

Sochacký, Jakub. *The Changing Legal and Social Status of the LGBT People in the U.S. Since 1990*. Praha, 2015. 49 s. Diplomová práce (Mgr.) Univerzita Karlova, Fakulta sociálních věd, Institut mezinárodních studií. Katedra americk.ch studií. Vedoucí diplomové práce Prof. Norma Hervey, PhD.

Reader Report by Dr. Ralph Young, Department of History, Temple University

The thesis of the paper is the underlying role that US courts have played in the gay community's struggle for civil rights.

The author, Jakub Sochacký, begins by evaluating the sources he will be using and then he gets into a detailed analysis of the historical background of the LGBT movement frequently showing the intersection of the gay struggle for civil rights with the century-long African American struggle for equality. "Just as suspicious treatment of racial minorities in the United States triggers much closer and rigorous examination of such behavior by courts, the case made here is that sexual minorities should be also included in the so-called suspect or quasi-suspect group triggering such examinations to enhance their protection against unfair treatment."

It is a good analysis of several significant Supreme Court decisions, but I'd like to see the author emphasize that the essential role of the judiciary in the United States is to protect minorities from the majority. Just because the majority of citizens might vote against same-sex marriage in a statewide referendum, for example, it does not mean they are right. The court's duty is to uphold constitutional rights for ALL people even those who are marginalized (especially those who are marginalized) and it often has to go against popular opinion or, as some call it, conventional wisdom.

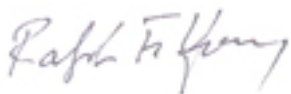
He touches on the historical background where appropriate so as to give context for the contemporary events and court decisions that make up the bulk of the paper.

He develops a good section about perceptions of homosexuality in which he meticulously and critically examines LGBTs self-perceptions as well as the perceptions of heterosexuals about them. Good analysis of biological, religious and social arguments about LGBTs.

I disagree to some extent in his comment that “Further research should be conducted to find why voices of LGBTs calling for rights and full equality did not begin to be heard earlier and why the amount of public support for their cause has been on the rise for only the last few decades. Why did not we see protesters marching the streets demanding to be respected during the time, or even before, Africans Americans were doing so?” There were gay rights activists and demonstrations even before Stonewall. Back in the 1950s there were many vocal gay rights activists and organizations. In 1950 Harry Hay founded the Mattachine Society in 1950, and in 1955 a similar lesbian organization, The Daughters of Bilitis, was formed. (Ironically, even though Harry Hay founded the Mattachine Society he was booted out because he was a communist. And even more ironically the Communist Party USA expelled him because he was gay!)

He does mention the backlash that always seems to crop up in America, but it might be interesting to go further into this. For example, give more details on the backlash against the Civil Rights movement that has occurred in the US (new laws trying to restrict voting rights, war on crime, mass incarceration) and speculate whether such a backlash is imminent against the recent LGBT gains.

Although there are a few parts where one can tell that English is the author’s second language, the author writes a very well written, scholarly erudite paper. There are a few writing mistakes, but nothing that a bit of tweaking can’t cure. On the whole it is an EXCELLENT analysis of one of today’s most important events taking place in the United States that successfully employs an interdisciplinary approach to the subject.



Ralph F. Young, 8 January 2015