

ALLAN BÉRUBÉ

b. December 3, 1946, Springfield, Massachusetts

d. December 11, 2006, San Francisco, California

HISTORIAN

“World War II relaxed the social constraints of peacetime that had kept gay men and women unaware of ... each other.”

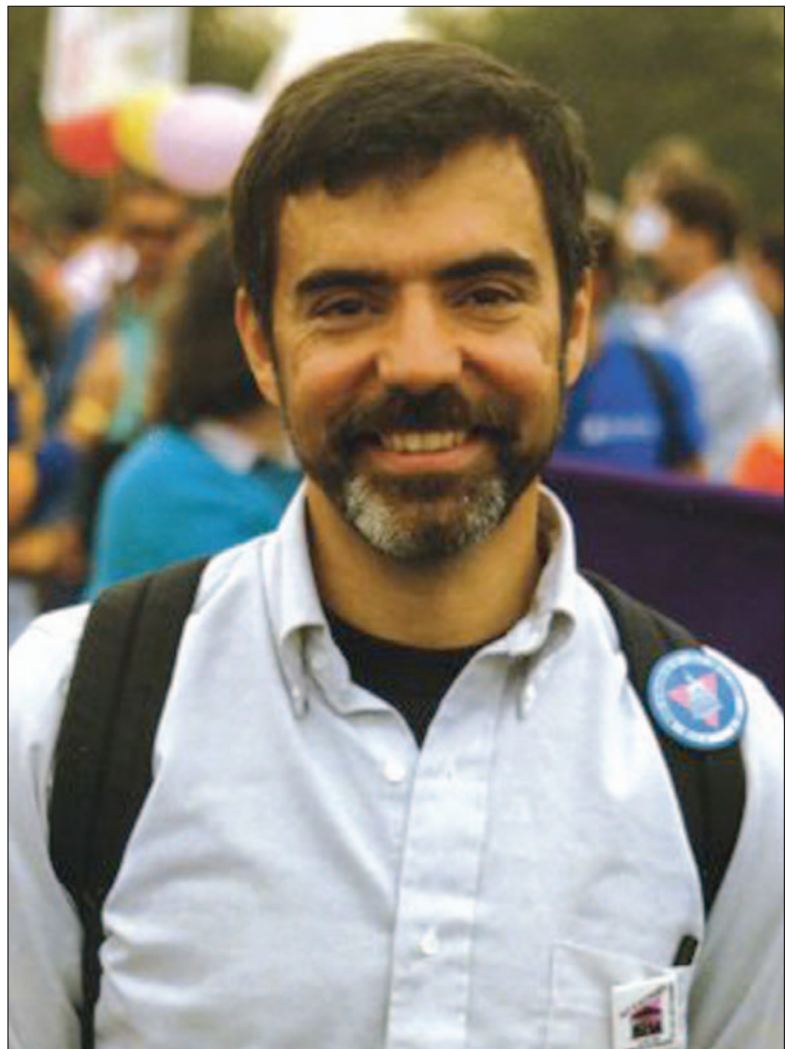
Bérubé’s book “Coming Out Under Fire” influenced the U.S. Senate’s 1993 hearings on the exclusion of lesbians and gay men from the military.

Allan Bérubé is best known for his 1990 book, “Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two.” He posits that servicemen and women during the war found the freedom to explore sexuality in a relatively judgment-free environment. When these soldiers returned home, many settled into a domestic heterosexual lifestyle that launched the baby boom. But a few, knowing they were not as “deviant” as they had been led to believe, decided to stand up against homosexual persecution.

Though Bérubé dropped out of college, he maintained a lifelong passion for scholarship. In 1976 Jonathan Ned Katz’s “Gay American History” inspired Bérubé to conduct his own research. He helped to form the San Francisco Lesbian and Gay History Project. In 1979 he created a slideshow titled “Lesbian Masquerade” about 19th-century women who had passed as men. The presentation became popular and was shown repeatedly in the San Francisco Bay area.

Due to his local celebrity, Bérubé received from an acquaintance the letters of Harold Clark. These letters detailed Clark’s friendships with other gay men during World War II. Bérubé created a second slideshow lecture, which he toured with across the country. His work inspired veterans to contribute their stories to the project. Thus began the 10-year journey that culminated in the publication of “Coming Out Under Fire.”

In 1990 “Coming Out Under Fire” received the Lambda Literary Award for outstanding Gay Men’s Nonfiction and influenced the U.S. Senate’s 1993 hearings on the exclusion of lesbians and gay men from the military. A documentary adaptation of the book won a Peabody Award.



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