



Dr. Bruce Dorsey Receives LGBT Religious History Award

The LGBT Religious Archives Network (LGBT-RAN) honors Dr. Bruce Dorsey with the 2015-16 LGBT Religious History Award. The review jury selected Dr. Dorsey's "'Making Men What They Should Be:' Male Same-Sex Intimacy and Evangelical Religion in Early Nineteenth-Century New England" to receive this award. The jury gave honorable mention to a second paper, "'Real True Buds:' Celibacy and Same-Sex Desire Across the Color Line in Father Divine's Peace Mission Movement," by Dr. Judith Weisenfeld.

Dr. Bruce Dorsey is a professor of history at Swarthmore College, where he teaches courses on early American history, cultural history, and the history of gender and sexuality. He received his Ph.D. from Brown University, where his mentors were historian of American religion William McLoughlin and historian of women and gender Mari Jo Buhle. Dorsey was one of the first historians to specialize in the history of masculinity, and taught perhaps the first course in the United States on the history of American masculinities. In 2012-13, he held a fellowship at the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History at Harvard.

Dorsey is the author of *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Cornell University Press, 2002), which was awarded the Philip S. Klein Prize by the Pennsylvania Historical Association. He is also the co-editor, with Woody Register, of *Crosscurrents in American Culture* (Houghton Mifflin, 2009). He is currently completing a book, entitled *Murder in a Mill Town*, which investigates the cultural history of the early American republic through the lens of an 1833 murder trial of a Methodist minister who was accused of killing a factory girl and Methodist convert. Dorsey lives in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, and New York City.

"'Making Men What They Should Be,'" published in the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* (September 2015), investigates a sex scandal in 1830s New England involving a revivalist preacher, Eleazer Sherman, from a small denomination called the Christian Connection. Sherman is the only known instance of a clergyman accused and tried (in a religious tribunal) during the early nineteenth century for same-sex sexual advances. Choosing not to dismiss Sherman as another in a long line of predatory clergymen, Dorsey explores the ways in which early evangelical piety embodied desire and eroticism, and the ways in which the scandalous can reveal quotidian expressions of love, intimacy, and desire. His analysis of Sherman's story unfolds on three levels, beginning with the contested meanings of masculinity and gender

transgression at a time when evangelicals confronted the emergence of women and lay preachers. He then explores the significance of intimacy and homoerotic desire within evangelical religious communities, noting that “If we listen carefully to the voices of Sherman and his accusers, we can detect the everyday practices of men who worked, prayed, slept, and loved within a spiritual family.” Finally, Dorsey exposes how Sherman’s story reveals a transformative moment in antebellum America, when competing sexual and religious cultures clashed over male sexuality and a new breed of evangelical sex reformers. At that historical moment, Sherman saw the same-sex intimacy of evangelical men and the possibility of autonomous pleasure that men might teach one another eclipsed by the rise of new public print representations of evangelical reformers who emphasized a gospel of self-denial, sexual restraint, and the policing of male pleasure.

Dorsey uncovered this case while researching another sex scandal at the center of his current research. His stated objective was to join scholars in the queering of religion, especially the queering of evangelical religion.

Dorsey is the ninth recipient of the LGBT Religious History Award that was initiated by the LGBT Religious Archives Network in 2005. It is the only award given for outstanding scholarship in this field. Dorsey’s paper was selected from among five papers submitted this year. Jury members Dr. Joanne Carlson Brown, Dr. Heather Rachele White and Dr. Bernard Schlager described Dorsey’s work as “an excellent use of sources that is well-situated in the historical period and in contemporary scholarly discussions about male-male sexual behavior in early 19th-century New England. Several other historians have examined related historical sources to point out the lived intersections of American evangelical Christian ideals of brotherhood with practices of emotional and physical intimacy. Dorsey goes beyond existing studies to suggest that this particular trial points to broader shifts in print culture, moral reform, and evangelical piety away from an older intermeshed sexual-religious culture that fostered male-male intimacy and toward a newer trend toward moral reform, public sexual broadsides, and compulsory heterosexuality.”

Noting the relevance and high quality of all five of this year’s submissions, the jury decided to recognize a second paper with honorable mention. Dr. Judith Weisenfeld’s “‘Real True Buds:’ Celibacy and Same-Sex Desire Across the Color Line in Father Divine’s Peace Mission Movement,” explores the dynamics of same-sex desire in this early 20th century interracial, sex-segregated, celibate utopian religious movement and focuses on letters exchanged among a white female visitor to the movement, two African American female members, and Father Divine himself. The paper argues that the movement’s understanding of acceptable desire as striving for connection with Father Divine, the Universal Spirit, within oneself paradoxically facilitated expressions of same-sex desire among these women and enabled intimacy outside the bounds of accepted Peace Mission emotions and behavior, yet faithful to the movement’s theological

vernacular. Weisenfeld is the Agate Brown and George L. Collord Professor of Religion at Princeton University.

Submissions for next year's LGBT Religious History Award must be postmarked or received electronically by December 1, 2016. Complete information on submission guidelines for the award can be found at: www.lgbtran.org/historyaward.aspx

The LGBT Religious Archives Network, a project of the [Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry](#) at [Pacific School of Religion](#), is a ground-breaking venture to preserve the history of LGBT religious movements. It has two primary purposes: a) to assist LGBT religious groups and leaders in preserving their records in appropriate repositories; and b) providing an electronic information clearinghouse on LGBT religious collections and other historical source materials on its web site: www.lgbtran.org

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