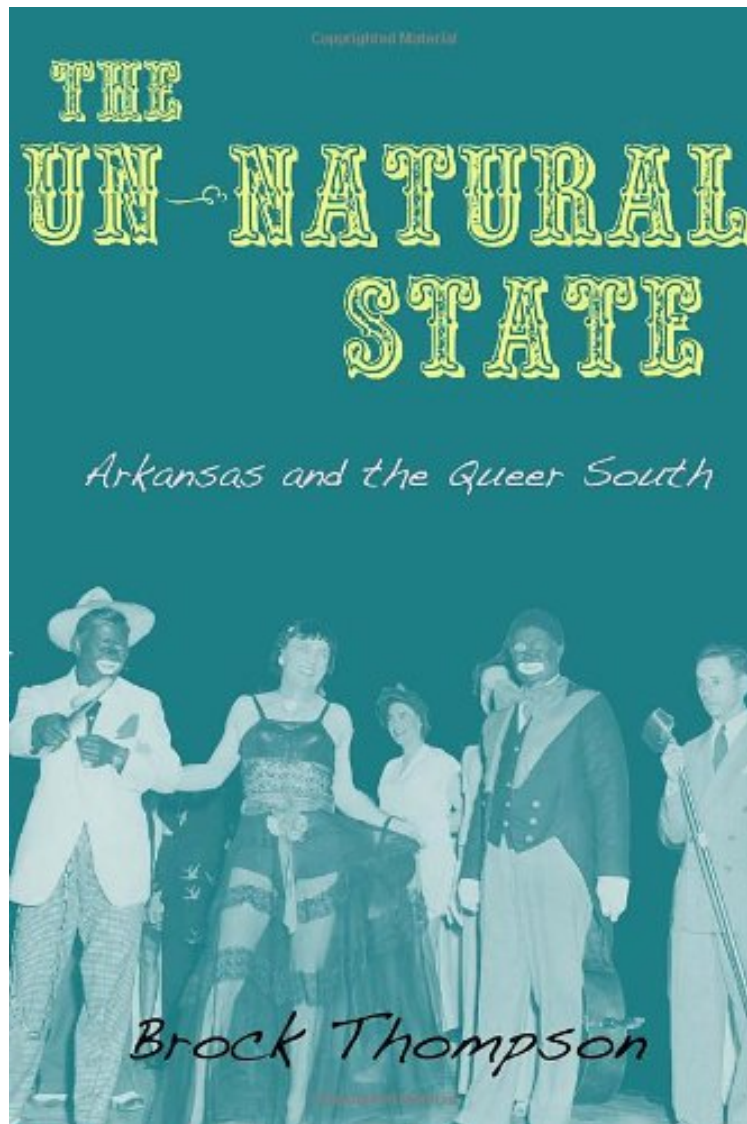


[Ebook free] The Un-Natural State: Arkansas and the Queer South

The Un-Natural State: Arkansas and the Queer South

Brock Thompson

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Brock Thompson : The Un-Natural State: Arkansas and the Queer South before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Un-Natural State: Arkansas and the Queer South:

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. Oral histories brought to life in this history of gay Arkansas By Garrett Peck "It should not have come as a shock to anyone that not all gay people lived in cities," writes Brock Thompson in his eye-opening history of his home state, "The Un-Natural State: Arkansas and the Queer South." While many gay people have flocked to cities, rural Arkansas has developed its own distinct gay identity. "There are certain

things about southern culture - the closeness to the land, church on Sunday - that so many do not want to give up to be another face in the city. It is their version of modernity that they cling to. No other will do."At the center of the narrative are oral histories. Thompson's original research included interviewing dozens of people. He explains, "In the South, a region where so much of a person's lineage and history are passed down by the spoken word, the discovery of life stories and images of those who came before are perhaps the best way to commemorate and see exactly how things have changed in Arkansas." He organizes his history around these interviews in three distinct sections, all named after Arkansas nicknames. The first section, the Diamond State, tells of the rich history of drag across the South, and how it moved from a church-oriented institution to gay expression after World War II. In the Natural State section, Thompson covers the emergence of the gay community - and how Arkansas repealed its sodomy law, but only to reinstate it a year later (the state supreme court wisely ruled it unconstitutional in 2002, a year before *Lawrence v. Texas* struck down sodomy laws nationwide); and how the state closed the Morgan rest stop on Interstate 40, rather than allow it continue as a gay cruising area. The Land of Opportunity - arguably the best section in the book - covers how Eureka Springs, a small mountain town in the Ozarks, became a gay mecca. But its roots were grounded in lesbian feminists who sought separation from a patriarchal society. Separation gave way to community. The book is filled with oral histories, fascinating stories that remained unknown and untold until Thompson wrote them down. This is the book's greatest strength: the author provided original research and true scholarship, and yet his work is endlessly readable and deeply personal. Thompson relates his own story as a gay man, as well as his family history. His great-aunt Opal was mostly likely a lesbian. Though her grave site is unmarked, Thompson movingly declares, "In lieu of a headstone, this work will have to do for now." The narrative ends in 1992 with Bill Clinton's election to the presidency, probably the most prominent Arkansan in American history. Although Clinton made significant election promises to the gay community, many felt he sold the community down the river to political expediency with *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* (1993) and the Defense of Marriage Act (1996). "The Un-Natural State" is extremely well documented and richly illustrated with photos, often from archives and the personal collections of people Thompson interviewed. For those of us who are Arkansas geographically-challenged, a map would have been nice. This book is a fascinating read, even for those who have never ventured to the Natural State. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Profound WERQBy ChrisBrock Thompson is crazy -- a witty wordsmith with an unrivaled knack at seamlessly weaving his passion for history with his arms-length insights into history's role in our own present. At once compelling and effortless, *The Un-Natural State* gives readers an incredible look into pre-Stonewall Appalachia. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Interesting, insightful, enjoyableBy JedThompson's *Un-Natural State* pushes against the assumption that it is the goal of every lgbt person to migrate to a city like New York or San Francisco. Rural places can be every bit as queer. Thompson injects his historical and ethnographic research with his own experiences, giving this book a very intimate, personal flavor. From bathroom sex to powderpuff football to blackface, this book has it all!

The Un-Natural State is a one-of-a-kind study of gay and lesbian life in Arkansas in the twentieth century, a deft weaving together of Arkansas history, dozens of oral histories, and Brock Thompson's own story. Thompson analyzes the meaning of rural drag shows, including a compelling description of a 1930s seasonal beauty pageant in Wilson, Arkansas, where white men in drag shared the stage with other white men in blackface, a suggestive mingling that went to the core of both racial transgression and sexual disobedience. These small town entertainments put on in churches and schools emerged decades later in gay bars across the state as a lucrative business practice and a larger means of community expression, while in the same period the state's sodomy law was rewritten to condemn sexual acts between those of the same sex in language similar to what was once used to denounce interracial sex. Thompson goes on to describe several lesbian communities established in the Ozark Mountains during the sixties and seventies and offers a substantial account of Eureka Springs's informal status as the "gay capital of the Ozarks." Through this exploration of identity formation, group articulation, political mobilization, and cultural visibility within the context of historical episodes such as the Second World War, the civil rights movement, and the AIDS epidemic, *The Un-Natural State* contributes not only to our understanding of gay and lesbian history but also to our understanding of the South.

"A must-read for anyone interested in the history of southern culture and sexuality." --Southern Historian, May 2012