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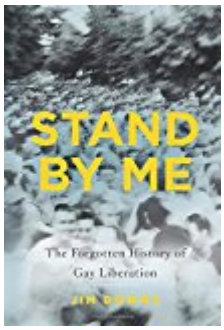
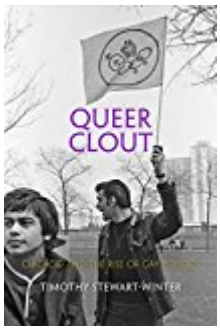


Jim Downs. *Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation.* New York: Basic Books, 2016. 272 pp. $27.99, cloth, ISBN 978-0-465-03270-9.



Timothy Stewart-Winter. *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics.* Politics and Culture in Modern America Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. 320 pp. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8122-4791-6.

Reviewed by Emily Hobson

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Commissioned by Zachary J. Lechner (Centenary College of Louisiana)

Over the past several years, historians have turned increasing attention to the queer past, to the 1970s and 1980s, and to the interaction between social movements previously imagined to stand at odds. Timothy Stewart-Winter and Jim Downs shed light on these topics through two very different books: the first a richly archival piece of scholarship, the second an uneven synthesis.

In *Queer Clout*, Stewart-Winter explains how gay and lesbian people—principally, though not exclusively, gay white men—won power in Chicago by organizing a voting bloc within its political "machine." Moving from the 1960s through the 1990s, Stewart-Winter argues that gay activists won "clout" by joining "progressive, black-led electoral coalitions" initially forged against shared experiences of police brutality (p. 2). Such alliances "ultimately foundered" as policing became harsher in black neighborhoods but eased in white gay enclaves, and as urban government shrank and segregation increased (p. 3). Stewart-Winter holds that black-gay alliances "clarify the gay movement's radical roots" (p. 89). He describes Chicago as a leader and exemplar of these alliances and offers compelling evidence of how they were realized in both word and deed. Equally clearly, he states that contemporary LGBT gains

in electoral politics have been won amid "neoliberalism and budgetary austerity" (p. 9).

Against dominant narratives of LGBTQ history, Stewart-Winter argues that the central cleavage in Chicago gay activism occurred not between the homophile and gay liberation eras (that is, in the 1960s), but two decades later as the focus on policing gave way to AIDS. This shift was also driven by geography, as the 1970s redevelopment of the Near North Side grounded a privileged gay "establishment" that assimilated itself into the Daley-style "machine."

Importantly, Stewart-Winter tracks continuity as interwoven with change: while his early examples center on multi-issue radicalism, he argues that later and more single-issue gay politics also drew a model from black liberalism. When analyzing the 1960s, he shows that black activism held the single greatest influence on the early Chicago gay movement, and that gay liberationists were radicalized by police violence at the 1968 Democratic Convention and the police murders of Black Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. He further highlights the police killing of James Clay Jr., a black gay man whose death inspired the creation of the Transvestites Legal Committee and the people of color group Third World Gay Revolution. By the early 1970s, a significant strand of gay activism moved in a more moderate direction toward electoral power; this organizing also modeled itself on black and other "ethnic" mobilization, but was more likely to pose black and gay communities as distinct rather than overlapping. Clifford Kelley, a straight black alderman, became a significant supporter of gay rights in the 1970s, and by the 1980s the black-gay coalition "achieved a greater degree of political integration than ever before" through Harold Washington's successful mayoral campaign (p. 153). Chicago police stopped raiding gay bars and the city finally passed a gay rights ordinance in 1988. These shifts cemented "queer clout," but did so at precisely the time that AIDS "brought into stark relief the class and racial divisions in gay politics that had been slowly emerging" (p. 186). By the 1990s, openly gay candidates won office in Chicago, but most were white men and none explicitly prioritized racial justice or anti-poverty work, and the self-declared "gay vote" shifted from supporting black candidates to backing Richard M. Daley.

Queer Clout is an excellent book—compellingly written, clearly argued, and deeply researched. It powerfully undercuts the tired trope of black homophobia and uses moving, striking anecdotes to illustrate its analysis of political relationships and political geography. The book's main limitation lies in its assumption that electoral power stood as the central pole around which gay political culture was organized after the 1960s. Many gay and lesbian activists saw different avenues for change, including countercultural living, publications, street protest, and the arts. Acknowledging how electoral power both differed from and interacted with these forms of politics might have allowed Stewart-Winter to lend sustained attention to gay and lesbian activists of color and to cast a more critical light on the racial and class limitations of "queer clout."

Downs's ***Stand By Me*** engages such broader political culture, but with mixed results. Concentrating on the 1970s United States (with glancing attention to Canada), Downs challenges what he believes to be the dominant image of gay male life in the era: "the 1970s was more than a night at the bathhouse" (p. 6). He ignores another and even more common narrative of the 1970s—the one that Stewart-Winter so usefully complicates, the rise of liberal gay rights. Although focused on radicalism, Downs entirely ignores the question of liberal-left divides. He instead sets as his straw man the 2005 documentary ***Gay Sex in the 70s***, a film whose squeamish portrait can hardly be overturned by making the topic of sex off limits. Indeed, by refusing to consider how nights at the bathhouse (or bar, newspaper collective, or com-

mune) transformed sexuality, Downs naturalizes a binary between gay sex and gay culture.

The strength of ***Stand by Me*** is its structure, through which Downs highlights central but under-examined dimensions of the gay 1970s. The book moves across disparate settings, beginning with the arson fire at the New Orleans gay bar, the Upstairs Lounge, on June 24, 1973, then moving on to gay churches, New York City's Oscar Wilde Bookshop, Jonathan Ned Katz's ***Gay American History*** (1976), gay newspapers including ***Body Politic***, and gay poetry and prisoner activism, before concluding with a chapter on ideals of the body.

Downs uses his account of the Upstairs Lounge fire to frame the necessity of gay liberation. In addition to offering stark evidence of vulnerability and risk, this chapter shows how gay bars facilitated activism and camaraderie—though Downs insistently frames such bonds against, rather than potentially through, casual sex. This chapter also bridges to Downs's discussion of religious life, which details both work to shift mainline churches and the creation of gay institutions, including the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC).

Downs is at his strongest when analyzing Craig Rodwell's Oscar Wilde Bookshop and Katz. His discussion of Rodwell provides useful evidence of gay liberationist engagement with civil rights and Black Power, and offers the book's most complex acknowledgment of sexuality by noting that Rodwell both celebrated cruising and refused to stock porn. Downs builds on his discussion of the bookstore's social and intellectual world to analyze Katz's ***Gay American History***, first staged as a play in 1972 and published as a book in 1976. Like Rodwell, Katz drew lessons from African American and German history to theorize the gay past, and he further came to understand gay history through a Marxist lens. Sadly, Downs fails to acknowledge Katz and other gay Marxists' entrenchment in socialist-feminism. This inhibits his understanding of how gay radicals used Marxist thought to imagine sexual liberation and how many gay men formed deep ties with lesbians and other women. The same mistakes mar his discussion of the scandal surrounding ***Body Politic***'s 1978 publication of an essay backing pederasty and pedophilia. One of the many reasons debates over this essay were volatile was that gay men and lesbians struggled over it, both together and apart, in ways influenced by their friendships and their shared feminist analyses. Here as elsewhere in the book, Downs limits his worthwhile focus on gay men by imagining them as operating in a vacuum.

In his penultimate chapter, Downs addresses two little-known aspects of gay liberation—gay poetry and gay prisoner activism—linking the two by focusing on poetry by prisoners. This is an exciting approach, but would have been strengthened by greater attention to activists' response to racism and state repression, as previously analyzed by Regina Kunzel and others. Downs concludes with a chapter on the ascendancy of the "clone," a masculinist ideal of the white and muscular body that became popular at the end of the 1970s and which he contrasts with activism by gay men of color. As this is the only section where Downs centers people of color, the chapter has the effect of defining people of color identities only against gay whiteness. This diminishes recognition of the "Third World" gay world that black, Latina/o, Asian, and Native activists built simultaneously with but independently from white women and men.

Stand By Me offers multiple anecdotes of the richness of 1970s gay life, but is ultimately flawed by a limited engagement with LGBTQ history as a field. Downs reveals gaps in his knowledge at multiple points, for example, when he fails to note the 1960s Council on Religion and the Homosexual (previously analyzed by Nan Alamilla Boyd), or when he inaccurately describes the Gay Latino Alliance as national rather than local to the Bay

Area (as detailed by the late Horacio N. Roque Ramírez). His claim that gay liberation collapsed at the end of the 1970s rings hollow when placed alongside a host of evidence from the following decade, including the widespread entry of gay men and lesbians into anti-nuclear and Central American solidarity work, the contributions of women of color feminism, and liberationist responses to AIDS.

Taken together, Stewart-Winter and Downs offer a compelling new investigation of recent LGBTQ history and postwar US politics. Stewart-Winter offers a sophisticated, engagingly written account of the development of gay electoral power and its formative ties to black urban politics. Downs offers many intriguing examples of the breadth of gay liberation, but leaves deeper investigations of the era's political and sexual cultures to other scholars.

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