

James E. Parco & David A. Levy (eds.), *Evolution of Government Policy towards Homosexuality in the US Military: The Rise and Fall of DADT*, Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2014, 424 pp.

Reviewed by Terry Babcock-Lumish

President Harry S. Truman, responsible for integrating America's hitherto segregated military, reminded the world that...

Men make history and not the other way around. In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skilful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better.

With Executive Order 9981, Truman established the President's seven-member Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces in 1948, thereby taking formal steps to ensure "*equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, colour, religion, or national origin*".

It is no overstatement to write that the individuals and organizations traced in James Parco and David Levy's recently released *Evolution of Government Policy towards Homosexuality in the US Military: The Rise and Fall of DADT* pick up where Truman left off. In this edited volume, Parco and Levy's authors carefully detail the experiences of key stakeholders throughout the 20-year history of the US Department of Defense Directive 1304.26, directing military leadership to "*Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Harass, and Don't Pursue*". While the Clinton administration's efforts theoretically prohibited military personnel from discrimination – a seeming improvement from World War II-era practice of considering homosexuality a disqualifying trait for uniformed service members – in practice, the 1993 "Don't Ask Don't Tell" (DADT) policy effectively kept qualified gays and lesbians in the closet while discharging others.

Originally published as a special issue of *The Journal of Homosexuality*, this ample volume offers a single point of reference for public policy researchers interested in understanding the origins of and experience under DADT, and ultimately the architecture of repeal. While Parco and Levy take care to caution that their intent was "*never to comprehensively capture every aspect of the evolution of government policy toward gays and lesbians in the military*" (p.5), taken together, their authors' contributions provide a robust case study of DADT.

Parco and Levy thoughtfully organize the volume into three distinct sections and provide key source documents, such as United States Code creating and repealing DADT and the Executive Summary of the Comprehensive Review Working Group's extensive study, as appendices. While the editors pen the preface and one of the chapters, they allow the contributions of leading experts to take centre stage. The first section, "Agents for Change", introduces key players, including policy advocates and scholars whose efforts led

to DADT repeal. The middle section, “Policy Evolution”, delineates developments within DADT policy in the eyes of both decision-makers and the very individuals affected by their public policy decisions. Finally, the editors conclude with “Organizational Implications”, which explores the narratives, experiences, and considerations of lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer (LGBTQ) veterans with an eye toward lessons learned for the US military.

While Parco and Levy’s contribution to the LGBTQ military policy literature fills a needed gap, the book remains uneven – and understandably so. The nature of applied research is that oftentimes that which is most worth working on with respect to societal change remains a work-in-progress. Taken together, the first two sections provide insights from a diversity of stakeholders, whose efforts made possible several decades of legislative reconsideration and eventual resolution of an inconsistent policy.

In particular, Nathaniel Frank’s introductory chapter recounting “*how a dedicated group of equality advocates successfully pressed the US government to end one of the last forms of government discrimination against its own people...*” (p.19), offers an excellent time line incorporating change agents ranging from former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen to the University of California at Santa Barbara’s Palm Center and *The Daily Show*’s Jon Stewart. Invaluable to the “Agents for Change” section is Brenda Sue Fulton’s insider account of how an underground network of active-duty LGBTQ service members connected and collaborated, eventually forming today’s OutServe organization.

In Section 2 on “Policy Evolution”, two chapters book-ending several decades of military policy can be taken together to reveal the efforts of civilian and military leaders to reconcile thorny policy issues. A chapter co-authored by the Center for American Progress’ Lawrence Korb and Alexander Rothman, speaking to Korb’s experience with “*one of the most egregious cases of modern day government-sanctioned discrimination*” (p.137) during his service as the United States Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower, Reserve Affairs, Installations, and Logistics, in the Reagan-Bush administration in the 1980’s provides extraordinary insight into the inconsistency and decentralized nature of LGBTQ policy implementation, often leaving separation decisions to individual commanding officers. In his account, he is clear that neither side of the proverbial political aisle can claim innocence, but rather, both Republican and Democrat administrations must accept responsibility. Similarly informative is Jonathan Lee’s piece on the Comprehensive Review Working Group’s (CRWG) extensive study considering the impact of DADT repeal, while also providing a road map and opening a dialogue amongst active-duty service members.

Unfortunately, the third section on “Organizational Implications” is the volume’s thinnest but perhaps the most important for today’s military. Within this section, the contributors offer a range of important considerations, including Michael Allsep’s provocative chapter calling into question traditional gender norms. Also considered are the very real challenges both the United States Department of Defense and Department of

Veterans Affairs must understand in order to comprehensively address the experiences of its gay and lesbian members. Though there exist insightful takeaways regarding behavioural health concerns – for example, LGB veterans are more likely to wrestle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and alcohol problems, likely related to anxiety from identity concealment –, a reader is left wanting for more concrete takeaways. In particular, Adam Yerke and Valory Mitchell’s chapter on transgender challenges provides some cursory review of other countries’ experiences with an eye towards US recommendations ; however, as this remains a gap for US military policy, it takes policy researchers (and ultimately, practitioners) only so far. Missing, for example, is a sense of sheer scale; work by Williams Institute demographer Gary J. Gates (2004, 2011) could quickly address these gaps.

While the strengths of this book are plenty, the third section reminds the reader of the work yet to come. Parco and Levy are clear that this volume’s intent is to capture the evolution of a policy, within which one may learn of decision-making by advocates, scholars, legislators, and other military and civilian leaders. Nonetheless, this is not a book on leadership *per se*. Missing are the very lessons for commanding officers, LGBTQ service members, family members, straight allies, and others navigating the realities of workplace rights and norms, same-sex marriage, partnership benefits, etc. In addition, the book speaks to ongoing tensions between military professionals and civilian oversight, yet fails to offer concrete lessons learned from civil-military engagement to inform future policy decisions. As this volume marks only Parco and Levy’s latest collaboration – including their earlier collaboration with Fred Blass on leadership within large bureaucracies (Levy *et al.*, 2008) – perhaps a few years’ more experience will pave the way for their next volume answering lingering questions and speaking to further progress.

During the reign of DADT, well-intended individuals were placed in the problematic position of violating, for example, the United States Military Academy’s hallowed Honor Code – “A Cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do” – or leaving one’s chosen profession. Navigating the day-to-day realities of not only policy change, but true cultural change, requires genuine leadership. Having witnessed both the progress and continued challenges first-hand in a taxpayer-supported organization that is, by definition, a learning institution, speaks volumes of individuals’ ability to recognize and learn from mistakes.

Consequently, one of the most memorable contributions to the volume is not captured within the book’s three defined sections, but rather, is the foreword written by one of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s former US Congressmen, Army Judge Advocate General (JAG) officer, and West Point law faculty member Patrick J. Murphy. He offers a powerful first-hand account of his and his colleagues’ legislative efforts to repeal DADT,

...a law that singled out lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) service members for unequal treatment and made those same people mute when it came to sharing their stories or advocating for themselves and the armed forces they selflessly chose to serve...” (p.7).

In his recollection of fighting this fight away from the traditional battlefield, Murphy invokes the West Point Cadet Prayer to "...choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong" (p.12).

While there remains work to realize President Truman's original vision of equal treatment, I take solace in efforts to consider lessons learned and to move beyond dialogue to action. After all, Truman also reminds us that "*America was not built on fear. America was built on courage, on imagination, and an unbeatable determination to do the job at hand*". When it comes to tackling the civil rights issue of this generation, there is undoubtedly more work to do, but this contribution by Parco and Levy demonstrates the efforts of fighters, both military and civilian, committed to choosing the "harder right" in public policy, human rights, and organizational development.

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