

## Freedom and justice for all — American-style

*With the Hardwick decision, the venerable gentlemen and lady of the Supreme Court made clear that America "land of the free and home of the brave" will not tolerate the ideal of freedom and justice for all.*

BY MICHAEL S. REED

It is July, the half-way mark for 1987. There will be picnics, vacations and hot summer evenings spent with friends. July is the month where America does the fandango for freedom. On July 4th, we celebrate revolution. We pay homage to people who rebelled against an oppressive government, high taxes and the dictation of religious philosophy.

What is ironic about this is that we celebrate the disruption of order all the while believing that we are safe and secure in our little American world of American double standards. We may sit cozily at our picnic tables, treading it up on watermelon and potato salad, safe in the knowledge that we have a leader who looks after our image almost as carefully as he promotes his own. Like our leader, we understand very little of foreign policy — but when he rides across our televisions like John Wayne, six-shooters blazing and proclaiming the strength and goodness of America, we are comforted in the same way as we are comforted by the celluloid cavalry's arrival at the last movie minute.

Americans, like others anywhere, choose their leaders by how well they tell us what we want to hear. If our economy seems to be weakening, we wait for someone to come along who acts well enough to convince us he can fix it all with no problem. When terrorists kill an American we wait for our leader to hop up on his stallion and charge into the fray to defend our honor and avenge those American lives.

If it's what we want, he'll give it to us. He's a showman. He understands razzle dazzle. And that's what frightens me.

I do not like the direction in which we are headed. Mr. Reagan has been steadily leading us down the primrose path of American self-righteousness. He is setting an example of just how ugly America can be as it knocks down anything that stands in the way of its goal. The ugliness lies in hypocrisy. A fine example of that hypocrisy is last year's Hardwick decision by the Supreme Court. With one hacking blow those venerable gentlemen and lady made it clear that America, land of the free and home of the brave, would not tolerate living up to its own ideals of freedom and justice for all.

The Supreme Court told each state in the country that they had the right to dictate what went on in the privacy of the bedroom. The case, *Bowers v. Hardwick*, involved a cop entering the home of Michael Hardwick with a traffic warrant. Once in Hardwick's home, the arresting officer found Hardwick making love with another man. Georgia has a law against that sort of thing. The officer arrested Hardwick. Hardwick fought the arrest, challenging its constitutionality. The case went before the Supreme Court which held that the Constitution did not confer a fundamental right upon homosexuals to engage in sodomy. Actually, the Constitution says nothing about the illegality of such an act, either. I do believe the court



makes a great deal of fuss over the word "freedom." Yet the venerable and esteemed Court chose to ignore that word and dwelt on their own rather aged religiosity. Rather than framing the issue on the freedom of consenting adults to choose their own sexual behavior, the Court focused on the issue of homosexuality. Most of us know that it is highly unlikely that a police officer would arrest a heterosexual caught in the act of sodomy. That same officer's morals, however, would be truly challenged should he find a homosexual in that situation. How convenient that now each state has the right to outlaw homosexuality — how very American.

I am not that surprised at the decision, though. 1986 marked the fifth year of the AIDS era and we have been seeing many homophobic events occur simply because of the fear engendered by this disease. The Hardwick decision was simply a giant stepping stone for what is to come.

The other night, while watching *Nightline*, I saw a group of protestors outside the White House being arrested by the Washington D.C. police. The protestors were protesting Mr. Reagan's most recent bout of ineptitude in calling for mandatory testing for HIV antibodies all across America. In the film clip, the police were wearing yellow rubber gloves, presumably to protect from being contaminated by the filthy, diseased perverts. It was more than a little chilling to see that kind of Homophobia in full bloom. But then, why shouldn't the police be as ignorant as our leader? Does he really think that mandatory testing is going to help? I don't think so. Since there is no provision for confidentiality in his plan, our names, addresses and health status will be offered up like sacrificial lambs when it comes time for more desperate measures.

I find it amusing, in a way, that Mr. Reagan is trying so desperately to deflect the nation's growing attention on his foreign policy blunders by calling for such a reactionary, short-sighted plan. I realize I should be relieved that finally, at long last, he has decided to speak out about the epidemic. I would have been more impressed if he had mentioned something straightforward about the exchange of bodily fluids or the necessity of condoms. But, that probably wouldn't sail with the more puritannical members of our society. They would rather have everyone die than to speak plainly about matters sexual. It is America's puritannical backbone which is

to blame for the spread of this disease. What is needed now is clear, no-nonsense language about sex and sexual behavior. And the language must not be in terms of right or wrong, but instead in terms of survival.

It really boils down to a matter of expectations. What can one expect from a man who helped to deprive, through his inadequate economic knowledge, so many people of their homes and jobs and then make token offerings of butter and cheese to assuage their losses. What can one expect from someone who has flouted the safety of the American people in his pre-tentious and ill-executed war on terrorism.

A leader is only as noble as the people who empower him, which doesn't say much for us, does it?

This July 4th, instead of celebrating freedom, I shall be in mourning. I shall mourn the inequity and injustice of the six year silence by America's leader that is nothing less than act of genocide. I shall rage against the hypocrisy of a country that makes lip service to the idea of freedom, yet sits on its morals when it comes time to make it a reality. I will attempt to ignore the choking fear I have that someday I shall find myself on a train, heading toward one of those internment camps used to incarcerate Americans of Japanese ancestry in the 1940s. They were Americans, too.

And I will renew my vow to fight, scratch and claw against injustice and persecution by any body of people that dictates how and whom to love.



Photo from the movie *The Times of Harvey Milk*.

Harvey Milk, openly gay & supervisor of San Francisco was assassinated by an anti-gay, racist, sexist bigot in 1979.

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