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## Review of *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics*

Michael Diambri  
*Pacific Lutheran University*

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Stewart-Winter, Timothy. *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0812247916

*Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* by Timothy Stewart-Winter is an invigorating history of how queer people developed political power in post-WWII America. Using Chicago as his case study, Stewart-Winter traces how the city's queer community managed to move "from the closet to the corridors of power" (1). While tracing LGBTQ+ people's political significance in Chicago, Stewart-Winter argues that the queer community mobilized to gain political influence in response to police brutality, economic discrimination, and social prejudice. To gain power, gay and lesbian people consciously chose to draw upon other social justice movements. Stewart-Winter credits anti-racist movements—mostly developed within the African American community—as a strong influence on queer activism. *Queer Clout* thus forwards that Chicago's gay rights movement both focused on ending discriminations unique to queer people and developed connections to post-WWII identity-based movements.

Stewart-Winter, who earned a Ph.D. in History from the University of Chicago, believes Chicago offers a case study in which local leaders and civic institutions casually and self-righteously perpetuated discrimination against lesbian and gay people. Additionally, the author believes that queer people, especially men, resisted that discrimination for over fifty years and eventually gained significant local influence. *Queer Clout* also introduces readers of history to an LGBTQ+ narrative that is distinctively shaped by Chicago's local politics as much as it is by activism in the queer meccas of San Francisco and New York. Known for its racial segregation, class division, and machine politics, Chicago presented distinctive challenges to its queer community.

Studying Chicago's queer politics thus adds to our understanding of the richness and complexity of queer activism.

A central goal of Stewart-Winter's book is to track how, "gay politics developed in relation to key moments in the life of local politics" (11). From the shame and deviance associated with same-sex attraction in the 1950s to the first same-sex marriage license issued in Chicago, each chapter follows the rise of gay political power, or *clout*, in Chicago. The first three chapters trace the homophile movement's creation in the face of repression and intense anti-queer discrimination, including bar raids, job-discrimination, and bigoted treatment from the media and public, from 1945 to the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago. In this period, Stewart-Winter argues, police brutality and anti-gay prejudice pushed the queer community to use local politics to instigate change. And "their eventual victory over police harassment, secured by allying with other urban residents who were policed with similar vigor, especially African Americans, was the prerequisite for later triumphs" (1). Chapters four through six posit that the 1968 Democratic National Convention (DNC) was a shifting point in queer politics and trace the revolutionary actions of queer people that built greater political prominence in the 1970s-80s. Stewart-Winter then devotes a chapter to the HIV/AIDS crisis and its subsequent political convalescence—which in turn led to greater visibility. He explains how the queer community's tendency to live in specific neighborhoods led to developing a "gay vote" in certain (mostly white) parts of North Chicago. The final chapter chronicles gay economic influence in the wake of the AIDS crisis—and how the LGBTQ+ community in Illinois helped further Barrack Obama's political career.

In the 1950s, most Christian Americans idealized the reproductive family and vehemently rejected same-sex attraction. This filtered throughout society as the norm. “Sexual deviants” were considered potential sexual predators and communists. However, as queer people began to flood into the cities and create clandestine gay enclaves in the 1950s, some launched tiny, fragile organizations aimed at improving the public’s perception of their community. Although these organizations were short-lived, they helped launch America’s homophile movement, enhancing the prevalence of gay and lesbian people in cities. Unfortunately, as most Americans continued to embrace anti-gay discrimination, taking part in the homophile movement, like joining Chicago’s chapter of the Mattachine Society, was dangerous and difficult. Stewart-Winter identifies the most prominent form of discrimination in the 1950s and 1960s as police harassment—especially in brutal and humiliating raids that police conducted on gay-affiliated establishments like bars.

One manner of endangering gay people after bar raids was the publishing of the names of individuals arrested during the raids—this both endangered them physically and often led to individuals being fired. In *Queer Clout*, Stewart-Winter brilliantly reconstructs specific bar raids. He showcases the infamous Fun Lounge bar raid of April, 1964, when “six women and 103 men” were arrested and almost every individual’s “name, age, home address, and occupation” appeared in the *Chicago Daily News* (53). Throughout the 1960s as more individuals were “outed” they could no longer deny their sexuality publicly in the face of persecution. Stewart-Winter asserts that police and media “outings” ushered in a more militant phase of the city’s gay-rights movement (70). As more people lost the safety of the closet, Mattachine Midwest changed

their philosophy and implored queer people to take necessary risks to gain rights and defend their community.

By 1968, around the time of the DNC, police raids and harassment—and outing—became too intense for the queer community to remain silent much longer. Stewart-Winter argues that key members of the queer community in Chicago took a revolutionary turn and used local politics to combat discrimination. He thus shifts focus from the 1969 Stonewall Riots—often misinterpreted as launching the Gay Revolution—to the unique urban revolution in Chicago.

Following the revolution beginning in 1968, Stewart-Winter renders the 1970s as a transformative time for lesbian, gay, and bisexual citizens, asserting that one symbolic embodiment of progress was the gay-pride marches. “By marching publicly and proudly, queer Chicagoans pressed at the boundaries of the closet and staked a claim to city streets,” especially in North Side wards which became inextricably linked to the gay community in the minds of politicians (95). Queers in the public sphere opposed nationwide anti-gay discrimination while radically demanding rights. New gay liberation organizations formed rapidly and were more stable and long-lasting than their 1950s counterparts.

Gaining power, gay-liberationists facilitated notable progress during the 1970s. For instance, bar raids occurred less frequently until they dissipated altogether, and attempts to were made to pass a “homosexual” bill of rights. Progress was made through the help of the city’s African American aldermen. Yet, as gay liberationists utilized black political leaders and modeled their activism after Civil Rights leaders they were in a sense exploiting black leadership as they

consequently did little to challenge Chicago's racism. Understandably, critiques from queer African American and lesbian feminists, highlighting the white, androcentric, locational, and class biases of the movement, became more prevalent.

In the 1980s the queer community faced a major roadblock in their quest for clout and social change: the AIDS crisis. As over one-third of the Chicagoans diagnosed with the disease died, the stigmatization associated with HIV/AIDS hindered the public's perception of gays as healthy and valuable citizens. As Stewart-Winter states, "For the first fifteen years of the epidemic, before protease inhibitors became available in 1996, AIDS meant large groups of people getting sick and dying" (188). Moreover, negative opinions of queer-people spewed the by Reagan Administration's hate-fueled rhetoric empowered anti-queer backlash. Moreover, the crisis further stratified the distance between white gays on the North Side and queer people of color generally living on the South Side. The latter usually had less access to health care, less financial stability, and faced both racial and sexual discrimination. Regardless, queer activists mobilized to fundraise huge amounts of money to sponsor AIDS research and support their community. Likewise, greater acceptance of queer people grew as more "came out," especially among artists, scholars, liberal politicians, and in many businesses. AIDS activism thus also emerged as a new form of social critique as gay people and newly acquired allies mobilized at rapid rates and demanded equality and justice.

In the wake of the AIDS crisis, Stewart-Winter argues, "gay men would reach the apex of their political power" (206). With fundraising skills developed during the epidemic, and with greater economic and social influence over the city, white gay men emerged as an interest group

respected by Chicago's political elite. Thus, in the late 1990s and early 21st century, Chicago's Democratic Party began to incorporate gay-rights issues into their platform.

Moving forward, gay and lesbian leaders (most of them white and middle-class) shifted toward conservative approaches to secure rights for their community. During this period, some gays and lesbians held political office for the first time in the city's history. However, under their more conservative leadership, "white gay elected officials... frequently responded to antigay violence by advocating intensified policing," which startled queers of color who often faced abuse from police because of their race, sexual, and gender identities (210). Queers of color understandably accused white, gay, and mostly-male, political elites of becoming complacent cogs in Chicago's political machine. Thus, role queers of color played in the gay community became more important than ever. Not only did they often criticize gay-rights leaders who embraced neoliberal values, they also continually pushed for greater attention to racism, classism, and sexism.

The final chapter of *Queer Clout* details the economic and political influence gays and lesbians hold over contemporary Chicago. Having identified the first gay men elected as aldermen, Stewart-Winters also highlights "Chicago's first out lesbian alderman, Deb Mill," elected in 2013 (225). He concludes with an intersectional story of gay-rights: the story of America's first black president. During Barack Obama's 2004 senatorial campaign the gay-community had high hopes for this young, promising politician. In the 1990s Obama favored legalizing same-sex marriage and supported AIDS research. During Obama's initial campaign for State Senate, he knew that "cultivating gay donors was an important element" to winning the election (229). Eventually Obama went on to win the presidential election in 2008 with overwhelming

contributions from the gay community. Thus, many in the LGBTQ+ community expected an ally in the Oval Office. However, Obama backed away from marriage equality, instead shifting to a moderate and gradual approach toward creating progress for the queer community. Nevertheless, as Obama shifted his opinions back towards favoring marriage equality he earned the trust while also recognizing the influence of many LGBTQ+ individuals. Stewart-Winter believes this example to be the perfect symbol of queer clout (231).

*Queer Clout* shows a stellar dedication to archival research and engagement with primary sources. Stewart-Winter draws upon photographs, newspapers, magazine articles, public documents and more to support his arguments. Furthermore, the archival materials tell a unique and diverse story, one that expresses the complexities of class, race, place, and sexuality in Chicago's queer history. Likewise, Stewart-Winter valuably draws on oral histories compiled by others and himself. And he synthesizes his findings with those of other prominent scholars, including Cathy J. Cohen, Margot Canaday, Robert Self, and Regina Kunzel.

Regardless of its many strengths, *Queer Clout* has a few shortcomings. The book still exists in *black and white* and *female and male* binaries, giving scant attention to other queers of color such as Latinx or Asian Americans—potentially leading readers to miss the significant role these groups played in post-WWII America. Furthermore, *Queer Clout* tells the stories of lesbian women and gay men, yet almost completely ignoring the stories of transgender or bisexual individuals who also hold historical weight in the queer movement.

Regardless of these omissions, *Queer Clout* is a spectacular work in queer history. Stewart-Winter's book urges LGBTQ+ scholars to continue focusing on specific examples of building

queer community in contexts rife with other forms of discrimination and inequality. Queer activists worked with (or were themselves) feminists, civil rights activists, and others fighting to end bigotry in its various forms. Readers today can use this book to consider the historical importance of contemporary social justice movements like Black Lives Matter and grasp the importance of working side-by-side with all oppressed individuals to create political, economic, and social change.

Michael Diambri (Pacific Lutheran University)

#### About the author

Michael Diambri is a junior history major and literature minor at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. His research interests include LGBTQ+ history, friendship and family in American history, and the history of alcohol. Michael is Vice President of his school's chapter of Phi Alpha Theta, is involved in PLU's Queer/Allied Student Union, and works as an Admission Ambassador on campus.

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