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*Travels in a Gay Nation: Portraits of LGBTQ
Americans* by Philip Gambone

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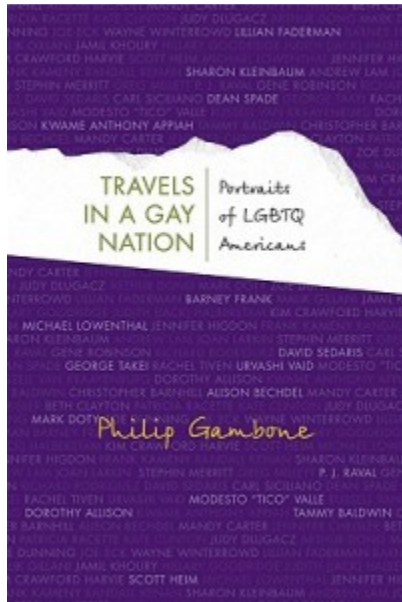
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‘Travels in a Gay Nation: Portraits of LGBTQ Americans’ by Philip Gambone

Posted on 21 Oct, 2010 by Rachel Wexelbaum



TRAVELS IN A GAY NATION
Portraits of LGBTQ Americans
ed. by [Philip Gambone](#)
[The University of Wisconsin Press](#)
ISBN: 9780299236846
Paperback: x+308 pp., \$26.95

Who are the “real” LGBTIQ Americans? Where do they live, what jobs do they have, and do they have the same problems as everyone else, in addition to the challenges they face due to their LGBTIQ identity? I wish that the anthology *Travels of a Gay Nation: Portraits of LGBTQ Americans*, the latest in the Living Out: Gay and Lesbian Autobiographies series, had answered that question.

Travels in a Gay Nation: Portraits of LGBTQ Americans is a collection of forty personal stories that English professor and journalist Philip Gambone gathered from interviews with prominent cultural, political, and intellectual figures of the LGBTIQ community.

Gambone makes the following rationale for collecting these stories:

Stories. Haven’t they always helped us to learn who we are, wherever we are? Stories both anchor us in reality and inspire our imaginations and dreams. They remind us where we have been and hit and where we are going. Stories allow us to discover the common humanity in all people. Other stories initiate us into the culture of our tribe: This is what it’s like to come from our people, to belong to our people...Sadly...throughout much of our history, a lot of life-

changing stories that we LGBTQ folk might have heard never got told...Our queer family was hidden from us, sometimes deliberately (think of those locked cages in the town library), more often because no one, even those most qualified to do so, dare to tell.

At first glance, the collection of stories is impressive. An academic audience would recognize at least twenty of the subjects featured in this compilation, which includes stories from Barney Frank, Alison Bechdel, Dorothy Allison, Tammy Baldwin, Frank Kameny, Kate Clinton, Urvashi Vaid, Judith Halberstam, Lillian Faderman, Gene Robinson, and George Takei.

Of the forty stories, at least ten are from LGBTQ people of color; half are from people who identify as female. People who would like to know how these LGBTIQ individuals with political, cultural, or religious influence in the United States achieved their status and success would enjoy reading these stories very much.

Unfortunately, coverage of what most LGBTIQ people in the “coming out” process really want to know—how did these prominent people handle coming out, what discrimination (if any) do they encounter today due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, and how are they able to work and have a partner in states where LGBTIQ people may have no legal protection or legal recognition of their committed relationship—is not consistent.

The majority of people featured in this collection live in states where there is some combination of strong anti-discrimination legislation, hate crime legislation, and recognition of same-sex committed relationships on some level—they are “safe.” Most have college educations, all are employed, and many of these people either work in professions that have traditionally accepted diversity, or have earned so much money that their affluence may shield them from LGBTIQ civil rights infringements.

For this reason, *Travels in a Gay Nation* becomes a troublesome title. What is Gambone’s definition of “the gay nation” if the majority of people featured in the anthology currently live in California, New York, or New England? If Gambone’s intention was to collect stories from LGBTIQ people from each of the fifty states in our union, then he truly would have made a statement—that LGBTIQ people live in all fifty states of the union, for better or for worse, and this entire country truly belongs to us.
