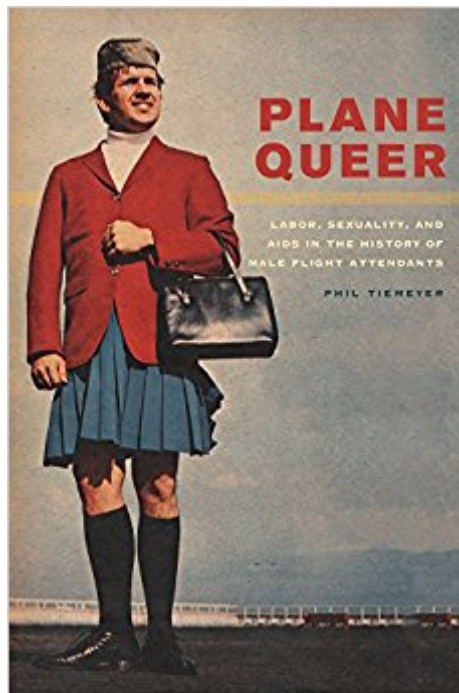


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# Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, And AIDS In The History Of Male Flight Attendants



## Synopsis

In this vibrant new history, Phil Tiemeyer details the history of men working as flight attendants. Beginning with the founding of the profession in the late 1920s and continuing into the post-September 11 era, *Plane Queer* examines the history of men who joined workplaces customarily identified as female-oriented. It examines the various hardships these men faced at work, paying particular attention to the conflation of gender-based, sexuality-based, and AIDS-based discrimination. Tiemeyer also examines how this heavily gay-identified group of workers created an important place for gay men to come out, garner acceptance from their fellow workers, fight homophobia and AIDS phobia, and advocate for LGBT civil rights. All the while, male flight attendants facilitated key breakthroughs in gender-based civil rights law, including an important expansion of the ways that Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act would protect workers from sex discrimination. Throughout their history, men working as flight attendants helped evolve an industry often identified with American adventuring, technological innovation, and economic power into a queer space.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A stunning success and an enormously important contribution to not only LGBT history, but also to the labor, feminist, legal, aviation, and AIDS historiographic literatures. . . . *Plane Queer* is essential reading for anybody interested in LGBT history. . . . Pick the book up. Read it. You won't be disappointed, I promise." (Chrislove Daily Kos 2013-10-08)"In this seemingly narrow demographic, Tiemeyer finds notable achievements in equal rights, from the first workplace health

benefits for domestic partners, in 2001, to a 1984 legal decision forcing an airline to reinstate a flight attendant with AIDS, which he argues was a key step in the run-up to the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act." (Don Sapatkin Philadelphia Inquirer 2013-04-23)"Tiemeyer's fascinating, in-depth study reveals that the very assumption that male flight attendants are gay has led to major conflicts--and major progress." (Jim Gladstone Passport Magazine 2013-08-01)

•Tiemeyer takes a completely original approach to a fascinating subject in aviation history and American history. He deftly reconstructs the careers of gay flight attendants and relates them to changes in urban nightlife, the technological and regulatory revolutions in aviation, the cold war backlash against homosexuality, the civil rights movement, feminism, neoliberalism, and the AIDS pandemic. His postmortem on the "patient zero" legend of Gaetan Dugas is nothing short of a revelation. •David Courtwright, author of Sky as Frontier•Phil Tiemeyer's terrific book delivers the long, forgotten history of the male flight attendant. That history stretches back to the dawn of commercial aviation, and was characterized by waves of toleration and scorn in which the male steward was repeatedly drawn in and then forced out of the occupation. Through jack-of-all-trades research methods, Tiemeyer has broken the boundaries that separate labor, legal, and LGBT history, and given us a unique vantage on the history of AIDS. Pioneering and important. •Margot Canaday, author of The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth Century America•Plane Queer demonstrates the usefulness of thinking about the treatment of workers seen as "gender-queers": those who refuse to act in the ways expected of individuals of their sex, regardless of their own sexual orientation. In doing so, he expands notions of gender rights, queer rights, and the impact of homophobia on all workers. •Ileen A. DeVault, Professor of Labor History, Cornell University

I'm worried that tenure boards could say, "Well who cares about gay stewards?! No tenure for you!" However, this book is so amazing and thoughtful, it boggles the mind. I simply looove this book and applaud the scholar for making it. This was such a profound marriage of history, gender studies, gay studies, inter alia, that it boggle the mind. The book's title has a double meaning. A gay steward is the "queer" on the plane. Moreover, they may perform a role in which they make the plane or plane staff or plane trip non-normative i.e. "queer." (Btw, I don't think the author ever mentions that they former Nirvana member played the role of a gay steward in one Foo Fighters video.) The author never mentions Dr. Christine Williams, as far as I remember. She has written several books about the experiences of workers in professions that consist mostly of people of the

opposite gender. Thus, she has studies female engineers, but also male nurses and librarians. I think of this author's book is a continuation of Dr. Williams' pioneering efforts. For those who doubt the cultural importance of gay stewards, the author emphasizes two things. First, the Patient Zero of Randy Shilt's "And the Band Played On" was a foreign, gay flight attendant. This caused a hysteria. However, a few years ago, the press covered a flight attendant who jumped out a plane on the slip-n-slide slide with two bottles of beer. Instead of being reviled, that steward was seen as a working-class hero. The author has explained how so much has changed in the past 70 or so years of flight. To the author's credit, he doesn't leave other identities at the table; this does not just deal with sexual orientation. The author asks very quickly, "Stewards do comforting, servile work and thus are deemed feminized, yet (Black) Pullman porters did the exact same work, only a trains, and their sexuality was never questioned." He stated that only white and white-looking Latinos were the only hired stewards originally, so there is a reason why gay men of color do not originally appear in the text, not out of oppressive motives. He speaks about how the racial civil rights movement influenced the original gay rights movement, which included many stewards. I forgot the name of it, but another scholar wrote an amazing book in which she explain why we now associate figure skating with women when it was originally seen as an upper-class leisure activity for men. I think folk may want to read these texts back to back. Again, two loud snaps for this powerful, thoughtful, informative text. Give this man tenure five months ago!

Having been a flight attendant.....I never knew how much I was discriminated against ! but seriously...and this book is VERY serious, there is a lot of substance and education here, This is not a happy "coffee tea or me" romp and giggle. It is very informative and should be enjoyed by people into the history of gay men, labor relations and airline history. Amazing. Not for the faint of heart or those looking for a "light" read.

Don't know that the subject has any competition. Fascinating to realise not only homophobia and sexism involved but also racism. As Pullman porters who were the train equivalent of flight attendants - got no flack for the same service role. But they were black you see! Also interesting shifts in time for when was ok and then not ok.

So good I purchased it for Justice Ginsburg. Great synthesis of law, economics and social change. Yes, it reads like a dissertation, but a fascinating one.

Incredible oral histories. The author did an great job of capturing the seriousness of both the AIDS crisis and the importance of men moving into a female dominated workspace. This was a great book to read for my history of masculinity graduate course. It was well written.

"Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, and AIDS in the History of Male Flight Attendants" is an outstanding social history by Phil Tiemeyer about flight attendants and their challenges since the beginning of air transportation. He argues that these individuals were a distinct, highly-visible, uniquely-skilled work force whose actions were very much the stuff of popular culture. The male flight attendants looked to their profession as something more than a job; it was more like a calling, and it required sacrifice to carry the mission forward. Although the first stewards/flight attendants in the pre-World War II era were largely male, with the coming of war this profession became filled with women. In the aftermath of the war stewardesses entered the popular culture as a glamorous profession for young, attractive, single women who wanted to see the world, meet wealthy and handsome men, and expand their lives beyond anything they had known in America. The "coffee, tea, or me" meme emerged in the 1960s at almost the same time that men sought to reenter the ranks of flight attendants only to find them shut out by industry policy. Lawsuits resulted and eventually the first male flight attendants began work. Just as famously, the cultural mindset identified these men as largely gay and assigned to them gender-based, sexuality-based, and AIDS-based discrimination. Many were gay, Tiemeyer suggests, but not all. Regardless of sexual orientation they facilitated key breakthroughs in civil rights, helping to reinterpret Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act protecting workers from sex discrimination as a means of breaking into the all-female flight attendant corps. They also helped—sometimes inadvertently through their professionalism on the job and sometimes through activism—to build acceptance for their community. They came out to employers and co-workers, responded to homophobic and AIDS-phobic ideas, and advocated for LGBT rights. This is social history of a high order; it is also a success in drawing an important aspect of aerospace history into a larger conversation about the culture of America in the period since the 1960s.

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