

From Identity to Politics: The Lesbian and Gay Movements in the United States by Craig A. Rimmerman. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2002. 239 pp. Cloth, \$69.50; paper, \$19.95.

This book is a useful survey of the recent evolution of the lesbian and gay movement in the United States. It outlines the movement's three main approaches to political activism: electoralism and lobbying, litigation, and unconventional politics. It also contains a chapter on the Christian right as an opponent of the lesbian and gay rights movement in the United States. The main goal of the book is to evaluate the extent to which the movement's current strategies have advanced the position of lesbians and gay men in American political, social, and economic life. Rimmerman suggests that the top-down, elite-driven politics of lobbying, electoral politics, and litigation have had mixed success at best for the movement. He calls for lesbian and gay activists to focus on grassroots coalition building incorporating other issues such as class and race, which would move the movement beyond the simple identity politics of gay rights. This call from identity to politics anchors the analysis presented in the book.

Rimmerman surveys the main theoretical approaches to interest group and social movement politics including pluralism, resource mobilization, the political process model, and new social movement theory. However, his goal is not to assess which of these perspectives is most analytically powerful for the analysis of the movement; rather, he is interested in the ideological and normative implications of these theories for lesbian and gay strategizing in the U.S. context. The chapter on electoral and interest group politics, for example, is organized around the concept of assimilation, referring to the risk of assimilation through participation in the mainstream politics. Rimmerman argues that mainstream strategies have not worked effectively for the lesbian and gay movement. He provides a number of important case studies of recent moments in lesbian and gay movement history such as AIDS organizing, the marriage litigation, and the ups and downs of the Clinton presidency. He also provides a very useful survey of the main lesbian and gay lobby and electoral organizations such as the National Lesbian and Gay Task Force and the Human Rights Campaign. In the end though, Rimmerman is pessimistic about the chances for political success of the movement. While he critiques mainstream approaches, his concluding chapter points out that there are many obstacles to grass-roots coalition politics as well.

Despite the strategic focus of the analysis, Rimmerman's book provides much fodder for theoretical analysis. For example, his analysis of the role of the courts emphasizes the impact of early court decisions on the political demands of the movement. The conduct/status distinction, which shapes lesbian and gay politics down to Clinton's "don't ask/don't tell" policy was refracted through the prism of legal decision making. Another example is the impact of consumerism on lesbian and gay politics, which reinforces the privatization of lesbian and gay

identities to the advantage of professionalized Washington-based lobby groups. However, Rimmerman's policy discussions around the assessment of the Clinton legacy might have been strengthened by more systemic attention to internal movement dynamics and community debates over policy directions and goals.

As a comparative politics of lesbian and gay movements emerges through national case studies such as this one, it is becoming clear that two main factors impede the movement's success, compared to similar cases: the strength, financing, and organization of the evangelical Christian movement and the relative permeability of American political institutions. These two factors have made the United States a relative laggard with regard to the recognition of lesbian and gay rights. In this challenging political context, Rimmerman rightly emphasizes the need for local organization to counter the well-financed evangelical movement. In his conclusion, he calls for the lesbian and gay movement to shift from interest group politics to a radical deepening of democratic citizenship. It remains to be seen if lesbian and gay activists will heed the call.

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