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# A Queer History Of The United States (ReVisioning American History)



## A QUEER HISTORY *of the* UNITED STATES

MICHAEL BRONSKI



"Bronski does a stunning job of sweeping across five hundred years and weaving 'queer' through the history of this nation. Always insightful, and provocative."

—John D'Emilio, author of *Lost Prophet*  
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## Synopsis

Winner of a 2012 Stonewall Book Award in nonfiction *A Queer History of the United States* is more than a "who's who" of queer history: it is a book that radically challenges how we understand American history. Drawing upon primary-source documents, literature, and cultural histories, scholar and activist Michael Bronski charts the breadth of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender history, from 1492 to the 1990s.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Covering almost 500 years of history in fewer than 250 pages is certainly a daunting task, and one that--by necessity--requires sacrificing some depth for the sake of breadth. Bronski, however, does an impressive job of providing adequate depth and critical insight as he weaves together a "queer history" (more on the title in a moment) of the US, connecting pivotal events in the LGBT community to relevant social, political, cultural, and international historic events. By doing so, he contextualizes the evolution of LGBT people in the US (and their predecessors, who most likely did not identify as lesbian or gay but who were certainly same-sex attracted) in a way that vividly exemplifies their importance in the development of the country as a whole. I suspect that Bronski chose the syntax of his title quite carefully--note that he calls his book "A Queer History," implying that: a) his version is one of numerous possible interpretations; and b) history itself--and not just the people who populate it--can be queer(ed). Although this book is by no means comprehensive (such a task would be impossible), Bronski has packed his pages with a plethora of educational facts and critical analyses.

For example, he considers the wealth of homoerotic references in early American literature, from well-known works such as *Moby-Dick* to the more obscure work of Charles Warren Stoddard. Bronski also deftly manages to elucidate the intricate interconnections among sexuality, gender, and race and offers a few tentative theories regarding their co-evolution in our nation's history.

3.5 of 5 stars â “What a fine compilation of the LGBTQ story over the last FIVE CENTURIES. Bronski does a good job of taking a high-level, broad-brush approach to the historical, sociological, cultural evolution of the LGBTQ experience. Even so, I also feel he could have related even more of the underlying individual psychological factors and more intense emotions and motivations that might connect readers to the times, which may be why this seemed more academic and intellectual. One reason I like history is to see how previous events and cultures lead to what we experience today. Bronskiâ ™s book definitely gives me that in spades. I liked how throughout he interrelated the gay history and movement with other non-gay issues and movements, be they racial, womenâ ™s rights, labor, gender issues, war protests. This lent insight on some of the underlying cultural and psychological desires and fears at the times, leading up to today. I appreciated the breadth, and reasonable depth, which unfortunately the latter had to be understandably sacrificed for the sake of the former. Which was fine by me, because I have not seen anyone bring the length and breadth together as Bronski does. I particularly appreciate his coverage of the earlier years, about which there would understandably be less known â “ so Iâ ™m actually surprised that he was able to pull in as much as he did. Spanning the 500 years he writes about both public as well as maybe not necessarily apparent, subtle, behind-the-scenes, even unconscious influences, people and events. He reveals numerous stories and details of people, events, and the arts that are little-known â “ at least to me, and I assume to most others.

This only moderately successful political history reads like the syllabus of a Gay History 101 college course. It touches on all the high points but makes you wish for the weekly lectures to investigate the people, conditions and implications hinted at in this volume. Not surprisingly for a professor of Women's Studies (at Dartmouth), Mr. Bronski gives women loving women (though not necessarily explicitly lesbian) much more page space and well-deserved credit for all that they contributed to the national dialogue and evolution of attitudes towards a more tolerant attitude of Americans. Jonathan Ned Katz, a writer mentioned by Mr. Bronski several times, posited that heterosexuality did not exist until there was a named, delineated homosexuality that needed to be reacted against. Mr. Bronski seems to posit that queer history is actually the story of how heterosexuality was modified to reflect

the changing definitions of American manhood by various versions of Social Purists down the decades, including, in the Epilogue, our present times. This evolution of masculinity represents societal reaction to counterbalance the civilizing affect of homosexuality on heterosexual men, an effect once believed to be the purview of women and family. At times providing fresh insight, "A Queer History Of The United States (Revisioning American History)" doesn't provide anything that those who have studied gay history don't already know or have heard about. The "Queer" in the title is more directed not as an identity but in the use of the word as a verb, the equivalent of the "Revisioning" in the subtitle. In my reading of this book, this revisionism seems to shift the success of the LGBT Rights movement from activism to passivism.

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