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BOOKS

A double life
Gay right-wing character
assassin comes clean

BY KEVIN MOORE

David Brock wants to tell the truth. As a muckraking journalist for the conservative press during the late 1980s and early '90s, he made a name for himself by trashing political reputations—most notably those of Anita Hill and President Bill Clinton. In both cases, he mostly relied upon conjecture, distortions, unreliable witnesses and a poison pen well suited to the sexual McCarthyism and scandal machinery dogging the Clinton presidency.

While lying to the rest of the world, Brock began lying to himself. As a closeted gay man in an increasingly homophobic political culture, he led a precarious double life. His suppressed emotions, isolation and fear of being outed helped drive his character assassinations.

Only when faced with a possible outing by the *Washington Post* could Brock begin to tell the truth, first confessing his homosexuality and eventually revealing his role in the Clinton scandal machine that forms the basis of *Blinded by the Right: The Conscience of an Ex-Conservative* (Crown Publishing Group, 2002; \$25.95 hardcover).

Brock recently discussed his new book and his new conscience with *Just Out*.

Kevin Moore: You converted from liberal to conservative in the mid-'80s. Did this new ideology accommodate your sexual identity?

David Brock: Well, at the University of Berkeley, it didn't strike me as a conflict between the two. Coming to terms with being gay was relatively easy for me.

At the time I wasn't aware of the extent to which the Christian right was a key constituency of Ronald Reagan, who struck me as a more of a Goldwater edition of "live and let live" libertarianism. And, of course, the Christian Coalition hadn't been founded yet.

The gay issue...wasn't as much of a political issue in the country as it became towards the late '80s.... It wasn't until the Soviet Union fell that the Republican Party started to adopt explicit gay-bashing tactics.

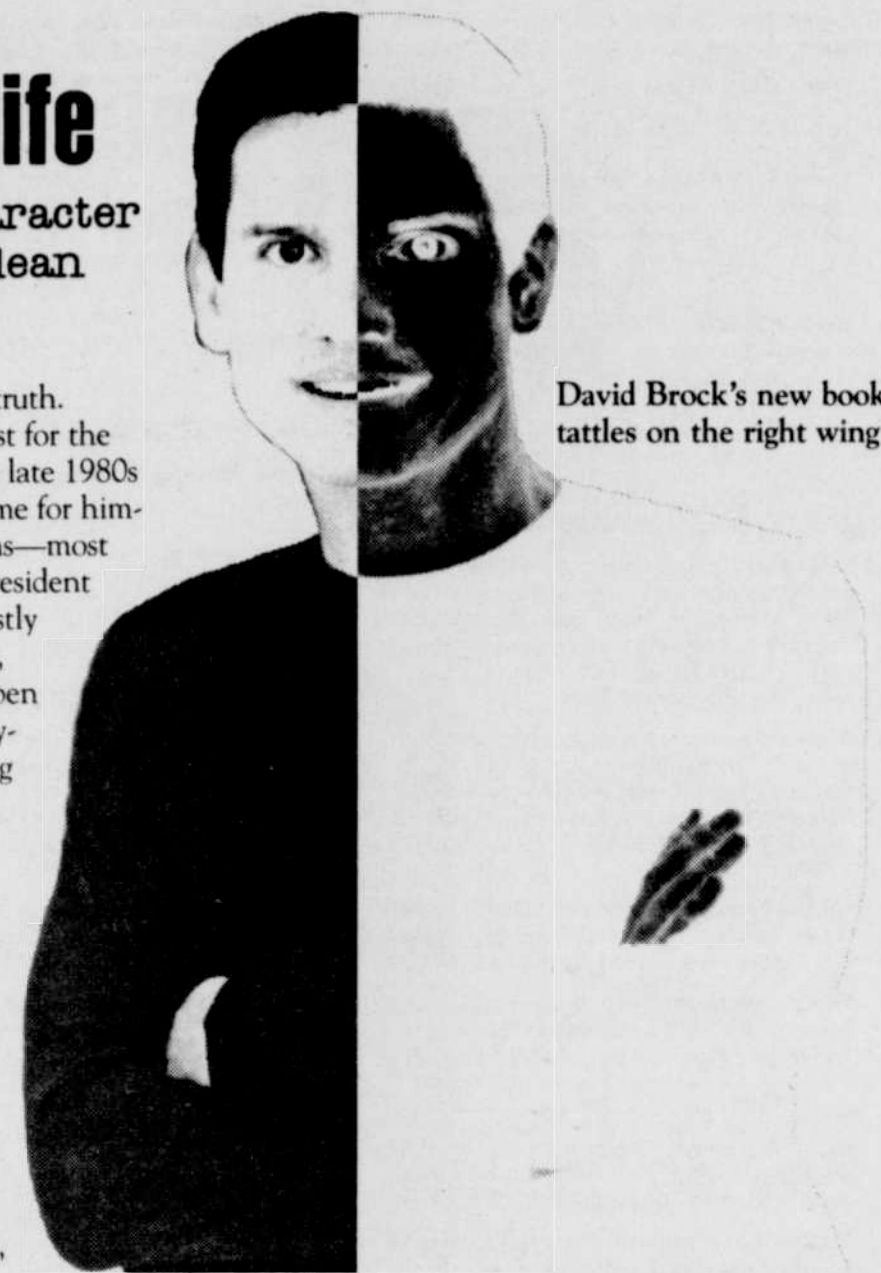
When I got to Washington, I gradually got back in the closet. It wasn't at first a conscious decision, but I found myself doing that over time.

KM: You describe it as "living like a cockroach."

DB: By the late '80s...I was leading a double life. Everyone I knew [who] was gay and Republican...was doing the same thing. Nobody was out professionally or was integrating their personal life with their professional or public life.

There was a somewhat integrated bar scene. Gay conservatives were able to go to gay bars and not really fear they were going to be outed. That was considered a "safe zone."

But it became more difficult over time...there was an inevitable collision course I was on: By the time I became at all known for



David Brock's new book tattles on the right wing

my writing, as a figure that would be somewhat recognizable in Washington, I made the choice to protect...the position I had in the conservative movement. I had to basically not have much of a personal life at all.

KM: And that fueled your animus.

DB: Yes, an unfortunate consequence was that this misdirected emotion fed some of the anger that was in the writing I was doing at the time.

Also, I had never resented the fact that I was gay until I started to realize that it might be an impediment to sustaining the position I had in the conservative movement...once I had a constituency and an audience, I started to realize this was definitely problematic. That lasted a couple years until I came out in early '94.

KM: And even that you had to "spin"—

DB: Right. Troopergate [Clinton's alleged use of the Arkansas State Police to solicit women] came out in December of '93—an unprecedented invasion into a president's private life involving allegations of consensual sexual errors—so there was a way into the question of my private life. I was basically "outing" Clinton, so I was fair game.

Even though I was closeted, it's still impossible in a small town like Washington for everyone not to know. So *The American Spectator* [Brock's employer] got a few calls from the gay press. Then Frank Rich wrote a column for the *New York Times* which was interpreted by some as a thinly disguised outing.

I decided to come out to get ahead of a story [in the *Post*] and tell it my own way rather than have it told for me. To give it an added twist and to get conservative support was to blame Frank Rich—that I was being penalized...because I was a conservative. It worked to the extent that several prominent conservatives took my side of it and "beat up" Rich while defending me.

