

## **Transgender Warriors**

*Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman*

*By Leslie Feinberg*

This is not a new book (published 1996), but it is often recommended to newcomers to the transgender phenomenon. Some of the communal philosophy bothers me – Feinberg seems to support the tenets of Marxism – but the historical information is quite valuable.

He starts with his own history, showing how he was led to investigate the history of transsexualism while working with the Workers World Party. Feinberg had presented androgynous, and various people would comment, “Is that a man or a woman?” as he (then she) passed by. His employment experiences strengthened his awareness of the reality of class distinctions in our “free and open” society. But how did bigotry and hate begin?

His studies led to investigation of transgender throughout history. Avoiding the overall conflict about the definitions of various “levels” of transgender, Feinberg uses transgender in his book as an umbrella term for all persons who challenge the socially acceptable or cultural boundaries of sex and gender. All those who fall under this definition have experienced oppression, and representatives of all have fought back. These are the transgender warriors.

Historically, gender variance was accepted – and often honored – in communal societies. Male to female were often priestesses serving the Great Earth Mother. Female to male were mostly accepted as men – the group’s hunters. As property gained importance, the nomadic communal tribes became concerned about inheritance. Patriarchy gained dominance, and has dominated the most developed nations ever since. Wherever ruling classes became stronger, they reinforced their position with fierce and relentless oppression.

Wesley Thomas, an anthropologist studying the Navajo culture, introduced the concept of a sexual /gender continuum. Investigating the tribal members’ concept of gender, Dr. Thomas identified 49 different gender identifications. Early American Indians accepted and honored all of these gender variations. Early European explorers and colonists were not so accepting.

Throughout history, from the time of the great Greek civilizations through the middle ages and even today, transgenders have been active participants in government, the church, and the military. Joan of Arc is the best known, but many others performed superbly in the armies of Albania, Spain, France, Angola, Mexico, and China. Over 400 female –to-male transgenders served on both sides in our civil war.

The book closes with an extensive photo gallery.