

JOSEPH BEAM

b. December 30, 1954

d. December 27, 1988

ACTIVIST

“We are black men who are proudly gay.”

Joseph Beam was a gay rights activist who helped build a black LGBT community in the 1980s. He was the editor of “In the Life,” the first collection of nonfiction works by and about black gay men.

A native of Philadelphia, Beam attended Franklin College in Indiana, where he studied journalism. He was an active member of the black student union and the Black Power movement. After college, Beam received his master’s degree in communications.

In 1979, he returned to Philadelphia. He explored literature on gay figures and institutions while working at Giovanni’s Room, an LGBT bookstore. Discouraged by the lack of community for black gay men and lesbians, Beam began writing articles and short stories for gay publications.

In 1984, he received an award for outstanding achievement by a minority journalist from The Lesbian and Gay Press Association. In 1985, he became the first editor of “Black/Out,” a journal produced by the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays. He served as a consultant for the Gay and Lesbian Task Force of the American Friends Service Committee.

Beam continued to collect materials about being black and gay. In 1986, he produced the first collection written by black gay men, called “In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology.”

In 1988, while compiling “Brother to Brother,” a sequel to his anthology, Beam died from AIDS-related complications. His mother, Dorothy Beam, and the gay poet Essex Hemphill completed the work, which was published in 1991.

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