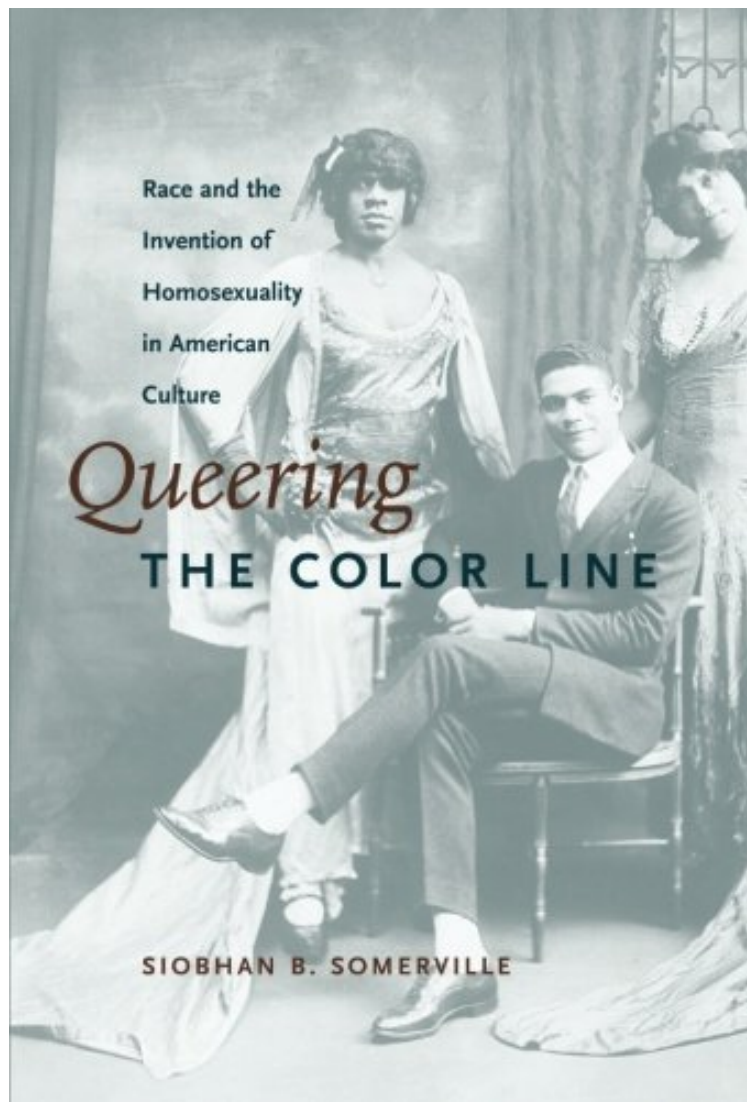


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## Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture (Series Q)

Siobhan B. Somerville

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**Siobhan B. Somerville : Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture (Series Q)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture (Series Q):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy CustomerPerfect condition6 of 27 people found the following review helpful. Very disappointingBy jfpessoaThe chosen gay jargon of the "closet" is so woefully

inadequate to the historical condition of gays dealing with passing for straight. I hoped this book might have really seized on the similarities in the dilemma of passing as it affected Blacks and gay people, but unfortunately this isn't the case. The author seems to begin with those intentions, but after presenting some interesting thoughts she simply follows them up with a set of four jargon-laden book reports on works of fiction and that's that. What she has produced could be a text for yet another multicultural lit course, but it sadly misses as a discussion of the phenomenon of gay passing. The survivors of the era in which gay passing was a norm for homosexuals are fewer and fewer. And the passive imagery of "the closet" remains in place, misleading and inappropriate as is to much of the gay past. It is a shame that there are not traditionally-oriented gay historians dealing with the actual dynamics of gay passing as it affected the lives of millions of men and women. This doesn't come close to being that book. 17 of 20 people found the following review helpful. New Queer Studies By A Customer This book is a largely successful attempt to blend together two of the most interesting theoretical innovations--queer theory and critical race theory. When I first purchased this book, I was expecting to struggle with a difficult theoretical text but found the book as a whole to be accessible. The first three chapters in particular offer careful nuanced readings of scientific, literary and movie texts. As the author states, however, her readings require that the reader accept different models of historical proof as a queer reading generally examines the spaces in between texts. While as a somewhat old fashioned historian, I would have liked to have seen better connections; i.e. a more precise cause and effect relationship between the texts she examines but in fairness it is not her intention to establish such relationships. I nonetheless found her analysis provocative--I really mean this word and am not simply using it to dismiss the work as some academics do--and suitable for the classroom. My hope is that her work will provoke more study and that the relationship between queer theory and critical race theory will continue to produce books like this one.

*Queering the Color Line* transforms previous understandings of how homosexuality was "invented" as a category of identity in the United States beginning in the late nineteenth century. Analyzing a range of sources, including sexology texts, early cinema, and African American literature, Siobhan B. Somerville argues that the emerging understanding of homosexuality depended on the context of the black/white "color line," the dominant system of racial distinction during this period. This book thus critiques and revises tendencies to treat race and sexuality as unrelated categories of analysis, showing instead that race has historically been central to the cultural production of homosexuality. At about the same time that the 1896 Supreme Court *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision hardened the racialized boundary between black and white, prominent trials were drawing the public's attention to emerging categories of sexual identity. Somerville argues that these concurrent developments were not merely parallel but in fact inextricably interrelated and that the discourses of racial and sexual "deviance" were used to reinforce each other's terms. She provides original readings of such texts as Havelock Ellis's late nineteenth-century work on "sexual inversion," the 1914 film *A Florida Enchantment*, the novels of Pauline E. Hopkins, James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, and Jean Toomer's fiction and autobiographical writings, including *Cane*. Through her analyses of these texts and her archival research, Somerville contributes to the growing body of scholarship that focuses on discovering the intersections of gender, race, and sexuality. *Queering the Color Line* will have broad appeal across disciplines including African American studies, gay and lesbian studies, literary criticism, cultural studies, cinema studies, and gender studies.

From *Library Journal* Black and queer studies have, for the most part, proceeded separately; here, Somerville (English and women's studies, Purdue Univ.) examines the intersections between these fields. In five essays, she looks at the writings of Jean Toomer and Pauline E. Hopkins, James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, the film *A Florida Enchantment*, and scientific racism. Although limited in scope, her essays do address a number of issues significant in turn-of-the-century African American and gay life. Alike "passing" and self-identification and, in doing so, raise interesting questions about the representation of race and sexual identity in U.S. culture. Recommended for all academic sociology and literature collections. A Anthony J. Adam, *Prairie View AM Univ. Lib., TX* Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. "Queering the Color Line is a groundbreaking study that sets a new agenda for critical investigations of the intersecting histories of race and sexuality in the United States. Siobhan Somerville provides a model of interdisciplinary, politically engaged scholarship that is certain to become required reading in queer studies, race theory, and U.S. history as well as American literature."—Lisa Duggan, *New York University*