

## Gay pride 1988: still angry after all these years

*Those who keep silent condone bigotry because they  
refuse to stand and be counted against it*

BY MICHAEL S. REED

**M**y fearless editor called the other day to tell me that someone out there found parts of this column obscene and was going to take it straight to the attorney general's office.

The offending column appeared in the March 1988 issue. I believe the offending word was "cock." The offensive passage discussed the use of that cock in an act of the love that dare not speak its name.

I'm a wordsmith, and although — aesthetically — I may not like certain words because of their



sound or how they are spelled, I find very few words obscene.

I could understand the fuss if I had used the word "cock" in some licentious and lascivious manner: "He licked the cock lovingly for fifteen hours." But I didn't. I used the word in reference to safe sex, or the lack thereof, in an encounter between two men.

I do not believe in mincing words. This country is under siege by a deadly virus, a virus that is spread through blood and/or semen (cum, jism, sperm), and its most likely mode of transmission between men is asshole/cock contact.

I find nothing shameful about trying to save lives. As for complaints that the word "cock" might damage someone's child, I have this to say: if a child is old enough to read this newspaper and understand it, then he or she is old enough to learn how to avoid getting AIDS. Hiding behind medical terminology is not enough. Honesty is. If you let someone fuck you without a rubber on his cock, you may well die. It's very simple.

The freedom to speak frankly is one of the fringe benefits of being an American. It's a right for which we all pay a fortune in taxes each year. Those best served by waving an obscenity banner are those who want our elimination.

Obscenity laws must be challenged and broken. They are wrong. Who is fit to decide such things? Where does it end? Should we allow petty moralists to tell us what we can and cannot read, words we may not use, thoughts and feelings we may or may not have?

The answer is no.

I worry when folks have such an intimate relationship with God that they forget it is human beings with whom they coexist. Human beings are sexual, and no amount of moralizing will change that. Moralizing only suppresses sexuality into an unhealthy state. There are worse problems in the world than the use of the word "cock" in this publication. Why aren't these do-gooders — these self-proclaimed protectors of society's dwindling mores — working to house and employ the homeless or setting up shelters to protect battered and sexually abused children? After all, they certainly aren't going to protect anyone from AIDS if they believe that morality alone will stop the virus.

And we cannot forget that there are gay and lesbian children, too. Those children have as much right to the information of their subculture as does any other minority. This particular subculture hasn't the time to be squeamish about sexual terminology. If those children learn from me how to protect themselves from AIDS, then so be it. That is how we save lives. Next question: what are the moralists doing to save lives?

The answer: very little. They waste precious time by shrieking about the innocence of children as the disease spreads because people are too embarrassed to discuss the sexual issues.

So, it's time to get in their face — to stand and be counted. Begin by being at the Lesbian and Gay Pride Day march/parade. If you aren't at the parade on June 18, then you must believe that gay people deserve to be beaten up, imprisoned, quarantined and tested. Those who keep silent condone bigotry because they refuse to stand and be counted against it.

As AIDS seeps into the consciousness of America, we are in more danger than ever before. America has already ignored the deaths of thousands of gay men, simply because it was the easiest means of exterminating us. Now, with America blaming us for AIDS, we must protect ourselves. We must be loud and strong, gathering together to make ourselves heard. We cannot afford to make a weak showing to the world. We know from experience how America feeds on the weakness of others. We cannot allow ourselves the luxury of silence when there remain so many wrongs to right.

And there is room for everyone at the parade: gay and lesbian, black and white, butch and nelly, feminists, the proud and the angry, boy-lovers, Marxists, the weak, the desperate, the hopeful, Christians, moms, dads, sisters, brothers, Jews, Chicanos, fairies and fags, dykes and lezzies; everyone should be there — everyone who can walk, ride or crawl — if they believe that there is room in the world for everyone.

It is our Independence Day, our celebration of the Stonewall riots where we refused to be oppressed by ignorance any longer. We shall celebrate freedom from our closets, freedom from silence.

No one is ashamed here. We are strong because we have to be. We have lived in the shadow of the plague for seven years. We have watched our friends and acquaintances die. We are still educating ourselves and, if the world is willing to listen, we can share our ways of coping with this deadly disease. We are better informed about AIDS because we won't hide behind prudery as an excuse for ignorance. This is the lesson we must teach America. Silence now means death.

So be at the parade. Bring your pity for the Bible-thumping moralists who haven't the sophistication to understand that AIDS education slows the spread of the virus. Bring your love for freedom and your pride for having the courage to live your life the way you choose. Carry this message to the world: We are not your enemy. We are your sons and daughters. We are Americans. We are human beings who deserve the same right to love and live as any other human being. A virus is the enemy. Stand with us against this virus. Perhaps then we may achieve a world where people can live peacefully together without imposing moral judgments and stifling oppressions on each other.

And bring your whistles, banners, signs, ribbons and balloons. The point is to make noise, be heard and be seen. It's time to let the world know that we will never be silenced again. •

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Our thanks go to those *Just Out* readers who number among our customers. We enjoy seeing each of you, appreciate being of service to all of you — and welcome your references — thank you very much.

This month, we join our *Just Out* clients in celebrating Lesbian and Gay Pride and remind them to celebrate safely.

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