

## Book Review: No Place Like Home: Lessons in Activism from LGBT Kansas by C.J. Janovy

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### Recommended Citation

Atkins, Laura C. () "Book Review: No Place Like Home: Lessons in Activism from LGBT Kansas by C.J. Janovy," *International Social Science Review*. Vol. 96 : Iss. 2 , Article 6.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/issr/vol96/iss2/6>

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**Janovy, C.J. *No Place Like Home: Lessons in Activism from LGBT Kansas*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 308 pages, Paperback. \$19.95**

In *No Place Like Home: Lessons in Activism from LGBT Kansas*, C.J. Janovy takes the reader on a trip around the state of Kansas to explore the intertwining paths of LGBT politics and community. Focusing on a unique midwestern context, the author applies a journalistic lens to peer into the intimate stories of people, families, and communities that weave together with politics and activism. It adds to the literature on LGBT culture and politics, situated within more rural areas, and engages the reader by focusing on unexpected communities that can be sources of strength and social justice transformation from local to national levels.

For the method and structure of her book, Janovy applies fourth estate skills, akin to qualitative techniques, that are familiar to many social scientists. Janovy travels the state interviewing individuals to glean insights into their deeply personal experiences and courageous forms of activism. Most chapters focus on specific geographic regions, towns, and cities in Kansas. Chapters, such as “Trouble in Topeka” and “Springtime in Salina,” illuminate how different areas of the state experience unique, and at other times similar, threads of LGBT life and change efforts. Frequently, a chapter emphasizes a small number of key LGBT activists; this technique allows Janovy to introduce more in-depth biographies of focal actors elucidating connections between their lives, activism and wider political transformations. Throughout the text, Janovy guides the reader from the early years of the 1980s’ AIDS activism into the last three decades of the LGBT movement; touching on the politics of relationships, careers, safety, physical health, and emotional well-being. Through the stories, Janovy introduces the changing landscape of LGBT ordinances and laws at the city, state, and national levels.

Some of the main themes found along the journey of *No Place Like Home* include family, religion, community, and activism. The book carefully addresses ways that LGBT individuals, groups, and allies, navigate challenges and redefine the expectations and experiences of their communities. The author adeptly demonstrates how individuals traverse paths of self-discovery and acceptance regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. She also explains how individuals uncover and approach their roles as activists. This was most useful through accounts of everyday folks, and especially youth, who bravely stepped forward to participate in community organizations or establish groups for wider social benefit. Finally, Janovy carefully layers in the complexities of inclusion and exclusion within social movements; specifically focusing on how over time the LGBT movement restructured aims to be more trans inclusive.

In *No Place Like Home*, Janovy skillfully brings the people to life and places them on center stage. I found myself getting lost in the stories of people finding their places in the LGBT movement, experiencing love and fear, and navigating family, careers, and community all within the midwestern landscapes, towns and cities of Kansas. Since the people were the foundation of the book, Janovy provided a few photos of specific Kansan LGBT activists which even more deeply connects the reader with these caring, strong, strategic activists.

The author also keenly interweaves individual stories with specific aspects of wider social justice concerns, both within and outside of, the LGBT movement. Janovy demonstrates the power of a Midwestern state to play a meaningful role in broader national issues to remind the reader of the significance of individuals and unexpected groups in social justice efforts. Janovy accomplishes this by highlighting LGBT wins and losses and by positioning these efforts in relationship to other social and historical activities centered in Kansas; e.g. she recalls the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case that positioned Kansas in the crux of the civil

rights conversation about school segregation. She also perceptively highlights the agricultural shifts that provide social and economic context to struggles within Kansas and throughout the U.S. Through this mechanism, Janovy legitimizes her point that Kansas claims an important role in the U.S. social justice framework, which makes this state, with much LGBT work still to do, ideal as a complex case study.

There are two things that were a bit incongruent in the book. First, the chapter “Pioneers in Western Kansas” quilted together the lives of LGBT people in western Kansas, yet it diverged from the political fabric that was prominent in the rest of the book. To put this concern in context, the author did acknowledge that the regional chapter of the key LGBT organization Equality Kansas was more of a resource for social support than political activism in that region. Second, with its strongly geographic footing, *No Place Like Home* needed to better capitalize on the map. There is a map of Kansas, after the table of contents, but it feels a bit like an afterthought. For a book that draws the reader in via a geographically organized story, it would have been more powerful to have a geographic visual, in whole or in part, represented at the beginning of each chapter to highlight key organizations, dates, and people associated with each location.

*No Place Like Home* demonstrates the power of grassroots activism and presents it as a read that would be smooth for most readers. This book would be a useful resource for a variety of social sciences or humanities courses that focus on sexualities or activism; especially if paired with another text. Through its colorful focus on personal stories and activism, within a Midwestern state, *No Place Like Home* provides a tool for deeper understanding of individuals, and better strategizing for the LGBT social justice efforts ahead for the state of Kansas and the nation.

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