



Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right

Whitney Strub

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While America is not alone in its ambivalence toward sex and its depictions, the preferences of the nation swing sharply between toleration and censure. This pattern has grown even more pronounced since the 1960s, with the emergence of the New Right and its attack on the "floodtide of filth" that was supposedly sweeping the nation. Antipornography campaigns became the New Right's political capital in the 1960s, laying the groundwork for the "family values" agenda that shifted the country to the right.

Perversion for Profit traces the anatomy of this trend and the crucial function of pornography in constructing the New Right agenda, which has emphasized social issues over racial and economic inequality. Conducting his own extensive research, Whitney Strub vividly recreates the debates over obscenity that consumed members of the ACLU in the 1950s and revisits the deployment of obscenity charges against purveyors of gay erotica during the cold war, revealing the differing standards applied to heterosexual and homosexual pornography. He follows the rise of the influential Citizens for Decent Literature during the 1960s and the pivotal events that followed: the sexual revolution, feminist activism, the rise of the gay rights movement, the "porno chic" moment of the early 1970s, and resurgent Christian conservatism, which now shapes public policy far beyond the issue of sexual decency.

Strub also examines the ways in which the left failed to mount a serious or sustained counterattack to the New Right's use of pornography as a political tool. As he demonstrates, this failure put the Democratic Party at the mercy of Republican rhetoric. In placing debates about pornography at the forefront of American postwar history, Strub revolutionizes our understanding of sex and American politics.

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