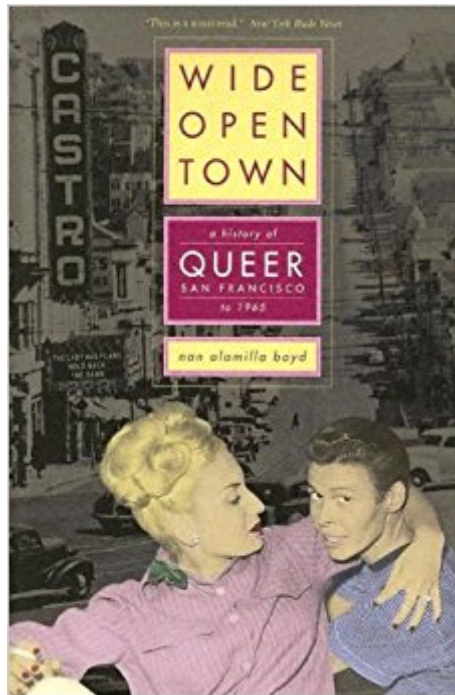


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# Wide-Open Town: A History Of Queer San Francisco To 1965



## Synopsis

Wide-Open Town traces the history of gay men and lesbians in San Francisco from the turn of the century, when queer bars emerged in San Francisco's tourist districts, to 1965, when a raid on a drag ball changed the course of queer history. Bringing to life the striking personalities and vibrant milieu that fueled this era, Nan Alamilla Boyd examines the culture that developed around the bar scene and homophile activism. She argues that the communities forged inside bars and taverns functioned politically and, ultimately, offered practical and ideological responses to the policing of San Francisco's queer and transgender communities. Using police and court records, oral histories, tourist literature, and manuscript collections from local and state archives, Nan Alamilla Boyd explains the phenomenal growth of San Francisco as a "wide-open town"; a town where anything goes. She also relates the early history of the gay and lesbian civil rights movement that took place in San Francisco prior to 1965. Wide-Open Town argues that police persecution forged debates about rights and justice that transformed San Francisco's queer communities into the identity-based groups we see today. In its vivid re-creation of bar and drag life, its absorbing portrait of central figures in the communities, and its provocative chronicling of this period in the country's most transgressive city, Wide-Open Town offers a fascinating and lively new chapter of American queer history.

## Book Information

Paperback: 333 pages

Publisher: University of California Press; New Ed edition (April 13, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0520244745

ISBN-13: 978-0520244740

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #185,569 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #70 in Books > Gay & Lesbian > History #71 in Books > Gay & Lesbian > Nonfiction > Bisexuality #262 in Books > Gay & Lesbian > Nonfiction > LGBT Studies

## Customer Reviews

Many people presume San Francisco's gay-friendly character began in the 1970s, but this engaging if sometimes facile social history uncovers sexually tolerant roots that go back much further. Boyd, a

women's studies professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder, shows that as far back as the Gold Rush of 1849, the city manifested a charmingly lax attitude toward enforcement of public morals-gaining a reputation as a "wide-open town"-and repeatedly resisted civic moralists who tried to enforce antvice laws. By the 1930s and the fall of Prohibition, the city hosted "publicly visible queer cultures and communities" with tourist-friendly nightclubs and bars. While Boyd relies on standard historical texts and sources such as police records for basic city history, the book is deeply informed and enlivened by 42 oral histories she gathered with lesbians and gay men who have lived in San Francisco since the 1930s. Five are partially reprinted here, and this terrific material allows Boyd to explore topics that have traditionally been ignored by gay historians: how drag shows helped stimulate the tourist economy of the city; how its African-American community engendered changes in the structures of the gay community; how a distinct lesbian public space evolved with the advent of such bars as Mona's in the 1930s and '40s; and how the city put itself at the forefront of transgender activism in the 1950s and '60s. Boyd has a keen ear for distinctive details, and it is this (rather than her major contention, that "the politics of everyday life were every bit as important as the politics of organized social movement activism") that drives this welcome study. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"[An] insightful and thought-provoking study of the social, economic, cultural, sexual, gender and geographic factors that created San Francisco as the gay capital of the U.S."--Kevin McAteer, "Out In the Mountains""For anyone interested in as-yet-untold queer history, this is a must-read."--"New York Blade News""In its vivid re-creation of bar and drag life, its absorbing portraits of central figures in the communities, and its provocative chronicling of this period in the country's most transgressive city, Wide Open Town offers a fascinating and lively new chapter in American queer history."--"Pink Pages""A dynamic, immanently readable study of the making of queer public culture in San Francisco."--Benjamin Shepard, "Left Turn""Wide-Open Town" is a well-researched and well-written history of an essential topic that manages to be scholarly without being dull. To those who came of age after Stonewall, this book is a vivid look at a bygone era, and of the women and men who made gay San Francisco what it is today."--Jesse Monteagudo, "Gay Today""Boyd zones in on the city's status as a destination for 'sex and race tourism' and its concomitant reputation where, sexually speaking, anything goes."--"Bookforum""Shows that as far back as the Gold Rush of 1849, [San Francisco] manifested a charmingly lax attitude toward enforcement of public morals -- gaining a reputation as a "wide-open town..." Boyd has a keen ear for distinctive details, and it is this... that drives his welcome study."--"Publishers Weekly""Boyd provides deeply detailed context

by relating the broader American social and historical forces at work, as well as the personal perspective of oral histories. ... [A]s San Francisco's virtually gay Mecca, Wide-Open Town is recommended for large public libraries as well."--"Library Journal""The book is deeply informed and enlivened by 42 oral histories she [Boyd] gathered with lesbians and gay men who have lived in San Francisco since the 1930s . . . and this terrific material allows Boyd to explore topics that have traditionally been ignored by gay historians. . . . Boyd has a keen ear for distinctive details, and it is this . . . that drives this welcome study."--"Publishers Weekly""A vital book, a fact-packed chronicle of the people and the places that kept San Francisco 'open.' It not only demonstrates the richness of the city's early gay culture but also seeks to validate the influence of the (not so) underground bar culture on generations of queer San Franciscans and on the city they call home."--"San Francisco Chronicle

Great book and great research. So many interesting facts and bits. As always, some of the best parts are in the footnotes, which are meticulous.

#### Interesting Book on History of Gay Life in San Francisco

First of all, I was looking for a book written more along the lines of the George Chauncey's, "Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940". This book is well researched and clearly proves that there was a thriving gay culture in San Francisco well before the Stonewall uprising in New York. The idea that San Francisco was able to sustain a gay community based upon its "wide open" ideology and its status as a shipping port and military base also helped further cement this position as a gay bulwark in America. The only problem I had with this book, is that it covers a lot of minutia which makes it somewhat of a laborious read and I found myself skipping ahead. All in all, this is a good book and is priced right for a digital book.

I like the book. it is actually a text book for a class at city college of san francisco. thanks

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