PRAISE FOR QUEER IN AMERICA

"A journalistic history of gay activism in the AIDS era, a coming-of-age coming-out memoir, a manual for guerrilla politics in the Age of Information, and even a utopian blueprint for the high-tech liberation of coming generations of lesbians and gay men, Queer in America will open minds as well as closets."

* WASHINGTON POST *

"The much anticipated Queer in America hits the ground running and sweeps us into a frenzied pace."

* SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE *

"Fascinating... Signorile does make one valid point: to be within the closet is to admit that to be a fag is the most evil thing that anyone can be."

* GORE VIDAL, THE VILLAGE VOICE *

"Queer in America offers a detailed and powerful account of the destructive workings of the closet on the lives of those in it, gay people in general, and the social institutions that structure meaning and power in America. Openly gay people, in order to live morally, must not play along with the convention of the closet [which] treats gays as less than human... Signorile’s brilliant analysis shows why."

* RICHARD B. MOHR, THE NATION *

"Queer in America is a landmark book, ranking with such other gay masterpieces as Larry Kramer's Reports from the Holocaust and Paul Monette's National Book Award-winning Becoming a Man. Part memoir, part social history, Signorile's book must reading for those struggling to come to grips with the gay and lesbian struggle for equality."

* WASHINGTON MONTHLY *

"A detailed, evocative rationale...[for] outing as a tool for gay survival in the present-day United States. Queer in America is a persuasive indictment of powerful closeted gays and lesbians and their straight, often liberal, co-conspirators. An insightful look into the new politics of visibility and exclusion, this document promises to become an activist primer."

* PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER *
Quark Xpress, the desktop publishing software produced by Tim Gill's Quark. Every reporter now uses Nexus, the computerized database that catalogs past and present articles from major American publications. Television news is being revolutionized by computer graphics, and editors at publications like Time and People couldn't operate under the gun today without sophisticated word-processing software and electronic mail.

As the three older power structures that form the Trinity of the Closet collide and merge with the rising power structure of Silicon Valley, the high-technology companies and their younger, more enlightened, and very openly queer executives and work force will greatly influence and change Washington, Hollywood, and New York. Those changes will ultimately affect all of politics and corporate America. They will alter even the most conservative institutions, transform mass culture on a grand scale, and aid in dismantling the closet in American society forever.

TO ALL QUEERS

There is no "right" to the closet.

If you are in it, it is not by your choice. You were forced into it as a child, and you are being held captive by a hypocritical, homophobic society.

Now is the time to plan your escape. The power to do so is inside of you, and only you can unleash it.

Stop sitting around blaming your parents, your school, the government, the media.

Stop whining about your existence and wallowing in self-pity.

Stop wishing yourself dead.

If you are already out of the closet, it is your obligation to help all those who are still being held prisoner.

If you are not yet out of the closet—if you are a teenager dependent on your parents, if you are trapped in a homophobic town or a rough city neighborhood where they beat up queers, if you are in any way in danger—hold on and plan for the day when you are older, when you have saved some money, when you can leave that place, when you can stand up on your own two feet and take charge of your life. No one can keep you where you are—except yourself. But you must come out wisely.
Everyone must come out of the closet, no matter how difficult, no matter how painful.
We must all tell our parents.
We must all tell our families.
We must all tell our friends.
We must all tell our coworkers.
These people vote. If they don’t know that we’re queer—if they think only the most horrible people are queer—they will vote against us.

What was done to us when we were children was nothing less than child abuse. Our psyches were tampered with, our personalities stunted.

Now we have a responsibility to speak out when we witness such crimes. If a child being viciously beaten by his parents confided in another child, would we expect the second child to respect the “privacy” of the other child’s pain? Or would we praise him for speaking out?

Liberate yourself and all others who are locked in the closet. Don’t be codependent with those whose dysfunction enables the bigots who bash us.

Badger everyone you know who is closeted—your friends, your family members, your coworkers—to come out. Put pressure on those in power whom you know to be queer. Send them letters. Call them on the phone. Fax them. Confront them in the streets.

Tell them they have a responsibility: to themselves, to you, to humanity.
Tell them they have to face the truth. And tell the truth yourself. Tell them that you will not stop until they are out—until their closets no longer affect your life.

Remember that all those in the closet, blinded by their own trauma, hurt themselves and all other queers. The invisibility they perpetuate harms us more than any of their good deeds might benefit us.

As the demagogues of the religious right push ahead with their campaign of hatred against homosexuals, the moment of truth is upon us.

Now is the time for all queers to come out and be counted.

TO THE CLOSETED IN POWER

Get yourself some professional help.

The walls are caving in around you, and there’s nothing you can do. Your future is going to be painful and difficult, and you would be wise to seek counseling rather than continue to live in denial. While it is hard for you to think rationally about coming out, try just for a moment:

An army of lovers is marching forth: women and women, men and men, arm in arm, hand in hand. Our numbers keep growing every day as we become more and more impatient with the likes of you. All of the hell you’ve lived through—the hiding, the sweating, the crying, the lying—is only going to become more unbearable. Unless you come out, you’ll eventually be revealed as just another cowering, sad, self-loathing homosexual. You’ll be remembered as just another Roy Cohn, just another Terry Dolan, just another J. Edgar Hoover.

Deep down, you know you have no “right” to be where you are, that you were shoved in your closet a long time ago. Deep down, you know why you must now come out and why it is wrong for you not to. It’s better if you do it yourself. It’s liberating and invigorating and empowering.

And it’s time.

Just think: You’ll be one of the people who have decided to be honest and make the world a better place for all queers. You’ll be another Barney Frank, another Martina Navratilova, another k.d. lang, another David Geffen. You’ll be a hero.

Now is the time for those who occupy the closets of power to come out and be counted.

TO THE SYMPATHETIC STRAIGHTS

From now on, discard the opinions of the closeted gays around you. Everything they have to say is colored by the closet, tinged by the repressed and fearful existence they lead.

Talk to the out-of-the-closet people you know, talk to several who represent a spectrum of opinions and experiences.

Admit it: All of you have some discomfort with homosexuality.
Your minds have been as polluted as ours by the homophobic society in which we live. You must now be part of changing that society, beginning in your own home. Your children must be brought up without the hatred, without the slurs, without the closet. They must be taught not only that they should have respect for lesbians and gay men but also that it’s okay if they are gay themselves. And this honest, compassionate teaching must come not only from you but from their schools and from their churches.

Your queer children must not be forced into the closet.

If your children are being closeted—by you, by their teachers, or by their churches—you are engaging in child abuse, brutal psychological terror, the kind that may lead them to consider or even commit suicide. Stop the terror. Stop other parents from engaging in such abuse. Start thinking about the future, about constructing legislation that will punish people who abuse their children in this way.

Teach your straight children that it’s okay if their brothers, their sisters, their cousins, their friends, their uncles, or their aunts—even their moms or dads—are gay. Understand this: If your children are straight they cannot be made gay, but they can be made into gay bashers.

Those of you in positions of power, stop rewarding the closeted around you for being “discreet.” Be there for your closeted friends and colleagues, help them and comfort them. Let them know how much you care. But do not aid in their self-destructive behavior. If a heroin addict were looking for a fix, wouldn’t you help him through the withdrawal, no matter how painful it was?

If you really and truly love your closeted friends—as well as all humanity—you will not be party to maintaining their closets.

Now is the time for sympathetic straights to help their queer friends come out and be counted.

TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

You say we’re coming for your children, and you’re right.

We’re coming for your queer children. We are your queer children.

God—your God, our God—made us that way. And there’s nothing you can do about it.

So now we have to be saved—from you—because you do nothing but warp innocent minds.

We will not allow you to force future generations into the closet.

We will not allow you to abuse them in that way.

We will not allow you to poison all of American life.

We will not allow you to breed hatred in our schools.

We will not allow you to create queer bashers and murderers.

We will not allow you to push us all back into the closet—in the military, on Capitol Hill, in Hollywood, or on Main Street.

We are never going back into the closet.

Your most articulate and ardent spokespeople and politicians still claim that homosexuality is a “choice.”

This we find curious.

Sexuality is not a choice—it is a natural, immutable orientation. It’s those who speak of “choice” who made a choice to fight their own queer urges. Many of them are repressed bisexuals and homosexuals, obsessed with routinizing society what is coming from deep inside them. Quite a few of them—we know for a fact—are even active but deeply closeted homosexuals who preach the gospel of homophobia.

But the army of lovers will no longer be silent; the greatest casualty in this war you’ve declared will be the closet.

TO ALL QUEER ACTIVISTS

We have come to an exciting, critical juncture, one for which we have all worked hard.

But we are fractured, split into a million opposing factions. It is essential that we put our differences aside, at least for this crucial moment in history.

We must focus not on that which divides us—our genders, races, classes, ages, political ideologies—but on the one powerful enemy that we all have in common: the closet.

Our diversity is in fact our greatest weapon.

Now is the time for the gay Republicans and the black lesbian mothers and the computer nerds and the congressional staffers and the queer radicals and the gossip columnists and the AIDS activists
and the television executives and the gay lobbyists and the record moguls and the outing proponents and the businesspeople and the drag queens to come together.

Our brainpower, resources, talent, and experiences will break down the closers of power forever.

And future generations will be able to be out, proud, and queer in America.

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