



Marty Fink. *Forget Burial: HIV Kinship, Disability, and Queer/Trans Narratives of Care.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020. 214 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-978813-76-2.

Reviewed by Jessie Hewitt (University of Redlands)

Published on H-Disability (October, 2021)

Commissioned by Iain C. Hutchison (University of Glasgow)

Marty Fink's *Forget Burial* incorporates often-neglected histories of caregiving into the history of HIV activism by linking early experiences of the epidemic to more recent narrative accounts of caregiving within queer and trans communities. As a media scholar, Fink puts a wide variety of sources in dialogue with one another, often to convincing effect. In the process, they highlight how archival investigations and curatorial practices have the potential to create intergenerational bonds and provide caregiving models for queer/trans people who did not personally experience the early years of the epidemic.

Central to Fink's investigation is the insistence that disability forges community. Interdependence is a fact of life for disabled and nondisabled people alike, but individuals with HIV in the 1980s and 1990s were particularly attuned to the ways the state, the medical establishment, and the prison system all exacerbated their isolation and stigmatization. Chosen families, on the other hand, provided care and also received it in ways that exposed the cruelty of official neglect and indifference. As Fink explains, "I apply HIV histories to contemporary narratives about gender and disability: rather than trying to cure disabilities and eliminate bodily differences, HIV narratives offer

queer and trans models for taking care of each other when we experience institutional harm" (p. 5). While the actions and inaction of those in power dehumanized queer/trans people with HIV, communities of care celebrated and reinforced one another's humanity.

By focusing on caregiving as a form of activism, Fink centers the actions of queer/trans people of color, which have often received less attention than more spectacular types of public protest associated with majority-white activist groups. One salient example involves reframing the origins of safer-sex efforts in the 1980s. While some safer-sex initiatives eventually garnered official support, campaigns sanctioned by the state implicitly sought to discipline queer and trans bodies by focusing on abstinence and/or pathologizing promiscuity. Conversely, grassroots sex education invented "safer sex as a caregiving response to HIV... Creating and sharing medical information therefore became a form of care, and the distribution of this knowledge happened on the community level, bringing together lovers, professionals, and friends through the process of creating access to sex education" (p. 40). The activism of DiAna DiAna, a Black woman who began to provide safer-sex education and free condoms in her South Car-

olina hair salon in 1986, serves as a revelatory case in point. While DiAna's efforts were appreciated within her community, Fink argues that she was regularly blocked from receiving state funds due to institutional racism.

Fink thematically links numerous types of primary sources in the process of constructing their argument. This is one of the book's strengths. Yet I often found discussion of the words and deeds of historical actors more compelling than the literary analysis. For example, Fink argues that disability kinship communities formed during the early years of the HIV epidemic provide anti-capitalist and anti-racist models for prison abolition. The thrust of this argument focuses on Octavia Butler's 2005 vampire novel, *Fledgling*, and Jamaica Kincaid's caregiving 1997 memoir, *My Brother*. While the exploration of these works is suggestive—particularly in the case of *Fledgling*—the experiences of HIV-positive individuals ensnared by the prison system is less thorough. Of course, as Fink points out, the isolation produced by incarceration makes it very difficult to uncover these stories.

Forget Burial is well worth reading. The most successful parts of this book take the reader inside the kitchens, bedrooms, prisons, art galleries, and hospital waiting rooms where people laughed, fought, loved, and sometimes died together. Fink makes a strong case that the early years of the HIV epidemic provide models for living joyously and communally despite the myriad ways capitalist institutions leave individuals to fend for ourselves. In the process of “unburying” the stories of historically marginalized people, Fink rightly and eloquently depicts disability as a generative force.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-disability>

Citation: Jessie Hewitt. Review of Fink, Marty. *Forget Burial: HIV Kinship, Disability, and Queer/Trans Narratives of Care*. H-Disability, H-Net Reviews. October, 2021.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=56289>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.