



Metropolitan Community Church of Portland Presents

# OUT on Broadway

In Celebration of National Coming Out Day  
~ Benefiting Esther's Pantry & MCC-Portland ~



**GRETHE CAMMERMEYER**  
Author "Serving in Silence"



**BARRY MORSE**  
Lt. General of 70's  
"The Fugitive"

**THE DICK SAUNDERS BAND**  
with VOCALIST  
Featuring the Music of Broadway  
and performances from the stage show  
Merely Players  
starring BARRY MORSE

With Presentation of the 2001 Shepherd's Award  
and Farewell Tribute to Rev. Roy Cole

**Thursday, October 11, 2001**  
**World Trade Center Theater**  
121 SW Salmon, Portland

Doors Open at 6 pm with Silent Auction • Show 7 pm  
Tickets \$45 - includes Post-Show Reception  
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## BOOKS

## The gaying of America

Will and Ellen might be accepted and applauded,  
but what about the rest of us?

BY ORIANA GREEN

**W**e are a living paradox. Gay men and lesbians have never enjoyed more media visibility and support, yet 30 of our 50 states provide no legal protection of our basic rights. Polls reveal most U.S. citizens want us to have equal employment opportunities but not the right to adopt children.

Author Suzanna Danuta Walters, with her impressive credentials from Georgetown University and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, demonstrates she's up to the task of dissecting this paradox and guiding us to an understanding of it. Her new book is titled *All the Rage: The Story of Gay Visibility in America* (University of Chicago Press, 2001; \$30 hardcover).

She calls our current times a historic moment. "Only 20 years ago when I was coming out, this world we now live in was unimaginable...gay MasterCards and gay ads, gay resorts and gay bingo, politicians courting gays and domestic partnership laws—who could even envision this moment?"

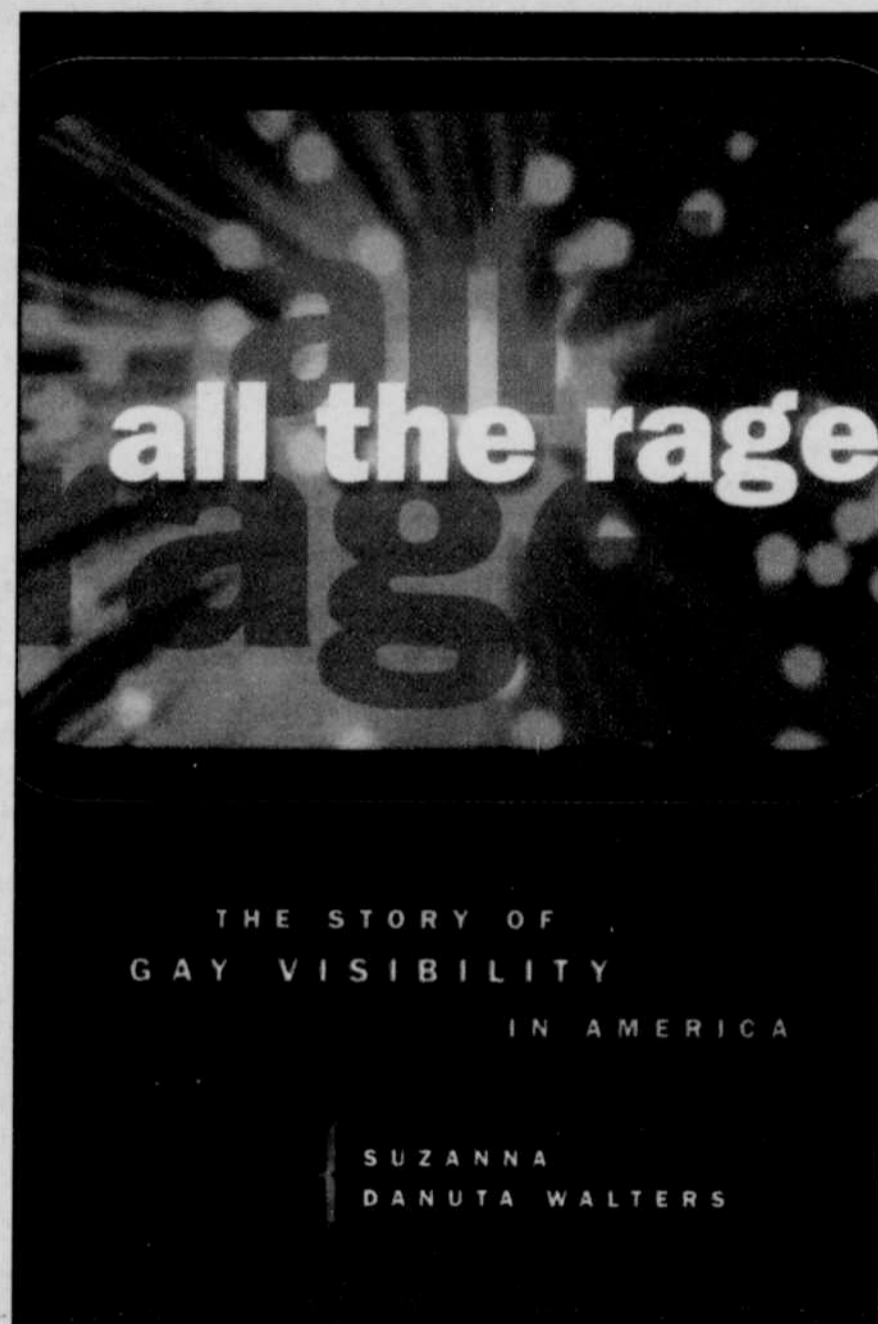
So doesn't this new visibility reveal an ideological shift in our acceptance? "I would never downplay the significance of having gay characters enter mainstream culture. But which images of gays are embraced, and which are pushed farther into the shadows? Heterosexuals who laugh at *Will & Grace* may dig the aesthetic but avoid the implications."

Walters also is concerned that the kinds of gay characters easily embraced by straights are the ones who are least threatening. "Far too often, representation of gays is limited to either the exotic but ultimately unthreatening Other—the cuddly cross-dresser like RuPaul—or as gays [who are] really just like straights after all—like Tom Hanks in *Philadelphia*. [It's] the 'aren't we all just human beings' position that reduces cultural specificity to a bland sameness and, of course, assumes heterosexuality as the desirable default zone."

And that reminds Walters of another buried bias. "It's reminiscent of the racist statement 'but I don't think of you as black'—implying that inclusion is based on an erasure of difference and an assumption of unquestioned white as good and normal."

Walters also worries that the true heart of our culture is not represented at all. "Our communities, our histories of struggle and survival, our imposed shame and subterfuge, our wit and alternative structures-of care—all these differences get erased and really violated when our worth is endlessly compared to that of heterosexuals."

In her book Walters expresses objections to the coming-out scenes that are a staple of so many films and television shows. "All too often, they focus [more] on the heterosexual reaction and response than the self-affirmation of the gay person. Anguished parents and compassionate 'friends' are the staples of these stories, focusing much more on the 'acceptance' and 'understanding' of the gay person,



THE STORY OF  
GAY VISIBILITY  
IN AMERICA  
SUZANNA  
DANUTA WALTERS

thus rendering gayness still a 'problem' to be understood."

Political dichotomies also are examined, especially the Clinton administration, which welcomed more than 150 openly gay appointees yet failed us in so many other ways. "Clinton changed the climate even while he capitulated to anti-gay advocates," Walters says. "His own lurches back and forth speak to the uneven development of gay rights in America. It's not simply a forward march."

As a lesbian mother, Walters has strong views about society's volatile attitudes toward gay parenting. "The family itself is the site where so many of our cultural and social anxieties are played out: about sexuality, about children, about relationships between individuals and the state...gay families are OK as long as they look like heterosexual families and are suspect when they attempt to revise family structures and reinvent intimacy and parenting practices."

So what does she think is a solution to all of this? "The gaying of American culture can and should be more than a fleeting fashion statement or subcultural suicide. In insisting on visibility without assimilation, the new gay movement can change the table settings themselves, not simply find the places already set at the table," Walters believes. "A full and complete 'conscious integration' of gays into American society means not just an end to the closet or double standards or gay stereotypes in popular culture. It means an opening up, a breaking through the tightly drawn wagons of heterosexual assumptions that could potentially challenge and expand all our conceptions of family, gender, love, intimacy, sexuality." ■

ORIANA GREEN is happy to be visible as the Entertainment Editor of Just Out and can be buttonholed at [oriana@justout.com](mailto:oriana@justout.com).

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