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**Review of *Out in the Union: A Labor History of Queer America*.  
Miriam Frank. Reviewed by Ann S. Holder.**

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force in making arrests and engage in racially discriminatory stop-and-frisk practices. Oberfield's research suggests that the key to reducing abusive police behavior is likely to be the recruitment of much more diverse police recruits.

It should be noted that the research focused on the views and values of its informants, not on behaviors. As with any case study, generalization of results is limited. Its two-year time period is too short to address long-run questions. Originally a dissertation, it is destined to appeal primarily to scholars and practitioners of public administration. Nevertheless, with its careful, multimethod research and thoughtful analysis, interested readers will glean many insights into the worldviews of welfare caseworkers and police officers. *Becoming Bureaucrats* is a worthy addition to the literature on front-line public servants pioneered by Michael Lipsky's classic *Street-Level Bureaucrats*.

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Miriam Frank, *Out in the Union: A Labor History of Queer America*. (2014). Temple University Press. \$54.50 (hardcover), \$29.95 (paperback), 240 pages.

At a time when ally-ship has again become an intense focus of left protest and strategy, Frank's *Out in the Union: A Labor History of Queer America* explores an understudied and complex arena of coalition politics: the contingent, uneasy alliances between LGBT culture and politics and labor activism. Frank provides a rich case study of "surprising, but not impossible" political intersections that were always embattled. As Joni Christian, one of the book's many narrators, explained about her experience with union co-workers at an Ohio GM plant in the mid-1970s during her gender transition, "We didn't have to like each other, but we learned to live together."

The book chronicles the remarkable story of LGBT labor history from 1965-2013. Five chapters are divided into three sections: "Coming Out," "Coalition Politics" and "Conflict and Transformation." This thematic organization allows Frank to break with standard chronology and capture key moments of a relationship that shifts across time, place, union, local and

organizing campaigns. It also places the narrative against the complex backdrop of national economic devolution from a post-WWII apogee to a 21st century crisis, the drop in union membership from roughly one-third of the workforce in the late 1950s to just above 11%, and a queer politics that evolved from confronting the terror of exposure to an embrace of gay marriage by a sitting President. This is a lot of ground to cover, and that ambition constitutes the stunning success and the lingering unease that emerges from Frank's provocative work.

*Out in the Union* does a number of things very well. Frank has written a page-turner, filled with first-hand accounts and retrospective musings by those who took the risks and made gay/labor coalitions come alive. Frank gives space to the words of activists recalling the complications of social, personal and political identities that did not easily mesh, and of unexpected solidarities across lines of race, gender and sexual difference. Frank foregrounds women and gender trouble-makers in the story of queer labor. Lesbians emerge with courage and confidence. She has also fleshed out historian Allan Bérubé's concept of "queer work," by looking at the interaction of labor activism with the lives of people whose sexuality added both danger and allure to unconventional workplaces—service work for men, tough physical work for women.

For those who lived these decades, the pivotal events that shaped the modern labor and LGBT movements will be familiar: the Coors boycott, Save Our Children, the Briggs initiative, the eruption and impact of AIDS, the effort to organize 'gay' workplaces, the founding of gay and lesbian labor networks, the emergence of radically queer activism, union insurgency and reorganization, and the mainstreaming and institutionalization of LGBT politics. But for those unfamiliar with the political history of these four decades, the absence of a strong embedded chronology and the very mobility and scope of the narrative threaten to blur some of the crucial lessons the book so richly offers.

The heart of the book centers on the 'out' labor activism that transformed union organizing and LGBT politics between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s, particularly on the urban coasts. Labor insurgencies, the confluence of seasoned activists and a new generation that drew on powerful and

emergent forms of identity solidarity challenged the consolidation of global capitalist production at the turn of the 20th century. Success required a cross-class, multiracial and multi-ethnic social movement that was imagined but had not yet materialized. For queer labor activism, organizing was hampered by the limits of both traditional and reform unionism and the increasingly identitarian, individualist and consumerist mode of LGBT politics.

The gay and lesbian 'labor-nineties' was an important, powerful moment that had an outsized impact reshaping the labor movement. Frank's work breaks new ground in this regard, but she fails to place it explicitly at the center of her narrative. The interviews from the nineties are merged with thematic convergences from the '70s onward. The LGBT movement too often comes across as a fledgling political entity, while mainstream labor seems like an organizational behemoth. The internal transformation of labor signaled by *Pride at Work* should have been the culminating moment, especially given the temporal focus of Frank's research. Instead, the epilogue heralds New York State's passage of gay marriage, a 'win' that obfuscates the significance of queer unionism.

Still, Frank's text at its most powerful reveals lesbians, gay men and 'gender queers' who largely made their mark through upholding the interests of the rank and file against labor elites and contrary to the gay establishment. Their staunchest allies were other principled unionists and radical activists, regardless of sexuality. That legacy has driven recent union moves toward expansive notions of class-based solidarities, including previously unorganized constituencies: undocumented workers, seasonal agricultural employees, domestic workers and the growing caregiving sector, fast-food workers, back-of-the-house restaurant employees and casual, part-time or contingent labor. These workers have demonstrated the courage and confidence of earlier generations of lesbians and gay men, despite, or perhaps because of, their distance from traditional unionism and conventional forms of U.S. identity politics.

Workers marginalized (and motivated) by differences of culture, class and citizenship may offer the next best hope for multiplying the political solidarities and the transnational

forms of democracy necessary to roll back the losses of the last three decades. How will these unlikely comrades come to recognize each other, and be seen by a labor movement? *Out in the Union* contains the seeds of that answer.

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