

Imperial New York: destruction and disneyfication under Emperor Giuliani.

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Imperial New York: Destruction and Disneyfication under Emperor Giuliani

Eric E. Rofes

GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies

Duke University Press

Volume 7, Number 1, 2001

pp. 101-109

REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies 7.1 (2001) 101-109

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Book Review

Imperial New York:

Destruction and Disneyfication under Emperor Giuliani

Eric Rofes

Times Square Red, Times Square Blue Samuel R. Delany. New York: New York University Press, 1999. xviii + 203 pp. \$19.95

Cities are attractive to people because of the pleasures the city holds.

--Samuel R. Delany

During the early 1970s, as a Harvard undergraduate, I became a habitué of Boston's leather bars, especially Herbie's Ramrod Room, adjacent to the bus depot in Park Square, and the Shed, a few doors from the Huntington Avenue YMCA. Neither was situated in an upscale neighborhood like Beacon Hill or the Back Bay. Instead I was forced to walk through the Combat Zone, Boston's counterpart to New York's Times Square, past peep shows and adult theaters, and navigate the Fenway, at that time a primarily residential neighborhood occupied by seniors, students, queers, and aging hippie refugees from the 1960s. My suburban, middle-class upbringing had warned me about life in the naked city. The messages I had heard about poor people, prostitutes, drugs, and street violence told me to rush through these neighborhoods with great trepidation. While my Ivy League life directed me to sherry hours and literary talks, my sex life, apparently, was leading me right into the gutter.

The men whom I met at these bars and with whom I tricked and formed friendships also brought me to places I had never been: local bowling leagues, Friday-night poker games, the dog races. I learned a geography of the city beyond [End Page 101] the museums, the symphony, and the Athenaeum: working-class neighborhoods, industrial areas, and public housing projects. When I arrived at these sites at age seventeen, I was an anxious tourist lured into rough neighborhoods by carnal cravings, against my better judgment. Yet the worlds opened to me then have filled my life with opportunities more satisfying than an evening at the opera or a stroll on the Cambridge Common.

The men with whom I made contact through my wanderings in these neighborhoods were different from my classmates. One man, a building inspector for the city, took me home to South Boston, at that time the bastion of working-class white rage as federal courts forced local schools to admit black students. Once there, I discovered that he lived behind his aunt's house in a trailer with a bumper sticker saying "Keep Southie White." I dated a butcher from East Boston who invited me to his two-room apartment one night, where I found that he lived with his mother and that we had to have sex silently as she snored in the next room. I can recall following a swarthy Italian man back to his home in Mattapan one Saturday night; the next morning I discovered that he was a priest who had to wake up early to make the first mass at his church.

The social world of the leather bars brought me together with men whom my family and roommates had often described as the dangerous other: white ethnics, black and Puerto Rican men, working-class joes. If my daytimes were spent with aspiring lawyers, doctors, and politicians, my evenings were spent with men who delivered mail, loaded ships, drove buses, repaired phone lines, and worked construction. At the time, I knew that I was drawn to these men because I found them to be masculine. The butcher's big hands and arms, the priest's macho stride, the building inspector's unrefined Southie accent spoke to me of an enactment of masculinity whose relationship to manual labor differed from mine and that of my fellow

students across the Charles in Cambridge. As time has passed, I have realized that my interest in these men and these neighborhoods is part of a broad dynamic of homosocial interclass relations, captured by writers such as Walt Whitman, W. H. Auden, Frank O'Hara, and Paul Monette, that has been at times liberating and at other times part of..

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GLQ 7:1

pp. 101–109

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