

## REVIEWS

### *The Seventies: A Breakthrough Decade for LGBT Rights*

This memory book provides the most comprehensive picture to date of who the LGBTQ+ legal activists of the 1970s were, and how they participated in movement building and sustained advocacy on behalf of LGBTQ+ folks and their communities. It does so by bringing together a compelling collection of biographies of many leading lights of this generation, drawn from across the United States, tracing their paths to the law and how being LGBTQ+ or an ally shaped their professional and personal lives. It is a valuable contribution to our collective understanding of the many roles that law students and lawyers played in the social, political, and legal history of this period.

David A. Reichard  
Professor of Legal Studies and History  
California State University, Monterey Bay

*The Seventies* isolates a unique and wonderful decade in which the voices of LGBTQ+ legal trailblazers were beginning to emerge into the mainstream. Through historical narratives and individual biographies, the book recognizes and keeps alive the contributions of scores of people who helped to propel the legal side of the LGBTQ+ movement. The book is suggested reading for attorneys and law students, as well as professors and students of history and political science. Present day LGBTQ+ advocates might also benefit from the inspiration and understanding they may gain from reading the stories of their historical counterparts.

Jay M. Kohorn  
LGBT Rights Advocate in the 1970s and 1980s  
Assistant Director of California Appellate Project (1987 – present)

The Memory Book is an extraordinary achievement of historical preservation. The book has assembled priceless documentation of a crucial time in the development of the modern movement for LGBT rights in the United States. The book's distinct contribution is to focus on the role of law students and lawyers. While some of the names that surface in the book will be immediately familiar to many readers, its special contribution is to recover and document the contributions of those whose important roles might otherwise be lost to history. Anyone with an interest in learning more about the early legal struggles will find much here that is new to them.

Arthur S. Leonard  
Professor Emeritus, New York Law School  
Editor, LGBT Law Notes

While the "Memory Book" is certainly a unique historical retrospective into the LGBT climate of the 1970s, it is more than just a review. It is a primer for today's LGBTQ+ community and its allies. Students of politics, history, law, sociology and the media will find valuable information within its pages. Lawyers, judges, and elected officials would also do well to study the historical significance of this critical decade. It would serve us all to recognize the efforts of so many who have pushed us to the current status of LGBTQ+ accomplishments. I highly recommend this skilled work of art.

John Adam DiPietro, Esq.  
Board Member of Spectrum Institute

<https://lgbtlegalhistory.com/>

This is an engagingly illustrated Memory Book honoring the gay law students and lawyers who propelled the social and legal reforms we enjoy today.

The book begins with a historical perspective, going through all the myriad ways the legal system disrupted and damaged the lives of LGBT folk prior to the Seventies. Then it explores all the myriad ways gay law students and lawyers fought back and recounts some of their victories. Following that are inspiring biographies of the activities of 123 trailblazers, both gay law students and gay lawyers. It concludes with a brief look at the progress we've made in terms of legal protections, public opinion, the legal profession and the future.

It's hard to remember today but before the 1970's homosexuality was criminalized. It was labeled a perversion and a mental disease, gays were not allowed in the military nor were they admitted to the professions like teaching or law, lovers were disinherited on the grounds of "undue influence," gay parents lost custody and even visitation, gay people couldn't safely hold hands or dance in public, hospitals wouldn't permit gays to visit their loved ones, the list goes on.

All of that began to change in the Seventies, due in no small part to the advocacy and organizing efforts of gay law students and lawyers. This book tells that story in a readable, relatable, and comprehensive way.

The first thing gay law students and lawyers focused on was legal education about what the state of the law was as it affected gay people via conferences and publications. They also organized as students and as lawyers. They served as legal counsel to gay organizations. And they formed legal associations to provide legal advice to clients and to other lawyers. They pressured organizations like the American Psychiatric Association to normalize gay identity. Separately, The Model Penal Code which was adopted by many states in the 1970's (all states today) decriminalized homosexuality.

The law student and lawyer biographies are fascinating and include photos and a two page description of each trailblazer's contributions to the cause of gay rights. Most of them are not household names with the possible exception of a Black woman, the Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray who was gender nonconforming before their time and a Constitutional lawyer.

The editor is Tom Coleman whose legal practice began in the Seventies and continues to this day, and includes a great many aspects of the advances that have been made in gay rights. He has written a personal history called [The Domino Effect](#).

Anyone interested in the history of the gay rights movement would cherish this book.

– Mary Stevens  
Princeton, NJ  
(Rutgers Law School - 1978)

**Review of *The Seventies: A Breakthrough Decade for LGBT Rights*,  
edited by Thomas F. Coleman.**

Over the past fifty years, LGBTQ rights in the United States have advanced significantly as laws criminalizing queer behavior have been overturned and protections against discrimination have been expanded to include gender and sexual minorities. In *The Seventies: A Breakthrough Decade for LGBT Rights*, editor Thomas F. Coleman highlights the lawyers and law students in the 1970s who challenged the stigmatization of queer people in society and worked to transform the legal landscape, paving the way for the advancements in the rights of LGBTQ people. While the legal history of the LGBTQ rights movement is well-documented, the contributions of individual law students and lawyers in the 1970s are not. This collection provides a valuable look into the lives and strategies of LGBTQ activists in the legal profession during the early years of the LGBTQ rights movement and contextualizes their work through an analysis of the broader social and political context of the United States during this time.

This text provides a historical overview of the situation for LGBTQ people in the United States from the 1940s through the 1970s, with a focus on efforts to transform the legal landscape and establish rights for queer people. Coleman describes the era before the 1970s as largely oppressive, which is supported through his analysis of the representation of homosexuality in culture, media, education, psychiatry, religion, and government, which pathologized and criminalized queer behavior. However, as Coleman notes, even during times of harsh repression, activists were able to form political organizations and mount successful legal challenges to laws that criminalized and censored queer life. As the broader LGBTQ movement in the United States developed in the 1970s, efforts to transform the legal landscape and to establish LGBTQ rights grew with the formation of queer law student groups, lawyer associations, and legal advocacy organizations.

While the historical background presented in this volume is valuable, its most significant contribution to LGBTQ legal history is the collection of over 100 biographies of queer legal professionals and allies. The biographies in this text bring together the history of LGBTQ legal activism in the 1970s by highlighting numerous campaigns by legal professionals to transform the legal system in the United States in the fight for LGBTQ rights. This collection documents early efforts to extend benefits to same-sex partners by challenging marriage requirements and advocating for domestic partnership laws, challenges to the criminalization of queer people and the discriminatory enforcement of lewd conduct and solicitation laws, projects advocating for LGBTQ rights in international human rights law, and more. The focus on individuals personalizes LGBTQ legal history and provides insight into the struggles of existing as a queer person during this era and demonstrates how this situation motivated people to become involved in the LGBTQ rights movement.

While this text seeks to document the development of the LGBTQ rights movement in the United States, it is important to recognize that it remains largely focused on the efforts of gay men and lesbians to decriminalize homosexuality and obtain rights for homosexual couples. The relative absence of transgender voices in this volume reflects the fact that it was largely gay men and lesbians who were represented in the legal organizations of the early LGBTQ rights movement. As editor, Coleman made a clear effort to include the voices of transgender legal professionals in this volume by highlighting the stories of two transgender and gender non-conforming lawyers who were involved in the struggles for LGBTQ rights in the 1970s. It is important that future scholars continue to build on Coleman's work by documenting the lives and efforts of individuals involved in the LGBTQ rights movement and by highlighting the efforts of transgender activists in particular.

*The Seventies* reframes LGBTQ legal history by centering the efforts of individual queer legal professionals who made modern advancements in LGBTQ rights possible. The developments in LGBTQ legal advocacy in the 1970s were supported by the public demonstrations of millions of queer people across the United States who fought to shift social attitudes towards homosexuality through protests, political organization, and conversations with their colleagues, families, and friends. These shifting social attitudes made it more possible for LGBTQ legal professionals to express their identities publicly, find each other, and form organizations that pioneered LGBTQ legal advocacy.

In recent years, advancements in LGBTQ rights, including the decriminalization of sodomy and the extension of protections against discrimination to gender and sexual minorities, have come under attack. The current social and political context for LGBTQ people in the United States gives greater significance to works like *The Seventies*, which provide insight into early LGBTQ advocacy and help inform efforts to protect the rights of queer people today. This text is an important read for researchers interested in the early history of LGBTQ rights in the United States and for activists fighting to protect LGBTQ rights today.

Sidney Negrón



Sidney Negrón is a researcher studying the history of relations between queer people and police in the United States during the twentieth century. They currently work with the Encyclopedia of Cleveland History where they work to document the history of the LGBTQ community in Cleveland and have worked with the Western Reserve Historical Society as an LGBT archives processing intern in the past.

## Review

“The Seventies - A Breakthrough Decade for LGBT Rights”

Looking back to the 1970’s one can say it was the worst of times and it was the best of times.

As a law school student then I was vaguely aware of the profound societal changes underway relative to civil rights, equality and justice issues and LGBT agendas. The ugly face of bigotry and discrimination was still chipping away at our core democratic principles. Yet it was also a time of awakening, of legal and social activism and of an unparalleled hope for the future.

The “Seventies Memory Book” by Thomas F. Coleman is a concise and extraordinary account of the role law students, lawyers, and various other trailblazers performed in the LGBT equality movement. Of special interest are the portions of the Book dealing with the biographies, comments and recollections of these individuals. It is also encouraging to note the support and encouragement from current day benefactors and contributors.

While the “Memory Book” is certainly a unique historical retrospective into the LGBT climate of that time, it is more than just a review. It is a primer for today’s LGBTQ+ community and its allies.

Students of politics, history, law, sociology and the media will find valuable information within its pages. Lawyers, Judges, and elected officials would also do well to review the historical significance of this critical decade. It would serve us all to recognize the efforts of so many who have pushed us to the current status of LGBTQ+ accomplishments. I highly recommend this skilled work of art.

Indeed it is important for us to recall where we have come from; to review and understand our collective history; but it is equally important to forge our future from the lessons of the past. Thomas F. Coleman’s “The Seventies” is unique starting point from which we can sustain and expand the journey of the LGBTQ+ community ‘s crusade to full equality and justice.

John Adam Di Pietro, Esquire



John Adam Di Pietro earned his J.D. degree from the University of Notre Dame. He began practicing law in 1976 and for several decades served as an attorney for various municipalities and zoning boards in Pennsylvania. John has had ongoing involvement in LGBT legal rights advocacy. He currently serves as a member of the board of trustees of Spectrum Institute. John and his husband now live in Palm Springs, California.