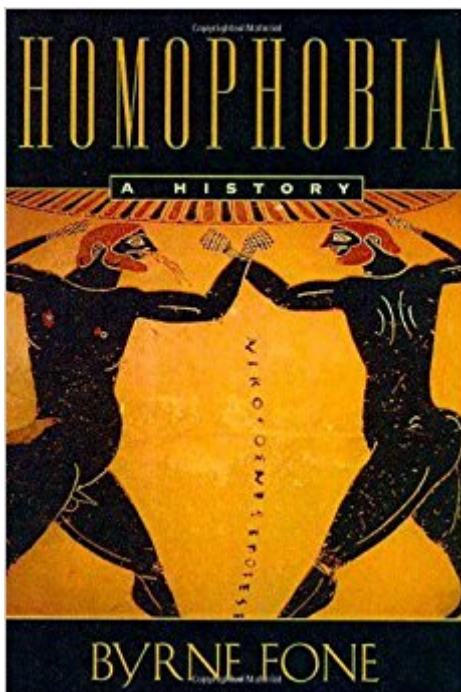


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Homophobia: A History



Synopsis

The first comprehensive history of homophobia-from ancient Athens to the halls of Congress-this bold, original work is certain to become a classic. It is the last acceptable prejudice. In an age when racial and ethnic name-calling are viewed with distaste, and physical epithets are frowned upon, hatred of homosexuals remains rife. Now, in a tour de force of historical and literary research, Byrne Fone chronicles the evolution of homophobia through the centuries. Delving into literary sources as diverse as Greek philosophy, the Bible, Elizabethan poetry, and the Victorian novel, as well as historical texts and propaganda from the French Revolution to the Moral Majority, Fone finds that same-sex desire has always been the object of legal, social, and religious persecution. Fone shows how the biblical story of Sodom became the primary source for later prohibitions against homosexuality. He charts the subtle shifts in public attitudes and law, from Anglo-Saxon edicts that imposed death by burning upon "confess'd sodomytes," to Victorian decrees that punished sodomy with "forfeiture of all rights, including procreation" (i.e., castration). Sifting the evidence of our own times, including Reader's Digest articles and TV talk-show transcripts, Fone demonstrates that homophobia remains one of the central tenets of law, science, faith, and literature, and defines the very essence of what it means to be male or female. Written by an acclaimed expert in gay and lesbian history, Homophobia is the best sort of history: lively, accessible, and enlightening.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a young gay man trying to understand his place in the world and how he fits into it all, this book was shocking and occasionally disturbing as it chronicled the tormented history of homosexuals in

Europe and America. Being the first non-fiction book I read concerning homosexuality, I winced as I read about the grisly executions performed in the name of God and/or the law, or how homosexuals were rooted and hunted out as in the witch hunts in early Europe. Atrocities towards fellow human beings are perpetrated with such righteous fervor that you wish they would look in the mirror and see what monsters they've become. It chills me to think that had I been born during that dismal period, I could be drowned, stoned, or burned at the stake for consummating my love with another man. As a Christian, it shames me to learn from reading this that because of one account in the Bible, twisted or misunderstood by interpreters, Christian authorities have employed it as a reason to deliver their brutal judgement against the "sin of Sodom". Worse, as Christianity spread throughout the world, it carried with it the plague of homophobia. Read with horror upon the settlers' arrival in the New World, what they did to the Native Americans. It still confounds me to why people who believe in a god who is the epitome of love and forgiveness, would embrace hatred and prejudice against their fellow men, as different as they may be. Reading this has really made me thankful to be living in this day, where even if homosexuality might be frowned upon by some, it has become more understood and more tolerated, if not accepted.

In many ways, this is a brilliant book with a brilliant starting point. Tragically, "Western" GLBT history, after the ancient Greeks & Romans, is bound-up with homophobia. Worse, homophobia was and often still is officially sanctioned. Sexual & loving personal details are much less public and reported than, say, battles and the reigns of kings. So until recently, most of what's written in Europe and North America about homosexuality is homophobia. Fone is a great author for "grand history", that is, history well-written with just the right fascinating details and targeted generalizations about cultural aspects and time periods. These often center on great men (yes, usually male), great events, great thoughts, and great writing. As a literary historian with several books on GLBT history, Fone knows his sources. (His *The Columbia Anthology of Gay Literature* - a collection of GLBT writings since the Greeks - though almost 20 years old is still, to my knowledge, the best collection available.) He also appears to have a good working knowledge of Greek, Latin, German and French. So he can delve into often untranslated sources and non-English histories. He is wonderful with "potted histories" -- one to two paragraph summaries, memorably encapsulating the main points. These introduce and conclude not only all chapters, but all his many sections. And fortunately, by the time he wrote this book (1998-1999), there were enough specialized GLBT histories - e.g., homosexuality in Renaissance Florence, male friendships in Victorian England, gay life in late 19th/early 20th c.

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