

white backlash that led to cutbacks in federal funding for social welfare programs, health care, and education during the Reagan/Bush era.

Estes carries his analysis to the Million Man March, the Promise Keepers, and one of the most important cultural and artistic developments within the Black community, Hip Hop, to show the shaping power and limitations of Black manhood in contemporary society. However ambitious this book is, *I Am a Man!* fails to explain the gender dynamics in times of racial crisis and transformation. Missing from his analysis is a conceptual framework. Nowhere does one find a rigorous theoretical and methodological treatment of gender, especially as it relates to the question of power. Estes never theorizes gender as a process that is not only flexible and historically contingent but also capable of producing possibilities for a new politics and cultural formation within the Black freedom struggle. He also does not clarify gender as a relational category, although his analysis throughout reveals not only how men and women on both sides of the colour line related to each other but also how the gender identities of Black men and women were defined across class and generational differences within Black communities.

These theoretical and methodological concerns do matter since this book's objective is ostensibly to recast the familiar story of the struggle for Black freedom in a new way. Instead, Estes seems to be more concerned with establishing the movement's narrative in a seamless fashion in order to show how the interplay of race and manhood shaped the course of historical and political developments during the civil rights movement era. To this end, he relies on the traditional chronology of the civil rights movement, making sure that the transition from one chapter to another follows this timeline. The result, however, is that the manner in which the story is told is contrived and ultimately underplays the complexities of gender identity formations. If Estes had shown theoretical persistence and established methodological orientations, the book would not read like a typical textbook full of the familiar events, images, and dramas.

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Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis; 1918-1957* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Matt Houlbrook begins his history of male homosexual life in mid-century London with the story of Cyril. Cyril moved to London in 1932 and quickly found his way around town, frequenting clubs like the Caravan, in a basement of Endell Street, where he made friends and embarked on a series of sexual affairs. Known as 'The Countess,' he was dancing in the Caravan when it was

raided on 25 August 1934. Retaining his composure, he approached the Divisional Detective Inspector in charge and said, “I don’t mind the beastly raid, but I would like to know if you could let me have one of your nice boys to come home with me. I really am rather good” (12).

Cyril’s experiences demonstrate how mid-century London could be a place of affirmation and liberation, a “productive space and place that generates and stabilizes a new form of selfhood and way of life” (3). Yet paradoxically, Cyril’s story itself survives because the state sought to suppress certain forms of sexuality and sociability between men.

Plainclothes police had the Caravan under surveillance for several weeks, and after the raid Cyril was arrested, taken to the Bow Street Police station where his cheeks were rubbed with blotting paper for evidence of make-up. He was imprisoned and brought to trial at the Central Criminal Court for aiding and abetting in keeping a disorderly house while the police searched his flat and confiscated a pencil sketch of a naked man, a photograph of a penis, and his letters to friends and lovers. His name, nickname, address, and a letter to his lover Morris were mentioned in the *Times*, *The News of the World*, and *The Illustrated Police News*. Thus the very survival of the records indicate the tensions inherent in queer urban life; the failure of queer men to evade the law and public hostility, and London as the site of a vibrant, extensive, and diverse queer urban culture.

Houlbrook succeeds in doing more than simply ‘uncovering’ a hidden set of sources that reveal historical parallels to contemporary queer culture. As he is careful to point out, Cyril’s London is not the London of the present, and Cyril’s definitions of ‘queer’ and ‘normal’ in his letters are very different from contemporary ones. When Cyril was at the Caravan he wore makeup, was referred to and referred to himself as the Countess and with the pronoun ‘she,’ and had a series of passionate affairs with men. Cyril was also married, had a two-year old daughter, and “still like[d] girls occasionally” (6). While he located his queerness in his public effeminate persona, others, mainly middle and upper class men, defined themselves as queer only in their choice of a sexual partner. Definitions of normal also varied. To a modern observer, the most enigmatic figures in the queer urban culture of mid-twentieth century London were the working class men, known as ‘trade,’ who engaged in gay sex on ongoing emotional relationships with other men, who were not considered, by themselves or others, anything other than normal. As Houlbrook writes, “The most remarkable thing about queer urban culture is that it was, to a large extent, composed of and created by men who never thought themselves queer” (7).

Despite the numerous fascinating individuals that Houlbrook brings to life in his work, the most important character that emerges in the book is the city of London itself. London, the city in which the modern police force had first emerged in the early nineteenth century, was also the site of strict surveillance

and enforcement of the sexual offences laws, detailed in Part One. As Houlbrook describes in Part Two, London also provided the freedom, anonymity, and convivial public and private spaces in which men met and loved. It was in these spaces, Houlbrook argues in Part Three, that the fluctuating identities of queer and normal, of trade and queens were explored, defined, dissolved, and reformed. And finally in Part Four, London is revealed as the site of the shifting bureaucratic and legal reactions to queer urban culture that would culminate in the 1967 Sexual Offences Law which privileged a new privatized form of male homosexuality, even as it sought to exclude the public expressions of sexuality that had formed the basis of so much queer urban culture. The city of London was not just the backdrop for these individual and historical events, but profoundly influenced male sexual practices and identities, and they in turn helped to shape the physical and cultural forms of modern urban life.

Matt Houlbrook's book is a landmark in queer history, much as George Chauncey's *Gay New York* was ten years ago. Although occasionally marred by impenetrable prose, Houlbrook's work provides a detailed map of the complex spaces and patterns of class, sex, gender, and identity that constituted queer urban culture in London between 1918 and 1957.

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Brad Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men in Britain, 1850-1945* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005).

This is an ambitious book. Some of the material discussed here may seem old hat to historians familiar with the huge body of literature on working-class popular culture in Britain in the century before the end of World War Two, but Brad Beaven has undertaken to work back through much of that writing to extract some key debates and, by adding new evidence or re-examining older findings, to challenge some facile or overly simplistic perspectives. His re-interpretation is thoughtful and compelling.

Beaven is interested in one central question: how did working-class men respond to the 'civilizing' projects directed at them by a dominant order intent on turning them into acceptable material for 'citizenship'? He notes that the greatest anxieties that began to emerge in bourgeois circles by the second half of the nineteenth century were about what men got up to in their 'free time' after work. Consequently, a series of cultural projects in 'rational leisure' were launched to tame and shape them into self-disciplined, responsible actors capable of participating appropriately in public life. There was particular concern about the destructive impact of commercial pleasures that more and more working men bought into over the century, and that, according to critical commentators, were turning them into dull, passive, poorly motivated creatures. As a