

AAHP
AIDS Activist History Project

George W. Smith Quotations

Prepared by members of the AIDS Activist History Project, the following list includes quotations by George W. Smith as well as other quotations about or related to George's work.

Quotations by, about or related to George W. Smith's work

If the Right to Privacy Committee has learned one thing this year," said George Smith, RTPC treasurer, "it's that confrontations with the police department result in statements of good intentions and little else. We'll have to change the laws themselves if we want real control over our sexual lives. - "The Right to Privacy Committee evaluates year at policy meeting, The Body Politic, 1980, June/July.

"The people who signed the affidavits have no intention of talking directly to the police," Mr. Smith said. He said they do not think the police will conduct an unbiased investigation and that is why the group wants a public meeting. - Unknown (The Globe and Mail, 11 April 1981) Re: activists demanding public police talks.

One of the few patches of common ground between the two groups was Mr. Bruner's proposal to recruit homosexual police. George W. Smith, a member of the Right to Privacy Committee, called the suggestion unworkable. "When you consider how senior officers view gays, it would be virtually impossible for one of us to operate within that atmosphere," he said. "It wouldn't be a very happy life. I don't know anyone who would want to work in that situation." Toronto Mayor Arthur Eggleton, who recommended that council hire Mr. Bruner for the study, said last night that he saw "major problems" with virtually all the report's 16 recommendations except those dealing with communication between homosexuals and the police. - Ross Laver (The Globe and Mail, 25 September 1981). Re: hiring homosexuals in policy.

George Smith, the leader of the Right To Privacy Committee, told the crowd at Queen's Park that the Metro Toronto police department "is on a collision course with the people of Toronto What is needed is a police commission and a police force that is responsible to the people who live here, and that includes minorities," he said. - Margaret Mironowicz (The Globe and Mail, 21 February 1981).

"But George Smith, chairman of the Right to Privacy Committee and an organizer of the parade, said that "the policemen clearly knew that they were going to be at the front of the parade, and actively took the banner in their hands." He emphasized that they were not community relations officers, and that if they had been they would have informed the parade marshals of their presence. Mr. Smith said the committee expected to take some action concerning the presence of the four policemen." - Stephen Godfrey (The Globe and Mail, 17 March 1981). Re: police in demonstration.

George Smith, chairman of the Right to Privacy Committee, said its findings would not be submitted to the complaints bureau "because there is no point until there is a proper review procedure." The bureau is an internal operation and the rights committee is seeking public participation in complaint procedures. - Unknown (The Globe and Mail, 24 March 1981).

"We object to the free editorial appeal, particularly because past Renaissance International activities and Campbell's belief that "homosexuality is a sin and a disease" indicates that any finances generated by the article may very well be used to oppose The Right to Privacy Committee's work in promoting gay rights in Canada." - George Smith ("Letters to fanfare," The Globe and Mail, August 22 1981)

George Smith of the Right to Privacy Committee in Toronto says, "The most serious problem is how the trials are going on and on and on." George Hislop, a shareholder in the Barracks who is charged with conspiracy and being a keeper of a common bawdy house, said: "It's part of police strategy to exhaust people - financially, physically and emotionally. It takes stamina for an accused to exercise his right to trial. Justice is very costly. A lot of people plead guilty to charges they don't feel guilty about simply because they can't afford it." - Patricia Chapman (The Globe and Mail, 6 February 1982).

Privacy is something that is socially constructed in this society ... Indeed, in the middle of the night, when it is absolutely pitch dark, a park might be a very private place. – George Smith (Action, 1982)

George Smith, a Toronto graduate student at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and the chairman of Canada's Right to [Privacy] Committee, is working on a thesis analyzing the CBS production of GAY POWER, GAY POLITICS. To quote from an excerpt which appeared in Fusemagazine: "The result is a series of images and conceptions divorced from reality — a kind of life in TV land. In this case, CBS's account of the gay community fails to include, for example, Black, Asian or Hispanic gays. There are no older people. And what is of particular interest, there are no women. It is a cardboard community of white, mostly middle class, 'macho' men, where the elite spend their time at cocktail parties and the rest simply walk the streets and cruise the parks in search of sex." – Martha Fleming ("The Celluloid Closet," 1983)

George Smith explained why in a recent article in Action, the newsletter of the Right to Privacy Committee. "People seldom have sex in public. Even in a public place, they take some measures, no matter how minimal, to protect their privacy. The best evidence for this is that arrests on charges for public sex are rarely straightforward "Instead, what we see is they usually result from very elaborate spying activities on the part of the police: everything from entrapment practices, to two-way mirrors, to the use of infrared film and specially constructed peep holes, to say nothing of prowling through the under- growth of public parks late at night. If people were having sex in public none of these activities would be necessary." / As George Smith explains, however, the state would prefer to regulate our sexual lives. "The government prohibits sex 'in public' by decree. But what does 'public' mean? Section 158 of the (Criminal) Code, the section which legalizes homosexuality, goes on to say that not only is a sexual act public and therefore illegal if it is committed in a public place, it is also a public act if more than two people are present. This means that what is 'public,' and illegal as far as sex is concerned, is very broadly defined. It refers to all possible situations but one — two individuals behind a locked door — essentially relegating all sexual activity to the bedroom. – Findlay (The Body Politic, 1983)

"(The parties) seem to have decided to try to not make AIDS an issue in the campaign," said George Smith, a spokesman for Toronto's AIDS Action Now. – Unknown (The Windsor Star, 16 November 1988)

"George Smith is so soothing as a political conferrer; he eases my tortuosities." – Michael Lynch's last entry for diary number 57 (1988, March 10 as cited by Ann Silversides)

"The struggle for ddi has produced the first confrontation with a multinational pharmaceutical company," George Smith wrote in the AIDS Action Now! Newsletter. "There is no reason to believe that this will be the last one, either." – George Smith (Rites, Fall 1989 as cited by Silversides, 2003, p. 205)

"Fortunately, Metro councillor Jack Layton was marching with us and told the police we were his guests," George Smith wrote later. "They let us in—but not before councillor Layton had to produce his I.D." – George Smith (Rites, July/August 1988 as cited by Ann Silversides, 2003, p. 165)

"The more I become immersed in the underworld of AIDS treatments, the more I wonder if everyone who is sick with a life-threatening disease has the same problems that AIDS patients do" – George Smith (Rites, September 1988 as cited by Ann Silversides).

"It's not a bad document in many ways," said George Smith of AIDS Action Now. "However, it deals mostly with the management of correctional services, not with the health care of patients, and that should be the first priority." / Smith's group is one several organizations that staged a winter protest outside the Toronto

(Don) Jail over how inmates infected with the AIDS virus are treated. – Kelly Toughill (Toronto Star, 19 April 1989) Re: New policy for prisoners who have AIDS.

For the first time, effective combination therapies — highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) — and the dream of AIDS as a “chronic manageable infection,” a concept popularized by AAN!’s George Smith in 1988, were real possibilities. – Tim McCaskell (“Power to the People,” CATIE.ca, Spring/Summer 2006).

Multinational pharmaceutical giant Bristol-Myers Co., which holds the sole marketing rights to dideoxyinosine, or DDI, should be forced by Ottawa to make the drug available to Canadians seriously ill with AIDS, said George Smith of AIDS Action Now. / “We’d like to see the Canadian government exert its sovereignty in this case,” he said. / The basic drug “is manufactured in this country, and we feel that gives the federal government the right to step in and say how at least part of it should be used.” ... “But that’s not good enough, Smith said, arguing that DDI “should be made available to patients, especially those in the last stages of the disease, for whom there is nothing else. / “And if Bristol-Myers refuses, Ottawa should simply order the company to release it here,” Smith said. ... AIDS, caused by a virus that destroys the body’s immune system, leaves people vulnerable to other, often fatal, infections. Only one drug, AZT, is known to fight the virus, but it’s extremely toxic and works for only about two years. / “About a third of people with AIDS can’t tolerate AZT,” Smith said. – Nicolaas van Rijn (Toronto Star, 11 September 1989). Re: release of AIDS drug sought.

“He was widely appreciated for the help he provided people in an “absolutely unpretentious way,” Dorothy Smith said. He was “a very brilliant man.” - Obituary (Toronto Star, 1994, November 10)

“It appears people with AIDS have been used like pawns in a game,” said George Smith, of AIDS Action Now. “This sort of thing just causes more AIDS hysteria.” – Kelly Toughill (Toronto Star, 1989 February 8). Re: “jail bite story.”

“This is very, very good news,” said George Smith, of AIDS Action Now. “This is everything we’ve been fighting for.” – Kelly Toughill (Toronto Star, 28 Jan 1989). Re: Experimental AIDS drugs released).

“With catastrophic cases, the right to drug access is paramount,” says George Smith, of the activist group AIDS Action Now. “For these people, their only hope is to try a drug and see if it works.” – Kelly Toughill (Toronto Star, 10 February 1989).

AIDS support groups lauded the government for initiating the registry, which they began lobbying for some years ago. Such praise is rare for Ottawa, which has been harshly criticized by AIDS groups for being slow to react to the epidemic, particularly in approving new drugs. / “It’s been extraordinarily well put together,” said George Smith of AIDS Action Now, a militant support group for people with AIDS that first proposed the registry. / “This is really the first major initiative that’s been taken to support doctors in the fight against AIDS, and to deal specifically with the issue of treatment,” he said. – Unknown (Edmonton Journal, June 28 1990).

“This will let doctors be much more aggressive in their treatment,” predicted George Smith of AIDS Action Now, a lobby group that first suggested the registry. / “This means that patients will get state-of-the-art treatments and more non-traditional therapies.” – Kelly Toughill (Toronto Star, 28 June 1990). Re: U of T to get \$6 million AIDS centre.

“The sociologist cannot know her world from outside but only from inside its social organization” – George Smith (“Political activist as ethnographer,” 1990)

“The sociologist finds herself working with a different method, both ontologically and epistemologically, in relation to the actual world she intends to explore and describe. For Smith, this is a world materially constituted in the practices and activities of people as these are known and organized reflexively and recursively through time” – George W. Smith (Political activist as ethnographer, p. 631)

“The medical treatment supplied by the politico-administrative regime managing the epidemic in Ontario was ideologically organized by the conception of AIDS as a fatal disease. Palliative rather than aggressive “accelerated care” was the order of the day. The provincial health department, for example, basically allocated funds for hospice care and for psycho-social support for the dying.² While most local doctors also followed regimens of palliative rather than accelerated care. PLWAS in Toronto knew through personal contacts and “underground” networking with their counterparts in the United States that people with AIDS could live longer. Contrary to the official prognosis of the politico-administrative regime in charge of managing the epidemic, they believed that AIDS was no longer a necessarily fatal disease in the short run” – George W. Smith (Political activist as ethnographer, p. 632)

“The medical treatment supplied ... was ideologically organized by the conception of AIDS as a fatal disease. Palliative rather than aggressive “accelerated care was the order of the day” – George Smith (“Political activist as ethnographer,” 1990).

“These kinds of problems of knowing – of being told one thing but in fact knowing otherwise on the basis of personal experience – provided a starting point for the research that went on to explicate how a regime works” – George Smith (“Political activist as ethnographer,” 1990).

George asked, “How is the policing of gay men organized? ... How is the delivery of AIDS treatments in ON organized?” – George Smith (“Political activist as ethnographer,” 1990).

G.W. Smith saw events as “actively produced by people in concrete situations” – not caused “by ideas such as ‘AIDS phobia” - George Smith (“Political activist as ethnographer,” 1990)

It is necessary to change the law rather than engaging in public relations efforts to change how police think – George Smith (“Political activist as ethnographer,” 1990)

“The research was never a study of these people; they were never the object of research. Rather, it was the social organization of the regime that constituted my object of study” – George Smith (“Political activist as ethnographer,” 1990)

“My ethnographic work, in this respect, was intent on describing from inside, the social organization of a world that was constantly emerging and one of which, I, too, was a member” – George Smith (“Political activist as ethnographer,” 1990)

“The problem of ‘AIDS-phobia’ or bureaucratic ‘red tape’ arose, not so much because health professionals and bureaucrats were not doing their job but because they were not prepared to redesign the health-care delivery system to meet the challenges of AIDS and HIV infection” – George Smith (“Political activist as ethnographer,” 1990).

“It's a terrible situation,” advisory committee member George Smith said. “When you give someone a project to do, you expect them to do it. I'm really quite angry at the University of Toronto for messing this thing up. / “Meanwhile, we have people dying of AIDS. It's as simple as that.” – R. Mickleburg (The Globe and Mail, 5 April 1991). Re: U of T could lose AIDS project committee.

Mr. Smith said individuals infected with HIV, the virus that leads to acquired immune deficiency syndrome, simply do not have the time to wait for the university to get its act together. / "We see the project as an important vehicle for extending the lives of people with the HIV infection," he said, noting that new treatments are under constant development. – Paul Taylor (The Globe and Mail, 12 April 1991).

Another member of the project's advisory committee, AIDS activist George Smith of Toronto, was furious at news of the latest delay. / "This whole thing is really disgraceful. After all of this money that has been thrown at it, they haven't been able to bring this thing to fruition," Mr. Smith said. "People need this information. This is really unacceptable." – Michkeburg (The Globe and Mail, 15 September 1993). Re: consortium withdrawing from federal project.

George Smith, chairperson of the Right To Privacy Committee which organized the legal fight against the charges, compared the raids to the arrests of hundreds of Quebec residents during the 1970 October Crisis. / "After the War Measures Act in 1970, it was the largest mass arrest of citizens in Canadian history," Smith said. ... "We also did a lot of work on television and radio and people began to see this is crazy. People also saw that gay people were not the stereotypes the moral majority made them out to be," Smith said. / "An enormous number of good things came out of (the raids). People began to see themselves as a community that had power," Smith said. ... "The gay community became organized in Toronto," Smith said. / Many of the people involved in the Right To Privacy Committee would soon play a crucial role in founding organizations like the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) to combat the health crisis that was just beginning to emerge, Smith added. – Bruce DeMara (Toronto Star, 30 June 1994).

The term, "regime of ruling," is borrowed from George Smith's analysis of the regulation of homosexuals and AIDS treatment and inspired by Patty Simpson's adaptation of this term in her work on development, which she calls "the development regime." I am using the term to refer to the complex conglomerate of relations and apparatuses developed among and across nation-states to coordinate capital mobility and regulate production and labour to facilitate capital augmentation--a key development in this period of globalization. – Roxana Ng (Canadian Woman Studies, 1998, Vol 18, Issue 1).

Until its disbanding in the late '80s, the late George Smith (he died in '94) skillfully chaired the meetings. / "He had a remarkable skill in bringing people together," says Kinsman. "He was able to bridge the gap between theory and action. He was able to keep everyone together - from the left leaning to the rightwing business people." - Gary Kinsman as cited by Nicola Luksic ("False Victory: The new fight for privacy," Daily Xtra, 1999).

Dr Alastair Clayton, head of the Federal Centre, joined the march. "The man who has done more than most to obstruct treatment for PLWAS tried to present that he was for AIDS Action Now! What hypocrisy!" George Smith wrote in Rites. – Ann Silversides (2003, p. 168-169).

"Thank God for George Smith, Timmy McCaskell, Art Wood and other Tired Old Activists—and for the relatively new minds and bodies," he [Michael Lynch] wrote in his diary. "We TOAs can trust each other, or at least know how far to trust each other, and the newer blood brings help" – Ann Silversides (2003, p. 140)

"Smith, who had chaired the Right to Privacy Committee, was a sociologist teaching at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Kinsman later credited Smith for insisting that the name of the new organization should be a slogan. According to McCaskell, Smith was "really the intellectual power behind the organization and the strategies we used—organizing a large public meeting, getting personal stories from the community and what was wrong, and beginning to channel the anger and energy into an actual political force" - Ann Silversides (2003, p. 141)

“George Smith, writing in the gay and lesbian tabloid Rites, noted that the media reported the AAN!-organized demonstration as the work of the entire AIDS conference between held at the Sheraton Hotel, “It was really great that AAN!’s activist politics struck such a resounding chord and were able to focus, in a public way, the real concerns of PLWAs and AIDS workers ... it was also clear that people across the country felt very deeply about the government’s lack of leadership on AIDS treatments” – Ann Silversides (2003, p. 167)

Smith urged the Ministry of Health to prepare for that conference by commissioning a “baseline” report on the state of delivery of medical services to people with HIV/AIDS. He warned of “a rising tide of anger” in Toronto over the failure of the medical profession, hospitals, and the government to provide leadership and innovative management strategies for the delivery of health services. “People afflicted with AIDS require more than palliative care,” Smith wrote. “Public health announcements extolling the virtues of condoms have come to late for them. They expect state-of-the-art treatment for their disease, and have every right to it” – Ann Silversides (2003, p. 177-178).

George Smith observed that more and more AIDS organizations across Canada were becoming activist-oriented “because of the new treatments and the possibility of PWAS surviving” – Ann Silversides (2003, p. 192)

“As George Smith had suggested in his column in Rites magazine, AIDS treatment activism was drawing attention to fundamental problems within the health-care system—from issues around clinical trials (who gets to participate) to conflicts of interest and the surveillance of drugs after they were released” – Ann Silversides (2003, p. 208).

George Smith was profoundly committed to an antireification approach constantly making visible social organization and how people can resist and transform social relations. We have to constantly resist giving agency and power to things. – Gary Kinsman (“Mapping Social Relations of Struggle”)

Other gay Marxists such as Tim McCaskell and George Smith argued that state forms of organization were absolutely central to the oppression of gays, and so it was the state that you had to primarily organize around. My point here is that there were political debates and discussions going on within the gay left about the origins of gay oppression. We were certain that it is related to capitalism but the question was, how? – Gary Kinsman (as cited by Deborah Brock in “Workers of the world caress,” York University publication).

Rayside and McCaskell both name the late George Smith as instrumental in the RTPC. It had been somewhat disorganized until Smith took charge. Smith's model for that first meeting -- allowing those affected by the raids to stand up and speak first -- revved up the crowd and created the tension needed to motivate people to take action. Seven years later, he would follow a nearly identical format in helping with the mobilization of AIDS activists through AIDS Action Now.” – Tanya Gulliver (“Harnessed anger,” 2006).

George and I had first conceived of GLF over drinks one quiet night at a tiny gay bar on Seymour St called Faces. Faces was a bottle club, ie. members brought their own booze. It was a great place although it was so tucked away behind double doors that you almost needed someone to take you there. – Gordon Hardy as quoted by Rothon (“The Castle kiss-in,” 2008).

In Canada, AIDS ACTION NOW! (AAN!) led the way. The group, which drew largely on gay liberation politics and feminist health activism, followed a strategy of “documents and demonstrations,” a term coined by George Smith, one of CATIE’s founders. That strategy involved publishing critiques and analyses of key issues supported by creative street actions and demonstrations, with the goal of making effective treatments widely available to PHAs. – Erik Mykhalovsky (CATIE publication, 2010)

If I could put it all into a sentence, I would say that George Smith was one of the most brilliant people that I have ever met and that he was always a supporter of the oppressed. But even that sentence could not do justice to George's massive legacy, not just to the struggle against AIDS but to human dignity. George graduated with distinction from McGill University and he was encouraged to apply to Harvard University and to McGill's medical school by his professors. Instead, he chose a life of political and sociological enquiry. He used his training as an ethnographer to make visible the hidden world of agencies that controlled people's lives. George put his skills and findings in the service of despised minorities – initially these were gay men in the late 1970s and early 1980s, later to be followed by HIV-positive people. In the mid-1980s as the AIDS epidemic blossomed across Canada, governments of the day were largely indifferent to the suffering. If they paid any attention to what was called 'the gay plague,' it was to make sure that HIV did not break out of its initial 'risk groups' and infect the 'innocent.' To shift the focus to helping people with HIV, George used his training and knowledge to form a remedial and grand strategy. He brought diverse activists together and, with community activist and intellectual Tim McCaskell, formed Canada's first AIDS activist group – AIDS ACTION NOW! Their demonstrations, street theatre and guerilla press conferences were always successful in garnering sympathetic media attention and, ultimately, public support. Next, George, together with other activists such as McCaskell and University of Toronto professor Michael Lynch, pressured the Federal bureaucracy into allowing promising experimental HIV therapies into Canada so that doctors could treat their patients. George helped to draft policy papers that would contest and rewrite the rules for conducting clinical trials with HIV-positive people in Canada, making them fairer by discouraging the use of placebos. Being an ethnographer allowed him to penetrate the inner sanctum of bureaucracies, medical associations, universities and corporations. He was able to take advantage of their competing interests to make them serve the treatment needs of PHAs. One of George's legacies is CATIE, which together with lawyer Alan Cornwall, he co-founded to help meet the complex and changing information requirements of HIV-positive people. George did all of this work while doing the research necessary for two PhDs at the University of Toronto. We can only marvel at such drive and vision. In addition to all of this work, somehow George found time to be my mentor, tutoring me on a wide range of subjects from the principles of adult education to politics, media analysis, mathematics and philosophy. He would always be interested in making sense of the research papers that I brought home almost every night from my foraging in the University's Science library. He described this work as "Going to medical school at night." Our medical allies nodded in mirth and wonder. My partner George passed away in November 1994, before HAART was available. But thanks to the nutritional expertise of Chester Myers, PhD, the Traditional Chinese Medicine of Dr. David Bray, the experimental therapies made available by Doug MacFadden, MD, PhD, and the knowledge that I had accumulated over the years, we were able to preserve his intellectual functions and give him good quality of life until the very end. We have lost so many gracious, talented, brilliant and beautiful souls to AIDS. They would be proud of what has been achieved and accomplished. The memory of their struggle in the face of so much adversity is a testament to the resiliency of the human spirit. It inspires me to this day. – Sean R. Hosein ("Remembering George Smith May 7, 1935 – Nov 6, 1994," CATIE at 20, 2010).

It was a quiet, rainy night in January 1971. George Smith taught education at Simon Fraser University, and Gordon Hardy was his former student. Over beer, talk came around to the Vancouver gay scene. Two years had passed since the riots at Stonewall, but the same revolutionary spirit had yet to catch in Canada. – Bell ("Celebrating the many roots of Pride," 2013).

With Issue 9 (summer 1973), TBP was in another house, 139 Seaton Street on the western fringe of Cabbagetown, a Victorian working-class neighbourhood rapidly being gentrified -- with much of the "whitepainting" and sandblasting being done by quietly well-off gay men. / Seaton was a collective household (gay, if less quiet and well-off). It was later dubbed "Seaton South" to distinguish it from "Seaton

North" at 188 1/2, another menage also connected to TBP. (Residents of 188 1/2, over time, included Tim McCaskell, Richard Fung, David Gibson, John Manwaring, David Mole, George Smith, David Roche, Elan Rosenquist and Aquiles Molina). Much work on the paper also went on farther away at 38 Marchmount Road -- so much so that co-tenants Herb Spiers, Gerald Hannon, Ed Jackson and Merv Walker were accused of conspiring as the 'Kitchen Collective. – Addresses and neighborhoods (The Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives)

"The kind of research that George conducted changed the focus of activist-oriented research" – Marie Campbell (Sociology for a changing world, 2006, p. 87).

"He discovered that creating knowledge did not as such create change" - Dorothy Smith (Sociology for a changing world, 2006, p. 19-20).

Things were done in a very haphazard manner, though, back then because we rushed from one emergency to another, all done with volunteer labour. We naively felt that there would be a cure after a few years. You didn't know who was going to get infected and die. The late George Smith, a brilliant intellectual, gay rights activist and co-founder of AAN! and CATIE said that it was like living in London during the Second World War, during the Blitz, so you were on adrenalin all the time. It was at once exciting but there was a lot of danger in the sense that your friends could die at any time from some mysterious cause. We have lost so many brilliant and kind people to this damned virus. – Sean Hosein (as cited by Bob Leahy, PositiveLife.com, 2013)

"the George I knew: George the philosopher, George the intellectual, George the analytically sophisticated sociologist – and yes, of course, always George the political activist." – Lisa McCoy (SSSP newsletter)

I first met George Smith as a gay activist shortly after he moved to Toronto in the later 1970s. Along with Tim McCaskell he was teaching a course on Marxism and gay liberation at the Marxist Institute. One of George's favorite expressions at this time was that often left ideas were "grounded in a discourse" and not in people's actual lives. Some of us in a homourous and campy response, in the context of the times, suggested that he really meant that these ideas "were grounded in a disco." – Gary Kinsman (SSSP newsletter)

"George in his own life, in his involvement in the Right to Privacy Committee and in AIDS ACTION NOW! bridged the divides between activism and theorizing in amazing ways. At times this major divide many of us live in our lives seemed to almost effortlessly dissolve for George." Gary Kinsman (SSSP newsletter)