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Outrage: An Interview with Director Kirby Dick

What's Your Reaction?

Florida Governor Charlie Crist. Former New York Mayor Ed Koch. California Congressman David Dreier. Former Chairman of the Republican National Committee Ken Mehlman. Ex-Idaho Senator Larry Craig. Ex-Louisiana Congressman Jim McCrery. All play starring roles in *Outrage*, the incendiary new documentary from Academy Award-nominated director Kirby Dick.

The film's thesis: The American political system is home to a large number of closeted homosexual lawmakers. Most are Republican. Nearly all of them oppose equal rights measures for gays because they want to conceal their own sexual orientation. In the words of openly gay congressman Barney Frank: "There is a right to privacy, but there is no right to hypocrisy."

Outrage digs deep, and what's more, it names names. Now playing in theaters, it is a timely, unsettling exposé that is sure to generate a good bit of controversy.

Are you gay?

Kirby Dick: What right do you have to ask the question?! Just kidding--I'm straight.

So what brought you to make this film?

I was in Washington, D.C. in August 2006 promoting my last film, *This Film Is Not Yet Rated*, which is about censorship in the MPAA film rating system. While I was there, I heard numerous stories that many high profile politicians were closeted and that a number of them were protecting their closet by voting anti-gay. I was equally surprised to learn that there was very little coverage of this hypocrisy in the mainstream media, and decided almost immediately to make a film on the subject.

Your film presents Washington as a place that is home to many high-powered, closeted gay people.

It comes as a surprise to many viewers, but DC is actually a very gay town, and a very high percentage of the staffers who work on Capitol Hill are gay. Many are closeted to one degree or another, but most are

out. What also comes as a great surprise is that there are nearly as many gay Republicans in DC as gay Democrats.

Do you feel it's morally justifiable to out closeted politicians who vote against gay rights?

My film isn't about outing closeted gay people; my film is about reporting on the hypocrisy of closeted politicians whose anti-gay actions harm millions of LGBT Americans. Not only do I feel it is justifiable to report on this hypocrisy, but I also feel it is the responsibility of journalists and documentary filmmakers to do so.

And if you do out closeted politicians, what about other folks in the public sphere? Actors? Television personalities? Journalists? Pundits? When is it *not* okay to out someone?

My film focuses primarily on hypocrisy of politicians who are entrusted to uphold the rights of all citizens equally. Closeted gays and lesbians in the other professions you mention have not been elected to enact laws that affect the entire citizenry, and they are not usually acting hypocritically. The film does report on one journalist, Shepard Smith, who was first reported on by Kevin Naff of the *Washington Blade*. Shepard Smith works for Fox News, which has been a major factor in the rise of anti-gay hysteria in this country over the past two decades. As one of the most prominent people in Fox News---according to the *New York Times*, Smith makes 7 to 8 million dollars per year---his complicity with the network's homophobic agenda rises to a level of hypocrisy that I felt was worthy of reporting.

Barney Frank has a pretty compelling line in the film: "There is a right to privacy, but there is no right to hypocrisy." Is this the central message of your film, more or less?

One of the central messages. The other message is that the closet contorts the American political system. Closeted politicians who would generally vote pro-gay instead vote anti-gay to protect the closet because they are afraid their constituency might view a pro-gay vote as an indication that they are gay. Jim McGreevey candidly admitted that he had made just this calculation when I spoke with him.

Was it difficult to get people to talk on camera? And if so, how did you convince them? Dina Matos McGreevey must have been difficult to persuade, no?

It did take a great deal of effort to get many of the interview subjects to speak on camera. In the end, however, I thought we wound up with a very impressive selection of people who were very familiar with the corridors of power. This is primarily due to the incredible efforts of my producer, Amy Ziering, who was especially skilled in getting people to agree to appear in what some might perceive as a controversial film. Dina Matos McGreevey stepped forward because she felt it was important that the spouses in situations like hers be given a voice to let the public know that the deception of closeted politicians has a very personal cost to those around them.

Has there been any backlash? Did you meet a lot of resistance while making it? Any weird threats? Warrant-less wiretaps? Any windowless vans trailing you around town? Visits from the IRS?

I was surprised by the level of fear expressed by many of the sources I spoke with. Many of these people were very supportive of the film but chose not to go on the record because they were afraid of repercussions. I don't know if their fear is warranted, but that fear is definitely out there.

The mainstream media has been loath to address many of the issues raised in *Outrage*. Why?

The mainstream media have been loath to address these issues, but generally it's not because the reporters themselves don't want to cover them. Instead, this reluctance comes from people above the reporters. Many news outlets are afraid to discuss issues involving gay sexuality because their readership is straight and they think coverage of gay sexuality may turn off these readers. I also think that in some situations these outlets, which are often owned by large media conglomerates that do a great deal of business on Capitol Hill, do not want to run a story that would antagonize powerful members of Congress. Finally, some straight reporters may feel they are doing the right thing by not outing even if it means not reporting on hypocrisy. However, the gay press has been reporting on these issues for years and and calling on the mainstream media to do so as well.

For years the Republican party has used gay rights issues as a wedge and a way of currying favor with the Religious Right. Do you get the sense that the Republicans might slowly be changing their tune on this issue? The party seems to be in flux. Is it becoming more politically viable for them

to do so?

There is a growing debate within the Republican party over whether or not this is the best strategy. One of the best things that could happen for the gay rights movement would be for a significant, out gay or lesbian Republican (or Democratic) candidate to contend for the presidential nomination. I am hopeful that we will see this happen within the next decade.

It's been a big year for gay rights in American cinema. *Milk* was big success. Hugh Jackman hosted the Oscars. (Just kidding---I think.) Is gay rights the central, defining human rights issue in American life at this time?

Absolutely. I think there should be zero tolerance for any attempt to delay 100% human and civil rights for all American citizens. And I think it's time that Obama fulfills the promises he made during the campaign to end the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, overturn the Defense of Marriage Act, and remove the HIV travel ban.

Did you request interviews with guys like Governor Crist or Ed Koch? Any response from their camps as the film makes its way into theaters?

For most of the politicians I reported on in my film, I included their responses to the question as to whether they are gay or straight. Koch did tell the *NY Post* that he was "outraged" by *Outrage* and I certainly appreciate the fact that he mentioned the title of my film twice in his response.

Crist, Koch, Craig: Which one is most likely to come out of the closet by 2012? Handicap it.

I hope they all come out. Every time a closeted politician comes out it advances the cause of gay rights tremendously.

Any surprises as you made the film? Any, um, Deep Throats?

To me the greatest surprise is how stunned audiences are by the information in this film. It shows how little mainstream media coverage the subject has received.

Is Karl Rove gay? Care to set the record straight?

There are rumors out there that he is gay but I came across no credible information that would substantiate those rumors. His stepfather, who raised Rove until he was a teenager and whom Rove refers to as his father, was gay (he has since passed away).

Sort of surprised that no mention was made of Jeff Gannon. A gay male prostitute posing as a journalist who gets credentialed for White House press briefings and then pitches softballs to George W. Bush. How the hell does *that* happen?

My film is about the hypocrisy of powerful closeted politicians. While the Gannon story is related, he is neither powerful nor closeted (although since the scandal he has become less forthcoming about his sexual orientation).

Watching the film, one of the prevailing sentiments is a profound sadness. Charlie Crist in particular is pretty heartbreaking to watch. He seems like a very decent guy, and yet his voting record on gay rights issues is miserable.

He may be a very decent guy. And I think he believes that gays and lesbians should have full civil rights. However, this makes his public anti-gay positions all the more reprehensible because they are part of a purely political calculation to protect the closet.

Jim Kolbe and Jim McGreevey were pretty powerful examples of formerly closeted pols who now live much healthier existences. You think they might inspire other politicians to come forward? Or is that just wishful thinking?

I hope so. I think one of the reasons they were so forthcoming is that they wanted people going into politics to realize the incredible personal cost of living in the closet. In fact, I was just recently contacted by a gay man who had decided not to run for political office because he didn't think he could win as an out candidate. But after seeing my film, he is seriously reconsidering that decision.

Do you get the sense that we are approaching the tipping point with this stuff?

I hope so. The closet has contorted the American political process for far too long, and I hope my film will help contribute to the demise of the closet in American politics. Because the mainstream media have been reluctant to cover this issue, people entering politics have often chosen to stay in the closet because they feel they can get away with this deception. Once the film is out and the public becomes more aware of this issue, I hope many more politicians will realize the right thing to do, both personally and politically, is to be open about their sexual orientation, and this goes for both Democrats and Republicans.

What's next for you?

Ripping open another "closet" (one unrelated to gay issues). I can't say anything more about it because I don't want the people and institutions I'm looking into to know I'm coming their way.

Sounds good. And best of luck with it. Many thanks for your time.

My pleasure. Thank you.

This interview first appeared at TheNervousBreakdown.com.

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