

just out

since 1983

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guest editorial

Moral immune system

The far right came out the night of the Republican National Convention and the country looked straight into the face of hate

by Barbra Streisand

The moral immune system of this country has been weakened and attacked, and the AIDS virus is the perfect metaphor for it. What's happened these last 12 years is that bigotry was legitimized. Rules were made by and for white, Christian, heterosexual males. All the rest of us were left out. And a disease that has infected far more heterosexuals than homosexuals throughout the world was dismissed as a gay disease, with that official homophobic wink, implying that those deaths didn't really matter. I will never forgive my fellow actor Ronald Reagan for his genocidal denial of the illness's existence, for his refusal to even utter the word *AIDS* for seven years, and for blocking adequate funding for research and education which could have saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

Then came George Bush, once the moderate, who, in a Faustian bargain, allied himself with the same primitive, gay-bashing, immoral minority. Like many of you, I sat and watched the Republican Convention in utter disbelief. How could the Pat Robertsons and Pat Buchanans, presuming to be the spokespeople for God, spew such doctrines of divisiveness, intolerance and inhumanity? Who is that God? A lot of us of different political outlooks came together that night. The radical right linked the issues for us and reminded us of how much was at stake as they branded the concerns of women, gays, minorities and Democrats as un-American. How dare they call us un-American! When Pat Robertson stood up and warned of Clinton, and I quote, "He wants to repeal the ban on homosexuals in the military and appoint homosexuals to his administration," I and millions of other Americans were even more convinced Bill Clinton was our candidate. And when Pat Buchanan thundered, and I quote, "We stand with George Bush against the amoral idea that gay and lesbian couples should have the same standing in law as married men and women," I wondered, who is Pat Buchanan to pronounce anybody's love invalid? How can he deny the profound love felt by one human being for another, a love that all too often takes them to the bitter end, holding each other in hospices and hospitals all over this nation?

Well, George Bush didn't say no to the Buchanans, but we said no to George Bush. The far right finally went too far. They came out that night and the country looked straight into the face of hate, and thank God—the God I know—the majority of people said: "Enough! Enough racism, enough sexism, enough gay-bashing, name-calling, discrimination, enough extremism." Isn't it just fantastic that the American people came down on the right side, the side of human rights, pure and simple? And we elected new leaders. We did it, you did it, I did it, women, gays, Jews, people of color, working people, old people, young people—all of us who valued ourselves enough to demand that our voices be heard. All of us who cherished common decency

and common sense revolted and out-organized, out-financed and out-thought those who despise what is best about our country: our cultural, racial and religious diversity.

I keep pinching myself. Finally, a president who is committed to finding a cure for AIDS. Finally, a president who acknowledges the patriotism of gays and lesbians willing to serve in the armed forces.... I feel that we are now entering a time of healing. We're grateful that our new president is committed to life, that he has put before us an agenda which is compassionate and caring. And, as he has said, AIDS policy can now be made based on sound scientific and public-health principles, not on panic, politics and prejudice.

We will be there to support him every step of the way. Our hopes are high and so are our expectations. But lest we be lulled into a false sense of security, the struggle goes on. Just look at the vote for hate in Colorado, where voters rescinded any protections for gays in employment or housing. And there are plenty of us who love the mountains and rivers of that truly beautiful state, but we must now say clearly that the moral climate there is no longer acceptable and, if we're asked to, we must refuse to play where they discriminate.

Many of us in this community worked very hard to get this president and many members of Congress elected, and we didn't do so in order to be invited to formal state dinners at the White House. We supported these candidates because they promised us profound change, and we want them to know we will be listening, watching and waiting.

In 1986, I saw a play by Larry Kramer called *The Normal Heart*, which affected me deeply, and I plan to make it into a movie. Set against the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, it's about everybody's right to love. The main character, Ned Weeks, founded the Gay Men's Health Crisis, only to be thrown out because he was too loud, too aggressive, too accusatory, too angry. Months later, discouraged, disheartened, sick of fighting his friends as well as his enemies, sick of the stupidity and worn down, he now faces his lover who is dying of AIDS. And his lover looks up at him and says: "Please learn to fight again. Don't lose that anger. Just have a little patience and forgiveness, for yourself as well." After his lover dies, Ned cries out: "Why didn't I fight harder? Why didn't I picket the White House all by myself if nobody would come?"

We're filled with hope right now that someday, somehow, we will see an end to this human tragedy. But let us vow, if need be, to picket the White House all by ourselves, until somebody comes. Thank you.

This is a speech given by Barbra Streisand to a star-studded gala benefiting the Los Angeles AIDS Project.



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