

## The straight stuff

*The mainstreaming of America; the (AIDS) children are for burning; the gowns and grass skirts of the Right wing; and more.*

B Y W C M c R A E

### Suffer the little children

The White House, unsurprisingly, announced it will oppose a House bill designed to ban discrimination against people infected by HIV; the bill would also establish civil penalties for abridging the confidentiality of AIDS test results. Speaking for the administration, Secretary of Health Dr. Otis Bowen dismissed the need for federal leadership in AIDS anti-discrimination. "If a state concludes that additional protections are or are not in the interest of its people under the particular conditions of such state, then it should be free to act accordingly."

The White House announcement followed Senate hearings and media coverage that have increasingly focused on discrimination against children with AIDS. The Ray family of Arcadia, Florida, had their house razed and their children expelled from public school. Ryan White has made the cover of most national news magazines. The Associated Press and National Public Radio contrasted reactions to school-age AIDS patients in different cities. Suddenly children have become the token around which the social issues of AIDS are being fought. However, the energies brought to this discussion derive from the malignancy of homophobia.

It isn't surprising that the media focus on the impact of AIDS on families: it is a way of taking the experience of discrimination, fear, and illness associated with AIDS and making it universally meaningful. What is surprising, given the fact we have now centered the discourse on kids, is the speed with which a portion of the population is still willing to consign children to the flames (in Florida, literally so). Likewise, the White House, despite testimony from parents, took a stand to allow discrimination against ill children, in order not to seem to be pandering to the demands of gays. If some kids suffer just so gays don't benefit, then so be it, Reagan seems to be saying.

### Mandatory testing as litmus test

The dawning of the Age of Aquarius was nothing compared to the new age of glamour (and social responsibility) ushered in by our new Miss America. Not only did Kaye Lani Rae Rafko look divine in a grass skirt, she also tends to the ill.

As a nurse, Rafko told judges, she had worked with AIDS patients. Furthermore, she advocated "mandatory" testing for antibodies to HIV. Satisfied with her High Seriousness, the judges awarded the Michigan 24-year-old Miss

America's \$100,000 stipend. The media did not report just who Miss Rafko thought should be mandatorily tested, nor was evidence presented that the judges bothered to ask her.

Calls for mandatory testing by the AIDS Laity have increasingly come to signify, not a seriously considered opinion on epidemiology, but merely a Rightist position on the political scale. Like the Equal Rights Amendment and *Contra* funding before it, calls for mandatory testing (of Others) are becoming the litmus test of the Far Right, the password into the Sanctuary of Conservatism.

With such a rigorously pragmatic turn of mind, Miss Rafko might consider going into politics. She might, given her expertise and experience, consider serving on President Reagan's AIDS Commission. There, she could join Penny Pullen, an Illinois state legislator, who, with the aid of help-mate Phyllis Schlafly, this summer pushed a sweeping set of state laws regarding AIDS through the Illinois legislature. Among other things, the laws mandate (that word again) testing of applicants for marriage licenses for HIV antibodies and allow tracing of sex partners of sero-positive individuals by the state.

Miss Rafko would also join Cory SerVaas, editor of the *Saturday Evening Post* on the commission. SerVaas, whose principal contribution to the AIDS crisis has been the AIDS Mobile which goes from church to church testing Christians for HIV antibodies (not mandatorily — yet). This month's *Post* deals with another compelling and central issue of AIDS: cases of AIDS misdiagnosed as Alzheimer's disease.

The Commission that Reagan named in July to advise him on AIDS issues has had some rough sledding recently. The commission last month fired its own executive director, Linda Schaeffer, amid reports of complaints that she lacked the experience to organize the panel and establish its goals. It might well be asked how even a gifted bureaucrat could organize a committee that includes, among other notables, the president of Amway, an anti-gay Roman Catholic Cardinal, a California sex counsellor who backed last year's LaRouche AIDS-quarantine initiative, a gay geneticist, and the Weird Sisters, Pullen and SerVaas.

Is this a commission, or a circus? Neither. It's Chernobyl — an administration official told the *New York Times* "the commission is in a state of total meltdown."

### Beware men wearing gowns

Two men who have both used arguments of "original intent" to justify the limitation of rights of gays and lesbians — and just about everyone else — have been on media parade



this month.

Robert Bork journeyed to the Senate for his confirmation hearing, and found the press in a lather. Media opponents have chosen largely to portray Bork as Adolf Hitler with chin hairs: a man "out of the mainstream" due to his apparent disregard of rights for minorities and individual freedoms.

One person's "minority," however, is another person's "special interest group." Bork's partisans, using the old "by his enemies ye shall know him" strategy, have attempted to portray Borkophobes as "yes boys" to special interest groups who, by advocating more rights for everyone, will soon have us lock-stepping into Soviet domination.

To Bork's supporters, gay rights activists are first among equals when it comes to special interest groups. References to opposition by the "organized gay lobby" in editorials is meant to show just how more-mainstream-than-thou Bork really is. The liberals who are running the Senate hearings have never allowed Bork's (and their own?) anti-gay sentiments to become an issue in the hearings, proving once again that gay bashing is still a popular sport.

Such fear of being in thrall to "special interest groups" might be justified if the Right itself weren't so densely populated with them. Since when aren't Republicans a special interest group?

The resemblance between the views of Bork and Pope John Paul II is uncanny. Both oppose, within their respective spheres of influence, precisely the same things — the rights of women, and gays and lesbians; access to contraception and abortions, and so on. The Pope, however, argues God's original intent.

The media have used religious dissenters (the ecclesiastic equivalent of special interest groups) not so much to locate the Pope out of the church's mainstream, but to isolate the dissenters outside of orthodoxy. Gays — especially gay priests (whatever happened to lesbian nuns?) — became media stars as they demanded full inclusion in the church. The media effect, however, was to discredit the opposition. By playing up the gay angle, the press consigned the Pope's opposition to the fringe.

So what's the difference between Pope John Paul II and Judge Robert Bork? The colors of their gowns.

### Entertainment, briefly

As part of Seattle's Performa '87 New Works Festival, New City Theatre and Theatre X (of Milwaukie) premiered *A History of Sexuality*, a play based on the works of gay French social historian Michel Foucault. In each of three acts, the play examines changing concepts of what constitutes sexuality, from de Sade, to Freud, to a 20th century advertising firm.

Set in Toronto, *I've heard the Mermaids Singing* is filmmaker Patricia Rozema's first feature-length motion picture. *Mermaids* deals with an urban "bachelorette" whose job as a gallery assistant to a lesbian curator provides more than an education in art.

Portland had a hilarious weekend with comic Tom Ammiano last month. Producer Howie Bierbaum said Ammiano's show *Wrists*, which chronicled the comic's upbringing, played to full houses. Bierbaum was also pleased with the turnout of women for a gay male stand-up comic. "Gay show business would be nothing without lesbians," Bierbaum is looking for financial backers to help bring more gay entertainment to Portland. After leaving Portland, Ammiano opened in a new comedy revue *Can't Keep a Straight Face* in San Francisco's Theatre Rhino.

According to a poll in *Soap Opera Digest*, eighty-seven percent of soap viewers want to see AIDS addressed on daytime TV. Accordingly, *All My Children's* Mark reveals he has shared needles with a friend, now dead of AIDS.

Tune in tomorrow.

### ART/AIDS: Galleries, bookstores plan AIDS benefit

A benefit by Portland's visual arts community to provide a long-term care fund for AIDS patients, will be held Sunday, October 11. Participants will first visit galleries where works donated for sale will be on display (4-6 p.m.). Following gallery visits, a community gathering will be held (6-8 p.m.) at the Oregon Art Institute, where hors d'oeuvres, music, performances, and an address by Tom Higgins will conclude the evening. All proceeds from the sale of tickets and from the sale of art works will be donated to the Oregon AIDS Task Force, which will administer the dispersal of the funds. Tickets for the event are \$10 and up, and are available from private ticket sellers, and from participating bookstores and galleries.

The day before, on Saturday, October 10, Portland-area bookstores will contribute ten percent of that day's sales to ART/AIDS (it's not too early to buy those Christmas gifts). On the same day, starting at 11:00 and following throughout the day on the hour, local writers and artists will read from their own works and other selected passages.

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