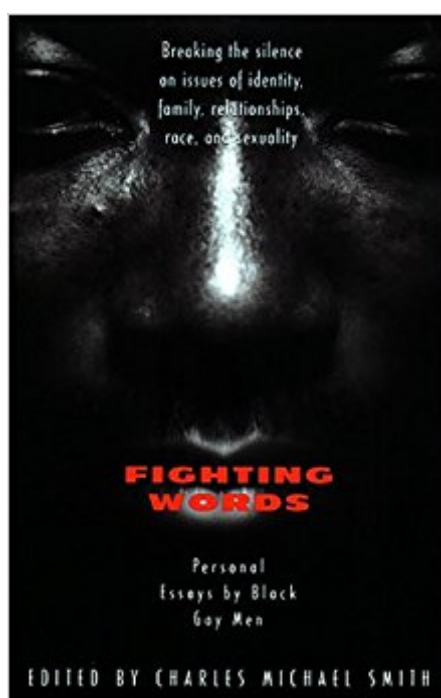


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# Fighting Words : Personal Essays By Black Gay Men : Breaking The Silence On Issues Of Identity, Family Relationships, Race, And Sexuality



## Synopsis

A boy discovers his sexuality in the shadow of a murder spree in Atlanta. A U.S. marine writes of his fierce, tragic love for a fellow marine. A man is forced to do a thing he dreads-play basketball-or risk losing face to the youngster for whom he is trying to provide a role model. These and twenty-seven other illuminating essays reveal a world of double barriers and two-fold prejudices-a world of men looking for love and careers, companionship and mentors, rough trade and gentle understanding among those who alone can know what it means to be African-American and gay. Writings that range from the street-smart to the erudite, from the erotic to the political and the spiritual, this collection explores the vicious crosscurrents of pressures that black gay men face, and the ways they have coped with them-or failed to. A vivid, candid and provocative portrait of a diverse community, *Fighting Words* is a remarkable anthology of individual journeys experienced by African-American gay men.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In putting together a volume that emphasizes the urgency of subjective experience, freelance journalist Smith has grouped 28 personal essays in familiar categories: Identity, Relationships, AIDS, Racism and Homophobia, Legacy. Among the best pieces is poet Reginald Shepherd's "Coloring Outside the Lines," which shows considerable subtlety in reconciling the often clashing demands of black and gay identities. Kevin McGruder's "I Hate Basketball" is both playful and earnest as it tackles similar themes and expresses insights gained from mentoring young black

boys as a Big Brother. "As an African-American male," he writes, "I admit this with a certain hesitancy, a slight feeling that I have let down the race, and as a gay man, I admit this with the feeling that I'm confirming a stereotype of non-athletic 'sissies.' But I love to play most sports. I just don't like playing basketball." With less clarity, G. Winston James's "Closets" traces a problematic genealogy from the safety of children's closets to the claustrophobic spaces of peep shows in "safer-sex clubs" that were "not unlike the pantry in my parents' house." Other of the essays, however, traffic in stereotypes about both race and homosexuality. And the emphasis on personal experience is relentless and ultimately comes at the expense of more considered insight and elegance of expression. (June) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Charles Michael Smith is a freelance journalist who has written for such publications as USA Today, the Los Angeles Times Syndicate, the Baltimore Evening Sun, the Manhattan Spirit, QW magazine, the New York Amsterdam News, the New York Native, the Philadelphia Gay News, and the Lambda Book Report. He was a contributor to *In the life: A Black Gay Anthology*, edited by Joseph Beam (Alyson, 1986). He lives in New York City.

I guess the reason I couldn't get into this book is because it was written by so many different authors, each complete with their own writing style. Some essays, I feel, were better written than others and some were just worth skipping over.

This is an excellent collection of essays by black male writers, excluding the gay part, because as mentioned time and again in many of these essays they must come to terms with their African-American heritage before they even think of coming to terms with their sexuality. I only wish that some of the essays were longer and some not edited. Essays that stood out for me were *Coloring Outside the Lines*, *The Letter*, and *Dearest Brother Set*. They and many others have helped me to evaluate the inner prejudice that lies within the gay community itself, a community whose so called main goal was to establish equality. Don't get me wrong, not all of these essays were like that but of those chosen for this book, essays of that matter were the ones that stood out the most.

The stories told here range from that of a child experiencing his first feelings of attraction and angst to adults negotiating a world which does them no justice. Well written essays and a well varied array of perspectives make for an entertaining, stimulating and inspiring text.

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