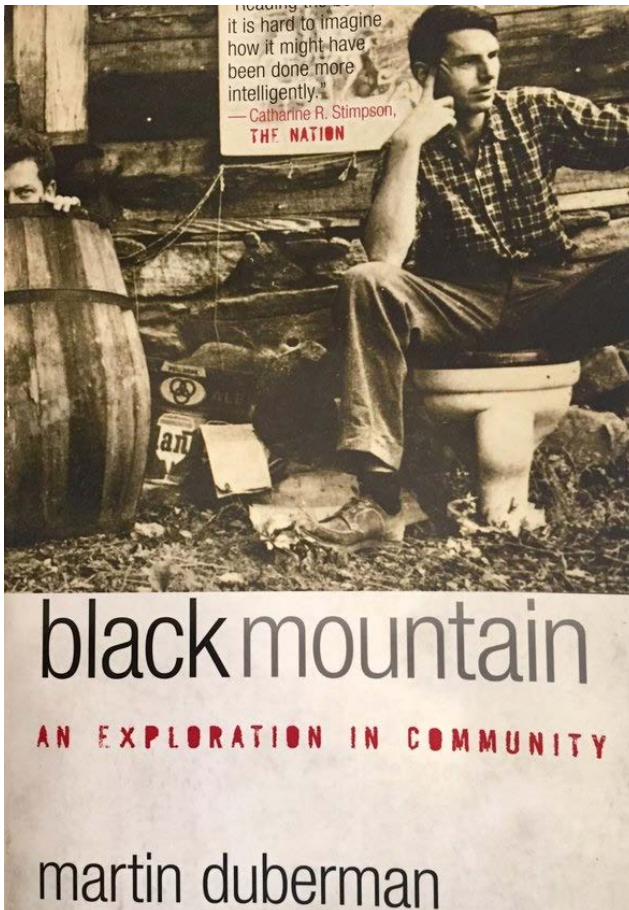


Figure 166 - *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* by Martin Duberman, Dutton, 1973, book cover photo, amazon.com

An additional note here re Marty's generosity. I recall another book event Marty hosted, this one at his home, for a friend of his who wasn't very well known in any circles and whose personal memoir had little social or literary interest and wasn't likely to have much reception or impact. It seemed reflective of Marty's deepest sense of commitment to helping those who are marginalized to have their say. I made note of this same aspect of Marty's character and service when I received a flier asking for support for a very marginalized group that Marty championed, so marginalized that it came and went in a matter of months: Queers for Economic Justice, which devoted its miniscule resources to acute problems of survival like homelessness. The tirelessness of such efforts of service on Marty's part, much of it heartbreaking and thankless, would be difficult to overstate.

Eventually, our friendship seemed to run its course. Nothing terrible happened, some minor misunderstandings that may have seemed like personal slights, but in the bigger picture, we were on seemingly different trajectories. If I appeared to be moving in the direction of more mainstream gay life with my Jewish identity and cultural issues and concerns about anti-Semitism and with my involvement in GMHC, Marty had taken the other fork in the road with CLAGS, which has done enormous good but which didn't seem especially welcoming to more mainstream LGBT persons like myself. In addition, Arnie and I grew increasingly uncomfortable with the anti-Israel rhetoric that we sensed to be veering into anti-Semitism on campus and otherwise from the left.

This inability to integrate at CLAGS was perhaps our own fault for not taking greater initiative to participate. If the left could seem boorish about "privileged gay white males"—a phrase or variant of which appears many times in the *The Rest of It*—and insensitive or worse on issues of Israel and anti-Semitism, we could be reflexively and commensurately defensive and critical of the left. I was never one to appear on panels. Arnie was better at that. Even so, and even if it's not an indictment, it felt subtly exclusionary that we were never invited to participate in anything at CLAGS, except to be supporters. The philosophy and vision of the epochal development of gay history and culture that is CLAGS and Marty's role in spearheading it, and highlights of the organization's early struggles and eventual triumphs, are summarized in *The Rest of It*.

Admittedly, I was and remain an odd duck. With my various interests in psychiatry, AIDS, hepatitis C, addiction, gay health, sexuality, the bear community, Jews, anti-Semitism, Wagner, music, opera, film and culture, I am someone who doesn't fit neatly in any camp. (Arnie, a CUNY professor of English and pioneer in gay studies, is a better fit for academic events and projects.) All OK. No hard feelings. Though we'd see each other and greet perfunctorily and sometimes awkwardly at movies in the neighborhood, we four (Marty and Eli, Arnie and I) dropped out of any regularity of communication for something like 20 years, from the mid-eighties to the recent period.

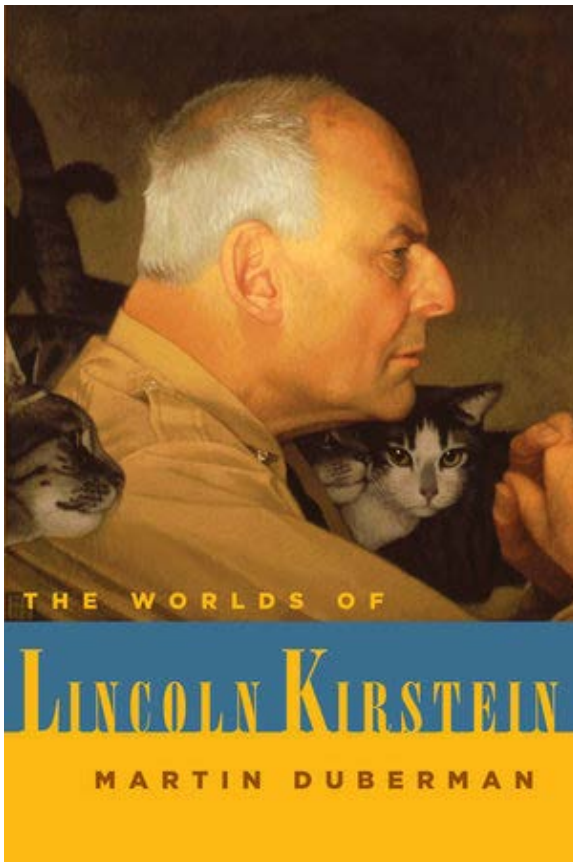


Figure 167 - *The Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein* by Martin Duberman, penguinrandomhouse.com, 2007

Some months ago, when I received a New York Public Library flier announcing Marty's reading from his new book, *Jews Queers Germans*, a subject right up my alley, Arnie and I decided to take the

initiative in breaking the ice and attend the event. It was a wonderful evening and loving reunion. All our warmth of feeling and friendship returned, all of which repeated itself over a lovely dinner with Marty and Eli at their home some weeks later (at the time Marty did not know that I had read and was preparing a review of *Jews Queers Germans*). Joining us that evening was our old mutual friend Jonathan Ned Katz. It was wonderful to be back in Marty's and Eli's home, with its warm hues and arresting art and objects. Throughout his writing career, from *Black Mountain College* to *Lincoln Kirstein* to *Jews Queers Germans*, Marty has written about art and artists. Someday, I'd like to read his thoughts, if he ever wrote any down or has anything to say about them now, on the pieces he and Eli have collected over the years.



Figure 168 - *Has The Gay Movement Failed* by Martin Duberman, University of California Press, 2018, book cover photo amazon.com

For me, the most interesting passages in *The Rest of It* are the reflections on AIDS. It's honest and an accurate telling of his viewpoints as I recall them for Marty to clearly and repeatedly express his disappointment with the "privileged white male" centrism that seemed to characterize the trajectory of the greater gay and early AIDS movements. In the course of these discussions in *The Rest of It* there are interesting and worthwhile analyses of how a comparable dilution of energies and priorities into the mainstream overtook the civil rights and women's movements.

Yet there's also a quaintness to this discussion. For example, mere mention of the mainstream gay organization, the Human Rights Campaign Fund (HRCF), could elicit condescension and derision among leftists, as it does from Marty here in his recalling an expensive dinner at the Waldorf hosted by HRCF for Walter Mondale, whose support for our struggles was as lackluster as his speech. Meanwhile, acclaimed black actor Jeffrey Wright just gave what has to be among the most impassioned anti-Trump speeches of the current period at San Francisco's HRCF awards dinner.

On further reflection, is there not some failure of imagination and generosity of spirit in not recognizing that even "privileged gay white men" could be a vulnerable minority? Hopefully so, since anti-Semitism, historically and still among the most explosively virulent of prejudices, is likewise often rationalized around the scapegoating of Jews as an economically privileged elite, a phenomenon that can be as unmistakable in leftist economics rhetoric as in the more familiar racist vilifications of the right.

When it comes to left vs right, the truth about the early history of the unfolding of the AIDS epidemic in the gay community is not very flattering to the left, which was more notable for its absence than its participation. Paradoxically, in view of the strike against them for not ever having been involved in gay or other politics or activism, it was a ragtag of these "privileged white males" (a number of whom were Hispanic and black) who first responded to create the organization that became Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC). There is ample material in *The Rest of It* as well as in other chronicles of AIDS, including *Hold Tight Gently*, Marty's 2014 book on Michael Callen and Essex Hemphill, that explores this history of early responses and questions of perspective.

A note here regarding one of Marty's historical citations that seems obfuscating, however unintentionally so.

"As early as 1981, a group of activists in San Francisco formed what later became known as the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, and soon after, New York City gave birth to GMHC, which rapidly became the largest organization in the country fighting AIDS."

That there were already activists in both cities dealing with health issues is well-established. Likewise, one can generalize that gay activism in San Francisco was earlier, more progressive and successful than in New York. What seems misleading here is a sense that the San Francisco AIDS Foundation preceded GMHC and figured or even inspired its inception. As a co-founder of GMHC, I have no recollection of any such progression. Also, this description ignores the fact that GMHC also had its own forerunners, the first of which was the NYU Research Foundation for KSOI (Kaposi's Sarcoma and Opportunistic Infections), established months earlier, before the epidemic became officially known as AIDS. For the record, GMHC was incorporated in January 1982, the SFAF 3 months later, in April of 1982.

That many leftists were turned off by mainstream gay culture is understandable and, in retrospect, prophetic. Some of the most powerful material in *The Rest of It* is Marty's recalling how he felt about gay life back then, as most of us were living it.

"I didn't feel at all confident about how 'left' the gay mainstream was...; discos, drugs and sex still maintained their primacy in urban, privileged, white male circles, preempting political activity...It felt increasingly true...that mainstream gay values were closely—and it seemed increasingly—indistinguishable from centrist, white middle class values."

At this juncture, a few more words about my own background of coming out at UC Berkeley in the late 1960's. Though I was against the war in Viet Nam and generally on the same page with activists and protests in being against elitism, racism, sexism and homophobia, and though I participated in protests, I kept feeling left out and uncomfortable as gay in these milieus. As it turns out, my real coming out during those years at Berkeley took place in the bars and bathhouses of neighboring San Francisco with everyday working people, most of them personally and even conscientiously neither racist nor sexist, and some of whom were Hispanic and black, but who

were not notably intellectual, political or activist. Rather, what they often seemed more notable for was sex, drugs, partying and being otherwise ordinary and detached from the political upheavals surrounding them, the very things the left has so relentlessly indicted mainstream gay men for. While the indictment may well have been justified, and I may have agreed with it then and later, it was these people, not the campus activists and leftists, who were the first to embrace me and make me feel real, comfortable, desired, happy and valued as a gay man.

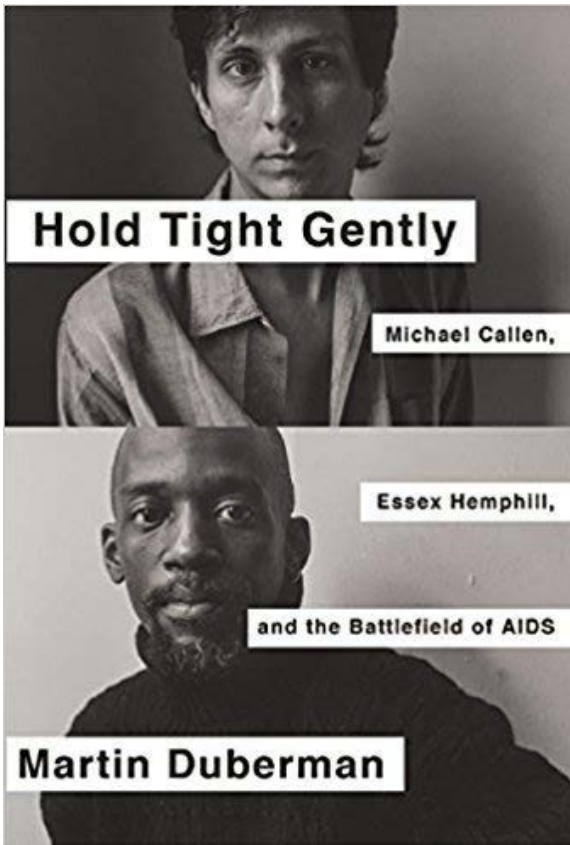


Figure 169 - *Hold Tight Gently* by Martin Duberman, The New Press, 2015

Of course, many leftists, especially women—Maxine Wolfe, Ann Northrop and Sarah Schulman, alongside others acknowledged by Marty, like Michael Callen—made huge contributions to AIDS and gay struggles in the heyday of ACT UP. Here too, however, Marty can

seem to obsess on the extent to which activism was still dominated by mainstream figures and values. Consider the following passage about ACT UP's Treatment and Data Committee:

...the prestigious and influential Treatment and Data Committee of ACT UP was primarily composed of entitled white men schooled from birth to believe that the world was their oyster; somewhere deep in the gut, they felt a kind of knee-jerk outrage that their presumptive destiny to lead comfortable, accomplished, untroubled lives had inexplicably run into a road block. Taught to overcome obstacles, they promptly devoted themselves to mastering the relevant science, and, remarkably, became peers of the scientific experts. The Committee's focus would remain on medical issues—who can criticize a determination to save one's own life?—refraining from involvement in 'peripheral' issues of social justice.

At the conclusion of a later chapter, "The Salmagundi Controversy," a recap of that literary quarterly's hopelessly primitive but nonetheless pioneering effort to devote a whole issue to the topic of homosexuality, following devastating indictments of virtually all of the participants, Marty offers a more summary take on the aggregate phenomena of the gay and AIDS movements, as he had come to view them:

Bland in deportment, narrow in social vision, the movement on the eve of the AIDS crisis was busily pledging allegiance to The American Way. It downgraded all talk of our "differentness," discarded any concern for the plight of the underprivileged (straight and gay), and energetically lobbied for the right to fully participate in a system that increasingly concentrated power and wealth in the hands of a few. Now and then, under extreme provocation—the Anita Bryant "Save Our Children" campaign or the California Briggs amendment to bar openly gay teachers—large numbers of angry protesters would take to the streets. (Yet even those were, at base, protestations of our ordinariness.) Those of us who—naively, perhaps—had believed the gay movement had the potential to become an instrument of transformational social change were shocked at the swiftness and ease with which it underwent a major face-lift and became a mere supplicant for equal "citizenship."

The AIDS crisis would reintroduce confrontational tactics, as well as demands for substantive change in standard health care procedures and the structure of medical research, but in the end ACT-

UP's imaginative lobbying only peripherally challenged existing social arrangements. The axis of privilege did not shift; the economic order did not reconstitute. Following the advent of protease inhibitors in 1996 and the shift in the focus of AIDS activism to a global dimension, the national gay movement featured, to the exclusion of almost all else, the assimilationist agenda of gay marriage and gays serving openly in the military...

Having acknowledged these powerful feelings, which can seem more reactive, defensive, judgmental and resentful than his otherwise characteristic tolerance and compassion, what's remarkable and what can be surpassing is the soul-searching that ensues. At the conclusion of this section, "The Onset of AIDS," Marty writes, "Who was I to pass judgment?" After a cursory inventory of the actions he did take to help out with AIDS, albeit delayed and overshadowed by scholarly projects he was in the midst of (*Robeson*),

"the nagging feeling remained," he observes, "that I wasn't doing enough to combat the AIDS crisis...something of an internal tug of war persisted...Perhaps if I'd felt more at risk personally, I would have reversed the ratio and invested more of myself in AIDS activism than in scholarship..."

And less, one might add, in relegating and derogating those who did show up and help out. That said, one of the most winning things about Marty can be his willingness to consider and value opposing viewpoints without compromising his own. Thus it is that Marty initially battled heterosexism in rejecting older norms of monogamy as requirements for failed heterosexual standards of maturity, stability, health and happiness, even as he discovered that anonymous and casual multi-partner sex and sexual role-playing didn't work very well for him personally. Despite his own inner conflicts around casual and what would later be called "fast-lane" sex, and even in the face of the emerging epidemic of AIDS on top of a slew of other STD's, Marty was among the early and outspoken critics to bristle at old bugaboos of "promiscuity" and intolerance of sexual variance.

The same dialectic is apparent in his feeling about the greater history of AIDS and the gay community. Though he can't help but see how AIDS activism became this engine of mainstream gay values and priorities, he does acknowledge and praise the achievements of gay mainstream organizations like GMHC and the activism of ACT UP.

He himself became a GMHC buddy, though he was critical of Larry Kramer and *The Normal Heart*, which he felt:

“‘ruthlessly denigrates the good work of GMHC,’ which for all its shortcomings had stepped into the breach when the heterosexual world (for the most part) turned its back, and had done heroic work in providing support for those suffering with AIDS...”

Like me trying to warn everybody about sexual risk and, simultaneously, affirm the sexual revolution, Marty can seem to be speaking out of both sides of his mouth. Does he sometimes contradict himself? Very well, then, he sometimes contradicts himself. Not so unlike another sage of gay history and spirituality with whom he might be compared for compassion, valor, brilliance and vision, he is large and contains multitudes.