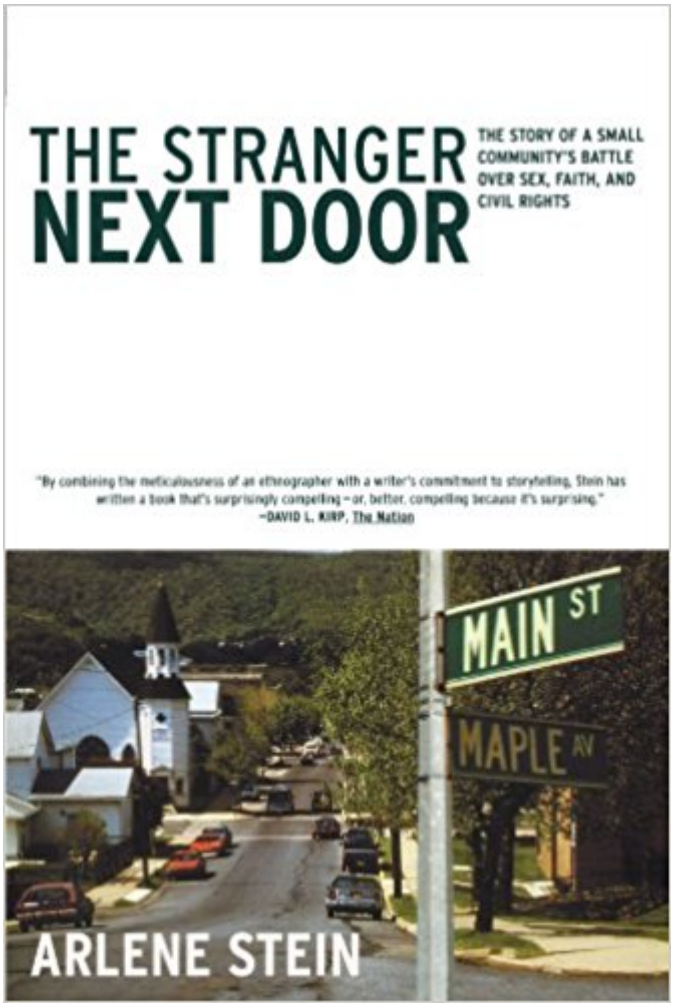
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The Stranger Next Door: The Story Of A Small Community's Battle Over Sex, Faith, And Civil Rights



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Synopsis

In The Stranger Next Door, Alrene Stein explores how a small community with a declining industrial economy became the site of a bitter battle over gay rights. Fearing job loss and a feeling of being left behind, one Oregon townÃ¢â ¬â„¢s working-class residents allied with religious conservatives to deny the civil liberties of queer men and women. In a book that combines strong on-the-ground research and lucid analysis with a novelistÃ¢â ¬â„¢s imaginative sympathy, SteinÃ¢â ¬â„¢s exploration of how fear and uncertainty can cause citizens to shift blame onto Ã¢â ¬Å“strangersÃ¢â ¬Â• provides insight into the challenges the country faces in the age of Trump. Winner of the 2001 Ruth Benedict Award

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"To conservative Christians, homosexuality was sinful, unnatural, against God and family... but to the vast majority, who believed that religion--and sex--should be kept private, these words sounded intolerant... even hateful," writes Stein in this astute social analysis of how a small Oregon community dealt with an early 1990s political referendum to prohibit "special rights" for homosexuals. A Jewish lesbian, Stein (Sisters, Sexperts, Queers) writes as both a community insider and outsider, drawing upon personal observation, media analysis and interviews with 50 of the town's residents to sympathetically and critically reveal how both sides, and those caught in the middle, responded to this culture war. She conjures a complex portrait of people under stress, attributing much of the community's conservatism to the flagging economy caused by the

weakening of the timber industry in the 1980s. Stein is best when articulating and exploring the myriad paradoxes and contradictions of the situation. Her most striking observation is that while conservative Christian organizers from outside Timbertown created widespread fear of a gay takeover, the town itself had no visible homosexual community, and most of its gay citizens were well integrated and accepted within the social fabric. A careful observer and writer, Stein uses traditional sociological methodology to reach conclusions about the boundaries of tolerance that are similar to those in Beth Loffreda's recent work of straightforward reportage on the murder of a young gay man in Wyoming, Losing Matt Shephard (Forecasts, July 31). Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

detailed, and very readable study of politics in rural Oregon. Stein spent several months in "Timbertown" (not the town's real name), a small town in central Oregon caught up in the battle of liberals and conservatives over a proposed amendment to the town's charter prohibiting "special status" for homosexuals. While the battle seemed to center on the issue of gay rights, Stein reports that this was only a proxy battle between longtime residents and newcomers over the change from a reliance on the old ways of the timber-based economy and the new service-based economy of the state. Stein provides detailed examinations of the conservative Oregon Citizens' Alliance and the more liberal Citizens' Action Network, exploring the belief systems driving each group. Her in-depth analysis of the evangelical Christian movement in America is also particularly noteworthy and broadly applicable beyond Oregon. This book is very highly recommended for academic and public libraries. Mark Bay, Indiana Univ.Purdue Univ. Indianapolis Lib. Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Inherent in the Fundamenalist view is the assumption that ethical principles come together harmoniously and do not meaningfully conflict. Indeed, conflict is seen as a test of one's ability to adhere to these moral priniciples. Thus, Fundamentalism knows the answers and isn't particularly open to persuasion--or so it would seem. However, Stein's sympathetic interviews reveals a different story about the Fundamentalists who launched a charter amendment against 'special rights' for gays and lesbians in a small, Oregon town where there weren't many gays and lesbians to speak of. Here, we meet Christian Fundamentalist women who weren't particularly close minded; felt uncertain about their principles; regretted the conflict they engendered; and, in some sense, felt an unacknowledged sense of shame. For reasons which are probably not very far from view, they just couldn't accept pluralism--mostly because it didn't speak to their insecurities. Those seeking

insight into the present turn in American and feminist politics would do well to read and take heed!

Bought this book in college for class.

Arlene Stein is a professor of sociology who moved to Oregon in 1994, a time when rural Oregon was in the surprising position of coming to terms with homosexuality. She tells how this happened to "Timbertown" (a pseudonym, and she has used pseudonyms for all the town residents) in The Stranger Next Door: The Story of a Small Community's Battle over Sex, Faith, and Civil Rights_ (Beacon Press), a balanced history of a contemporary controversy. Timbertown was a logging community, and in the eighties the economy turned bad for it. Newcomers came to the region, some in communes, and in the bad economy, didn't always get along with the long term timbermen. Among the newcomers were homosexuals, not many, to be sure, and most of them were women who blended into the community so that most others hardly knew. When the Oregon Citizens Alliance (OCA), an outside agency powered by Christian fundamentalism, came, Timbertown started fracturing.Timbertown was hardly teeming with the sort of gay population that scared the OCA, those that could be found in the larger, more open cities of the area, the hypermasculine muscleboys in leather, who dared to flaunt aggressive sexuality. Though a spokesman for the OCA could warn that the intent of homosexuals "... is to take over the state of Oregon and turn it into Queer Nation," no one in Timbertown could have seriously thought that of any fellow residents. The idea that homosexuals were going somehow to ruin government, or that homosexuality somehow weakens marriages (whose?), were never shown to have any factual foundations. But the OCA put a petition to put an anti-gay civil rights measure on an upcoming ballot, splitting the community into sides. This had bizarre and unexpected consequences.An exhibit based on the life of Anne Frank became politicized, with the OCA calling it "pro-homosexual propaganda." The valuable role of victimhood was sought by both sides, with the OCA unconvincingly arguing that they themselves were the persecuted minority, the equivalent of Jews in the Holocaust. The mayor of the town had to withdraw from the traditional annual prayer breakfast as it, too, became political rather than ecumenical. Children at school began to beat each other up depending on what sides their parents took on the issue. The few members of minority races in the town saw an increase in hostility, and although the newspaper and schools took an anti-racist attitude, the white majority who were losing jobs did what people always do, and found someone else to blame. There was no racial strife before the sexual issue started splitting people. Even more sadly, although the ballot measure passed with 57% of the vote, it accomplished little except the fracturing of Timbertown. In less than a year, there

was an injunction against putting the measure into effect, a statewide antigay ballot failed, and U.S. Supreme Court ruled in ways that would make the measure a dead issue, but of course Timbertown could not be put back together again. Stein's well-researched book coolly recounts the agonies of Timbertown, and reminds us that they are national concerns, here merely writ small.

I had to read THE STRANGER NEXT DOOR for a Sociology class, and I must say that this is one of the more fascinating nonfiction books I've read yet. The author, Arlene Stein (who is a Sociology professor at Rutgers University, where I currently attend), spent some time in the mid-90s in an Oregon town she names Timbertown, and tries to understand what led this town to be torn apart by a divisive argument about gay rights when there was no apparent queer population in town to speak of (and if there were any gays, they usually kept a low profile). Basically the town is divided into two groups: those who support a particular measure to try to curb gay rights, and those who do not. It is a thought-provoking book, and also rather frightening to read: the actions some of these people take against the "other" border on hate violence, and lead some people to compare the actions of the pro-antigay-measure people to Nazis. It is always rather scary to see what happens when fear coupled with ignorance is allowed to run rampant in these kinds of small, closely-knit communities. And yet Stein thankfully never comes off as overly smug or judgmental (though she clearly has her liberal leanings---and she's a lesbian herself): she makes an admirable effort to try to understand both sides of the issue, and what kind of circumstances, whether economic or religious, might have led these ordinary folk to turn against homosexuals the way they did. The end result of her painstaking field research is a well-written, fascinating, compelling book that might astonish you with its insights about what leads ordinary people to suddenly turn against each other. This is no dull academic lecture in writing, trust me: you won't be bored by this at all. Highly recommended.

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