EDMUND WHITE

LGBTQ+ NOVELIST

b. January 13, 1940
d. June 3, 2025

"For me, writing is about the truth. I have always to be faithful to my own experience."

Edmund White was a trailblazing author of gay literature and an AIDS activist. Writing with honesty from personal experience, he profoundly influenced modern LGBTQ+ storytelling.

Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, White began writing novels in high school. After coming out to his mother as a teen in the 1950s, he was dispatched to a psychologist to be "cured." Later, when Harvard College admitted him, the psychologist recommended he stay closer to home to continue his conversion therapy. White acquiesced and studied Chinese at the University of Michigan instead. After graduation, he followed a lover to New York City.

In New York, White freelanced for various publications and worked for Time-Life Books from 1962 to 1970. A regular at the Stonewall Inn, he witnessed the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion, an event that proved pivotal to his development and self-image.

He was a trailblazing author of gay literature.

White published his first book, "Forgetting Elena," in 1973. A stylish mystery coded with gay references, it was described by The New York Times Book Review as "an astonishing first novel."

In 1977, White found a broad LGBTQ+ audience with "The Joy of Gay Sex," a book he co-authored with Charles Silverstein, a gay psychologist. He published his first overtly gay novel, "Nocturnes for the King of Naples," the following year. In 1980, he founded the Violet Quill Club with a group of gay writers to share and critique each other's work.

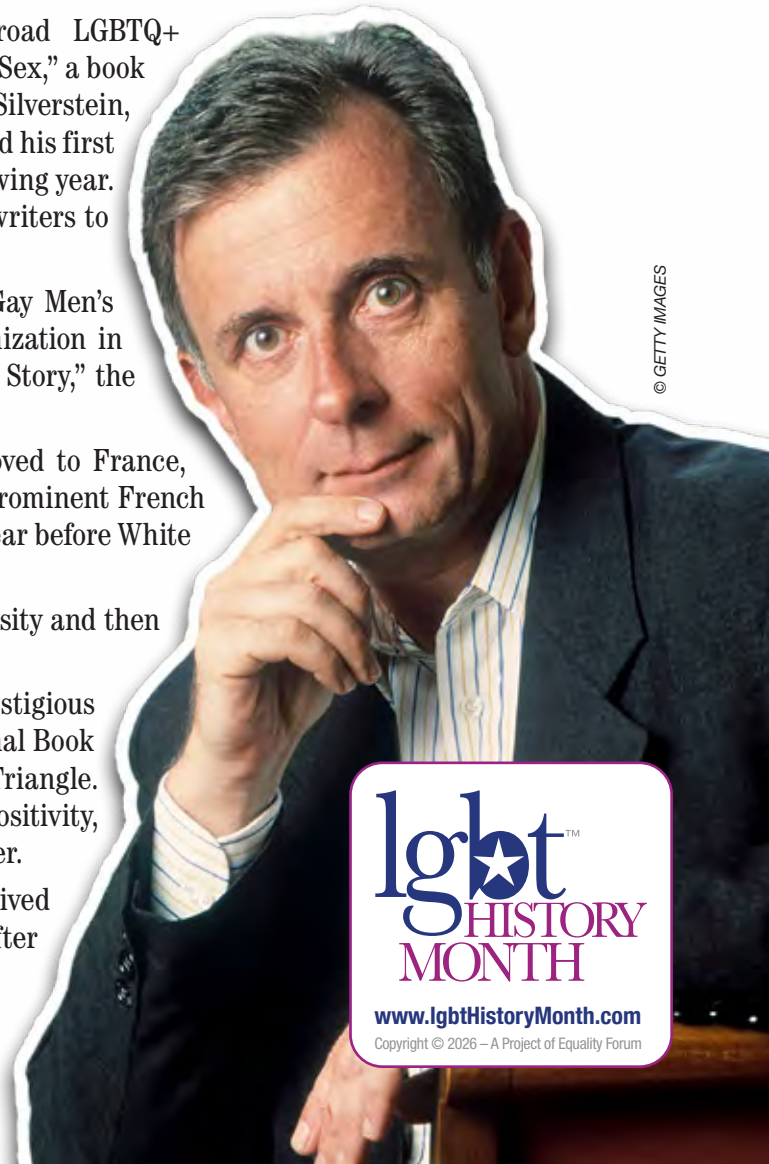
In 1982, early in the AIDS epidemic, White cofounded the Gay Men's Health Crisis, the first community-based AIDS service organization in the United States. That year, he also published "A Boy's Own Story," the first novel in what became an autobiographical fiction series.

After receiving a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1983, White moved to France, where he lived until 1990. He befriended Michel Foucault, a prominent French philosopher, who died of AIDS-related complications about a year before White learned that he himself was HIV positive.

Back in the States in the 1990s, White taught at Brown University and then at Princeton. He continued to publish until his death.

The author of more than 25 books, White received numerous prestigious honors, including lifetime achievement awards from the National Book Critics Circle, Lambda Literary Foundation, and Publishing Triangle. His candid portrayals of life as a gay man in America, his sex positivity, and the disclosure of his HIV status made him a literary pioneer.

White died at home in Manhattan at the age of 85. He is survived by his husband, Michael Carroll. The couple married in 2013 after living together for 18 years.



© GETTY IMAGES

lgbt™ HISTORY MONTH

www.lgbtHistoryMonth.com

Copyright © 2026 – A Project of Equality Forum