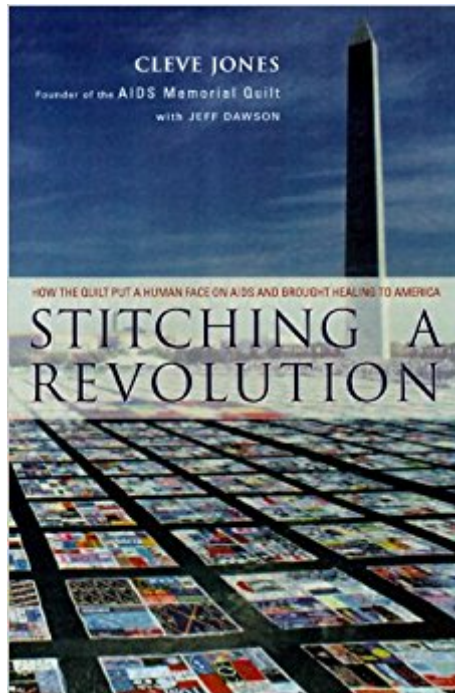




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# Stitching A Revolution - The Making Of An Activist



## Synopsis

From the frontlines of one of the greatest human struggles of our time comes this powerful and moving tale. Both an important cultural history of the AIDS crisis and an intimate personal memoir, *Stitching a Revolution* is the story of a man who, besieged by discrimination, death, and despair, found the courage and strength of spirit to conceive and create a unique healing vision--the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Against the turbulent backdrop of politics and sexual liberation in San Francisco during the seventies, Jones recounts his coming-of-age alongside friend and mentor Harvey Milk--and, later, Milk's assassination and the ensuing riots that threatened to tear down all they had accomplished. But Jones's political aspirations were put on hold after the emergence of an insidious, unexplainable "gay cancer" that would soon become known throughout the world as AIDS. Demoralized by the tide of death and despair sweeping his community, brutally assaulted by gay-bashing thugs, and faced with the specter of his own positive diagnosis, Jones sought a way to restore hope to a world falling apart beneath his feet. What started out as a simple panel of fabric stitched for his best friend now covers a space larger than twenty-five football fields and contains over eighty thousand names. The Quilt has affected the lives of many people, bridging racial, sexual, and religious barriers to unite millions in the fight against AIDS. *Stitching a Revolution* is a compelling, dramatic tale with a cast of memorable characters from all walks of life. At times uplifting, at times heartwrenching, this inspiring story reveals what it means to be human and how the power of love conquers all--even death.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There can be few American stories more inspiring than that of the tremendous 43,000-panel AIDS quilt, a national memorial as powerfully symbolic as the Vietnam War Memorial--but made from a material as fragile and ephemeral as human life. The quilt is predicated on a simple concept: putting names to those who have died of AIDS humanizes the statistics and forces those who visit the quilt to look beyond the stigmatized categories of gayness and contagious disease that cling to the popular image of AIDS. Cleve Jones stitched the first panel in his backyard in February 1987 as a memorial to his best friend, Marvin. He has been speaking in public about the quilt for many years now, and his narrative in *Stitching a Revolution* is smooth and engaging. Perhaps his best quality as a storyteller is his generous recognition of others, shown in his memory of Rosa Parks in her Sunday hat: "When she handed me the quilts she'd made for her neighbors," Jones recalls, "she wanted to relish only their lives, not the divisions--just memorialize her friends and what they'd meant to her. You're doing a wonderful thing, young man, she'd said. There were no tears in her eyes, just a message for me to continue. Did my fatigue show? Did she see that the death threats and potshots had taken their toll? Dismiss them, she seemed to say, and grow old. A challenge. I brighten and feel combative." --Regina Marler

The AIDS Memorial QuiltA42,016 interlocking panels, each celebrating the life of an individual who has died of AIDS-related causesAis one of the marvels of contemporary political organizing and art. Jones, who conceived of the quilt and formed the Names Project, which curates it, has written a memoir of his life as a gay rights and AIDS activist that attempts to place the meaning of the quilt within both a personal and a social history. Born in 1954 to a pair of liberal Indiana college professors, Jones left home and his less-than-accepting parents at 18, after he came out. Cutting his political teeth working for openly gay Supervisor Harvey Milk in San Francisco, Jones became a noted community leader after Milk's assassination in 1978. When AIDS hit three years later, Jones, who was working as a legislative aide on health concerns, became involved with local AIDS projects and in 1984 was inspired to begin developing the quilt. Although it is filled with dates and names, Jones's memoir is oddly vague about political or personal specifics. He claims, for example, that Harvey Milk's politics were not based in "any kind of political or economic philosophy" but were just "about individuals

For anyone who wants to understand what this quilt meant for gay people at the time of Reagan and Bush this is it.

While the emotion of experiencing the Quilt cannot be confined to mere words, this inspiring journey to activism and openness is a fascinating read. In 1995, while in San Francisco to say a heartbreaking goodbye to my dearest brother, I entered the NAMES project offices and was instantly overwhelmed by the raw emotion--not just sadness, which is the obvious response, but also a healing, a unity and a strength. I have never been so moved--until I traveled to DC to witness the 1996 display. A part of me travels with my brother's panel wherever it goes, and this book was a cathartic reliving of some of my most grueling and gratifying moments. 'Stitching a Revolution' is a treasure, a reminder that we often forget the power of one voice, and the staggering, wondrous results of bringing together disparate peoples.

For those of us who were fortunate enough to be in Washington on that cold morning in October, 1987 and see the entire AIDS Memorial Quilt unfurled for the first time, we should thank Cleve Jones for both his idea of the quilt as a memorial to those who died of AIDS and this wonderful book he has written. The quilt has almost become a cliché for some of us now-- we have seen it so many times in so many different variations and sizes-- that I did not believe I could be so moved and relive that intensely emotional and poignant day in October. I was wrong. I was taken by Mr. Jones' sincerity and utter lack of egotism. He is remarkably candid about his own life as he takes the reader through his own experiences as a young gay activist in San Francisco, his role in the history of the quilt and his own diagnosis with HIV. Mr. Jones reminds me of things I had forgotten or repressed: a lot about the heroism of Harvey Milk, for example, the awfulness of Anita Bryant, the indifference of the first President Bush who was too busy to see the quilt, of President Clinton, along with Mrs. Clinton and the Gores, who was not too busy to pay tribute to those who had fallen. We get to see some of our national celebrities in a new light: the gentle Rosa Parks, the beautiful Elizabeth Taylor frightened at making a speech, and finally Jane Fonda who can only be described as totally silly in her adoration of Tom Hayden. A friend of mine who has seen the quilt in its entirety many times and is active in the Names Project in his hometown in Maine says that he can only read this book a little at a time. Yes, it's very visceral, sometimes painful, and it will make you cry. In the Epilogue Mr. Jones writes: "My hope is that one day AIDS will be over and we will have to look upon all its different aspects: how it drew a country together from across cultural, ethnic, and religious divisions, and how it was, like the Holocaust, a crucible of definition. I think the Quilt will have a role in this discussion and a place in our history as memory is preserved and recreated in this symbol of our natural desire for community." And you, Mr. Jones, will have a place in that history. Many

Americans cannot thank you enough for that.

I read this book from cover to cover in half a day, despite taking breaks a couple of times when I started to cry, my emotions overcome by the power of this amazing story. Cleve Jones has an inspiring tale to tell, and his ghostwriter Jeff Dawson has put the pieces together in an extremely accessible manner. The book chronicles Jones' unlikely journey as a true American hero: his happy middle class childhood, his entry into politics as an acolyte of Harvey Milk, his Quaker religious influences, his emergence as a grassroots leader in the turbulent gay politics of San Francisco, his own struggle with Aids and how one night an epiphany came to him with the vision of a huge Aids Quilt. However, my favorite stories in the book are the anecdotes about the individual people who came from all walks of life and how they were brought together and transformed by the Quilt - a quiet dignified mother from Appalachia who took the bus to San Francisco to deliver a panel for her son, a US marine and his wife from Texas who memorialized their son's friends, and a man who made a quilt for his lover shortly before dying himself. These stories come out of the text and hit an emotional nerve that help us to understand the power of the love of all those affected by AIDS and shows exactly why the quilt is such an important touchstone. Jones is upfront about his anger, at those who opposed him from the extremes of the left and right, and especially Presidents Reagan and Bush - it wasn't until 1996 when the Clintons and the Gores came to see the display and were moved by seeing the panels of people they had known that a president had even acknowledged the existence of the Quilt. Larry Kramer also comes in for some severe and surprising criticism. I was a volunteer at the 1996 DC national display and memories of that time came rushing sharply back to me as I read this book - the emotions and the pain of the loss all around, but also the sense of connectedness, spirituality and even hope embodied by the quilt and the people there to see it. I remember a white-haired woman in her 70s sitting in a portable chair all day next to her son's panel, a particularly beautiful work of art, smiling with gratitude when people asked her about her son. Cleve Jones writes about his own transformation from a wild gay youth with a bullhorn to someone who understood how much we are all, young or old, gay or straight, rich or poor, connected together in ways we never imagined. My one complaint with the book is that there is not much self-examination into why exactly Cleve Jones was chosen to receive this vision and follow this particular path. Maybe it doesn't matter however - heroes aren't supposed to know all their inner workings and this is a truly inspiring hero's journey.

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