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Prologue

Love and Work and Queer Survival

This labor history of queer America begins with a tale of survival. In 1900, a thirteen-year-old girl was rescued from a hurricane that destroyed her hometown of Galveston, Texas, and wiped out her family. Dressed as a boy, the orphan took the name Bill and journeyed north, working at menial jobs along the way. By 1902, Bill was in St. Louis, employed at the American Rattan Works, making baskets and chairs. As told by the British sexologist Havelock Ellis, Bill associated “with fellow-workmen on a footing of masculine equality. . . . [S]he drank, she swore, she courted girls, she worked as hard as her fellows . . . and she did not flinch when the talk grew strong.”¹

Bill joined the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers as an apprentice, “wielding a hammer and driving in hot rivets.”² St. Louis was a major railroad hub; Bill was most likely initiated into Boilermakers Lodge 27, which represented the trade of locomotive engine repair. He was popular enough among his fellow workers to be elected secretary of the lodge and well-disguised enough to pass a doctor’s exam when he applied for insurance. Ellis brings Bill’s story to an abrupt end. In 1909, “in a moment of weakness, she admitted her sex and returned to the garments of womanhood.”³

Records of Lodge 27 (later Lodge 35) are scant and make no mention of Bill’s sojourn, but the story is believable.⁴ Before and after Bill, American women passed as men. Some did so to survive economically, or to study, or to participate in the military world; others wanted to live openly as husbands in lesbian relationships or to present the masculinity they felt in themselves.⁵ But the anecdote of Bill’s gamble is special: our first hint of any gender or sexual variance in the life of any American union member, let alone an elected official in the heavy metal workshops of the Boilermakers’ trade.

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A century later, transgender people are in the mix of sexual minorities at unionized workplaces. And some of them, along with gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, have come out in the union to make their place in labor's campaigns for economic justice. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) caucuses have formed coalitions to integrate civil rights into the constitutions of their national unions; LGBT activists have articulated winnable demands for local unions' collective bargaining agendas; and LGBT employees have led successful campaigns at their workplaces for collective bargaining rights.

Bill and his union brothers would be astonished to see any of this. In their day, unions were struggling for fair pay and an eight-hour limit to the workday. The eight-hour day and other standards for wages, hours, and working conditions endure as law. The hard fights today are the enforcement of those standards and the continuity of contractual gains that advance members' basic priorities.

The rights of transgender workers were first affirmed in labor agreements during the 1980s, in contracts negotiated by the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union with industrial laundries in New Jersey. The topic came up because a shop steward was harassed after returning to work from male-to-female surgery. She raised the issue with her union representative, Clayola Brown, who resolved the issue at the shop. The laundry contract cited sexual orientation in its antidiscrimination articles, but for Brown and the steward, that was not enough. They wanted explicit protections for transgender workers. In the next round of contract talks, labor and management agreed to add "change of sex" to the list of protected classes, a specific acknowledgment of transgender rights.⁶

The issue advanced in 1997 when employees of the Whitman-Walker clinic in Washington, DC, negotiated their second contract. The clinic specialized in AIDS-related services, and the staff union was affiliated with District 1199-E DC Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Some workers who were making the transition from male to female "wanted to wear skirts without supervisors threatening them," said Joe Izzo, a member of the negotiating committee. The five-year agreement was ratified with protection for "gender expression" in its equal rights articles.

In 2005, two unions went beyond discrimination and equal rights when they negotiated for transgender rights as economic topics. One of the unions was the Graduate Employees Organization (GEO) of the University of Michigan, founded in 1970 and affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) as Local 3550; the other was the union at Whitman-Walker. Both unions expanded health care coverage to all transition-related treatments and procedures, including sex-reassignment surgery. Whitman-Walker's unit of fewer than two hundred workers ratified transition-related coverage as an extension of rights that had been won in the previous contract of 1997. AFT Local 3550/GEO, a larger unit of 1,600, achieved antidiscrimination protections as well as transgender health coverage in one round.

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Three years earlier, GEO negotiators had focused on inequities in benefits and had demanded subsidies for child care to raise overall incomes of parents in low-wage jobs. The university affirmed the subsidies after a one-day walk-out that drew robust participation from the entire unit. In preparation for contract talks that would start up in 2004, the negotiating committee researched inequities in compensation across the university and found a wide range of unequal hours and rates of pay. Disproportionately clustered in the lowest-paid job classes were parents, international students, racial minorities, and sexual minorities.

Early in 2004, André Wilson, a former steward and a graduate student in architecture, traveled to San Francisco for sex-reassignment surgery. The health plan of his domestic partner had been covering hormonal treatments, but money for the operation had to come directly from his family. The release he experienced when the surgery was complete startled him to action. “It was suddenly clear to me that these procedures should be accessible to everyone who needs them,” he said. He returned to Ann Arbor with a new name, a new look, and a mission: to make comprehensive transgender health benefits a priority for GEO’s next contract.

“I went on strike in 2002 for members who needed child care,” said Wilson. “Now I wanted the union to stand for members who are transgender.” He discussed his ideas with the Negotiating Committee. “I wanted to bargain on gender identity and nondiscrimination as a matter of equal rights and equal access. Benefits are a mandatory subject in contract talks. I said we should propose a health plan with treatments and procedures necessary for the health and survival of people in transition.” The committee discussed how to develop a set of demands that would deflect contention among the unit’s diverse minorities. Wilson pointed out that transgender health benefits were likely to be cost-effective. “At the time, I was the only out trans- person in the union.” The committee decided to link transgender rights and benefits to the needs of GEO’s other constituencies and appointed Wilson to lead negotiations.⁷

Talks that began in November continued until March 25, when GEO walked out for one day and announced plans for a longer strike. Just short of the deadline, the university and the committee reached a settlement that was ratified early in April. The agreement included cost-of-living raises, improvements in dental benefits, equal protection for gender identity and gender expression, and coverage for sex-reassignment surgery.⁸

Bill the Boilermaker and André Wilson the college instructor: their identities as workers and as trade unionists are as different as how they lived their queerness. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Bill learned his craft and served his union, even as he attempted and accomplished, briefly, his own survival as a man. A century later, Wilson made his transition and then led negotiations for a contract that pledged protection for gender identity and expression and access to transgender-inclusive health benefits: explicit safeguards and supports for the lives of union members in transition.

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Since Bill's time, the labor movement has found its place in the economic and political life of the United States; the movement for LGBT rights is younger and less well established. But the two movements share an ethic. Throughout its history, the labor movement has accompanied its economic programs with the principles of solidarity, often expressed in the century-old motto "An injury to one is an injury to all." That call to political unity and human dignity is similarly essential to the modern movement for gay pride.

The Labor Movement and Gay Rights

Labor's interventions—organizing drives, strikes, political campaigns—have benefited the material welfare of an American working class that has always included lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. Landmark union battles during the first half of the twentieth century were sustained with the talent and support of queer workers in the ranks and queer volunteers in allied organizations.⁹ What they accomplished as trade unionists is part of labor's legacy, but the queer spheres of their lives exist only as fragments and guesses. Long years of truths untold have left little more to glean than anecdotes, episodes, and broken connections.

Some of those gaps have been examined by a new generation of scholars who have researched queer lives in working-class communities. They have documented the decades "before Stonewall" in terms of sexual behavior; romances; vice-related arrests; social connections in cafés, bars, parks, and other public meeting places; political groupings; and legal restrictions.¹⁰ But these histories make neither union participation nor life on the job their central subjects.

Allan Bérubé's historical studies have been the significant exception. His *Coming Out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* describes military workplaces and assignments of queer-seeming GIs and WACs to cross-gender jobs: men to clerical, medical, and chaplain's services; women to the motor vehicle corps.¹¹ Bérubé's next project, a history of the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union (MCS) of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), develops his insights about "queer work."¹² The MCS organized on the waterfronts of the West Coast among workers who served in dining rooms, galleys, and private living quarters of luxury cruise ships. The union welcomed black, white, Asian, and gay workers and encouraged their leadership. The MCS flourished from the late 1930s through the late 1940s. Refusals by officers to sign noncommunist affidavits required by the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 led to the union's expulsion from the CIO in 1949. The MCS held on for another five years and then disbanded.¹³

Red-baiting persisted as a common political practice during the 1950s, but the period was not uniformly repressive. Section 14(b) of Taft-Hartley weakened attempts by unions to recruit by permitting state legislatures to enact restrictions on organizing; however, in regions where "right-to-work" legislation did not prevail, peacetime industrial growth actually improved the climate

for organizing. In 1953, the economy was booming, and unions represented 32.5 percent of the U.S. workforce, a peak that gradually fell off to 28.5 percent during the next twenty years.¹⁴

Lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals sustained prejudice and persecution, too, but the dominant culture of sexual conformity could not inhibit all freedoms at all times. Queer subcultures survived and evolved, especially in large cities. Alfred Kinsey's best-selling *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953) enlightened a curious public about homosexuality and bisexuality, topics typically forbidden in conventional society.

Gay men in Los Angeles founded the Mattachine Society in 1951 and lesbians in San Francisco founded the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) in 1955. Both groups conducted business with stealth and pseudonyms, as was the custom of the time.¹⁵ Ambitions were big, beginnings modest; the Mattachine Society started as a discussion forum, and the Daughters of Bilitis as a social club. Working-class people participated in both groups, but little is known about their union affiliations. One of Mattachine's first branches in Southern California included a cluster of factory workers. As for DOB, programs and purposes shifted during its early period, though a core of blue-collar women remained loyal.¹⁶ Chapters of DOB and Mattachine formed in other cities, and monthly newsletters—the *Mattachine Review*, DOB's *Ladder*, and *One*, an independent magazine—reached subscribers beyond the urban enclaves. But actual numbers for readership and membership were very low. On the basis of Kinsey's data, activists estimated that 15 million or more Americans were homosexual; the vast majority were still quite isolated.¹⁷

A cultural thaw in the early 1960s awakened public interest in sexual freedom and encouraged a new wave of alliances and protests. The Society for Individual Rights, founded in San Francisco in 1964, offered community activities for migrants new to the city, including political forums, cultural evenings, service projects, and a bowling league.¹⁸ In the East, Mattachine and DOB joined with civil libertarians to demand an end to harassment by the police. Homophile activists picketed the White House, the United Nations, and Philadelphia's Independence Hall in 1965; they returned to Philadelphia for the next four years, always on July 4. Although they walked in silence, their demands were clear: "Equality for Homosexual Citizens" read one sign; "HOMOSEXUALS should be judged as individuals" read another.¹⁹

A younger generation of organizers arose in the 1960s. Lesbians and gay men among them were less brave about their queer identities than the homophile activists but more militant in their politics. Some came from working-class backgrounds; others, from privilege. They were at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in August 1963, and they volunteered for voter registration drives during "Freedom Summer" in Mississippi in 1964. A few years later, they protested at local draft boards and boarded union-sponsored buses to mobilize against the war in Vietnam. Few were open about their gayness in the context

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of these movements, but many who went to the big rallies brought lovers or gay friends and found tacit tolerance. Through these great movements, many gay men and lesbians discovered their own courage, political ideals, and capacities for leadership. They were already activists when they came out in the late 1960s to organize the fresh new work that became the gay liberation movement.²⁰

Political ethics—freedom, equality, justice, peace—did not always work out as personal values. Women’s liberation of the late 1960s proposed a different paradigm: personal experience at the center of political dialogue. Feminists identified male chauvinist behavior as a corruption of movement ethics and focused on power as the primary element in gender relations. The basic organizing model for women’s liberation was the process of consciousness-raising. Groups met regularly for intimate and confidential discussions that would affirm women’s solidarity while locating sources of oppression. Feminist theory and practice developed from those insights, and sex itself became a central political issue.²¹

Lesbians participated in feminist consciousness-raising. Some found the discussions about men annoying; others benefited from the support; and still others came out while they were in the groups. Gay men developed their own models for raising consciousness. They read feminist pamphlets and newspapers and discussed gender, power, and personal dynamics.²² But gay liberation’s flash point was not a discussion group.

Riots in June 1969 following a police raid at the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City, ignited a decisive turn toward public, militant action. The flying bottles and rocks, the spontaneous rage, the meetings and rallies during the weeks and months that followed released what first seemed impossible and then inevitable: a political transformation. Stonewall’s influence was lasting because the foundations for change—two decades of homophile resistance and the contemporary thrust of radical liberation—were so firmly in place.²³

Racial equality, peace, women’s liberation, gay liberation: the new mass movements challenged a labor movement that was no more united than the rest of the country. While the United Auto Workers (UAW) committed huge resources to the March on Washington, unions in the building trades restricted access to apprenticeships for racial minorities. Top leaders of the AFL-CIO endorsed continued military escalation in Vietnam even as the peace movement was persuading more and more union families, local officers, prominent leaders, and their entire organizations that the war must come to an end.

The rights of gay citizens became a national political issue in July 1972, at the Democratic Party’s convention in Miami. A gay rights plank for the party platform was proposed, rebutted, and then voted down. Two months later, George Meany, president of the AFL-CIO, mocked the initiative during his keynote speech to the United Steelworkers at their convention in Las Vegas.²⁴ Those delegates applauded, but the issue was not to be dismissed.

In other sectors of the labor movement, fair treatment for gay workers was no joke. The AFT in 1970 and 1973 and the National Education Association in

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1974 discussed the issue at executive meetings and at national conventions and then adopted resolutions and policies to affirm homosexual colleagues' rights to practice their professions without discrimination.²⁵

Lesbian- and gay-labor activists took note of the teachers' resolutions and explored feasible goals within their unions' structures. Some union leaders rejected gay proposals out of hand, but others acknowledged the sexual diversity of their membership and sponsored appropriate policies and programs. Labor's formal methods of negotiated alliances and patient pragmatism diverged sharply from what gay liberationists were projecting for their brave new movement. But without the radical breakthrough in public awareness that was Stonewall, proposals to adopt policies of tolerance never would have carried.

Historically and structurally, the labor movement and the movement for LGBT rights developed along distinctly different trajectories. Labor's primary program was always an economic one: to organize workers in all industries and thus better the material lives of all Americans. Included in labor's economic intentions are LGBT workers who do benefit materially from collective bargaining.²⁶ By contrast, LGBT movements for liberation and justice made their primary goal the affirmation of civil rights already assumed by the predominant straight majority: freedom from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender expression.

Although the gay movement always encouraged LGBT people to come out, most of the estimated 2 to 10 percent members of the U.S. population that are thought to be queer have kept their sexual identities private.²⁷ LGBT people could count neither on the law nor on the goodwill of neighbors, co-workers, or families to support their interests. Even in seemingly enlightened environments, gay people could still be intimidated by blackmail or violence. Masking or denying queer identity often seemed like a reasonable strategy for basic survival.

Clandestine activity and threats of violence lie deep in labor's heritage, too. Until the 1930s, workers who organized unions and negotiated contracts did so without legal protection. Some workers had to sign "yellow dog contracts" promising not to join a "combination" before they were hired. Organizers would hold union meetings at night in unlit rooms to keep company spies from recognizing their workmates; known union supporters risked being blackballed or beaten. Nor is antiunion intimidation a remnant of the distant past, as organizers who recruited in southern textile towns during the 1960s could testify. Those campaigns were waged in states with right-to-work statutes that hamper organizing and collective bargaining.

Gay communities and the labor movement have common foes and common friends. Until the 1960s, sodomy was a felony in every state, with gay men the likeliest targets for arrest and prosecution. Between 1961 and 2002, antisodomy laws were repealed or struck down in thirty-six states. Then, in 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* (539 U.S. 558 [2003]) struck

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down antisodomy laws in the fourteen remaining states. Of those states, twelve were among the twenty-four that maintain right-to-work statutes: Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and Virginia. Michigan, an antisodomy state at the time of *Lawrence*, adopted right-to-work sanctions in 2013. As for common friends, in 2013, seventeen states included sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes in their employment discrimination statutes; four other states protected sexual orientation only. None of these twenty-one states had ever been a right-to-work jurisdiction; nor did any of them wait until 2003 to abolish their antisodomy laws.

Teachers' resolutions of the early 1970s influenced reforms in other national unions and in local organizations. In 1974, municipal bus drivers in Ann Arbor and librarians in Seattle negotiated the addition of sexual orientation to their contracts' nondiscrimination articles. In 1978, a gay male couple at Boston City Hospital, a security guard and a laundry worker, represented an insurgent slate in a local union election. They were baited and then elected—the security guard to the presidency, and the laundry worker to the Executive Board. And in 1982, staff at the *Village Voice* in New York City ratified a contract that included full health benefits for domestic partners, straight or gay (the term in use was “spousal equivalent benefits,” and the plan was the first in the nation).

By the mid-1980s, unions in the public sector were developing policies and proposing contractual innovations to reflect the everyday realities of sexual minorities within labor's mainstream. Every reform suggested new directions. A turning point had come toward a new and continuous political relationship. No longer would the labor history of queer America be a disconnected series of occasional events. Some in leadership continued to wonder what labor's stake could be in supporting gay rights, but others quickly appreciated the possibilities. LGBT people would be coming out at work and would be looking to their unions to back them up.

Out in the Union

Out in the Union tells the continuous labor history of queer America from the mid-1960s through the turn of the twenty-first century in three major parts: “Coming Out,” “Coalition Politics,” and “Conflict and Transformation.”

Part I: Coming Out

Chapter 1, “From Construction to Couture: Coming Out in Unionized Workplaces,” and Chapter 2, “Outsiders as Insiders: Sexual Diversity and Union Leadership,” explore coming-out experiences of LGBT workers at unionized workplaces and of union officers and staff. Part I also follows queer and straight advocates for gay rights who stood against harassment at their workplaces and in their union halls.

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Chapter 1 concentrates on workplace cultures and friendships and hostilities among workmates. Although coming out on the job, for some unionized workers, was a statement of the obvious in a tolerant environment, many more held to the closet, knowing not to rely on the union to defend them as they tried to earn a living. The chapter surveys a range of employment sectors to demonstrate a breadth of experience, including that of office workers who navigated boundaries of social prejudice and tolerance; lesbians who were baited and harassed as they broke into the telephone crafts and construction trades; autoworkers who faced down bigotry on the line and in the union; drivers who affirmed queer solidarity in the bus yards of Ann Arbor and Boston; and high-fashion sales clerks who rallied community support during their battle for a contract by putting on a runway show—in drag.

Chapter 2 focuses on the political consequences of personal revelations—that is, of coming out in the union. I describe the experiences of unionists who stood as candidates for local office, competed for seats on regional executive boards, served as staff at headquarters, and organized in the field. They were union insiders with very public careers who lived their queer (and sometimes hidden) lives outside the social mainstream. Some were open and risked being shunned; others feared disgrace and held back.

Many unions of the late twentieth century endured rough internal politics. Chapter 2 highlights LGBT leaders of dissident caucuses. Their reform campaigns targeted corruption and other problems in the administration of their unions. Gay issues were not the point. The insurgents held to their strategies—elections, lawsuits, public protests—even when their opponents attacked with queer smears.

Part II: Coalition Politics

Chapter 3, “From Common Enemies to Common Causes: The Labor Movement and the Gay Movement in Action and Coalition,” and Chapter 4, “The Heart of the Matter: Union Politics, Queer Issues, and the Life of the Local,” describe how organizers in queer communities built comprehensive alliances with labor activists to prioritize gay-labor issues at national union conventions and in community-wide and regional campaigns. At local union levels, these gay-labor collaborations initiated important innovations, including contractual protections against discrimination, domestic partner benefits, and AIDS education in the workplace.

Chapter 3 highlights broad coalitions of national consequence: the twenty-year labor-gay boycott of Coors beer; the adoption of gay rights resolutions by the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees in 1982 and by the entire AFL-CIO in 1983; the growth of regional and union-wide gay-labor networks in the 1980s and 1990s; the founding of Pride at Work in 1995 and its recognition as an official constituency group of the AFL-CIO in 1997. The chapter also describes the wave of national countermovements in the late

1970s that threatened queer communities and union principles. Right-wing ballot initiatives successfully overturned standing municipal gay rights ordinances in four cities where unions and LGBT groups failed to collaborate; in Seattle, a solid coalition of labor, gay, and civil rights advocates beat back a similar attempt. A statewide initiative in California intended to amend the state's constitution to have all openly gay teachers and their allies fired (Proposition 6). But unions, gay organizations, religious groups, civil libertarians, and grassroots activists collaborated on a vigorous "No on 6" campaign that defeated the amendment.

Chapter 4 studies local unions as the basic organizing units of the labor movement and examines how gay issues have been integrated into collective bargaining, grievances, and other everyday union functions. Adding sexual orientation as a protected class to the contract's equal rights articles has been the foundation for grievances on AIDS discrimination and managerial and worker-to-worker harassment.²⁸

During the 1990s, LGBT caucuses in local unions connected with similar groups in their national unions and in their regional labor movements. In 1992, the gay and lesbian caucus of SEIU Local 503, the Oregon Public Employees Union, made the defeat of Ballot Measure 9 union business. The referendum proposed the abolition of standing civil rights protections for sexual minorities and dismissals of openly gay state-employed workers and their public sympathizers. Local 503 joined a broad coalition of religious and civil rights groups and garnered support from the statewide labor movement. Ballot Measure 9 was defeated.

Part III: Conflict and Transformation

Part III examines gay-labor campaigns that broke new ground. Chapter 5, "Organizing the Gay Unorganized: Talking Union, Talking Queer," describes recruitment drives to win collective bargaining rights at queer community-based businesses and service agencies. The Epilogue, "When Connie Married Phyllis," covers the ambitious campaign to win popular and legislative support for the marriage equality bill that became law in the State of New York in June 2011.

Chapter 5 begins with the growth of queer communities and their economies during the 1970s in California. Gay entrepreneurs flourished but resisted fair labor codes. Organizing was haphazard at first; unions did not understand the cultures of queer communities, and workers walked out without planning their strategies. During the early 1980s, two important local unions in San Francisco began targeted organizing among small businesses in gay neighborhoods. Employers put up hard resistance, and some campaigns failed, but a few drives were strong enough to achieve certification and solid contracts.

By the mid-1990s, AIDS service centers had become the best-funded and leading employers of gay people in the nonprofit sector, and the second half of Chapter 5 studies union drives at those agencies. Unions were certified at five

important centers during the heaviest years of the epidemic, some after bitter campaigns. The governing boards of two agencies were dominated by wealthy business leaders who took strategic advice from antiunion consultants; at both clinics, management successfully undermined bargaining, and the unions could not maintain their position. The three other service centers have changed in their missions and organizational structures, but workers still have union representation, and collective bargaining continues.

The early years of the twenty-first century have been harsh for working-class Americans and for a diminished labor movement. Union participation in the private sector has continued its decline, and unions in the previously well-fortified public sector took huge and heavy hits, especially following the recession of 2008. By 2012, unions represented only 12 percent of the workforce. LGBT union members shared in these losses, even as they took heart from the surging movement for LGBT rights and its development as a distinct and respected force in U.S. politics.

The Epilogue brings the labor history of queer America up to date with the story of a sweet and signal victory: the passage of the Marriage Equality Act in the State of New York in June 2011. Same-sex marriage emerged as a popular and achievable goal in the early years of the twenty-first century, and by 2010 it had become a matter of law in five states and the District of Columbia. The AFL-CIO of the State of New York first endorsed marriage equality in 2008 and maintained support as the campaign gathered force. Unions in 2011 represented 24.1 percent of the state's workforce, more than double the national average of 11.9 percent.²⁹ Some of the state's largest unions were especially generous with resources and trained volunteers. New York's intense labor mobilization set a pattern that campaigners adapted for the next four states. Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, and Washington won marriage equality in 2012.

Making Out in the Union

Connie Kopelov and Phyllis Siegel were the first of 484 couples in New York City to be pronounced married the first day that the Marriage Equality law took effect. I first met Connie in the late 1970s, and in the 1980s we both served on the board of the New York Labor History Association. I interviewed her during the summer of 1994, just after New York University awarded me the Stephen Charney Vladeck fellowship that allowed me a semester's leave to launch my research. Neither Connie nor I had any notion that gay marriage would ever be a reality, but Connie was hopeful that a new generation would overcome the prejudice that she and other lesbians had experienced doing union work.

Connie shared her memories, opinions, and contacts. She led me to several other older lesbians with union backgrounds, and they introduced me to their friends. Connie's interview became the first of more than 100 recorded conversations that have formed the groundwork of this book. Along with that central series, I used notes and transcripts from earlier interviews conducted

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in the late 1980s for *Pride at Work: Organizing for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Unions*, a staple-bound organizing handbook that Desma Holcomb and I co-wrote and published with New York City's Lesbian and Gay Labor Network (LGLN) in 1990.

There were few other sources. I researched lesbian and gay union issues in published books and archives, journals, and other print media and found some leads but was often disappointed that writings on "working-class" gay lives rarely mentioned life on the job, union participation, or collective bargaining. When I searched for "unions" and "lesbian and gay rights," the one publication that always came up was *Pride at Work*. Early in the project, I knew that the center of my research would have to be the interviews themselves, and luckily, the booklet's popularity led me to the very people I would need to meet.

LGLN distributed *Pride at Work* and used as its contact number the home phone number I shared with Desma. For the next two years, we fielded calls from all over the country, most of them not about book orders. People were excited about LGLN's vision of gay rights in unions and interested in the strategies that *Pride at Work* suggested. Regional labor networks were finding their work confirmed in our reports; union-wide caucuses in AFSCME and SEIU were tucking the pamphlet into conference packets; labor studies centers put it on their reading lists.

By the spring of 1995, I was in touch with key activists in communities where labor-gay organizing was especially lively, including Boston; the San Francisco Bay Area; Washington, DC; Seattle/Tacoma; and Portland, Oregon. Detroit in 1995 did not have a lively gay-labor organizing culture. Most of the male autoworkers I interviewed there were not activists. But I had lived in Detroit during the 1970s. That is where I came out and where I worked as a union educator for the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union. I left in 1981 but have kept up with the city and its political communities.

For each of these major cities, I interviewed main contacts and the people they suggested. In greater Detroit, I sought gay male autoworkers, including one Chrysler worker with a job and home in Windsor, Ontario, who "lived gay" when he crossed the Detroit River and the international border. Usually, however, I looked for a variety of experiences in unions, workplaces, and local queer communities. At the Labor Notes conference in Detroit in April 1995, I found activists from Salt Lake City and Toronto, and at the *Pride at Work* conference in Oakland in June 1996, I interviewed California activists and one more autoworker, from Kenosha, Wisconsin.³⁰ Until I wrote my first draft in 2000, I recorded all interviews on tape; thereafter, while I researched, wrote, and revised, I interviewed sporadically and made verbatim transcripts.

Out in the Union is not comprehensive. Important working-class communities and whole sectors of the unionized workforce are missing. Southeastern Michigan was the only midwestern region that I visited; after Bill the Boilermaker in St. Louis, there are no more reports about queer union members

in the steel, oil, mining, or manufacturing centers of the heartland. And while there is some material from the Southwest, I skimmed on Texas, a hub for airline labor, as well as Las Vegas, which before the 2008 recession was the fastest-growing city in the country and supported by an economy based in the highly unionized hospitality, entertainment, and gaming industries.³¹

This labor history of queer America is rooted in the events and controversies that have shaped unions of the late twentieth century: the country's last industrial organizing drives in textile towns of the South; the decades-long sweep of plant closings that devastated hundreds of communities that had long been union strongholds; the union megamergers that initiated new, aggressive organizing in the service and industrial sectors.

Conventional labor history has not told it this way, but LGBT union people were involved in those events and in many other powerful issues that have shaped unions and work in America. In the 1960s, LGBT social workers, teachers, and hospital workers organized successfully in public and service sector workplaces, where union participation grew steadily for the next forty years.³² Beginning in the 1970s, lesbians and bisexual women were among the brave female pioneers who broke through gender barriers to enter transportation services, the building trades, telephone, printing and film crafts, and other "nontraditional" trades. Their paths followed earlier efforts by black workers who broke the color bars of their trades during the 1960s and 1970s. During the 1970s and 1980s, LGBT union activists participated in rank-and-file movements that challenged leadership at local union halls and at national headquarters of the UAW, SEIU, the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union, the Office and Professional Employees International Union, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and the International Union of Electrical Workers. Many of the dissidents were radicals committed to community causes, from women's and immigrant rights to the fights against plant closings and for community-based AIDS education.

This labor history of queer America is about the survival of unions and the survival of queer communities. Sophisticated LGBT labor activists have long understood that the labor movement and the movement for LGBT rights need each other as essential allies. The two movements first found their way to cooperation through issues of mutual concern, such as the adoption of antidiscrimination resolutions by national unions. But they also responded to each other's crises, and they persevered on reforms that emphasized lasting results. From organizing unions at AIDS clinics to battling the right at the ballot box and negotiating transgender health benefits, they collaborated on common causes and worked out connections of mutual respect. *Out in the Union* tells the stories of people who stood for their unions and for their communities. With love, anger, humor, and insight they survived, and they thrived. Their enduring coalitions continue to shape the politics and culture of contemporary America.