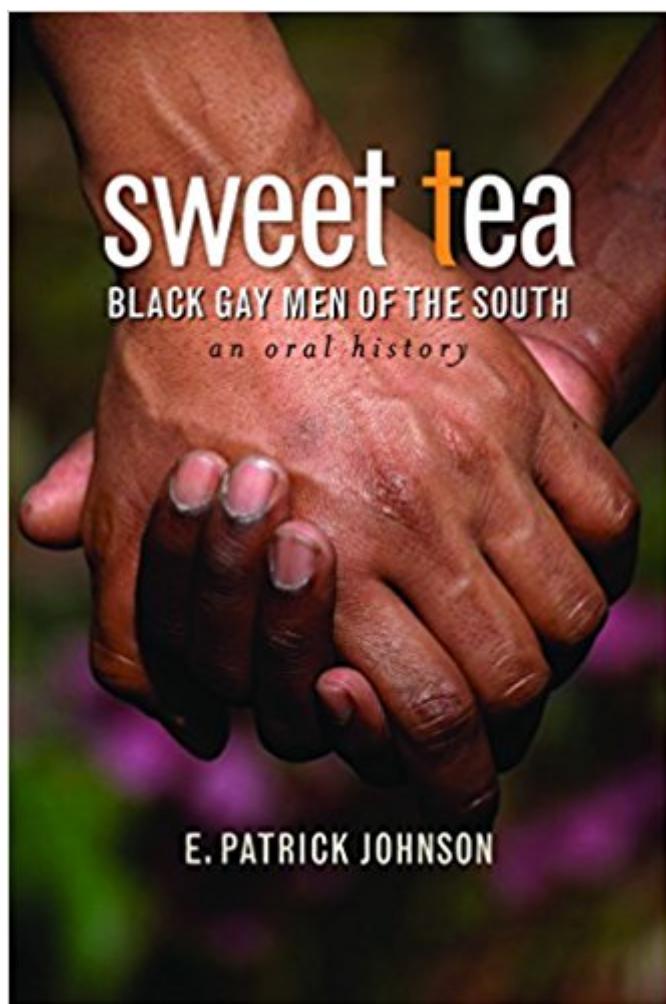


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# Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men Of The South (Caravan Book)



## **Synopsis**

Giving voice to a population too rarely acknowledged, Sweet Tea collects more than sixty life stories from black gay men who were born, raised, and continue to live in the South. E. Patrick Johnson challenges stereotypes of the South as "backward" or "repressive" and offers a window into the ways black gay men negotiate their identities, build community, maintain friendship networks, and find sexual and life partners--often in spaces and activities that appear to be antigay. Ultimately, Sweet Tea validates the lives of these black gay men and reinforces the role of storytelling in both African American and southern cultures.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

This fascinating "if excessively detailed" oral history subverts countless preconceptions in its illustration of black gay subcultures thriving in just about every imaginable rural and religious milieu in the South. Johnson (Appropriating Blackness) has an obvious fondness for the 63 men he interviews. Unfortunately, these interviews suffer from his failure to ask follow-up questions to revelatory or troubling responses and his adherence to set questions, for example, his insistence on asking his churchgoing subjects why they are attracted to the choir, keeps him from exploring the more interesting intersections (and contradictions) of their faith and sexuality. Responses are arranged by topics (Coming Out; Love and Relationships), an organization that provides thematic coherence, but makes it difficult to follow each recurring narrator. Still, the courage and honesty of Johnson's interviewees humble, and readers will find much to treasure in the stories of Stephen,

who adopts the mannerisms of straight classmates because he lacks masculine gay role models; proudly effeminate Lamar, transgendered Chastity and gay men in every state in the South falling in love, growing up and growing old, negotiating and redefining their identities. (Sept.) "Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved."

Profiles more than seventy men, from teenagers to elders, hairdressers to executives, in every southern state. . . . A calm chronology of growing up black and gay. . . . Illuminate[s] readers about their little-known history.--Arkansas Historical QuarterlyContains a wealth of information about Southern black gay men and makes a valuable addition to gay cultural history.--The Gay & Lesbian Review" With poignant stories from a demographically diverse spectrum of gay black men, this book is a fine addition to queer studies literature.--ChoiceJohnson's interviews often confound stereotypes. . . . Succeeds as a human document, giving voice to people who are seldom heard.--Wilmington Star-NewsThis fascinating . . . oral history subverts countless preconceptions in its illustration of black gay subcultures thriving in just about every imaginable rural and religious milieu in the South. . . . The courage and honesty of Johnson's interviewees humble, and readers will find much to treasure in the stories.--Publishers WeeklyInterjecting apt questions only occasionally, the author allows his subjects to speak for themselves, which they do articulately, colloquially (a glossary is included), and graphically. . . . [A] very good book.--Library JournalOffers a treasure trove of primary sources for those interested in the intersection of race, region, and gay experience in the twentieth century. . . . Fascinating. . . . For deep insights into the development of black-gay relationships and community in the South, Sweet Tea is unsurpassed.--Journal of American Ethnic HistoryEasily shatters many narrow perceptions around the intersections of class, sex, love, age, religion, family and gender expression in Southern communities, as well as the simple and complex reasons that the men profiled have chosen to remain in the south.--ColorLinesIt's pretty rare to pick up a book, turn randomly to any page, and find such a powerful personal story that you have to close the book for a moment to take it in. But the oral histories featured in Sweet Tea . . . cast just that kind of spell.--The AdvocateChallenges queer, black, men's, and southern historiographies. . . . Illuminates the fabric of black gay men's history . . . [and] debunks the myth that southern black gay men live only fearful, silenced, and secret lives.--Journal of Southern HistoryJohnson, who has never been one to shy away from the intricacies of race theory or queer theory, has put together a complex oral history of gay black men in the South.--The IndependentIn reading each colorful story, it seems as if the men are sitting right in front of you. . . . With nearly 46 percent of America's new HIV/AIDS cases occurring in the South,

Johnson is serving the tea right on time.--POZ

Got to be a little repetitious. Stopped reading halfway through. Many biographies were similar to each other. But overall stories were interesting. I know this was a study but if questions to subjects were varied or different set of questions , It would have Held my interest. I met the writer in Dallas. He was a charming and enthusiastic young man.

I could relate as this book is very personal for me. Having grown up in that era it brought back so many memories. Excellent reading.

Sweet tea is a qualitative analysis of several southern gay black males with a mixture of stories about their past histories. It rarely touches on the "gay" aspect of their lives, yet it presents almost every other aspect. The book is mostly ethnographic verbatim interviews (some rather difficult to read, as at times the subjects' English is non-standard and hard to follow). This book is important should the reader wish to understand southern gay male black culture with its many and varied histories and dynamics.

I found the book very interesting and the author manages to set his story narratives in a way that brings the reader into the lives of all the characters. Excellent read.

Thoroughly researched and completely engaging, "Sweet Tea" is a look into an overlooked minority: black, gay men of the South. The author spent time interviewing dozens of men - all natives who still call the South home -from all age ranges and transcribed the conversations. The interviews are eye-opening. The South is one of the most stereotyped and misunderstood regions of the United States and the personal histories these Southern men relate are illuminating. They are the stories of men who pursued an active gay lifestyle even while remaining part of their families, their communities and their churches. One of the more unforgettable interview subjects is Chaz/Chastity, a drag queen whom the author discovers almost by accident in his own North Carolina hometown. There are several photos of Chaz scattered throughout the various sections of the book, as well as those of other subjects. The photos are intimate and touching, showing the breadth of these men's lives. Another strength of the book is the author's own personal story: in the introduction, Johnson discusses his reasons for embarking upon this project and his own experience growing up in the South as a black, gay man. It's fortunate that Johnson wrote this book as it's an important piece of

scholarship that deserves all the accolades it receives.

The author, E. Patrick Johnson, is to be commended for the end product of his research into the lives of black gay men of the southern United States! Through numerous interviews with men of varying degrees of "outness" he has recorded their stories, and grouped them in 7 primary subject headings. While they cover the full range from joyous to tragic, they all deserve to be heard, and Mr. Johnson has let them tell their stories. Now, it is up to us to read, and hear, those stories! It is a journey that will not leave you unmoved... you WILL take away a new heightened awareness of the issues facing these men, whether they are 19 or 90. Kudos to each and every one of the men who shared their lives and stories!

E. Patrick Johnson's new book SWEET TEA purports to dignify the lives of Black Gay men from the American South by allowing them to tell their own stories. Maybe that's what Johnson meant to do when he began research on this lengthy book of interviews. Unfortunately, he seems to have gotten sidetracked by his ego, his condescending attitude and his willingness to exploit other Gay men in the pursuit of a theatre career. His one-man stage show based on this book may be artistically valid, but the book itself fails as valid scholarship. Johnson stages a freak show in print of apparently inarticulate, self-aggrandizing sex and gender exotics, all friends of his or friends of his friends. After making them appear as unsophisticated and quaint as he possibly can, he lines them up for curious Straight folk to gawk at. Johnson's fondness for idle gossip, for using sexual slurs as endearments, and his ill-begotten warts-and-all style of editing(???)transcripts all reinforce the freak show aspect of his book. While some passages do convey warmth, wisdom, fortitude and personal empowerment, all too often they're undermined by frivolity, stereotype, sensationalism and braggadocio. If only that were the worst of it: Johnson's downplaying of Southern Black heterosexism is disturbing, his stated method of turning interview subjects into "performers" is manipulative, and his characterization of Black churches as vehicles for sex cruising is offensive! Black Gay identity deserves far more dignity than it gets in this overpriced volume. Sweet Tea is spiked with rotgut whiskey, and the flavor is more bitter than sweet.

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