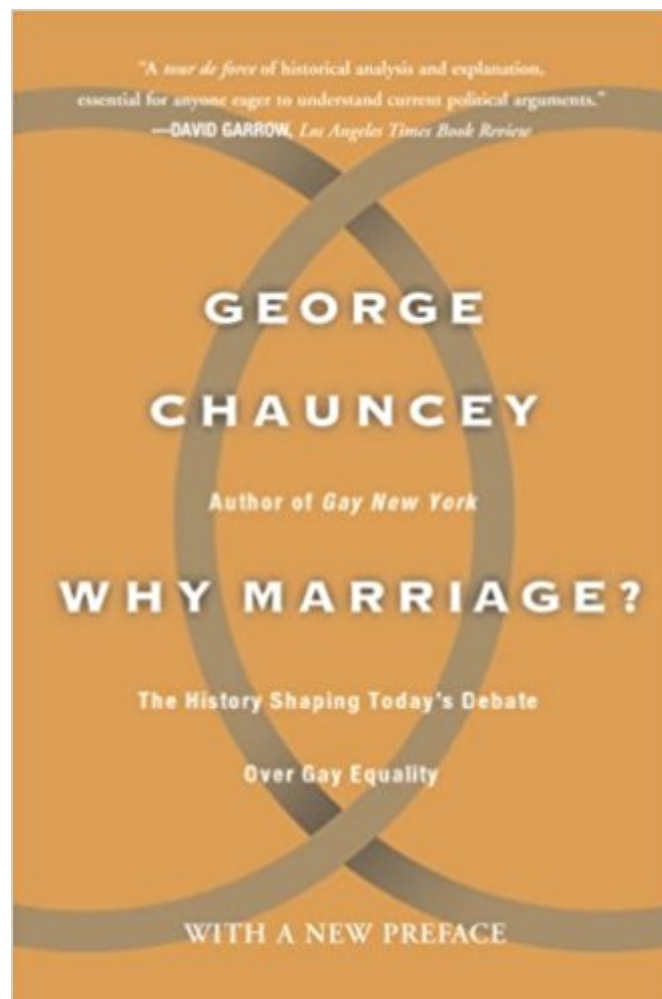




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# Why Marriage: The History Shaping Today's Debate Over Gay Equality



## Synopsis

Angry debate over gay marriage has divided the nation as no other issue since the Vietnam War. Why has marriage suddenly emerged as the most explosive issue in the gay struggle for equality? At times it seems to have come out of nowhere-but in fact it has a history. George Chauncey offers an electrifying analysis of the history of the shifting attitudes of heterosexual Americans toward gay people, from the dramatic growth in acceptance to the many campaigns against gay rights that form the background to today's demand for a constitutional amendment. Chauncey illuminates what's at stake for both sides of this contentious debate in this essential book for gay and straight readers alike.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Chauncey says this short book, written on a three-month deadline and between two long-gestating big books, was a challenge, and his strain shows in some poor and question-begging wording. Nevertheless, this is a swell, partisan, but not particularly argumentative U.S. gay-rights history primer, which makes at least two big points that need to be common knowledge. The first is that active antigay repression is largely a twentieth-century phenomenon; strong antigay law enforcement and many of the laws themselves date from the 1930s and became harsher and spread after World War II. The other is that marriage became a primary gay-rights goal because of AIDS and gay efforts to adopt, for AIDS patients' partners were barred from them in hospitals and stripped of jointly held property after they died, and gays wishing to share responsibility for partners' children had to leap costly legal hurdles. Marriage, with its presumption of mutual rights and

responsibilities, would eliminate those and other barriers. Ray Olson Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"A wonderfully readable account of how the issue emerged...[that] thoroughly debunks the myths of 'traditional' marriage." -- New York Times Book Review "Breathtaking...[a] brilliant, slim, and nuanced volume." -- OUT Magazine

Wonderful reading

Another fantastic historical account by George Chauncey of a subject that is often misunderstood and underrepresented. I would highly suggest this book and "Gay New York" to anyone interested in learning an untold history.

good

My mother's favorite perfume! As soon as she runs out, I make another gift out of this.

Why Marriage? The History Shaping Today's Debate Over Gay Equality written by George Chauncey describes the history that has set the stage for the debate over gay marriage today. The book begins with a history of gay and lesbian individuals in the US and their struggle to enter and gain acceptance in the public sphere. Up until the 1930s during the great depression gay and lesbians were not viewed with such critique and demonization. During the great depression there was a push for traditional families when men lost their jobs and no longer had the same role in their family and found homosexuals to be a threat. Continued discriminatory practices continued in the following decades and gay clubs and restaurants were closed and individuals presumed to be homosexual were jailed. During the 1950's Broadway plays were banned from having gay themed plays and an agreement was made in Hollywood not to represent gay characters or issues. During the 1970's public opinion was shifting and heterosexual couples were living together before marriage. Birth control was gaining popularity and sex was being viewed as a means of pleasure and not just for reproduction. During the 1980s through the 1990s the AIDS epidemic started and gay men were both stereotyped and feared as being diseased by the public and healthcare workers. Gay men came together with the support of female activists, who had experience in health due to

work in the women's movement, to battle discrimination. In 1987 78% of the US viewed homosexual relations as wrong. During the 1990s gay characters could be seen in the media and movies such as Philadelphia were hits and gay support was increasing significantly. In 1993 the military enacted a "Don't ask, Don't tell" policy on homosexuality forcing many gay individuals to lead a double life. Chauncey describes how marriage has evolved overtime from a system of control, where people wed for political reasons and one could not choose a partner, to a system of love and compassion. Since the nineteenth century marriage has evolved and the freedom to choose a partner is viewed as a right, gender roles within married families have changed and no longer need a stereotypical "man" or "woman", marriage is economically beneficial and often necessary, and is thought of less on the basis of religion, even though some churches do allow it. Marriage is desired by gay and lesbian couples because without the privilege they are second class citizens with no rights and protection if a partner becomes ill, as seen in the AIDS epidemic, or dies along with protection for their children. In 2004 gay couples received the right to marry in Massachusetts and California along with other counties throughout the US. Gay couples flocked to get married but this ability to wed was short lived when President Bush two weeks later set forth a constitutional amendment to end gay marriage. Taking notes through this reading allowed me to reflect on what I was writing its significance to the overall issue of gay marriage. I found this to be very helpful in understanding the context of this book. There was a lot of information presented and many different movements were occurring simultaneously so I benefited from taking short breaks to layout what I had learned within the greater picture. The tone of this book was informative and I did not find it to be biased. Being unbiased was important to me because I believe individuals from any walks of life would benefit from this book and not feel as if they were being attacked. I liked the way Chauncey approached the subject from a very factual and less philosophical frame. When reading similar information on gay marriage the argument tends to be emotional and philosophical but the factual way this book was presented was much more beneficial to me as a reader. Chauncey is able to present the material from a factual approach because he is an expert in the field and has testified as an expert witness in several major gay rights cases. He was also a head author of the Historians' Amicus Brief in Lawrence v. Texas (2003), which resulted in the Supreme Court's landmark decision overturning the nation's remaining sodomy laws.

Topics to discuss:

- 1) Does the AIDS epidemic still affect gay culture? Gay individuals were affected personally, socially, economically, and politically. Gay individuals were personally affected in the 1980s because the majority of those infected with the disease were gay men. These men suffered from health issues and had to pay inflated amounts for healthcare because pharmaceutical companies did not want to treat a "gay" disease. Healthcare

professionals were also scared of the disease. Gay individuals were targeted as social outcasts and heterosexual people did not want to eat or drink from where an individual with AIDS may have eaten or drank from. Gay partners had no right to visitation and upon death lost financial stability and security. Politically it was used as another way to prove gay inferiority.

George Chauncey gives a detailed argument in support of same-sex marriage in his book, "Why Marriage." First of all, Chauncey introduces the issue of same-sex marriage on a positive note of writing how much society has progressed in its opinions of same-sex marriage and other gay issues. Chauncey then begins the book with a history of the struggle for not only same-sex marriage, but also gay rights as a whole. The examples of discrimination that homosexuals have faced throughout history, especially in the past fifty years, would be shocking to even the most educated person. We see throughout the book, especially in the beginning, the significance of other movements, such as the feminist movement and the civil rights movement, in helping homosexuals to rise above the discrimination and to ultimately, fight valiantly for their cause. Chauncey also discusses the history of the struggle to bring AIDS to the forefront as not only as a homosexual issue, but as an issue that everyone must deal with. In the next part of the book, Chauncey discusses many of the ways in which the fundamental structure of marriage has changed in favor of gay marriage. For example, interracial marriages were not allowed in past. Marrying someone of a different religion was looked down upon, if not completely illegal. However, both of these examples have changed to be somewhat more accepted in society today. Chauncey argues that by looking at trends, it is hopeful that same-sex marriage will become more acceptable. We then are given the reasons that homosexual do want to get married and be together legally in the eyes of the government and others of society. Chauncey gives us several examples of committed couples wanting to officially become married. Finally, Chauncey discusses the current issues at hand and what can be done to allow same-sex marriages by looking at the political, religious, and social aspects of our country in relation to the same-sex marriage issue. As someone who before felt somewhat informed on this highly contested issue, I have certainly become more knowledgeable about the argument from Chauncey's book, "Why Marriage."

I'm a gay man who learned a lot about gay history from this book. The book describes the forgotten period at the beginning of the century when gays enjoyed an environment of relative freedom and then follows the severe crackdown on gays in the middle of the century (the viciousness of this period is also forgotten). Then he explains how this history promoted the emergence of gay

marriage as a rallying issue for the gay rights movement.

This book is a really good run down of gay history leading up to the gay marriage issue of today. It is concise, easy to read and a great history lesson for those not too familiar with gay history. I would definitely recommend it for those who are not too familiar with the issues surrounding the gay marriage issue-and leading up to it.

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