

VITO RUSSO

b. July 11, 1946

d. November 7, 1990

FILM HISTORIAN

In the early 1970s, he started research for "The Celluloid Closet" (1981), which entailed watching hundreds of films that included gay content and stereotypes.

"I never once, not for a second, believed it was wrong to be gay."

Vito Russo was a gay rights activist, a film historian and an author best known for his book, "The Celluloid Closet," a groundbreaking chronicle of gays and lesbians in film.

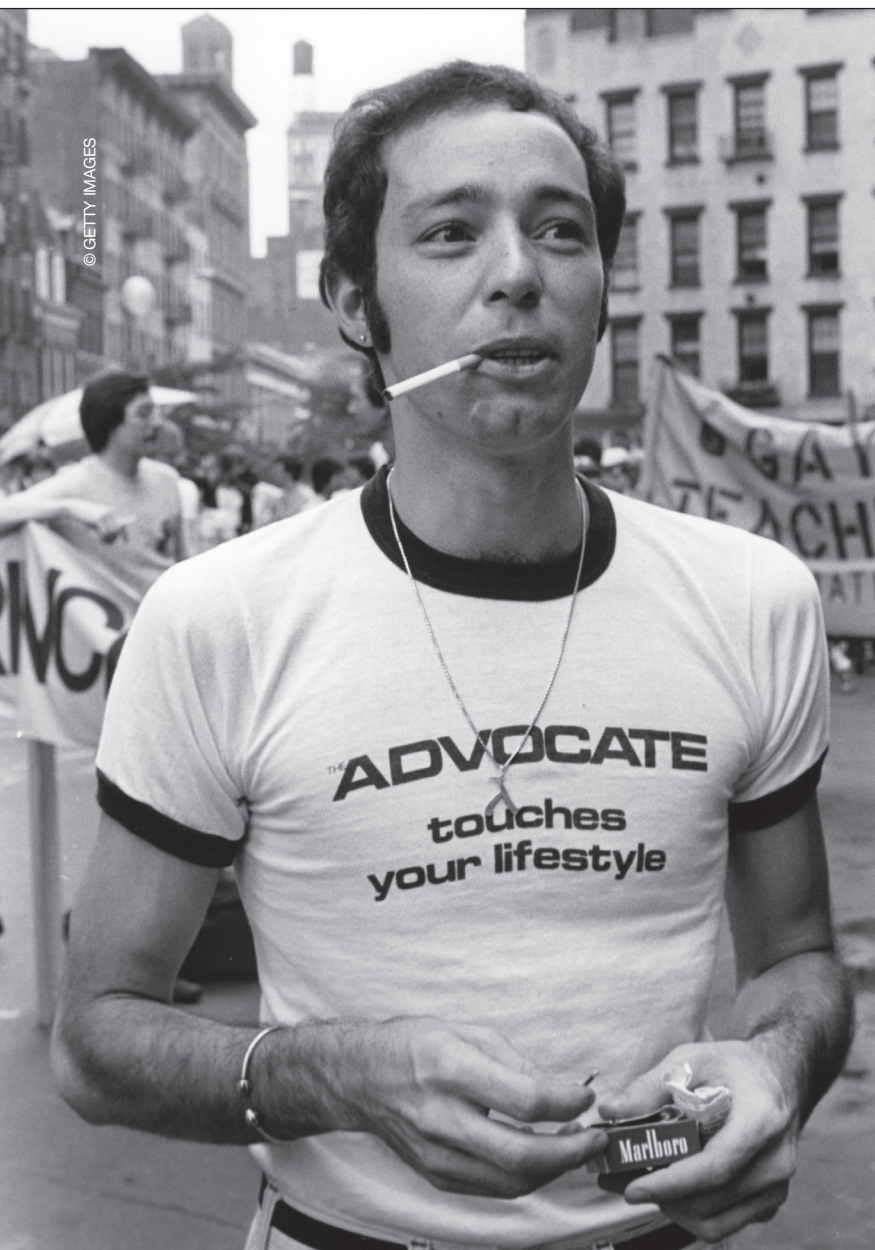
A New York City native, Russo grew up in East Harlem. As a young boy, he would sneak into Manhattan to go to the movies. From an early age, Russo knew he was "different." A cousin remembers him always talking about Rock Hudson rather than Ava Gardner.

After graduating from New York University, Russo joined the Gay Activists Alliance. In the early 1970s, he started research for "The Celluloid Closet" (1981), which entailed watching hundreds of films that included gay content and stereotypes. What originated as a lecture with film clips became one of the most informative books about gay people and pop culture.

Diagnosed with HIV in 1985, Russo was a frequent protestor with ACT UP. In 1986, Russo lost his longtime partner, Jeffrey Sevcik, to AIDS. Outraged by the media's inadequate and inaccurate coverage of the pandemic, Russo cofounded GLAAD, an organization that monitors LGBT representation in the media. In his memory, GLAAD created the Vito Russo Media Award to recognize out LGBT media professionals who have made a significant difference promoting equality.

Russo appeared in the 1989 Academy Award-winning documentary, "Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt," about the life and death of Sevcik and the quilt Russo made for him. A year later, Russo died from AIDS-related complications.

In 1996, "The Celluloid Closet" was made into a documentary that was co-produced and narrated by Lily Tomlin. In 2012, "Vito," a film about Russo's life, premiered on HBO.



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