

On the Fringe: Gays and Lesbians in Politics. By David Morton Rayside. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998. 384p. \$49.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

Donald P. Haider-Markel, *University of Kansas*

David Rayside adds to a growing literature on lesbian and gay politics and policy. His comparative study of lesbian and gay politics in England, Canada, and the United States focuses on several highly salient legislative issues and provides profiles of elected gay officials in each country. The cases are often dramatic, even riveting. Rayside's thesis is both empirical and normative. He seeks to understand the importance of mainstream and radical political action in efforts to secure civil rights for lesbians and gays as well as how groups can use the political system to make the lives of all citizens better. Rayside conducted 350 interviews with activists, journalists, elected and nonelected officials, and legislative aides to provide the main data component of this original project.

The book is divided into three sections, one for each country, with details on legislative actions, institutional structure, party politics, political culture, public opinion, and openly gay politicians. For the case of England, Rayside explores the dynamics of passing the antigay Section 28, which prohibited local officials from "promoting" homosexuality, and the later efforts to lower the age of consent for gay sexual relations. The Canadian case covers the successful efforts to add sexual orientation to the Canadian Human Rights Act as well as to provincial human rights laws. Interestingly, Rayside argues that the decentralized Canadian system simultaneously helped and hurt the efforts of gay activists. It seems that Canada has been the most receptive to gay civil rights at the national level, due in large part to a tolerant public.

The final section tackles politics in the United States, with particular attention to the debate over gays in the military. Rayside makes it clear that American gays and lesbians have won significant victories at all levels of government, and they enjoy more financial resources and political access than their counterparts in England and Canada, but they also face a larger, more vocal, and better funded organized opposition. Rayside demonstrates that groups on both sides of this issue have benefited from the multiple access points in the American system.

The author details the trials and tribulations of three openly gay politicians: British MP Chris Smith, Canadian MP Sven Robinson, and U.S. Representative Barney Frank. Rayside examines how each official chose to "come out" and under what circumstances, with a particular focus on legislative debates of the time. He shows how each struggled with a gay identity in public life and dealt with the sometimes conflicting demands of social movement activists, political parties, and a largely heterosexual constituency. Although these detailed accounts are illuminating, Rayside could have devoted more attention to comparing the problems faced by gay officials to those faced by minorities and women, and he relies little on the literature in this area.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the book is the detailed analysis of gay politics in Canada and England, both of which have received less scholarly attention than the United States. Although Barry Adam (*The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 1995) provided a good base for understanding gay politics in these countries, Rayside's work is truly comparative in that it provides a richer analysis of political systems and institutions as well as the dynamics of gay politics in each country, and it directly compares how conditions and institutions within each society shape politics generally and gay politics specifically.

The author's contention that gays and lesbians in England, Canada, and the United States have obtained a high level of access to the political system but little real influence is confirmed by a number of other authors (e.g., Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 1995; Robert W. Bailey, *Gay Politics, Urban Politics*, 1999; James W. Button, Barbara A. Rienzo, and Kenneth D. Wald, *Private Lives, Public Conflicts*, 1997; Donald P. Haider-Markel, "Redistributing Values in Congress: Interest Group Influence under Sub-Optimal Conditions," *Political Research Quarterly* 52 [March 1999]: 113–44; Ellen D. B. Riggle and Barry Tadlock, eds., *Gays and Lesbians in the Democratic Process*, 1999; Urvasi Vaid, *Virtual Equality*, 1995; and Kenneth Wald, Craig Rimmerman, and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *The Politics of Gay Rights*, 2000). Indeed, at times Rayside's arguments closely track those made by Vaid, but Rayside rarely references the important points made by Vaid and largely ignores previous empirical research in this area (see Timothy E. Cook, "The Empirical Study of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics: Assessing the First Wave of Research," *American Political Science Review* 93 [September 1999]: 679–92).

Although Rayside states that he is not concerned about the generalizability of his findings (p. xv), one has to suspect that any comparative research of this scope hopes to have some meaning outside the specific cases under study. What I found most troubling in this regard was Rayside's failure to note that perhaps there is nothing special about gay politics. He devotes so much effort to suggesting the uniqueness of gay politics that he may understate one of his most important findings: Gay politics often resembles everyday politics that existing theories can effectively explain, even across countries, institutions, and issues. Indeed, his research confirms recent journal articles that suggest the patterns of gay politics often fit those of other, less controversial political issues. Also, the gay movement has undergone many of the same strains and pressures as other social movements as it has become more institutionalized, which suggests that many social movements may be subject to the same processes. Furthermore, the factors that determine legislative and policy outcomes in gay politics, such as partisan control, public opinion, media attention and tone of coverage, interest group lobbying and resources, and the extent of a mobilized opposition, do not appear to be any different for most other policy issues.

Rayside could have said much more about politics generally and the policy process in each of these countries. My point is not that gay politics is unworthy of scholarly study. In fact, I contend the opposite: Gay politics should be studied as a means for understanding political systems and politics generally. Gay politics intersects broad questions, such as civil rights and liberties, institutional structures, and the role of parties and interest groups, issues with which all students of politics should be concerned. Rayside simply could have been more explicit in this regard and in the nature of his contribution.

A central focus of *On the Fringe* is the tension between grassroots activists and mainstream interest groups within the gay social movement, and it is here that a problem surfaces with regard to understanding social movements generally. Rayside consistently refers to "a gay movement" in each of the three countries, but he never fully explains what a social movement is or is not. Instead, he focuses on formal gay and lesbian interest groups, which could be more or less than a social movement. Even though the author consistently notes the increasing need for "inside" lobbyists to develop a grassroots network that can be mobilized for legislative campaigns, he downplays this as a fundamental component of

modern interest group politics generally (see Ken Kollman, *Outside Lobbying*, 1998). But Rayside does note that the problems of social movement institutionalization are apparent throughout each of the cases. Activists have gained a seat at the table, but without much influence, there is wide disagreement over tactics, and movement groups themselves often reflect gender and race disparities in the larger society. Each of these conditions has surfaced in many post-World War II movements, which suggests a common social movement phenomenon.

Even with its shortcomings, the book would make an excellent secondary text for undergraduate courses in gay politics, American politics or policy, and comparative politics or policy. It is unlikely that *On the Fringe* would fit well with most graduate-level courses in those areas. Rayside has laid the groundwork for comparative research in gay politics, as well as for richly described cases that provide needed background on lesbian and gay politics.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]