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"A powerful and disturbing documentary by Kirby Dick"

MOVIE REVIEW

'Outrage'

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"Outrage" is a title that demands to be broken into two parts: "out" and "rage." A powerful and disturbing documentary by Kirby Dick, it examines one of the most unexpected dynamics in contemporary American politics: the existence of right-wing, family-values conservative Republicans who are alleged to be closeted gays themselves.

It's a film that will cause a lot of talk, but its most compelling aspects are not its most obvious ones.

A much more focused and forceful piece of muckraking than Dick's last effort, "This Film Is Not Yet Rated," "Outrage" cuts crisply between news footage and interviews with nearly 40 subjects, including journalists, politicians and activists. But while the initial publicity fuss may be about who gets named, that is not what gives this film its enduring interest.

For one thing, aside from formerly closeted gay politicians who've already outed themselves, including James McGreevey, ex-governor of New Jersey, and Jim Kolbe, former Arizona congressman, it is beyond the resources of any film to prove conclusively the sexual orientation of people such as Idaho Sen. Larry Craig, California Rep. David Dreier and Florida Gov. Charlie Crist. Still, Dick is awfully persuasive, adroitly piling on the kindling in the service of convincing audiences that where there's smoke there's fire.

"Outrage" opens with an audiotape of the police questioning Craig after his famous encounter with an undercover officer in an airport men's room. But the key question here, as in the rest of the film, is not only what happened but also what the ramifications are: What leads people to vote against the interests of a group whose affinities they share.

While no conclusive answer is possible, among the points raised are the desire to deflect attention, the longing to feel better about yourself by aligning with powerful forces, as well as the kinds of pressure society has in the past -- and in part still does today -- put on people who are perceived as unacceptably different. "It's generational," offer's the Atlantic's openly gay Andrew Sullivan. "You're so terrified you just suppress it."

Equally controversial, if not more so, is the very idea of revealing sexual identity. Even if these politicians are gay, the question is asked, what is the rationale for people such as Michael Rogers, founder of BlogActive, to insist on publicly outing them. Don't they have a right to remain silent?

"There's a right to privacy," counters Barney Frank, the first congressman to come out on his own, "but there's no right to hypocrisy." Though some of "Outrage's" voices are uncomfortable with outing, the majority feel, in the words of one advocate, that where politicians are concerned, "that closet can kill other people," as public advocacy of anti-gay positions by politicians can lead to beatings and other hate crimes. Writer Larry Kramer recalls throwing a drink in the face of a gay Republican fundraiser who was behind some strident anti-gay campaigns and saying, "You're raising money to kill us."

One of the more interesting questions "Outrage" raises is why the mainstream media, so eager to cover every aspect of scandals like presidential candidate John Edwards' extramarital affair, don't follow up when the gay media do this kind of sexual outing. The consensus is that a kind of squeamishness about gay sexuality is a factor, perhaps the last vestiges of an "is it anyone's business?" feeling that has disappeared from the media's dealings with the heterosexual world.

While the anger of "Outrage" is to be expected, the surprise of the film is how much sadness you take away as well, the sadness of people who feel compelled to pretend to be what they are not. Both McGreevey and his ex-wife, Dina Matos McGreevey, interviewed separately, talk eloquently about the kind of chaos this kind of deception causes. And then there is activist Elizabeth Birch, who says, "I've had members of Congress crying in my arms because they didn't know how to come out." It's a significant moment in a significant film.

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/la-et-outrage8-2009may08,0,7585161.story>