

Awakening: How Gays and Lesbians Brought Marriage Equality to America

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those interested in the practice of place, a deeper understanding of how to “figure out where I am” and what it means to “inhabit” a place in addition to the chronicles of Root’s attentive hikes, engaging as they are, would have been welcome.

Awakening: How Gays and Lesbians Brought Marriage Equality to America, by Nathaniel Frank. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017. xii, 441 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$35.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Christopher Hommerding is an independent scholar. His article, “‘As Gay as Any Gypsy Caravan’: Grant Wood and the Queer Pastoral at the Stone City Art Colony” appeared in the *Annals of Iowa* (2015).

Nathaniel Frank’s *Awakening* adds an interesting perspective to the growing body of work on the gay marriage movement in the United States. Frank sets out to tell the story of the fight for marriage equality from within the LGBTQ movement, arguing that “divisions within what we now call the LGBTQ movement shaped the quest for same-sex marriage as much as, if not more than, clashes with social conservatives” (2). Using organizational documents, activist interviews, and personal recollections, Frank shows how intramovement politics shaped the speed, trajectory, and overall strategy of the fight for marriage equality.

In the first part of the text, Frank examines the broader sweep of twentieth-century LGBTQ history, showing how, in the 1970s and 1980s, battles over sodomy laws and protections for people living with HIV and AIDS meant that the LGBTQ movement, which was largely not interested in marriage, began to shift from a negative view of the state to a positive one—that is, from a desire to push the government out of LGBTQ lives to a request for protection, aid, and recognition from government entities. This, Frank suggests, established a legal infrastructure for the movement, including the formation of national LGBTQ organizations like Lambda Legal (1973), the Human Rights Campaign Fund (1980, later the Human Rights Campaign), and the Gay Rights Litigators’ Roundtable (1985).

The Roundtable is of particular interest to Frank, as its collection of lawyers represent for him the nucleus of what became the marriage equality movement. The remainder of the book explores the interplay between these lawyers and individuals he refers to as “accidental activists” — those who, starting with Hawaii in 1991, took legal action against the advice of movement lawyers and/or otherwise pressured the Roundtable and other organizations into action. In contrast to accidental activists, who often filed federal cases or advocated for immediate change, the Roundtable was skeptical of prioritizing the fight for marriage equality

and generally advocated an incremental approach. Shaped by federal-level defeats in the 1980s and fear of conservative backlash, the Roundtable's "brick-by-brick" strategy eschewed federal cases and worked, instead, to slowly and deliberately bring gay marriage to key states. For Frank, the push-and-pull between movement lawyers and accidental activists was the key dynamic that "awakened" the LGBTQ movement, convincing movement leaders of the importance of prioritizing marriage.

Readers interested in Iowa's role in these dynamics might be disappointed to find that the events surrounding the 2009 Iowa Supreme Court case that brought same-sex marriage to the state garners only two of 368 pages. This brief treatment is likely because Iowa was not a state where accidental activists forced the hand of the movement lawyers. Instead, Iowa was hand-picked in 2005 by Roundtable lawyers with the goal of sending "a powerful message that marriage equality could be embraced in the heartland" (210). The state was chosen as the midwestern vanguard because it leaned left and, at the time, had a solidly Democrat-controlled legislature that would prevent an immediate conservative backlash and a state constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage.

Frank's perspective adds to the growing literature on the marriage equality movement, but his extremely narrow definition of "the movement" is troubling. By limiting his definition of the movement to a small group of well-funded, professionally run organizations, Frank erases a large swath of the broader LGBTQ movement. As a result, we primarily see and hear the voices of privileged, coastal, white, and lesbian and gay activists—the "L" and the "G." Bisexual and transgender individuals are largely absent from the text, as are people of color, except where Frank problematically conflates the marriage equality movement and the African American civil rights movement. Indeed, one of the great shortcomings of the book is its lack of analysis of race and class. Additionally, Frank omits a very vocal segment of the broader movement: those who thought that focusing so heavily on marriage was a mistake. He praises, for example, the work of pro-marriage gay conservatives like Andrew Sullivan but ignores LGBTQ individuals like Michelangelo Signorile and Michael Warner who were in direct, and very public, debate with Sullivan.

Readers looking for a triumphalist narrative of the marriage equality movement will thoroughly enjoy this book. Those in search of insight into the political and legal machinations of the marriage movement will find plenty of value in the unique perspective Frank offers. However, those looking for a truly movement-wide history, fully addressing why marriage became *the* privileged campaign, will be left frustrated by this otherwise intriguing book.