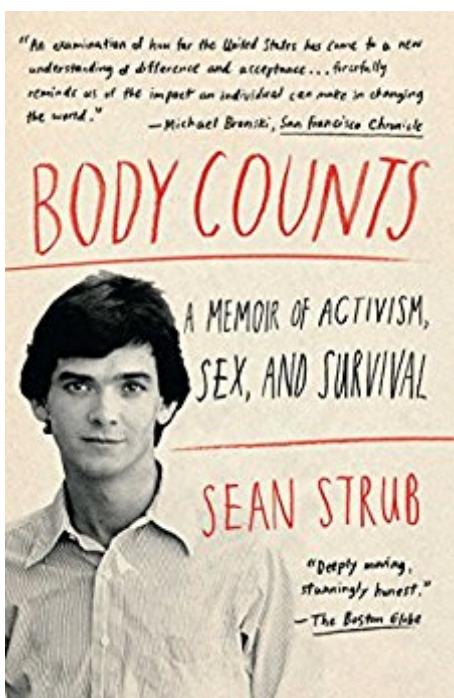


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Body Counts: A Memoir Of Politics, Sex, AIDS, And Survival



Synopsis

The founder of > magazine shares a captivating eyewitness account from inside the AIDS epidemic • (>) and a moving, multi-decade memoir of one gay man's life • (>). As a politics-obsessed Georgetown freshman, Sean Strub arrived in Washington, DC, from Iowa in 1976, with a plum part-time job running a Senate elevator in the US Capitol. He also harbored a terrifying secret: his attraction to men. As Strub explored the capital's political and social circles, he discovered a parallel world where powerful men lived double lives shrouded in shame. When the AIDS epidemic hit in the early 1980s, Strub was living in New York and soon found himself attending more funerals than birthday parties. • Scared and angry, he turned to radical activism to combat discrimination and demand research. Strub takes you through his own diagnosis and inside ACT UP, the organization that transformed a stigmatized cause into one of the defining political movements of our time. From the New York of Studio 54 and Andy Warhol's Factory to the intersection of politics and burgeoning LGBT and AIDS movements, Strub's story crackles with history. He recounts his role in shocking AIDS demonstrations at St. Patrick's Cathedral as well as at the home of US Senator Jesse Helms. With an astonishing cast of characters, including Tennessee Williams, Gore Vidal, Keith Haring, Bill Clinton, and Yoko Ono, is a vivid portrait of a tumultuous era: a page-turner [with] the suspense and horror of Paul Monette's memoir Borrowed Time and the drama of Larry Kramer's play The Normal Heart. What a lot of action and life there is in this gripping book • (>).

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Customer Reviews

Sean Strub's BODY COUNTS should be required reading for anyone interested in the AIDS epidemic in this country. It is one of those books that is difficult to put down. As I read it, I was reminded how much Mr. Strub's story mirrors that of all of us who were alive and young in large cities in that awful time in the 1980's and 90's until the drug cocktail became available in 1996 when we literally saw our friends come back from deathbeds in a matter of weeks. We first read of gay men dying of a strange affliction in the NEW YORK NATIVE in 1981, then it was called gay cancer, then something called GRID and finally AIDS. And Larry Kramer's front page article in the NEW YORK NATIVE, "1,112 and Counting," in 1983 sent shock waves into the gay community across this country. We found out just how bad homophobia and fear really were when funeral homes refused to accept our dead. We would hear in a casual conversation with friends that someone whom we had not seen in a few months had died. Families had gay sons whose obits in their home town newspaper listed the cause of death as cancer. And like the author, I remember the first person I ever knew who had AIDS. Mr. Strub's memoir brings it all back home. We would expect the man who founded the magazine POZ to write an honest-take-no-prisoners account of what happened, and he does. All the usual villains are here. Here are some of them: when Ronald Reagan spoke the word "AIDS" for the first time in 1987, way into his second term as President, twenty-one thousand Americans had already died of it.

Let me open by saying that Sean Strub's Body Counts: A Memoir of Politics, Sex, AIDS, and Survival is an essential, engaging piece of social history that belongs on everyone's reading list. Word! The years Sean Strub writes about in Body Counts are the same years I was engaged in my own activism, and his writing simultaneously makes those years feel very immediate and very removed historically. Today, at least in the liberal college community where I work, being lesbian is pretty much normal. I'm legally married (when a finance guy my wife and I were working with recently referred to us as "codomestic partners," we explained to him quite firmly that we are married and had never participated in that separate-but-equal charade). We'll even be filing joint federal taxes this year, rendering unnecessary the asterisks and explanatory statements that have

been accompanying my federal tax returns since we were married. Strubâ™s book reminds us that this normalcy is quite a new phenomenon. In the period from the late 70s to the 90s we were definitely not normal. Roughly half the states in the U.S. had laws criminalizing sexual acts between people of the same gender. Not only that, but in 1986 the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the legality of these laws. (That decision was finally overthrown in 2003.) George Moscone and Harvey Milk were murdered by Dan White, who got a minimal sentence thanks to his “Twinkies defense.” The AIDS epidemic erupted, followed by all sorts of anti-gay legislation. We had a president who refused to use the word AIDS. Congress passed laws prohibiting any AIDS research or education programs that included information on safe sexual activities for gay men or lesbian.

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