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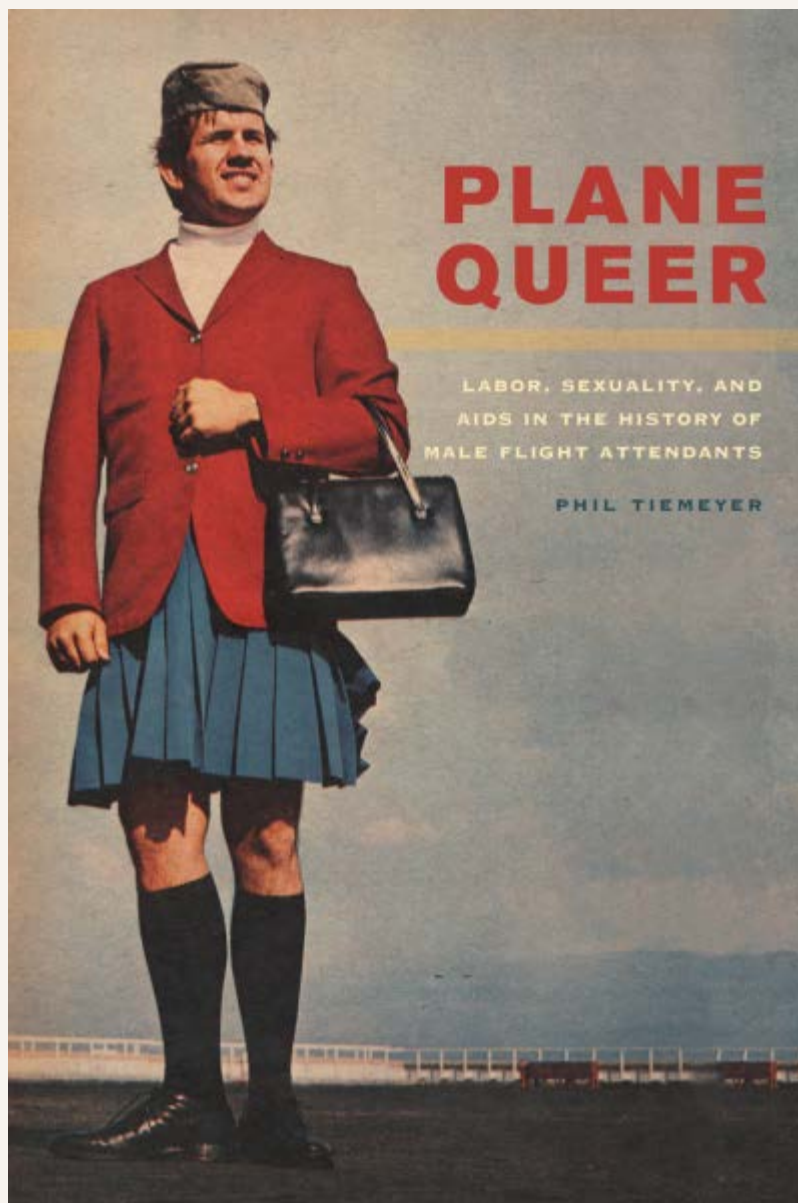
Alumni Voices: Phil Tiemeyer, Assistant Professor, Philadelphia University

by American Studies

*In 2013, Phil Tiemeyer, UT AMS alum and current Assistant Professor of History at Philadelphia University, released *Plane Queer, a history of men working as flight attendants*. We recently caught up with Tiemeyer to talk to him about his book, his teaching, and his time at UT.*

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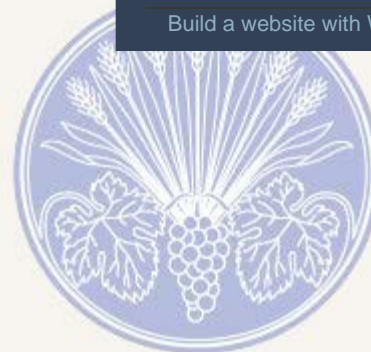
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Can you tell us a little bit about your book, *Plane Queer*, and how you came to the project?

My favorite coursework at UT was strewn over various departments: from Janet Davis’ course on social movements, to Ann Cvetkovich’s (English Dept) seminar on queer studies, to Mark Lawrence’s (History Dept) teaching on US Diplomatic History. So, naturally, I wanted to combine all these topics—especially gender, sexuality, and globalization—into one dissertation topic.

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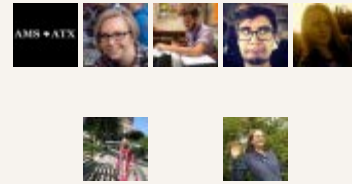
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This led me to think about viable topics that involved LGBTQ roles in the global economy. Between my own childhood passion for flying and Janet Davis' love for her prior work as a flight attendant, I ultimately ended up focusing on airplanes—the mode of transport that most quickly binds the globe's disparate nodes of economic activity. And it wasn't long before I was reading about and conducting interviews with gay men who served as flight attendants, literally working in the aisles and galleys of these planes that are linking the world together. It seemed to me that these men could serve as an important lens for examining the ways that gender and sexuality are intertwined with work in today's global economy.

Plane Queer ended up being a well-received addition to LGBTQ history, as it is the first book-length chronicle of a gay-oriented career. Work so often gets overlooked as a locus of queer life, in favor of better-documented realms like LGBTQ activism or queer urban nightlife. Plane Queer didn't end up being as global in focus as I originally envisioned—it focuses only on US-based flight attendants—but I was happy that it was able to chronicle queerness in this workplace all the way back to the 1930s, and all the way forward to the 2000s.

How is the work that you're doing right now, as a scholar or a teacher or both, informed by the work that you did as a student in American

Contributors



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Almost every thing I do nowadays is a continuation of my time in American Studies at UT. I got hired in my current job because of my writing in LGBTQ history, and that's the field I've been writing in since my early seminar papers at UT. I also teach a survey class now, so I'm really grateful that I read those hundreds of books for orals and sat in on Janet Davis' and Shirley Thompson's surveys and later TA'ed for Bob Abzug's survey. The more I work on my next book project, which is more focused on globalization and less focused on LGBTQ issues, I find myself grateful for the other work I did with Mark Lawrence and Richard Pells in the History Department—and equally grateful that our grueling preparation for orals forced me to master more than just one field. The only thing American Studies didn't prepare me for were the other tasks that eat up so much of my time as a professor: committee meetings, advising, and other administrative tasks. Shielding us from these things, though, was surely a merciful act!

Do you have any words of wisdom or advice for students in our department about how to get the most out of their time here?

There are so many components to landing a good teaching job that aren't simply tied to writing good seminar papers and getting As in courses. All of these things matter just as

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much, if not more, even though they don't appear on our transcripts: presenting at conferences, getting a couple of articles out while in grad school, and networking with scholars outside of UT who are doing similar work. It is also extremely advantageous to have introduced yourself and your book topic to acquisitions editors at university presses before graduating, since you'll likely need to have your manuscript finished and under contract within 4-5 years after finishing at UT...and everything about the publication process moves really slowly. I know I could have done a better job with these tasks, and each would have helped raise my prospects on the job market and made my progression towards tenure much less hectic. But it was easier at times to stay complacent in the undergraduate student mindset: as long as I'm writing good papers and getting good grades, I'm fine.

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