

Walter L. Williams book review of *Reviving the Tribe: Regenerating Gay Men's Sexuality and Culture in the Ongoing Epidemic*. By Eric Rofes. New York: Harrington Park Press, 1996. In *International Gay & Lesbian Review* 1997.

This book is part personal memoir, part history, and part social commentary. Besides his role as a writer, Eric Rofes has been right at the center of Gay history since the 1970s. He founded the Boston Lesbian and Gay Political Alliance, and was part of the Gay Community News collective when it was the premier newspaper in the nation. Moving to California in the early 1980s, he served as executive director of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, and later of the Shanti Project in San Francisco.

It was in California that Rofes was immersed in the heart of the AIDS epidemic. While remaining HIV-negative himself (due to his dislike of anal sex), he nevertheless was traumatized by the large number of friends and partners who died of the disease. This book will be a major source for future historians in their analysis of the psychological impact of AIDS on the Gay community in the 1980s. Rofes was also traumatized by controversies within the community, due to his leadership role in organizations. He provides an incomplete but convincing statement on his viewpoint in a financial controversy of the Shanti Project when he was director.

More importantly, Rofes book goes beyond merely chronicling events, to suggest future directions for reviving the Gay Male community post-AIDS. This is exactly the kind of longterm thinking that we need, and that has been all too lacking during the AIDS crisis. The first thing we have to do, Rofes argues, is to focus on restoring our individual mental health. While this is true, it is also easy for Gay males to think that they are the only ones to go through this kind of psychological devastation. It is important to remember that many other generations of people have suffered the death of multiple friends and relatives in a short period. From depopulation rates up to ninety percent for

Native Americans when confronted with diseases brought by the European colonists, to the massive losses of people involved in the World Wars and more recent civil wars, it must be kept in mind that we are not the only generation to have to deal with such trauma.

Going beyond individual mental health, Rofes points out that we also need to recover the psyche of the community and the body politic. He draws on multiple theories of communities dealing with disasters, including the efforts made by the Japanese in Hiroshima to rebuild their city after the destruction of nuclear attack. His ideas are too numerous to mention here, but they bear listening to by activists and community-minded individuals who want to think about how we might best improve life for Gay and Lesbian people in the twenty-first century.

This book is a message of hope for those who have persevered through a decade of epidemic, to seek a life beyond AIDS. This book is the testimony of a survivor, who has faced setbacks and disappointments, but who has moved beyond despair to a life of affirmation and contribution. Rofes not only asks the right questions, but provides concrete suggestions to improve community responses in the future.