



The Making of a Gay Asian Community: An Oral History of Pre-AIDS Los Angeles (Pacific Formations: Global Relations in Asian and Pacific Perspectives)

Eric C. Wat

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In this unique oral history, gay Asian Americans talk frankly about their struggle for self-determination and independence. For the first time, in their own words, pioneers in the Los Angeles movement discuss the gay scene in Southern California and the development of a distinctly Asian American identity. Despite its size, until recently the gay Asian American community in Los Angeles was fragmented and marginalized. Gay Asian men separated into their own ethnic cliques and preferred whites as sexual partners. Eric C. Wat convincingly demonstrates that these patterns are legacies of both a racialized hierarchy of desire and racial exclusion from the mainstream gay community. Using a cultural studies lens to interpret the rich oral narratives he collected, Wat shows how a dominant sexual ideology can influence our desires and contradict our memories. He follows the development of 'specialty' bars that at once reinforced this dominant ideology and highlighted its contradictions. By documenting the founding of the first gay Asian organization in Southern California (Asian/Pacific Lesbians and Gays [A/PLG]), the author powerfully portrays the ways gay Asian men confronted these contradictions publicly and struggled to reconcile them as they fashioned a coherent identity and community based on both their race and sexuality. Wat's analysis returns gay Asian men to the center of their lives and celebrates the power of individuals working collectively to define their desires and to change what is unjust around them. As living history, their voices are valuable and overdue.

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