

MELVIN BOOZER

b. June 21, 1945

d. March 6, 1987

GAY PIONEER

*"I know what it means to be called a nigger.
I know what it means to be called a faggot.
And I can sum up the difference in one word: none."*

**He was the first openly
gay candidate for
vice president of the
United States.**

Melvin "Mel" Boozer was a university professor, an activist for gay and African-American rights and the first openly gay candidate for vice president of the United States.

Boozer grew up in Washington, D.C. His mother was a domestic worker and his stepfather was a janitor. Boozer's childhood homes lacked electricity.

Boozer graduated salutatorian of his high school class and earned a scholarship to Dartmouth College where he studied sociology. He spent three years in the Peace Corps in Brazil before completing his graduate studies. He earned a Ph.D. from Yale University and became a professor of sociology at the University of Maryland.

In 1979 Boozer became the first African-American elected president of the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) of Washington, D.C. Under his leadership and in collaboration with

Frank Kameny, the GAA secured passage of the D.C. Sexual Assault Reform Act, which decriminalized sodomy and struck down other anti-gay laws. The GAA also sued the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority and won the right to display Metrobus posters announcing, "Someone in Your Life is Gay."

In 1980 the Socialist Party nominated Mel Boozer for vice president of the United States. The Democratic Party followed suit and nominated Boozer by petition. Though he was not elected, Boozer became the first-ever openly gay U.S. vice presidential candidate. In his primetime televised speech at the Democratic National Convention, Boozer called attention to discrimination against LGBT and black Americans.

In 1981 the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force hired Boozer as a district director. The following year, he cofounded and led the Langston Hughes-Eleanor Roosevelt Democratic Club, which advocated for black gays and lesbians in Washington, D.C. In 1984 he ran the D.C. gay-voter outreach effort for Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign. He also served on the national board of Americans for Democratic Action, a political advocacy organization for progressive causes and social justice.

Later in life, Boozer became an AIDS activist. He died of an AIDS-related illness at the age of 41. The New York Times published his obituary.



lgbtTM
HISTORY
MONTH

www.lgbtHistoryMonth.com

Copyright ©2018 – A Project of Equality Forum