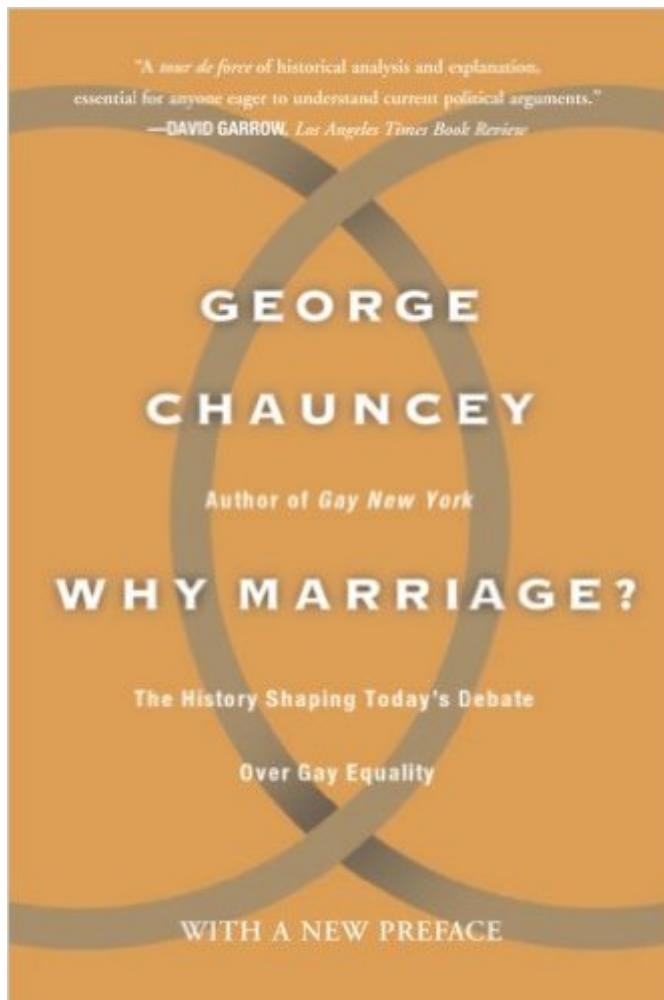


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# Why Marriage: The History Shaping Today's Debate Over Gay Equality



## **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**

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.

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.

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