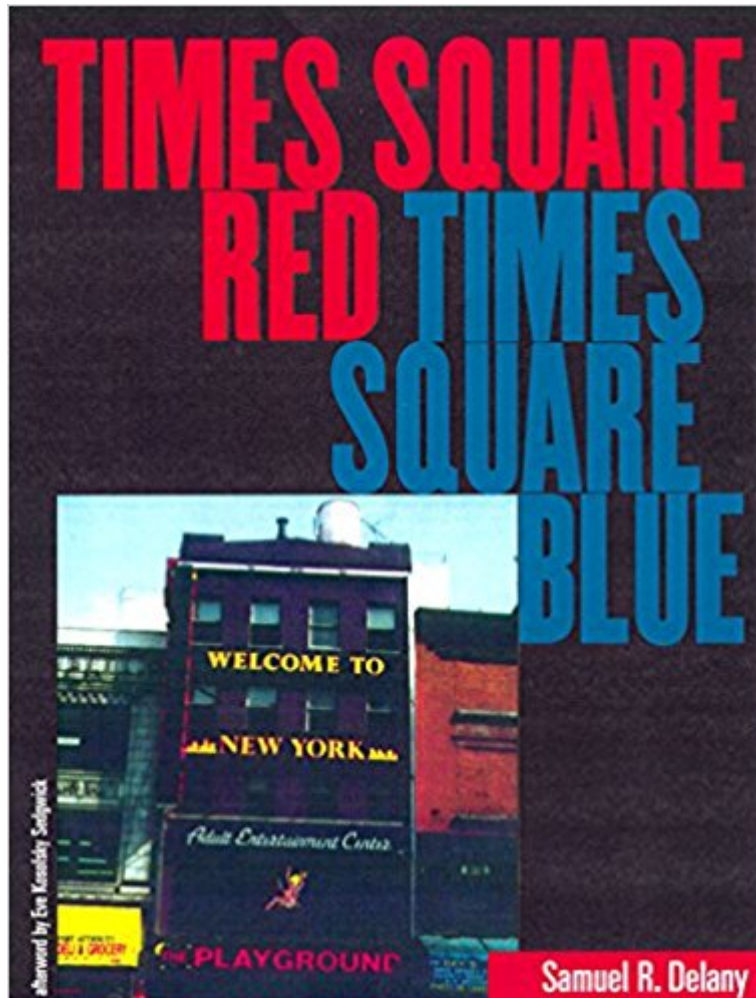




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Times Square Red, Times Square Blue



Synopsis

If one street in America can claim to be the most infamous, it is surely 42nd Street. Between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, 42nd Street was once known for its peep shows, street corner hustlers and movie houses. Over the last two decades the notion of safety-from safe sex and safe neighborhoods, to safe cities and safe relationships-has overcome 42nd Street, giving rise to a Disney store, a children's theater, and large, neon-lit cafes. 42nd Street has, in effect, become a family tourist attraction for visitors from Berlin, Tokyo, Westchester, and New Jersey's suburbs. Samuel R. Delany sees a disappearance not only of the old Times Square, but of the complex social relationships that developed there: the points of contact between people of different classes and races in a public space. In *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue*, Delany tackles the question of why public restrooms, peepshows, and tree-filled parks are necessary to a city's physical and psychological landscape. He argues that starting in 1985, New York City criminalized peep shows and sex movie houses to clear the way for the rebuilding of Times Square. Delany's critique reveals how Times Square is being "renovated" behind the scrim of public safety while the stage is occupied by gentrification. *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue* paints a portrait of a society dismantling the institutions that promote communication between classes, and disguising its fears of cross-class contact as "family values." Unless we overcome our fears and claim our "community of contact," it is a picture that will be replayed in cities across America.

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Customer Reviews

An award-winning science fiction writer, esteemed professor of comparative literature at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and celebrated essayist and memoirist, Samuel Delany is one of America's keenest observers. He was also a longtime habituÃ© of many of the sex theaters in New York City's Times Square, spending, by his own estimate, "thousands and thousands of hours" at the Capri, Variety Photoplays, the Eros, and the Venus. In the 1990s all of these theaters were shut down through new restrictive zoning laws, part of a combined effort by the Walt Disney Corporation and the administration of Mayor Rudy Giuliani to gentrify the area, replacing these seedily memorable institutions with antiseptic, innocuous architectural and cultural creations in the name of health safety. But as Delany reveals in his new book, *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue*, the decision to clean up Times Square had little to do with public health, and everything to do with corporate greed. In the two essays that comprise this eloquent, provocative book, Delany grieves for the loss of this strip of sexual release. Though he is careful not to romanticize or sentimentalize the peep shows and porn theaters, he does illuminate the way in which these venues crossed class, racial, and sexual orientation lines, providing a delightfully subversive utopia--and a microcosm of New York life. In the first essay, "Times Square Blue," Delany details his shared erotic and conversational encounters with working-class and homeless men in the theaters (which primarily showed straight porn films) and the genuine friendships that resulted; these immensely personal reminiscences also provide a social history of late-20th-century Times Square. Drawing on historical and theoretical resources in the second essay, "Three, Two, One, Contact: Times Square Red," Delany next builds a thoughtful and passionate argument against the gentrification of the area and the classist, characterless direction in which he sees New York heading. Read together, the essays of *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue* are both heartfelt homage to a beloved city and lament for a quirky vitality increasingly phased out by encroaching capitalism. --Kera Bolonik --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In a provocative and persuasively argued *cri de coeur* against New York City's gentrification and the redevelopment of Times Square in the name of "family values and safety," acclaimed science fiction writer Delany (Dhalgren, etc.) proves himself a dazzlingly eloquent and original social commentator. In the first of two radically distinct but related essays, Delany, an Amherst college professor and native of Manhattan, writes frankly about his gay sexual adventures in the peep shows, porno movie houses and bars of Times Square. This personal history is juxtaposed with a detailed record of how the city's red light zones have changed over the past 40 years. The companion essay movingly

details Delany's sociological and anthropological observations of the men who live, work and socialize in the area, and extols the virtues of a society that not only tolerates but values a public sexual culture. Drawing upon a wide range of historical and theoretical materials, the history of the pornographic film, Jane Jacobs's *Death and Life of Great American Cities* and Supreme Court discussions about homosexual activity, Delany makes the case that because urban areas like Times Square promote relationships across class boundaries, they are not a blight but foster an environment of safety, empathy and social coherence. In his most dramatic argument, Delany charges that, despite City Hall rhetoric, Times Square's "Disneyfication" is not about public morality, safety or health but simply serves corporate and private economic interests. This bracing and well-calibrated blend of journalism, personal history and cultural criticism will challenge readers of every persuasion. (July) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Samuel Delany is best known as the author of science fiction novels such as *Dhalgren*. He is also the author of a brilliant memoir, *The Motion of Light in Water*. This book is ostensibly about the transformation of Times Square but it's also an extension and updating of Delany's memoir. Delany is not a disinterested observer. He's a participant in the activities he describes. That gives the book a power it would otherwise lack. Delany's focus is narrow. He is not writing so much about Times Square as he is about what I'll call "Porn World". That is the pornographic movie theaters, sex emporiums and bars that served the patrons of these places. The HQ of this Porn World is Times Square but its substation was around 3rd Ave and 14th St. (If you never saw it in the flesh, you may have seen it in *Taxi Driver*). Delany, a brilliant highly educated intellectual, apparently loved these places. They were always doomed. There was no way the powers that be were going to allow Times Square a transportation hub and the nation's premiere theater district to forever remain the domain of Jack the Stripper and Teenage Nurses. As for 14th St, once the East Village became hip and trendy and NYU needed land, that was it for the unusual forms of entertainment that thrived on the east side (along with a very low life drug culture). The book is made up of two essays. I enjoyed the first one more. It's basically a collection of musings and observations, usually interesting, sometimes funny. The second essay put me off at first. It is "theoretical". However I had a slightly revelatory experience after I started reading it. I was looking at *THE SPECTATOR* and I came across an article where the author talked about meeting a former manager of Roxy Music and later one of the Sex Pistols through drinking in pubs. I said to myself, an example of contact rather than networking. In other words I picked up on a key concept from Delany and used it without even thinking about it. So

what at first stuck me as an utterly abstruse essay turned out to be analytically useful. You could probably dismiss Delany as crazed and weird and maybe you'd be right but mixed in with the craziness is considerable wisdom.

It seems like a lifetime ago, but before there was a Duane Reade, Starbucks, and TD Bank on every street corner, New York was a different place. Working class people could afford to live in the Village, Chelsea, and Hell's Kitchen or Clinton. Your neighbors were not all bland finance types who went to Wharton (I went to Penn, and I feel this way). Native New Yorkers actually worked waiter jobs and tended bar! New York was filled with rough and tumble guys who spoke English with non-Rhotic accents, lived in Single Room Occupancy houses, and those people rubbed elbows with college educated residents of the Upper West and East sides. There was a gritty-ness to the urban feel of New York street life, which now only exists in fleeting pockets, and is quickly being supplanted by the shining marble lobbies and spotless glass vitrines of LEED-certified office towers and luxury condos. Did I mention the Starbucks on every corner? In the 1990s a short-lived Disney Store opened on 42nd street next to the Disney renovated Amsterdam Theater. The efforts to "clean up" Times Square came to be known (perhaps unfairly) as the Disney-fication of the district, but Sam (Chip) Delany chronicles in time capsule-like fashion the lost micro-culture that was displaced in the process. 42nd street or the "Deuce" as it was called, was populated by a heterogenous intersection of rich, poor, white, black, able-bodied, and disabled who partook in the subversive sub-culture of adult movie houses and peep shows. Chip successfully shows how the mixing of the classes in the underground gay sex cruising, straight prostitution, and sundry commerce that took place on the Deuce, brought together New Yorkers from different walks of life, thus serving a civic function. The book offers tremendous insight into the changes that led to the demise of the Deuce: Real estate prices, suburban growth, home video, the crack and HIV epidemics and perhaps more significantly, the righteous panics they induced. This book is must reading for any urban planners, architects, social historians or young New Yorkers, interested in understanding what New York was like only a few years ago.

Delany manages to weave together the genres of personal memoir and political essay in both "Times Square Red" and "Times Square Blue," two pieces of writing that together offer a unique and compelling dialogue on the sexual culture of New York in the Times Square area before its gentrification. The material gets explicit about Delany's sexual encounters, so be prepared to read some graphically described scenes.

Could have done with more stories and less whatever the 2nd half of the book is about. Very dry and uninteresting, left me cold after the reading enjoyment the first part gave me. A very thin book, 1/3 of which can be recommended not a good bargain for me.

Chip Delany, the writer/critic with the eight-inch... beard, has done it again. Two books in one, and both will give you lots to think about. The first ("warm") half is an account of the now-vanished culture of random sexual encounters that once flourished in the Times Square area, especially in the porno theaters: alternately funny and tragic, and quite authentic, as I can attest from my own visits to the Adonis in ancient times. The second ("cool") half is (indirectly) on the same subject: it's an essay dealing with the difference between "contact" and "networking" (I won't try to explain... read the book). Even though it never mentions the Internet by name, it says a lot about what the Internet is about, and what it's doing to us.

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