



When We Were Outlaws: A Memoir of Love and Revolution

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A sweeping memoir, a raw and intimate chronicle of a young activist torn between conflicting personal longings and political goals. *When We Were Outlaws* offers a rare view of the life of a radical lesbian during the early cultural struggle for gay rights, Women's Liberation, and the New Left of the 1970s.

Brash and ambitious, activist Jeanne Córdova is living with one woman and falling in love with another, but her passionate beliefs tell her that her first duty is "to the revolution"---to change the world and end discrimination against gays and lesbians. Trying to compartmentalize her sexual life, she becomes an investigative reporter for the famous, underground L.A. Free Press and finds herself involved with covering the Weather Underground and Angela Davis, exposing neo-Nazi bomber Captain Joe Tomassi, and befriending Emily Harris of the Symbionese Liberation Army. At the same time she is creating what will be the center of her revolutionary lesbian world: her own newsmagazine, *The Lesbian Tide*, destined to become the voice of the national lesbian feminist movement.

By turns provocative and daringly honest, Cordova renders emblematic scenes of the era---ranging from strike protests to utopian music festivals, to underground meetings with radical fugitives---with period detail and evocative characters. For those who came of age in the 70s, and for those who weren't around but still ask, "What was it like?", *Outlaws* takes you back to re-live it. It also offers insights about ethics, decision making and strategy, still relevant today.

With an introduction by renowned lesbian historian Lillian Faderman, *When We Were Outlaws* paints a vivid portrait of activism and the search for self-identity, set against the turbulent landscape of multiple struggles for social change that swept hundreds of thousands of Americans into the streets.

When We Were Outlaws: A Memoir of Love and Revolution Details

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Beth Cook says

Great historical read

Zein says

This book is basically a lesbian feminist Anna Karinina: 80% politics, 20% star-crossed lovers. I appreciated the behind-the-scenes insight into the fights that precluded cooperation across gay liberation and lesbian feminism in the 1970s, and Cordova is an engaging writer with a keen attention to details as well as a flair for what will be compelling. In some parts it felt a little tedious to go through the details. Enter Rachel. Cordova's star-crossed affair did so much for me as a reader. I thought it was a sexy depiction of an un-butch/femme (but actually butch/femme) relationship. It also reminded me of what it's like to be 26 and think that the end of your dating life coincides with the beginning of it, which is to say that I thoroughly enjoyed the drama of it and the wisdom to know it was drama. The political and personal stories, and their unexpected conclusions, stayed with me for a long time. I would recommend this to anybody interested in lesbian feminism, feminism, or politics in the 1970s.

Ben Kim says

The book is subtitled "Love and Revolution" for good reason - consistently throughout the memoir Cordova relates her struggle to balance her relationship with her political activism. Sounds mundane until you realize that Cordova (and other 70s gay liberationists) were fighting the societal forces that disapproved of her having a relationship at all.

As a young queer activist in the modern age I was completely fascinated by the climate of gay politics in the 70s - if you have any interest in gay history this is a quick and entertaining read and will leave you with a bit more than just historical understanding.

Kelly says

Lags a bit at the end, and gets a tad corny with the star-crossed lovers-subplot, but overall, a compelling memoir by one badass lesbian feminist.

Esther says

When we were outlaws talks about the "Great revolution". The one that involved the feminism with the lesbianism in the 70's. The action happens in a fizzy L.A where women meetings had their own space at the

women's building, where events, music festival were set, organized by and for women, where more than ever women were a voice, a body and a soul. At the same time the book is a journey to the Communist movement of the decade in America and Jeanne makes us witness about the lesbian's first steps far away from the gay movement mainly influenced by the chauvinism of the times. A must read book for the Herstory.

Kersplebedeb says

So this book gets four stars, but with a big caveat. It won't be of interest to everyone, and is not in any way an extensive study of anything, except several months in the life of the author, back when she was forty years younger and the meanings of things like "feminism", "lesbian", "left" and "revolution" were not completely different, but definitely not the same.

That said, the book gets the four stars because it was very quick and easy to read (a big plus for me), not boring, seemed honest, and managed to give an unusually vivid glimpse at how gay men, lesbians, and the left related at one very precise point in time, where things were in flux and changing. It is a snapshot, and a memoir, not an MA thesis.

i often feel a bit of a disconnect with how the dynamic history of these movements is flattened in academic and activist accounts, and i think Cordova's telling of a few months of her life (a very particular few months) as a lesbian leader in LA could serve as a good antidote to this.

That said, i also felt the book read in an almost embarrassingly naive, let-me-be-a-tourist-guide-to-the-strange-and-wacky-scene-we-had-when-we-were-kids, tone to it, especially in the first chapters, which took some getting used to. Still not sure if this is a shortcoming of the author, or of the reader (!), or maybe just an inevitable consequence of telling this kind of story now.

Long and short of it, i will be recommending this book as a quick read to friends who are interested in how feminism and political lesbianism intersected with revolutionary politics for a moment during the New Left. This book captures that nicely. At the same time, i will be warning them that there is a lot of silly relationship soap opera drama in it, and that it can read in a bit of an embarrassing "we were so radical then" kinda way. (Which i guess i shouldda been prepared for, given the title)

Lynnhb says

“The riveting first-hand telling of a dangerous creative time.

The lesbian feminist '70s with their messy, sexy, bold social and personal visions, live again on these pages”

-- Joan Nestle

Reviews:

"When We Were Outlaws, is such an important addition to the literary cannon of LGBT non-fiction. The book manages to be captivating, heartbreaking, and gratifying all at once."

--Diane Anderson Minshall - The Advocate

"For LGBT people who care about activism, especially those young enough to have no memory of those iconic times, Córdova's "memoir of love and revolution" should be a must-read."

--Patricia Nell Warren - Bilerico Project

"When We Were Outlaws is content-rich and driven by a compelling plot. These two things make reading When We Were Outlaws a joy."

--Julie R. Enszer - Lambda Literary Review

*Lambda Lit Review - Julie Enzer - <http://www.lambdaliterary.org/reviews...>

*Advocate Review - Diane Anderson Minshall / Robin Tyler http://www.advocate.com/Arts_and_Enterte...

*San Diego gay & lesbian news review - <http://www.sdgl.com/social/2011/11/1...>

*Bilerico Project review - Patricia Nell Warren

http://www.bilerico.com/2011/12/book_...

*Radically Queer blog review

<http://radicallyqueer.wordpress.com/c...>

*Out in Print review

<http://blog.outinprint.net/2011/12/19...>

Out in Print interview with Jerry Wheeler

<http://blog.outinprint.net/2012/01/23...>

Danika at The Lesbrary says

It was a happy coincidence that When We Were Outlaws reached the top of my TBR stack just after it won a Lambda Literary Award. I was already looking forward to it, but the win pushed my expectations a little higher. I can definitely see when Cordova won. When We Were Outlaws is equal parts a historical look into the feminist and gay/lesbian activism of the 70s, and a personal memoir about a love affair. It took me a little while to get into, but by the end I was totally gripped...

Read the rest of my review here: <http://lesbrary.com/2012/07/03/danika...>

Jean Roberta says

Remember the kidnapping of newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst by a group of self-defined revolutionaries, the Symbionese Liberation Army? Remember the music of Joan Baez, Janis Ian and the first openly lesbian singer-songwriters of the 1970s?

Jeanne Cordova was a young journalist and political activist in Los Angeles at the time, and she has written a gripping account of it. The major political and cultural events covered by the author as Human Rights Editor of "the Freep" (The L.A. Free Press) and founder of The Lesbian Tide (1971-1980) form a dramatic background to the story of a lesbian love affair. Each chapter of this thick book has a "dateline" in 1974 or 1975, but the entire narrative reads like a novel.

The author describes herself as a "centrist" in the context of the New Left, gay-rights and lesbian-feminist politics of the 1970s. Despite her radical lifestyle, her self-description rings true.

Like many of her contemporaries, Jeanne Cordova left home in her late teens when she could no longer hide her sexual identity (lesbian and butch) from her conservative parents. As she explains, replacing her lost family with a chosen “family” of sister-dykes and compatible gay men was a practical and emotional necessity. She describes a fledgling “gay” community in the process of inventing itself, before the four flavours of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered became an acronym.

Cordova (as she was called) appears in this memoir as a remarkable mixture of naivete, clear-sightedness and community spirit. She was a coalition-builder who survived to tell the tale.

The story of the author’s affair with “Rachel,” a recently-divorced newbie in the urban lesbian community, is told in painful detail. From their first kiss (in public, surrounded by lesbian demonstrators), the author’s non-monogamous living arrangement and her full-time commitment to radical journalism clashes with “Rachel’s” need for security. And then “Rachel” adopts non-monogamy for herself, having learned that in her chosen community, it is regarded as a rational, liberated, feminist response to the personal “ownership” of women in heterosexual marriages.

Cordova is unflinching in her descriptions of her own jealous rage when “Rachel” appears at social events with another butch. The author describes herself and others this way even though butch and femme “sex roles,” like monogamous commitment, were widely assumed by lesbian-feminists of the time to be patriarchal and outdated. Like many another activist, the author finds that political theory and emotional reality are separate and often opposed.

The author’s frequent contact with outlaws in the most literal sense (self-defined revolutionaries running from the FBI) is shown forcing her to consider the uses of violence. She is invited to join “the revolution,” which takes different forms in the minds of different radicals. Could she use a gun to hasten the process of social change? For awhile, she can’t honestly answer that question. Her internal debates form part of a coming-of-age process.

The author’s sense of spiritual connection with “Rachel” is movingly described. In general, Cordova seems to have been unusually attuned to the natural world and to the “vibes” of other people, both as individuals and in groups. Her apparently inborn spirituality helps account for her early desire to become a nun as well as her resulting disillusionment with organized religion.

“Rachel’s” sense of connection with Cordova is convincingly expressed in dialogue. In an epilogue, the author thanks her for permission to tell their story in print. The conflicts and the cultural gap between them at the time are described with fairness and sensitivity.

The style and pacing of this memoir make it much more than a historical account of a particular time and place. It resembles a haunting song in which the personal and the collective are seamlessly combined.

Gina says

In short, an excellent synopsis of several years during the 1970s. The book highlights the tensions between socialism, feminism, and gay "liberation." Intertwined within the historical and political facts presented in "Outlaws" is the personal, in which Cordova recounts how the multiple (and sometimes contradictory)

ideologies of the time affected the lives of herself, her mentors, and her friends/lovers. An incredibly important addition to the body of work that goes behind-the-scenes to share the story of the LGBT movement in Los Angeles. Jeanne Cordova was, and continues to be, the definition of an activist.

Cordova dedicates the book to "[T]he queer youth of today whose activism now gives their elders so much pride."

Suzy says

Invaluable insight into the lesser known parts of lgbt activism history. We need more books like this! Cordova writes well, although the romance side plot occasionally veers into flowery territory.

Meg says

This memoir flowed like a novel, but I felt like I learned a lot about the feminist and lesbian movements in the 1970s through personal relationships and the interviews/work Cordova does. It was strangely written for a memoir. The writing seemed overly dramatic at times, and blocked out some of the reflection parts. I felt like she sometimes jumped from scene to scene where I wanted to delve deeper. But the political and historical side of things made this book worth reading.

Sally Sas Pants Pants says

Epic and very much a book to read as soon as possible I personally fell in love with the ability Cordova has to transport you to the exact place and time and feeling in every event she shared with us. LOVE

Wendi Kali says

I've carried this book around for quite a while now and finally took the time to read it. As a butch in the present day, it was interesting to read some of the history of the feminist movement as well as the LGBT movement in Los Angeles. The love story was good for me to read, as well. I could relate to it really well. Very good book.

Monica says

I almost gave this 4 stars, as I found Cordova's description of 1970s lesbian feminism in L.A., lesbian involvement in underground movements (e.g. the S.L.A.) and the battle at the gay community center really interesting. However, I quickly bored of her relationship drama. Also, the book could have used some copy editing.

