

# TOM STODDARD

b. 1949

d. 1997

## EQUALITY ATTORNEY

*"I've been very lucky. I always got back more than I gave."*

**Under his leadership, Lambda became one of the most important LGBT legal organizations in the country.**

Tom Stoddard was a lawyer who helped advance LGBT rights in America. He served as an early executive director of the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund in New York from 1986 to 1992, where he fought against discrimination in employment, housing, health care and the military. Under his leadership, Lambda became one of the most important LGBT legal organizations in the country.

Stoddard taught one of the first courses on constitutional law and its impact on the LGBT community. He also authored the successful 1986 bill to protect gay people against bias in housing, employment and public accommodations in New York City.

Former Mayor Ed Koch said of Stoddard, "He was an extraordinary lawyer. Even though he never retreated, he would find a way to explain, to placate and convince opponents that his approach was reasonable, rational and one they could accept. That's a gift."

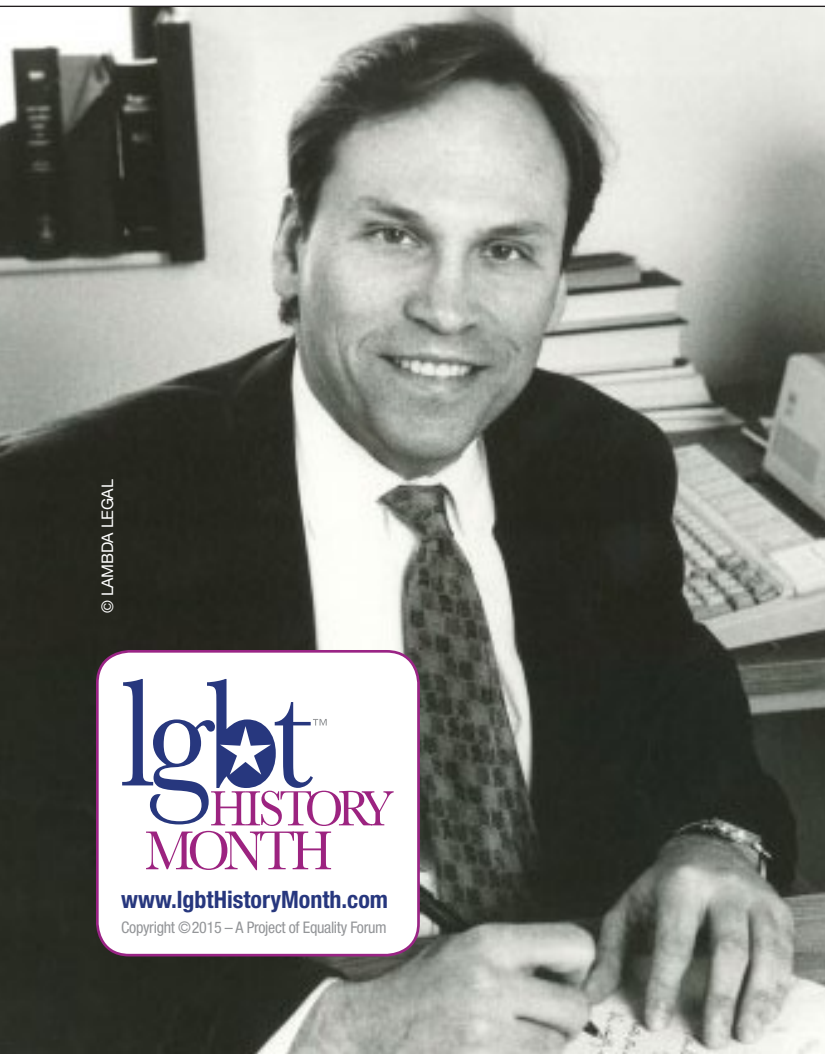
Over the years, Stoddard became an important spokesperson for gay rights and civil liberties, eventually becoming the director of the Campaign for Military Service. In 1993 he asked President Bill Clinton to end the ban on gays and lesbians in the military, only to see the Clinton administration institute the controversial "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.

Stoddard had a keen sense of justice throughout his life. He once called the fight against Georgia's sodomy law "our Dred Scott case," and was an early champion of marriage equality. In 1985 he said, "The general public seems to feel that being gay is an individual existence that precludes family life. In fact, it often involves being part of a family in every possible sense: as spouse, as parent, as child. Society needs to foster greater stability in gay relationships."

Stoddard eventually married his partner, Walter Rieman, in 1993. Though the marriage was never legally recognized, they exchanged rings and vows.

Stoddard also became an important advocate for people with AIDS facing discrimination. When he was diagnosed with AIDS himself, he joined the board of the American Foundation for AIDS Research. He attended the first White House Conference on AIDS in 1995 and the 11th International AIDS Conference just before his death.

In 1995 the Tom Stoddard Fellowship was established at New York University. It encourages law students to advocate on behalf of gay civil rights cases in America.



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