



Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South

James T. Sears

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While Scarlett O'Hara may resemble a drag queen, and Mardi Gras inspires more camp than a gay pride parade, the American South also boasts a rich, authentic and transgressive gay and lesbian history. In this chatty, free-ranging cultural survey, Sears (*Growing Up Gay in the South*) presents a vivid kaleidoscope of the mores and political activities of many gay Southerners following the 1969 Stonewall riots and leading up to the 1979 march on Washington. Sears unspools this history through portraits of activists and community organizers including Merrill Mushroom, Jack Nichols, Lige Clark, Vicki Gabriner, Minnie Bruce Pratt and Sgt. Leonard Matlovitch who helped shape the social and political climate below the Mason Dixon line and often in the rest of the country. While giving a nod to historic events like Anita Bryant's Save Our Children campaign, Sears focuses more closely on obscure but important local political events, like the founding of the lesbian journal *Sinister Wisdom*, the emergence of the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance and community response to a deadly firebombing that killed 31 patrons in a New Orleans bar in the mid-1970s. Sears's multifaceted approach pays off when he sketches such relatively unknown players as comedian Ray Bourbon and radical fairy Faygele ben Miriam, and he conveys well the complexity and intensity of the political activity of the decade. While not as historically conclusive or theoretically astute as John Howard's masterful *Men Like That* (2000), Sears provides a panoply of emotionally riveting snapshots that aptly portray Southern gay experience in the 1970s. B&w photos.

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