



Picturing Men: A Century of Male Relationships in Everyday American Photography

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These photographs, spanning from before the Civil War to the 1950s, reveal a lost world. They show men comfortably sitting on each other's laps, embracing, holding hands, and expressing their various relationships through countless examples of simple physical contact. Rather than imposing contemporary notions of sexuality by assuming the images only illustrate a portion of the gay past, John Ibson returns them to their own time to examine what they meant to the subjects. His perspective unearths a hidden aspect of American men's history. His analysis focuses on the history of male intimacy and how these everyday photographs challenge conventional boundaries between erotic and platonic, homosexuality and heterosexuality. He explores the photos as symbols of male association from a time when America was far more gender-segregated than it is today, and men felt no anxiety about showing their affection for one another. The images present men of different ages, classes, and races in a range of settings: posed in photographers' studios, on beaches, in lumber camps, on farms, on ships, indoors and out. Ibson concludes his study with images from the 1950s, in which the men begin to show a rigid and limited set of expressions. All the photographs are being published here for the first time, and are drawn from Ibson's private collection of more than 5,000 images.



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