



The Village Voice

"Moment by moment, Outrage proves duly provocative, well sourced, and almost certain to go more viral than swine flu."

Kirby Dick's Outrage Outs Closeted Pols and the Media that Protect Them

By Scott Foundas
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Director Kirby Dick doesn't actually stick his camera under any Capitol Hill bathroom stalls in the new documentary *Outrage*, but his goal is more or less the same: to catch conservative, family-values politicians with their pants down. Armed with a chorus of incriminating voices from across the alternative press and the corridors of state and federal government, Dick sets out to spill the beans on gay elected officials living in the closet. Call it yellow (or is that pink?) journalism if you must, but as *Outrage* persuasively argues, it comes not to invade its subjects' personal lives, but instead hold them accountable for their hypocrisy. It outs so that it can, in turn, rage against these Janus-faced men of the people (and they are all white men) who play to their Christian conservative base while lobbying for another sort of approval in gay bars, chat rooms, and public toilets.

This isn't the first time Dick has raided the wardrobes of America's moral guardians, having previously taken on the Catholic Church sex-abuse scandal in the Oscar-nominated *Twist of Faith* (2004) and the double standards of the Motion Picture Association of America's ratings board in the jaunty *This Film Is Not Yet Rated* (2006). In each case, Dick approaches his subject with little of the self-righteous effrontery of Michael Moore or Bill Maher, instead maintaining a modicum of objective distance and even mustering a certain sympathy for both the accuser and the accused. If anything, he's almost too tactful, so that while *Outrage* is clearly meant as one more flaming arrow fired into the GOP's perforated hull, everything is packaged so smoothly and tastefully that you can almost imagine Republicans thanking Dick for alerting them to their own party's traitorous elements.

The film presents a mixture of mostly extant innuendo with some new wrinkles. Opening with audio of Idaho Senator Larry Craig's unconvincing police interview following his 2007 arrest on sex solicitation charges in a Minneapolis airport bathroom, Dick surveys a series of other headline-grabbing closet cases, including Virginia Congressman Ed Schrock, who resigned in 2004 after leaving voice messages on a gay phone-sex line; New Jersey Governor James McGreevey, who left office the same year after confessing (under pressure) to his homosexuality and an affair with one of his male staffers; and

former New York City Mayor Ed Koch—the only prominent Democrat outed in the film—whom gay activist David Rothenberg accuses of having ditched his longtime boyfriend for the more powerful aphrodisiac of political power. Among sitting politicians, the most insidious claims are leveled against California Congressman David Dreier and Florida Governor Charlie Crist, the latter of whom has been bandied about as a 2012 Republican Presidential candidate.

Like the Beltway blogger Michael Rogers, who provides lively color commentary throughout, Dick positions himself as something of a reluctant witch hunter, less interested in his subjects' sexual orientations than their voting records, nearly all of which (save for Koch's, a fact that gets somewhat lost in the movie's shuffle) reveal strong anti-gay-rights stances. He also accuses the mainstream press of a "brilliantly orchestrated conspiracy" designed to perpetuate the double lives of gay politicians, producing a smoking gun in the form of a Larry King Live episode censored following its initial broadcast to remove Bill Maher's outing of Dubya campaign manager Ken Mehlman. That's partly because even the reporters who cover Capitol Hill are light in their shoes, *Outrage* claims, wagging its finger of shame at Fox News' Shepard Smith before one of Dick's subjects suggests that D.C. may be a "gayer" city than San Francisco.

Among the film's more compelling testimonials, the always quotable Massachusetts Representative Barney Frank and former Governor McGreevey speak to the liberating effects of coming out, while McGreevey's ex-wife makes a candid appearance as *Outrage*'s only on-camera "beard." For a dollop of historical perspective, *Angels in America* playwright Tony Kushner shows up to invoke the specter of Roy Cohn. Finally, Crist emerges as the film's tragic fool—at once deplorable and pitiable—pulling a mystery girlfriend (whose revealing brush-off message to the filmmakers gives the movie one of its juiciest bits) out of his hat when he is mentioned as a possible McCain running mate and, later, is seen with his eyes fixed on the bigger prize, getting hitched (to a different mystery woman).

Moment by moment, *Outrage* proves duly provocative, well sourced, and almost certain to go more viral than swine flu. But Dick's film only strikes its most resonant note just before the final fade-out, as Crist and bride Carole Rome descend the steps of a St. Petersburg chapel in a kind of Orwellian vaudeville—the very embodiment of the infernal entanglement of church and state and our collective desire to believe in the white-picket surface of things. By abetting—even encouraging—their doublethink, *Outrage* implies, we are living in the closet, too.

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