



Pray the Gay Away: The Extraordinary Lives of Bible Belt Gays

By Bernadette Barton



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2013 Finalist for the Lambda Literary Awards, LGBT Studies category

In the Bible Belt, it's common to see bumper stickers that claim One Man + One Woman = Marriage, church billboards that command one to "Get right with Jesus," letters to the editor comparing gay marriage to marrying one's dog, and nightly news about homophobic attacks from the Family Foundation. While some areas of the United States have made tremendous progress in securing rights for gay people, Bible Belt states lag behind. Not only do most Bible Belt gays lack domestic partner benefits, lesbians and gay men can still be fired from some places of employment in many regions of the Bible Belt for being a homosexual.

In *Pray the Gay Away*, Bernadette Barton argues that conventions of small town life, rules which govern Southern manners, and the power wielded by Christian institutions serve as a foundation for both passive and active homophobia in the Bible Belt. She explores how conservative Christian ideology reproduces homophobic attitudes and shares how Bible Belt gays negotiate these attitudes in their daily lives. Drawing on the remarkable stories of Bible Belt gays, Barton brings to the fore their thoughts, experiences and hard-won insights to explore the front lines of our national culture war over marriage, family, hate crimes, and equal rights. *Pray the Gay Away* illuminates their lives as both foot soldiers and casualties in the battle for gay rights.

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Editorial Review

Review

"[The author] draws on a trove of ethnographic data, including in-depth interviews with Bible Belt gays, visits to the Creation Museum and a local megachurch, attendance at an Exodus International conference for ex-gays, and her own experiences as an openly lesbian professor. . . . Though Barton documents numerous cases of religious-based abuse, she is tolerant of conservative Christians."-*Publishers Weekly*

"Bernadette Barton takes us on a vivid inside tour of Bible Belt America that us privileged gay folks from more liberal parts of the U.S. have a hard time imagining or even knew existed. The stories she tells are riveting, heartbreaking, infuriating, yet ultimately uplifting."-Eric Marcus, author of *Making Gay History*

"Barton's book gives voice to a group of people who have been through sometimes mind-boggling ordeals—including family members' knife attacks, violent efforts to exorcise demons from them, and disowning them—but who come through the constant shaming and stigmatization with strength, compassion, critical thought, and intense reflection on themselves and their spirituality. Rather than seeing her respondents as passive victims, Barton shows her audience that Bible Belt gays have an intimate understanding of conservative Christianity that can help us all to understand conflicts in American culture."-*Gender and Society*

"Very much worth reading, and at times moving, the book indicts the conservative wing of Christianity for promoting cruelty and intolerance."-*Library Journal*

". . . A must-read for the winter."-*News Review*

"Barton weaves a remarkable account. . . . Overall this work sets out to tell the stories of Bible Belt gays and provide an arena where their lives and experiences are given center stage. Barton skillfully achieves this end."-*Sociology of Religion*

"*Pray the Gay Away* shines a sobering light on the freedoms and comforts that many of us take for granted."-*Instinct*

"The author's tales of gay life in this area of the country, where anti-gay evangelical Protestantism holds sway, range from the harrowing to the mundane. . . . Worthwhile reading for anyone interested in what it means to be gay in an overtly hostile environment."-*Kirkus Reviews*

"The author reflects eloquently on the deeper meaning of her subjects' stories."-*The Gay and Lesbian Review*

"The book is full of interviews, analysis, and wonderment that these people have not moved to a more friendly location."-*Sacramento Book Review*

"Her mission isn't to vilify those who have deeply-held beliefs, and she recognizes that their actions and concerns are based in a genuine fear for relative and friends who they think have gone astray from the fold. Yet, she is blunt about the damage that they can cause."-*Popmatters.com*

"A truly great book for anyone interested in the topic. . . . Barton's arguments are refreshing and provide a

'talk back' to homophobic statements."-*Metapsychology*

"Barton's captivating and engaging research invites us to consider the challenges facing lesbian and gay youth living in the Bible Belt. This is a book to be valued by educators, social workers, mental health counselors, and others seeking a deeper understanding of the fear and hatred experienced by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth that will hopefully lead to improved support of gay youth and the development of safe spaces."-*Youth Today*

"[S]heds critical light upon the ways Christianity affects the everyday lives of sexual minorities regardless of their own religious identification. Using an impressive array of ethnographic materials . . . Barton provides a thorough analysis of the cultural terrain known as the Bible Belt as well as the factors embedded within this terrain that consistently isolate and marginalize non-heterosexual desire and practice. . . . Ultimately, Barton has constructed a substantive and instructive text for scholars and students . . . seeking to ascertain the interrelation of sexualities and religion in contemporary society."-*American Journal of Sociology*

"I highly recommend *Pray the Gay Away* to anyone with an interest in contemporary queer experience, in Bible Belt Christianity, and the intersection of the two. I'd go so far as to say it's required reading for anyone who cares about what it means to be gay in America today. Whether or not you've ever lived in the 'toxic closet' yourself, too many of our fellow citizens still wake up there every morning. We owe it to them to listen to the stories they have so generously shared."-Anna J. Cook, *The Feminist Librarian*

About the Author

Bernadette Barton is Professor Sociology and Gender Studies at Morehead State University in Kentucky. She is the author of *Pray the Gay Away: The Extraordinary Lives of Bible Belt Gays*.

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From reader reviews:

Lonnie Hammer:

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