

The Straight Stuff

How to succeed at bigotry without really trying, sex scandals a-go-go, and the latexing of America.

B Y W C M e R A E

Cameron-dammerung

While most of us were enjoying the May springtime, one group of Portlanders was arranging an Oregon speaking tour for a man who would urge the extermination of another group of Portlanders. **Paul Cameron** was here the last week of May. A self-styled scientist of homosexuality and AIDS, Cameron has been stripped of his credentials by the American Psychological Association and the Midwest Psychological Association, censured by a Texas Federal Court and ridiculed by the scientists whose statistics he distorts. Cameron's notoriety derives from his astonishingly anti-gay traveling snake oil show. For a \$2,000 fee, Cameron was invited to Oregon by the ever-vigilant **Concerned Women for America** to participate in debates and lectures intended to scare the bejeezus out of his right wing and fundamentalist hosts.

Unfortunately, the local press, either by collusion or ill-considered methods of objectivity, helped spread Cameron's hysterical views.

KGW covered Cameron's initial debate, probably giving us more credit ("Portland's gay community was ready") than is strictly fair. Before Cameron's arrival, **Mark Sanchez of KOIN** had been preparing a two-part report on the impact of AIDS, which Sanchez called "AfrAIDS." Enter Paul Cameron, whom Sanchez interviewed as an AIDS expert. Even though Sanchez and the management at KOIN were notified prior to screening that Cameron had been professionally discredited and that his appearance would negatively affect many viewers, KOIN went ahead. The report contained no references to Cameron's lack of professional credentials or his reputation as a deluded loonyman. Cameron's observations were countered. In KOIN's approximation of fairness, by opinions offered by local advocates of AIDS patients. Cameron, by fiat, became the sole "medical" ("Dr." Cameron) authority. KEX radio aired a "debate" between Cameron and Cascade AIDS Project's Tom Koberstein. KEX did not refer to Cameron's benighted professional status.

Only KGW had the nerve to broadcast **Cameron proposing the execution of gays as a solution to the AIDS crisis.**

Apparently, none of the other media was interested in doing so, perhaps due to fear of making Cameron seem too extreme. TV and radio have institutionalized the debate format into its new methodology, and if the media made Cameron seem too off the wall, too unanswerably objectionable, then its lazy reliance on a thesis/antithesis method of coverage would break down. But AIDS is not debatable: no one is for AIDS. However, in the melee of lies and misinterpreted statistics that is a Cameron debate, to be against Cameron is to be pro-AIDS. From here, it is not far to "gays cause AIDS" (a Cameron article of faith) and then only a stroll to the concentration camps.

The Oregonian fared no better in its coverage of Cameron. In a more than usually pusillanimous piece of reporting, the **Oregonian's** Holly Danks cogently summarized Cameron's arguments against condoms and sex education, but somehow neglected Cameron's comments about internment camps and executions. Further, Danks describes Cameron as "a psychologist who has written several books on sexuality and taught human development and family life at the University of Nebraska," and who "heads a private sex research institution." If Danks had access to this information she certainly also had access to information stating that Cameron had been censured by his colleagues and his professional affiliates due to ethical breaches, and that Cameron's "sex research institute" is staffed only by Cameron and his wife. By telling only one side of the story, our local paper of record conveys information in a style that Paul Harvey would applaud.

Cameron's welcome in Eugene was less fulsome than in Portland. He was invited for a debate with an ACLU representative by the intriguingly named **Oregonians for the Rectitude of Life** (a front group for county GOP chair Floyd Beam). However, the ACLU and its representative, Charles Hinkle, refused to legitimize Cameron's views by debating, and withdrew. University of Oregon's Young Republicans distanced themselves from the Cameron debate and cancelled the university classroom where the debate was to be held. Cameron did manage, however, to speak to Churchill High School health classes about AIDS.

In contrast to the *Oregonian*, the

Eugene Register-Guard printed a front page debunking of Cameron. Identifying him only as a "writer and lecturer." Bill Bishop's story quotes Cameron, ("Homosexuality is the single worst common habit system to which a human being can fall victim."), and turns the story to a questioning of Cameron's legitimacy by quoting three health care professionals.

The group that brought Cameron to Oregon, **Concerned Women for America**, is the equivalent of a ladies auxiliary to other groups in the Bible Truss that sometimes seems to girdle Portland: **Drew Davis' Concerned Citizens of Portland**, and Joe Lutz's coalition, **Oregon Citizen's Alliance**.

After the Portland debate, I angrily inquired of a "Concerned Woman" how she could sit there and hear someone propose the death of people like me, who were sitting next to her. "Why, it's for your own good," she replied simply. I realized then that what attracts these people to Cameron, and what they respond to, is not his bogus epidemiology, but **the opportunities he describes for suffering and punishment.** When Cameron says *extermination*, these worshipers of The-Straight-White-Man-Who-Art-In-Heaven hear *sacrifice*. They feel strongly about AIDS and homosexuality: It would add immeasurably to the sanctity of their ideas if someone were to suffer because of them. To minds that feverishly and constantly attempt to distill religious principles out of hatred and bigotry, Cameron's talk of eradication is transubstantiated into a regrettable but compellingly necessary sacrifice of fellow human beings. Demanding blood to justify the importance of a social order is nothing new. The military establishment has always derived a large measure of its sanctity by sacrificing the younger part of our population.

Sex and the politician

"Politics makes strange bed-fellows" is not even an effective colloquialism any longer — it is practically a headline. The *liaisons dangereuses* of Gary Hart and the PTL-cum-Babylon manipulated by Jimmy Bakker has sharpened the teeth of investigative reporters. You can't pick up the paper without reading about a politician with his pants down. And, as Gertrude Stein said, "History teaches history teaches": FDR and his secretary, Eisenhower and his assistant, Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe are all cited to establish the tradition. Even our current paragon is not immune: Barbara Ehrenreich and Jane

O'Reilly, writing in *Vogue*, allude to the "unusual closeness between Ronnie and his personal assistant, Helene Van Damm."

So it was a surprise that, when last month **Massachusetts Rep. Barney Frank revealed to the Boston Globe that he was gay**, the story did not explode into the sort of anguished rhetoric visited on recent revelations of heterosexual dalliance. Apparently the press decided that Gary Hart's heterosexuality would affect his performance in office, while Frank's forthrightness deserved their blessings.

The question isn't how Frank, or Gerry Studds, rose so high without being detected. Rather, why hasn't the press unmasked more gays in government? Locally, a former Washington governor, and a former Portland City Commissioner each served without the press staking out their homes. Former County Commissioner Shadburne was exposed only after financial irregularities came to light. But with the scent of blood in the air, one wonders how long these people, or senior members of the Oregon congressional delegation, can escape scrutiny.

Condoms, condoms, everywhere

Remember last winter when the media, because of the delicacy of their sensibilities, were shredding their garments in consternation because of **a call to advertise condoms?** Now it's hard to predict where you'll see the next condom ad, or what you'll receive in the paper: New York City is running an explicit series of ads (TV, print, and billboards,) directed at **heterosexuals.** "Bang, you're dead!" one begins; another reads, "The other night Charlie brought home a quart of milk, a loaf of bread, and a case of AIDS." New York City is also distributing condoms at singles bars, massage parlours and movie theaters. The *Boston Phoenix*, an alternative news-weekly, distributed condoms and a "safe sex" guide in a late May issue.



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Just Out, 4, July, 1987

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