



American Homo: Community and Perversity

By Jeffrey Escoffier

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Jeffrey Escoffier traces the emergence of a gay and lesbian political identity over the last four decades in this wide-ranging collection of his most influential essays. Situating the development of gay and lesbian communities in a broad sweep of recent American history, Escoffier examines how an urban subculture created by stigmatized and invisible men and women evolved into a vital public community with an activist political agenda and an influential position in contemporary American culture. Detailing what he calls the "political economy of the closet," Escoffier argues that the market process often played a crucial role (for better or for worse) in the emergence of gay and lesbian communities, and conversely, that these new communities have significantly impacted the American marketplace.

From the development of a camp sensibility in popular culture—inspired by the erotic exhibitionism of drag queens—to the public reformation of safer-sex guidelines, Escoffier demonstrates how the gay movement has gradually acquired both social authority and recognition as a booming market. Throughout the ongoing struggle for legitimacy, gays and lesbians have had to negotiate the historical tension between the homoeroticism that courses through American culture and periodic outbreaks of homophobic paranoia. Escoffier follows the lesbian and gay movement across the contested terrain of American political life between the poles of multiculturalism and the religious right, to reveal how sexual minorities constitute a challenge to American society even as they are thoroughly integrated as citizens and kin. From McCarthy-era witchhunts to the activism of Queer Nation, Escoffier vividly describes the characteristic American homosexual journey through the tangled political web of authenticity, identity, and community.

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American Homo: Community and Perversity By Jeffrey Escoffier Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #2418211 in Books
- Published on: 1998-09-30
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: .73" h x 5.96" w x 8.96" l, 1.10 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 316 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Jeffrey Escoffier has been writing about gay and lesbian life since the 1970s. He was a founding member of the hugely influential journal *The Gay Alternative* as well as the executive editor and publisher of *OUT/LOOK*, the quarterly that redefined gay and lesbian publishing in the late 1980s. Through it all, he has been in the vanguard of shaping, planing, and enlivening gay politics. In *American Homo*, Escoffier has collected almost 20 years' worth of essays that display not only his growth as a thinker, but provide a map to the past and future of gay theory.

Escoffier's interests mirror the enormous changes that have occurred in gay life over the past two decades. In his early chapters, he traces the rise of the gay movement and the increasing importance of visible sexuality in gay people's lives, moving from there to the importance of how identity manifests itself in community and politics. He discusses the tensions that exist between a professionalized homosexual politic (particularly in the academy) and the more independent, community-based models of grass-roots groups such as ACT UP and Queer Nation. Escoffier is able to communicate complicated ideas in plain language, and his vision and common sense are enlightening. *American Homo* is the perfect culmination to an already distinguished career. --Michael Bronski

From Library Journal

In the deconstructionist tradition of Foucault and Marcuse, this collection of essays and articles by gay writer and educator Escoffier spans 15 years in the author's attempt to "recode" the sociopolitical identity of gays and lesbians in contemporary American life. Covering such topics as sexual revolution and the politics of gay identity, the political economy of the closet, and the limits of multiculturalism, the author traces the burgeoning political vitality of gays and lesbians and how that vitality challenges the traditional heterosexist political and economic hegemony. The author concludes that in order to overcome the antidemocratic agenda of the far Right, gays and lesbians will have to unite with other social movements in a Rainbow Coalition-type organization. The French intellectual tradition is very much alive in this work. Suited primarily for academic and large collections where queer social theory is read. Jeffrey Ingram, Newport P.L., OR
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From the Inside Flap

"It is rare to find a writer whose intellectual orientations so effortlessly span the gaps from political sociology to cultural studies to economic history. It is likewise rare to find a solid analysis of contemporary politics and culture in which the emphasis on identity and discourse is grounded in a concern with social structure and cultural process. The virtue of Escoffier's articulate prose is its insistent concern with the relation between high theory and the struggles of everyday life."—Steven Epstein, author of *Impure Science*

"Through his three decades as an independent, activist intellectual, Jeffrey Escoffier has established himself as one of the senior statesmen in the field of gay and lesbian studies. His experience and intellectual acumen bridge both the 'town-gown' divide and the transition from gay studies to queer theory and cultural studies. This is a wise, original book from one of our finest."—Judith Stacey, Streisand Professor, University of Southern California

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