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### "Big Mean Sweaty Dykes Looking For Trouble:' The Evolution of Working Class Lesbian Culture and Organized Labor"

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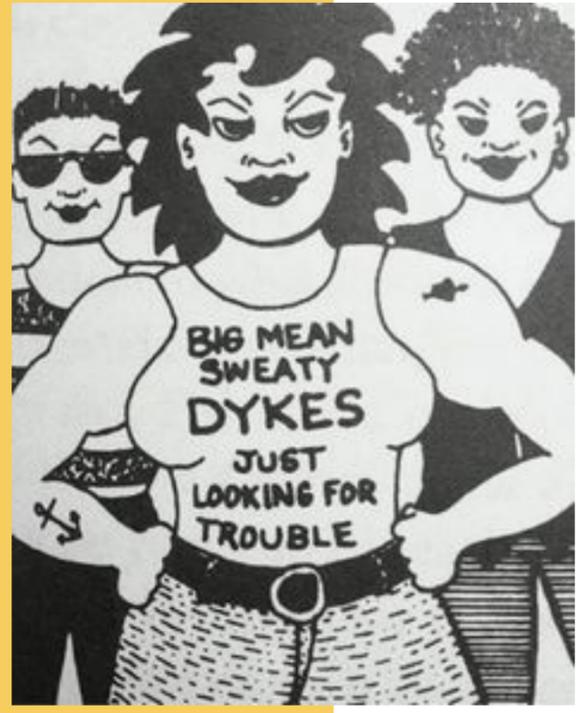
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# BIG MEAN SWEATY DYKES LOOKING FOR TROUBLE

Working Class Lesbian Culture and Organized Labor

Keywords: Marxist; queer; lesbian; trans; geography; feminism; homonationalism; 9/11



### THESIS

Political working class lesbians uniquely “fail” at being cooperative economic subjects, both due to their status as organized members of the working class and their historical disengagement with the reproduction of the nuclear family. Capitalism depends on these structures in order to operate properly, and due to the interconnected nature of oppression, organized communities are a capitalist’s worst nightmare. In truth, the ruling class “constitutes a small minority of the population; it therefore must use the institutional and ideological tools at its disposal to divide the mass of the population against itself in order to prevent the majority from uniting and rising in unison to take back what is rightfully theirs” (Wolf, 10). Disruptions of this capitalist status quo are exactly why it is in the interest of the ruling class to deem these groups “invisible” and then replace them. The loss of this radical community leaves us to wonder, as Judith Butler articulates in “Imitation and Gender Insubordination:” “How, then, to ‘be’ a lesbian in a political context in which the lesbian does not exist?” (Butler, 312)

### POLITICAL LESBIANISM

Who *are* the big mean sweaty dykes in question? Political lesbians, dykes, working class queers; while lesbian terminology varies across decades of discourse, the community I aim to refer to is distinctly located in the working class and interested in organized liberation. I use “dykes” in this project.



“Lesbianism: an Act of Resistance” by Cheryl Clarke has become a critical text in identifying this community. She argues that political lesbians are “lesbians who are resisting the prevailing culture’s attempts to keep us invisible and powerless,” who have a duty to “become more visible (particularly black and other lesbians of color) to our sisters hidden in their various closets, locked in prisons of self-hate and ambiguity, afraid to take the ancient act of woman-bonding beyond the sexual, the private, the personal” (Clarke, 134)

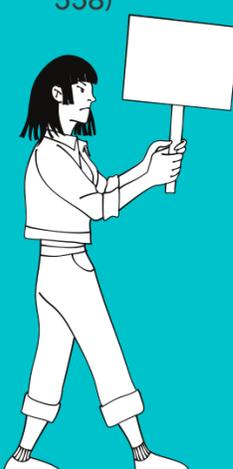


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### BUTCH OR FEMME?: BAR CULTURE AND POLITICS

Stone Butch Blues by Leslie Feinberg

- “Making a queer world has required the development of all kinds of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation. These intimacies do bear a necessary relation to a counterpublic-- an indefinitely accessible world conscious of its subordinate relation” (Berlant and Warner, 558)
- The relationship between homophobia and social reproduction
  - Butch/femme bar culture and working class politics
- Political strength of labor/unions
- The impact of Red Scare and Lavender Scare



### DIVIDE AND CONQUER: THE LESBIAN BORDER WARS

Zami by Audre Lorde

- “However, in the border wars between butches and transsexual men, transsexuals are often cast as those who cross borders (of sex, gender, bodily coherence), and butches are left as those who stay in one place, possibly a border space of nonidentity. The terminology of “border war” is both apt and problematic for this reason. On the one hand, the idea of a border war sets up some notion of territories to be defended, ground to be held or lost, permeability to be defended against. On the other hand, a border war suggests that the border is at best slippery and permeable” (Halberstam, 163)
- The role of academia and second-wave feminism in the disappearance of working class lesbian spaces
- Crackdown on organized labor

### BORN THIS WAY: HOMONATIONALISM AND THE 'NEW QUEER'

Drag King Dreams by Leslie Feinberg

- “Thus while queer bodies may be disallowed, there is room for the absorption and management of homosexuality—temporally, historically, and spatially specific—when advantageous for US national interests” (Puar, 72)
- Homonationalism and the affect of 9/11
- Assimilationism and the new queer economy
  - Living in a “post-gay” world
- Globalization and outsourcing labor
- The future of “queer”

