



That's Revolting!: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation

Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore (Editor) , Chris Grinnell (Contributor) , Charlie Jane Anders (Contributor) , Stephanie Schroeder (Contributor) , Carol Queen (Contributor) , Marlon M. Bailey (Contributor) , Priya Kandaswamy (Contributor) , Mattie Udora Richardson (Contributor) , more... Benjamin Shepard (Contributor) , Josina Manu Maltzman (Contributor) , Reginald Lamar (Contributor) , Ferd Eggan (Contributor) , Neil Edgar (Contributor) , Blake Nemec (Contributor) , Ralowe Trinitrotoluene Ampu (Contributor) , Elias seMbessakwini (Contributor) , Rocko Bulldagger (Contributor) , Simone Chess (Contributor) , Gina de Vries (Contributor) , Sarah Schulman (Contributor) , Jennifer Flynn (Contributor) , Eustacia Smith (Contributor) , Patrick Califia-Rice (Contributor) , Michelle E O'Brien (Contributor) , Jesse Heiwa (Contributor) , Justin Anton Rosado (Contributor) , Eric A. Stanley (Contributor) , Daniel Burton-Rose (Contributor) , Tommi Avicoli Mecca (Contributor) , Priyank Jindal (Contributor) , Dean Spade (Contributor) , Stephen Kent Jusick (Contributor) , Kaila Kuban (Contributor) ...less

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As the gay mainstream prioritizes the attainment of straight privilege over all else, it drains queer identity of any meaning, relevance, or cultural value, writes Matt Bernstein Sycamore, aka Mattilda, editor of *That's Revolting!*. This timely collection of essays by writers such as Patrick Califia, Kate Bornstein, Carol Queen, Charlie Anders, Benjamin Shepard, and others shows what the new queer resistance looks like. Intended as a fistful of rocks to throw at the glass house of Gaylandia, the book challenges the commercialized, commoditized, and hyper objectified view of gay/queer identity projected by the mainstream (straight and gay) media by exploring queer struggles to transform gender, revolutionize sexuality, and build community/family outside of traditional models. Essays include "Dr. Laura, Sit on My Face," "Gay Art Guerrillas," "Legalized Sodomy Is Political Foreplay," and "Queer Parents: An Oxymoron or Just Plain Moronic?"

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Jay says

The essays varied between insightful critiques and monotonous repetition, creative action and self-indulgence. "Calling All Restroom Revolutionaries" is a worthwhile read, however many of the essays by Mattilda displayed little more than ineffective direct action and self-obsession by someone rightly angry with assimilationist agendas.

Sarah says

Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore raises the new call to arms for all self-identified freaks, queers, pervs, weirdos, and anyone else not interested in fitting themselves into the nice, neat assimilationist "homos are just like everyone else" box. Her anthology issues a "wake the fuck up" for all those wondering why mainstream gays & allies have been fighting so hard to appease and comfort the Right & the mainstream media, telling them that the thing we want most in the world is the "right" to take part in one of the most historically patriarchal, mysogynistic, capitalistic institutions of the straight world - i.e. marriage. If you've ever wondered what other choices are out there, then this is the book for you.

Richard says

Ten years ago one might not have imagined the largest national gay rights lobbying group (Human Rights Campaign) endorsing a right-wing Republican Senatorial candidate (Al D'Amato in New York), or the San Francisco Pride parade adopting the Budweiser advertising slogan as its official theme (2002). As an assimilationist gay mainstream wields increasing power, the focus of gay struggle has become limited to marriage, military service, and adoption. The gay mainstream presents a sanitized, straight-friendly version of gay identity which makes it safe for Richard Chamberlain or Rosie O'Donnell to come out, and still rake in the bucks. By the twisted priorities of this gay mainstream, it's okay to oppose a queer youth shelter because it might interfere with property values, or to fight against the inclusion of transgendered people under hate crimes legislation because this might not appeal to straight voters. As the gay mainstream ironically prioritizes the attainment of straight privilege over all else, it drains queer identity of any meaning, relevance, or cultural value - and calls this progress.

That's Revolting shows us what the new queer resistance looks like. The collection is a fistful of rocks to throw at the glass house of Gaylandia. That's Revolting uses queer identity and struggle as a starting point from which to reframe, reclaim, and re-shape the world. The collection challenges the commercialized, commodified, and hyper-objectified view of gay/queer identity projected by the mainstream (straight and gay) media by exploring queer struggles to transform gender, revolutionize sexuality, and build community/family outside of traditional models.

Edited by Matt Bernstein Sycamore (aka Mattilda), the creator and driving force behind Gay Shame, the radical queer organization in San Francisco that was primarily responsible for the protests, mobilizations, and guerilla tactics that shut down the city of San Francisco in response to the declaration of war on Iraq,

That's Revolting brings the post-identity politics of a new generation of pissed off queers to the light. The collection is both a blueprint and a call to action.

Ezekiel says

A series of essays dealing with the queer resistance, anarchy, anti-racism, queer youth of color, intersectional oppression, and activism. Much of it in the form of histories/herstories written by members of activist movements. While That's Revolting! can be quite intellectually heavy (and occasionally seems a bit one-note), it also offers a glimpse of a heady world where shocking behavior for its own sake is prized and rejecting the status quo is the norm. I recommend it for anyone who is interested in intersectional activism or who wants to learn more about some of the "unwritten" history/herstory of queer communities.

Gilberto says

I thought this book was amazing!! The essays are thought provoking and inspiring. Especially when the address Queers of Color and the current Gay Rights Movement. I recommend this book tremendously.

Daniel says

This book really challenged my views on sexuality, sex, and radical feminist and queer thought. Theory, story, interview and case study blended together to create a coherent radical queer agenda against assimilation into the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. The hot topics of the "gay rights" white gay male "movement" are Gay Marriage, Adoption, and the Right to Military Service. These all benefit the system more than they benefit queer liberation, so that even if you win, you lose.

One of the highlights of the book for me was the story of PISS, the campus movement to create gender-neutral and handicap accessible bathrooms. To have things as simple as being able to go to the bathroom be a serious complication with your body and identity is heartbreaking. It was inspiring to read about what I had previously thought of as disparate movements working together for a common goal and supporting one another.

Another highlight was the article stating that Gay Marriage is racist. Marriage is seen as the route to assimilation and acceptance from the hetero world. The interviewee made the case, however, that black families and mixed-race families often have the "foundation" of marriage. Black people have done the experiment of marrying for acceptance within the larger society, but the state sees them as "queer" (as in, part of the "other" that isn't white and wealthy). The state destroys their families by jailing the father, refusing welfare to the mother, and putting up children for adoption or foster care. Therefore, marriage is an ineffective route to acceptance, and even if it were effective, it would be selective acceptance based on race, as black people are systematically denied family and marriage.

After reading this book, I was embarrassed that I put HRC stickers on my class binders in university to show that I was a queer ally.

Kathy says

This book is unique in its perspectives of the queer rights movement, and publicly thwarts the mainstream in a manner that makes most people cringe. That part, I like. I also appreciate the telling of the more "underground" history that is often hidden or not as well known. Additionally, it was great to have way more than just the token inclusion of trans/genderqueer individuals.

I don't agree with all of the tactics taken and advocated by the writers, and I don't necessarily believe that living exactly opposite of convention makes you a revolutionary. I am all for resisting assimilation, and am often criticized for going against the mainstream, but being against convention just for the sake of being against convention makes one just as controlled by it. The glorification of being arrested was also problematic, since the risks of arrest and how much one stands to lose are not equal, and should not necessarily be as much of a marker of a successful revolt as it was portrayed in this book.

Overall, however, this book is truly revolutionary, and stands out from the rest.

Whitney says

I wouldn't say every essay in here is a 5-star, but there are enough of them to make this book worth it. Very up-to-date and an excellent refresher about the current faces of queer activism.

Vincent Silk says

i found this hard to get through. some essays were great and really interesting, especially personal life stories from older people. some stuff was a bit repetitive. it didn't really fit with my idea of 'strategies for resisting assimilation'. but that's ok.

Sarah Cavar says

Intellectually and ideologically challenging, written / filled with language more accessible than the headier "queer theory." This collection of essays provides excellent historical context to socio-spatial issues queer communities face, particularly gentrification, police violence, and intra-community conflict along racial, class, sexual, gender, and political lines.

You're almost definitely not going to agree with all of the points asserted in this book, especially by those who self-identify with more anti-family, anti-future, and anti-marriage views. But this collection helped me read those perspectives with more understanding and compassion than, for example, "Against Equality! Queer Revolution, Not Mere Inclusion" did.

Brilliantly edited & contributed to by Mattilda, I especially recommend having a notebook and pen by your side to take notes and quotes.

S. says

The word “radical” does not mean “extreme” but rather “going to the root.” That is, being radical is about going to the root of the problem, the root of our patriarchal a.k.a. dominator society, finding solutions for overthrowing it, and living as much as possible outside of the dominant system. During the same-sex marriage debate, I kept reflecting on how marriage was invented for the purpose of enslaving women. I kept signing petitions in favor of gay marriage while feeling apprehensive and wondering why lesbians, especially, would want to participate in such a patriarchal establishment.

Reading the anthology *That's Revolting* was a great relief, because it proves that many people see things the same way I do, from a radical point of view rather than a liberal point of view. *That's Revolting* is for those who want a nonviolent revolution, not a white picket fence and a house in suburbia. It is for those who question the American dream rather than gobble up capitalism, respectability, or the nuclear family lifestyle. It is for those who wish to overthrow marriage and the military, not participate in them. This diverse anthology is social criticism, inspiration, words of reassurance that radical activism continues, and a call to action.

Julene says

"*That's Revolting: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*," is an important book that documents and keeps history alive that would otherwise be forgotten. First thing I learned is that it is a false belief that the Stonewall riot/revolt started while mourning Judy Garland's death. This is briefly mentioned. This myth was something I read somewhere about the Stonewall rebellion that seemed to make sense, I even wrote a poem about it, I still like the idea but stand corrected. This book does that task, it corrects our historical knowledge. It makes me wonder about truth, or what we think is true if we were not actually there. I only wish there were a footnote as to how that rumor got started, were they playing a Judy Garland song at the time? Time passes, we've lost so many people, we've lost so much, but here Mattilda gives us a document of people from the time and place to reconstruct lost history.

In "Sylvia & Sylvia's Children: A Battle for a Queer Public Space" by Benjamin Shepard, we learn about the gentrification of the piers by the "quality of life" developers. We get insight into Sylvia's life and her lover Martha P. Johnson, who was later murdered on the piers. Together they founded STAR, Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries. So much good work was done, so many fought the good fight.

Later there is the essay "Corroding Our Quality of Life" by Justin Anton Rosado, one of the youth who was displaced, telling a personal tale from his experience as one of the homeless youths who made the pier home and how they were driven out, and how they fought back. So many organizations were formed that have been forgotten. He was a part of the group FIERCE. It was heartbreaking to read his story.

The piece "Revolting" by Josina Manu Maltzman, sums up this book with this quote, "We fagulously freaky queerbos are not looking for a seat at the table of normality." When someone at a pride march said you look proud, the response was, "We're not proud! We're revolting!" The angst in this book is the corporate take over of the world. How commercialization and militarization takes away power.

In the piece "Fed Up Queers" (FUQ) by Jennifer Flynn & Eustacia Smith (also Mattilda has sections), FUQ organized the political funeral after Matthew's murder, Jennifer Flynn says, "Power that is handed over, conceded without demand, is always a gift that can be taken back at will." This comes at the end of a paragraph about the gay pride organizers, and it is after Matthew Shephard's death, and how people who buy into the commerorization of gay pride do not realize that, "asimulation would not only hurt others, it might even backfire."

I am lucky to know Mattilda, and we are lucky to have her living in Seattle. She brought in Sarah Schulman to talk about her latest book on communication, and she ran a year-long series titled Contageous Exchanges at our local literary center, Hugo House. She brings history, diversity, and a perspective of radical politics that is vitally needed as our city is undergoing the same changes as NY and SF went through. She understands the truth that assimilation is simply fascism with a different name.

Shay Gabriel says

Necessary but prone to lifestylism. "Resisting assimilation" has to mean more than frowning on squares who get married, hating children, and doing a lot of drugs and alcohol. For the most part in these essays, it does. But — especially as a gay man who works with poor mothers — there's a lot that rubs me the wrong way.

I'm sure it's supposed to, as revolutionary gay politics has always loved the provocative. That's why I like this book, and have read it. I just want a revolutionary gay politic that doesn't traffic in notions of cool/uncool. Is that too much to ask?

Charlie says

It can be hard giving a single rating to an anthology, especially when there are thirty-two different pieces in that anthology. Some of them are really good--delightfully seditious pieces denouncing "Stepford homosexuals", capitalism, and the prison industrial complex--but some of them seem like bad choices. There were far too many essays or interviews with cis gay men and/or cis lesbians, and those were all boring (they didn't queer the norm at all).

The worst was an essay about parenting by this cis lesbian who referred to Chaz Bono by his birth name and the wrong pronouns, advocated for the nonconsensual outing of variant people, and used transphobic slurs. For my own sake, I'm going to try not to go off on a rant about how dangerous outing people is and how it perpetuates violence. Instead, here's a reminder for people who try to "reclaim" words:

- 1) an individual can only reclaim words that have been used against them or people in their particular identity group (ex, a white person cannot reclaim the N word).
- 2) an individual can only reclaim a word for themselves, not for others within their identity group (ex, a lot of trans people are not okay with the T word, so even if a specific trans person likes it that doesn't mean they can or should refer to all trans people that way).

These are two important things which the contributors to this book of essays seem to forget. It's really frustrating coming across transphobia, and violent words and imagery that come out of nowhere, and other oppressive/disturbing things in a book edited by a trans person who seems to advocate self-liberation. I have

a lot of respect for Mattilda, and I really look up to her, but I think writings by the likes of Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and Fabian Romero (in place of essays about "cruising" gay cis men or someone who "was a couple blocks away from Stonewall") would have improved the collection.

Sara Jaye says

This book embodies all of my deep ambivalence about radical queers. I agree with pretty much everything but...get over yourselves?
