VI:

OUTINGS BY ACTIVISTS (THE 1990S)

Our own century's last decade also counts as the last of the second Christian millennium. Some will of course regard this prospect with foreboding: could it be that the apocalypse, which failed to arrive in 1000, now looms--rescheduled? Others will espy in such a turning point the hope for a new beginning. Of course different folks will have different hopes. Few may care to voice the thought directly, yet we queer nationals are entitled to ask whether we may at last see the end of homophobia, so that the new millennium can open a fresh page in our history. This vision is more optimistic than the goal that Americans will have the best schools by then. A sense is, nevertheless, abroad that now is the time for the queer nation to strive for strategic changes--in life partner recognition and social benefits, in permission to serve in the military and the clergy, and in putting the record straight on certain prominent denizens of the closet, at least in outing hypocrites. Even the shadow of AIDS may vanish.

Such expectations may be thought counter to political realities--but then the gay movement has always thrived on going against the odds. Judging from appearances, circumstances may not seem promising. The Republicans' selection of George Bush to
succeed Ronald Reagan set the stage for the nineties. Many felt, however, that Bush's exploitation of the Willie Horton affair, the murderer paroled by the "liberal" Massachusetts governor, was racially divisive and boded ill for the future. Dukakis was also pro-choice unlike Bush, but he had alienated the gay vote by opposing our right of adoption in his own state. Once elected, Bush involved himself mainly with foreign policy, his greatest expertise. Remarkably, his efforts coincided with the fall of Communism--in the former East Central European satellites (1989) and then in the Soviet Union itself (1991). To almost everyone's relief, the "Red menace" seemed to be fading, and both Mikhail Gorbachov and Boris Yeltsin acknowledged a debt to Bush. The collapse of the hard-line military and Party conservatives' coup in August of 1991 saved the fledgling Russian gay movement from almost certain extinction. In America left-leaning "leaders" were faced with the need to rethink their beliefs, but many found it hard to face up to the consequences of the fact that the Party Is Over. They have long been at odds with their "constituencies," who have always been more conservative, like the great American public itself of which we are, far more than the ethnic "minorities," a cross-section. Even socialism itself is now losing favor throughout the world. In one of the last outposts of Communism, Fidel Castro, whose homophobic policies now include compulsory isolation for HIV-positives, found himself more alone than ever. Jerry Brown, who made another unsuccessful bid for the
presidential nomination in 1992, joked that there are more communists in Santa Monica or in Cambridge, Massachusetts than in Managua. 

Coming in between Communist collapse in East Central Europe and the Soviet Union was Desert Storm. Against Saddam Hussein Bush was able to build an unprecedented international coalition, including the Soviets. Some activists, such as Urvashi Vaid and John D'Emilio of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, misreading the war, moved their organizations to oppose hostilities. But to the intense disappointment of aging radicals who thought that the sixties had returned, the antiwar movement fizzled before it really got off the ground. Although gay and lesbian military served in the Mideast war with distinction, the Defense Department ominously hinted that it might discharge them once it no longer needed them for cannon fodder. Since most of us rejected the minority, pacifist, left-leaning line of pseudo-Marxist "leaders," the perception spread that it was at long last opportune to end discrimination in our armed forces. Instead of defaming the military as such, as leftists had done during the Vietnam War, gay leaders other than those implacably hostile for ideological reasons to "the state" now insisted that military service be open to all. As will be seen, this interest dovetailed with the most spectacular outing of 1991, that of Pentagon spokesman Pete Williams.

The emergent Soviet gay movement had received the support of the International Lesbian and Gay Organization (ILGA), whose
strength had hitherto been largely confined to the advanced capitalist nations. An academic conference at Tallinn, Estonia in May 1990 was followed by an activist one at Moscow in July 1991. In a bold move, the ILGA scheduled its annual meeting for the first time in a Third World country, at Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city. Although threats of violence from local reactionaries and a decree by its mayor prevented the gathering from being held there in the early summer of 1991 as planned, a substitute meeting was convened in Acapulco, a beach resort long frequented by American movie stars, who frequently did as they pleased there sexually, and by gay tourists. On the whole, the nineties boded well for a gradual reception of the American model and for movement building in developing and former Communist countries.

Still, the fall of Communism left the United States as the sole superpower and world leader. Almost half our states, however, still retain anti-sodomy statutes and other homophobic legislation and decisions, rendered constitutional by the Supreme Court's decision in Bowers vs. Hardwick (1986). As Bush's first term, in which foreign events had been riveting, neared its close, many felt that he had not done enough on the domestic front. Cities continue to fester, while the savings and loan, education and health crises ground on accompanied by recession. Queer nationals cried, loudly and forcefully, that the AIDS epidemic had not been halted and that the Republican administration neglected the growing number of those afflicted
and impoverished by it. Fear of quarantine or other sanctions, vivid for some in the 1980s, had ebbed in the face of pronouncements by officials and responsible professionals. But our souls could not rest. While it may not have been entirely reasonable to blame the country's leadership, mounting frustration gave rise to vigorous new measures. Among these steps was a break in an unwritten rule that had been largely observed up to this point in practice, if not in theory: no homosexual should reveal another to heterosexuals without his or her explicit consent.

**The Progress of AIDS**

The plague continued to spread. In America and Europe the highest rates of new cases of HIV-infection and AIDS were now among IV-drug users. These marginalized and unorganized sufferers were the hardest to reach. They had no activist groups or media analogous to those which we had created since 1969. The worst peril was that given the new trend the establishment would turn its back on the problem, judging it another misfortune of those for whom life is an unbroken series of misfortunes.

As the epidemic leveled off in the industrialized world, however, it struck with a vengeance in sub-Saharan Africa and in Southeast Asia and India. In Central Africa AIDS has wiped out many extended families—even whole villages. It was predicted that by 2000 that region would have 10 to 15 million "AIDS orphans." Thailand, the modern paradise of sexual tolerance, which had inspired the French writer René Guyon's theories of
"sexual freedom," now began to pay a terrible price. In a reasoned critique of Christian asceticism, Guyon had in the 1930s published a six-volume work defending the "legitimacy of sexual acts." Prostitution, illegal but ubiquitous, is causing the disease to spread there with terrifying speed. A 1990 survey showed 30% of Thai prostitutes infected with AIDS. Domestic and international health agencies foresee that by 2000 at least 3 million Thais will be infected. Further, heterosexual contact and IV-drug users chiefly transmit the disease there. On the global scale, AIDS is not a "gay disease," despite our enemies' assertions: 75% of HIV-infection is heterosexual. Worst of all, Third World countries lack the resources with which to buy the drugs marketed by American, Swedish, and Swiss pharmaceutical firms at astronomical prices.

The inadequate response of governments, the medical establishment, and private citizens to the crisis continues to spur gay activists. Largely as the result of dissension over whether ACT UP should deal with gay issues having nothing to do with AIDS, in March 1990 another activist group was founded at New York's Community Services Center. Queer Nation, the new splinter organization, took up all gay issues whether they concerned AIDS or not, but kept the élan and the tactics of the earlier group. Rejecting the clumsy "lesbian, bisexual, gay. . .", these new radicals determined to rehabilitate the opprobrious queer as a badge of honor.

With the aggressiveness it inherited from its parent, one of
whose envious members styled it "ACT UP for HIV-negatives," it asserted our right to have a public presence, even in supposedly "straight" bars and restaurants. With shouts of "We're here, we're queer, we're fabulous, get used to it!" a working group styled Knights Out in New York and Queer Nights Out in Boston boldly invaded establishments normally frequented only by a straight clientele. It displayed signs in Greenwich Village informing such visitors that "this is queer turf" and "if you do not like gay people, then go elsewhere!" Although lesbians had only auxiliary status in ACT UP chapters, no matter how selflessly they worked against the plague, they attained a greater role as leaders of the other group in part because so many males sickened and died, but mainly because of Queer Nation's broader agenda. Many older and some younger gay people were, however, repelled by the new group's name, for the adjective "queer" still retains its sting, and by its daringly confrontational style, which some feel alienates outsiders and even moderates in our own community. In large measure this difference--between intransigent activism and long-cherished caution--quintessentialized the opposing responses to outing.

In late September of 1991 riots in all major California cities followed Governor Pete Wilson's veto of AB 101, the gay rights bill. With throngs of new supporters, Queer Nation/Los Angeles, whose meetings had dwindled to almost nothing, demonstrated angrily. Just as the victory of Anita Bryant in Dade County in 1977 had inspired the founding of the Coalition
for Lesbian and Gay Rights in New York City, this defeat proved a stimulus for reinvigorated activism. On St. Patrick's Day in 1992, queer nationals by court order marched through South Boston, stronghold of Irish Catholic bigotry, but failed in their attempt to force the Ancient Order of Hibernians to let them parade up New York's Fifth Avenue. A group was, however, allowed to march in Cork, the second city of the Irish Republic, where Boston's mayor was visiting. Neither Cardinal Law in Boston nor O'Connor in New York denounced the bigots who insulted and pelted the marchers in Boston and excluded those who wished to march in New York.

In racial matters, unquestioning support for the assimilationist policies that nearly everyone had hitherto tacitly accepted as the norm has broken down. In the past second-generation Americans expected and were expected to be raised in the culture of the Anglo-Saxon majority, not the distinctive traditions of their forebears. Now even a growing number of African-Americans whose ancestors were brought here before those of most whites are seeking their African roots. As in previous decades, homosexuals and bisexuals stood to gain no benefit whatsoever from affirmative action policies in employment because we are not legally recognized as a group deserving that remedy. In part, this omission reflected the fact that none had been visible in the past, and few were enough now to benefit from such policies. The opponents of "affirmative action" for their part cited quotas for homosexuals (or lesbians) as the ultimate
absurdity of such a practice. In short, we benefitted last and least from the so-called rainbow coalition.

**TIME Magazine Outs Outing and OutWeek**

Many roads, it seems, led to outing. Outing had been in the air for months, even perhaps years before it reached the mass media in January 1990. New York's *OutWeek* had been practicing it almost from its first appearance in June 1989, but since gay papers have few readers among the general public, it remained ignorant of the phenomenon. This obscurity was not to last. When the subject reached the pages of a leading American weekly, it became the talk of readers straight and gay alike.

On January 29, 1990, *Time* carried a story by William A. Henry III entitled "Forcing Gays Out of the Closet." It began "Gays have long gossiped about which public figures of the past and present might be secret homosexuals. . . . This name dropping is defended as a way of giving the gay community role models and a sense of continuity. When the rumors involve living people, however, discussion about who is in the closet has generally been held to a discreet murmur--partly in deference to libel laws but mostly in defense of privacy. That consensus is fast breaking down with the spread of a phenomenon known as 'outing', the intentional exposure of secret gays by other gays."

The phenomenon was ascribed to "the slow pace of gay civil rights legislation"--the movement to repeal the archaic sodomy laws virtually ground to a halt in the 1980s--and what the gay community interpreted as official indifference to AIDS. As a
result, activists feel it their moral right or even duty to "force people out of the closet," either to make them support the movement or at least to discredit them as foes. Others would just show how many closet queers are idols of the masses or pillars of the nation.

The objects of the initial "outings" by queer nationals were mainly politicians, but similar action against religious leaders has been threatened. The Roman Church was in an ambiguous position. It has long enjoyed the reputation, particularly in Protestant circles, of being a cosy nest of the vicious and the abnormal, yet it has unflinchingly opposed the gay rights movement at every step. Even now it shows not the slightest urge to moderate its stand. The implacable and vociferous hostility of O'Connor and Law, regarded by many as the Pope's American mouthpieces, has particularly irked New York and Boston activists. Surveys indicate that 40% to 60% of the priests in the United States today are gay, so hard has it become, since the aborted opening up of the Church in the aftermath of Vatican II, to recruit so-called normal human beings. Hence in the long run the clergy are a prime target for outing.

Many people belonging to or sympathetic to our movement, however, deplore outing. The Chicago Windy City Times associate editor, Sarah Craig, wrote: "Really, you're only using the same bludgeon used to injure you to injure someone else." For practical purposes, if outing ends someone's career, he will have, as Henry [author of the Time article] concluded, little
motive for supporting the movement—and often no opportunity to be effective. The Lambda
Legal Defense and Education Fund's executive director, Tom Stoddard, maintained that "The gay
movement is actually based upon two principles that collide. One is privacy, and the other is
disclosure, the process of coming out."
These ideals clash because of the historical situation in which we now find ourselves in the early
1990s. We are Oppressed by the anachronistic survival of the infamy inflicted upon us by the
Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches in the Middle Ages and perpetuated by the
Protestant denominations, and with theologically-inspired laws that violate our sexual privacy.
But we also must refute the defamation which the churches and synagogues have practiced
against us by demonstrating that their teachings are lies, that we are as kind, useful, productive,
and patriotic as anybody else, and that many brilliant, famous, and successful individuals lead
sexually unconventional lives now as they have done throughout history without being any the
less worthy of admiration and emulation. Incidentally, in the popular mind as well as among
civic leaders the calumny of "mental illness" has not been entirely erased.
OutWeek, the controversial New York City periodical that did the most outing, began publication
in 1989, on the eve of Gay Pride Day, the last Sunday in June. Within weeks of its appearance,
under the bold, radical editorship of Gabriel Rotello, it had positioned itself center stage in
outing. It
aimed to convince members of the young generation that they are not alone by taking a journalistic stand against the pious myth that all public figures and celebrities are heterosexual. Backed by the publishers, Rotello, a strong advocate of the practice, refused to employ a double standard when writing about public figures he knew to be gay. If we do not gloss over celebrities' heterosexuality, he commented, neither are we going to gloss over their homosexuality. We are not going to lie to cover up for them while they flourish hypocritically, making millions while denying their inner nature, their nationality so to speak. The days of the gentlemen's agreement (or the fairy conspiracy) to keep sexual orientation a secret are over, he declared. Unfortunately, OutWeek shut down just two years later. It published its last issue on June 24, 1991, just when it was about to undertake its most sensational outing, that of Pentagon spokesman Pete Williams.

Queer Nation

Informally associated at the time of its founding with ACT UP, OutWeek carried the news of the doings and plans of both ACT UP and its offshoot Queer Nation to the rest of the world. Led by such activists as Robbie Considine, Joe Cooper, Dave Fleck, and Alan Klein, Queer Nation/New York staged a whole range of events meant to promote "queer visibility." Formed in March 1990, this parent chapter in turn cast its seed to the wind, which in a year and a half sprouted some 60 Queer Nation chapters here and abroad.
The phenomenal growth of the parallel sets of activist groups reflected the leadership of the gay movement that the United States had assumed in the wake of Stonewall. If from 1864 to 1933 the homophile movement was German, after 1969 at the latest American activists led the world. Members are either radical by nature or become so caught up by the meetings' spirit. They inspire other organizations to which they belong. For example, Queer Nationalists conceived the contingent that dared to march in Boston's St. Patrick's Day parade. Heterosexuals often unduly fear Queer Nation, as when they learned that some of the marchers in South Boston belonged to it. Even other gay activists--especially Log Cabin club members (the gay Republican organization)--along with Dignity and similar Christian groups routinely denounce Queer Nation. Critics of outing--which included all major movement bodies except ACT UP and Queer Nation, neither of which has ever taken a clear-cut stand--called it an "invasion of privacy" and "fascism." The stand of the radical groups against the Roman Catholic Church and the demonstrations at St. Patrick's Cathedral permanently and completely alienated Dignity and virtually all other Catholic organizations. Many mainstream gay groups, as well as those which voice heterosexual opinion, profess horror at both the goals and the tactics of ACT UP and Queer Nation: proof that they are effective!

*Malcolm Forbes*

In February 1990 *USA Today*--correctly described as "not a
newspaper, but a television station in print”--published a story about Malcolm Forbes' homosexuality. Its decision may have been motivated by anticipation of the story in OutWeek.

No issue of OutWeek earned more notoriety than the one dated March 18, 1990. Its cover was captioned THE SECRET GAY LIFE OF MALCOLM FORBES, with a photograph of the late multimillionaire socialite and publisher on his motorcycle. Forbes (1919-1990), who had died three weeks before, was a flamboyant celebrity, noted for his lavish parties, motorcycles, and well-publicized balloon ascents. OutWeek used the revelations about his life to launch a new and startling editorial policy.

The editorial bore the title "Claiming Forbes for the Gay Nation," a curious halfway house to the newly forming "Queer Nation," the spearhead of the movement in the nineties. Because of its electrifying--and polarizing--effect, we must look closely at this editorial. It began:

The ancient Romans had a time-honored policy that whenever they conquered a nation they would attempt to deprive that nation of its leaders. . . . And the policy worked. Deprived of their native politicians, their philosophers, their literati, artists, thinkers and natural leaders, most nations annexed by Rome sank into centuries of provincial apathy.

Today, 20 years after Stonewall, the Gay Nation is in some way similar to Rome's demoralized provinces. Although we could always count among our ranks some of the greatest
Americans in every field, most gay leaders are prematurely and permanently snatched away from us by the dark tyranny of the closet. . . .

The fears of social and professional catastrophe that motivated people like Malcolm Forbes to remain hidden may have been well-founded in 1950 or even 1970; they're wildly exaggerated in 1990. . . .

This is a tragedy for America and it's a tragedy for those who, like Forbes, needlessly cower in the closet. But the greatest losers are gay and lesbian youth. Like subjects of a vanquished Roman province, they seem destined to grow up not ever knowing that wonderful, winning people like Forbes are their soul mates and could be their inspiration in a hostile world. . . .

So we say this to the youth of our tribe. There are idols you aren't allowed to dream of. There are thousands of invisible paragons you aren't allowed to know. . . . They are ours and, like them, Malcolm Forbes was ours. And in your names and for your futures we claim them all.

This editorial was the manifesto of outing. Like nearly all gay political innovations since 1969, when leadership passed from Los Angeles and San Francisco, it came from New York City. The Big Apple has been the starting point of successive waves of activism from the Gay Liberation Front and Gay Activists Alliance (both 1969), to GMHC (1981), ACT UP (1987) and Queer Nation (1990). But New York is also the nation's media capital, where
trends are set and reversed. Thus OutWeek's bold move marked a new phase in the struggle to "tear down the closet door."

Michelangelo Signorile's article in the same issue, "The Other Side of Malcolm," displayed the further caption: "He was the epitome of the fabled American Dream. The guy with the bucks, the brains and the beautiful movie actress by his side. But like so many in the upper echelons of glamour, glitter and glory, Malcolm Forbes was living a senseless lie." Signorile began by noting that many celebrities whose homophobic beliefs and opinions were a matter of public record attended the memorial service for Forbes at St. Bartholomew's Church on Park Avenue. These figures, often nationally known conservative Republicans, had come pay their last respects to a man whose private life was aggressively and uninhibitedly homosexual. He added: "Actually, some of the people present at the memorial service had to have known that Malcolm Forbes was gay, no matter what they may actually say. They, after all, were privy to the same information that the rest of us were. But their hypocrisy is easily rationalized."

In conservative circles, it was de rigueur to keep quiet about others' private eccentricities. While some may have been shocked by the thought that an pillar of capitalism was a fag, others knew full well what his secret life was and excused it on one ground or another. Although Forbes' marriage to the former Roberta Remsen Laidlaw ended in divorce in 1985, the two had been leading separate lives for years. The marriage served a double
purpose: to create a façade and to engender heirs.

But throughout the marriage Forbes never ceased what as the years went by became his predominant, if not exclusive, sexual outlet. Trapped within the confines of an upper-class family life and his business obligations, Forbes found himself trying to fit his homosexual escapades into his daily routine. This meant hiring men as chauffeurs, waiters, and houseboys with whom he could have sex unobtrusively on a daily basis—which led to practices that the resentful partners described as exploitative, coercive, and tantamount, as some felt, to sexual abuse. The term in German law had been "Missbrauch eines Abhängigkeitsverhältnisses," "abuse of a relationship of dependency." It should surprise no one that a multi-millionaire should engage in such activity. After all, the scandal involving Alfred Krupp, the German industrialist and close friend of Kaiser Wilhelm II, and Italian boys from the resort isle of Capri in the early years of the century brought to light rather similar conduct. A system of justice subject to class pressures exempts those at the very top from laws whose application to the lower strata of society can mean ostracism, economic ruin, public disgrace, and even imprisonment or suicide.

Forbes had a particular employee, a stunning beauty, who worked at his townhouse. His job included being always on the alert for handsome young men who might be induced to have sexual relations with Forbes as part of their duties at the townhouse. "He got Malcolm his boys," said an informant quoted by Signorile.
"He was responsible for getting that fresh meat." What went on at his lavish place in Morocco, a country famous for attracting gay tourists?

The position as his chauffeur was linked with sexual services, as it often has been for others such as Dag Hammarskjöld, long-time Secretary General of the United Nations, because it was relatively easy to arrange brief trysts in the car or in garages. It was therefore a "special" position. But rumors and stories inevitably circulated among at least some of his staff. One of them later told Signorile: "I always wanted to say to him, 'if you would just come out you could be so beneficial to gays instead of being this pathetic, secretive person'."

Forbes rarely enjoyed any long-term relationships because he feared that a prolonged liaison would attract public notice and make his closeted life even more insecure. He steered clear of gay establishments because he could never mingle with the overt and politically conscious types. And besides, he had to keep this side of his life hidden from friends, business associates, and the public. But at times he behaved in a careless way, yearning for forbidden joys and testing the limits of a double life.

Those in his circle heard the rumors, but preferred not to echo them. They would not willingly forego the favor of a powerful and wealthy man. After the outing, Liz Smith, gossip columnist for the New York Daily News, claimed to be "too square"
to have suspected Forbes' erotic proclivities. "The subject never came up at any time. I never saw any evidence of it. In fact, it never occurred to me," she claimed. Is our society so repressive that even individuals as powerful as Forbes cannot come out of the closet? asked Signorile rhetorically. He went on to reply: "Forbes was the victim of a virulently homohobic society which he too fed into regularly. . . . His own internalized homophobia far outweighed the commanding authority that any amount of dollars could possibly wield." But, he added, "one of the most influential men in America just died, and . . . he was gay. And that must be recorded."

Public response to the outing was ambivalent. Newspapers reporting the disclosures tacitly accepted the legalistic view that the dead cannot be libeled. But what about the unwelcome notoriety for members of his family? Yet to raise that question addresses the whole problem of homosexuality and public opinion. Is it a disgrace by definition? Would outing be the same as calling the deceased a philanderer or an alcoholic? Advocates for the gay movement, who see the matter from their own perspective, accuse the heterosexual world of a built-in bias that distorts its vision. Queer nationals insist on outing at least the dead, if not the living.

The San Francisco Chronicle named not only Forbes and the late California publisher Charles K. McClatchy, owner of the McClatchy Newspapers such as the Sacramento Bee who died in April 1989, as "victims" of outing, but also Mayor Edward Koch--whose
homosexuality had long been mooted in the Gotham press--Calvin Klein, and Cher's daughter Chastity Bono (the object of exposés in supermarket tabloids). On June 28, 1990 the Philadelphia Inquirer intoned: "In the past three months alone, the targets have included: two governors, one lieutenant governor, seven members of Congress, a recording industry megamogul, a renowned athlete, a school superintendent from a West Coast city, a married American fashion designer, two male actors who play 'straight' love interests on television and in the movies, the female co-star of a network series, the daughter of a female pop singer, and four Philadelphia TV-news personalities." Despite the attempted blackout, some forty stories did appear between March and August of 1990 that mentioned Forbes' homosexuality, which thus entered America's folklore. In this fashion one of the most prominent but closeted homosexuals in twentieth-century America underwent outing--after his death. But this was only the beginning. Much, much more was to follow.

Michelangelo Signorile, Arch-Outer

At the heart of the controversy stands Michelangelo Signorile. This man of the hour makes no bones about where he stands. The 30-year old writer excoriates gay journalists and editors who toady to queer celebrities in their velvet-lined closets. They act as human shields for the rich and famous who remain smugly indifferent to the mounting violence targeting queers in the streets of our major cities and to the plight of gay prisoners and others victims of blatant discrimination, not
to mention AIDS.

For almost a year the New York columnist had been inserting the code words "self-loathing" or "self-hating" before the names of media and entertainment world celebrities. In two issues of *OutWeek* he ran lists of famous people under the headline PEEK-A-BOO. While the August 7, 1989 "Gossip Watch" column in *OutWeek* was entitled "Peek-A-Boo," at the same time the San Francisco gay novelist Armistead Maupin was outing prominent homosexuals as part of speaking engagements on tours to promote his own books. But these trial runs in outing drew little attention save in gay periodicals.

Then Signorile daringly smashed the gentlemen's agreement protecting closeted homosexuals by "naming names" in his column in *OutWeek*. Suddenly all of New York knew what had been whispered in gay circles for years: that two prominent New York newspaper columnists are queer. Signorile accused them of promoting homophobia by breaking the cardinal rule of honest journalism "Thou Shalt Not Lie to Thy Readers." They were outed for their own hypocrisy and as a warning--to others still wearing the mask. But, as we have seen, what grabbed the attention of the mainstream media was the cover story "The Secret Gay Life of Malcolm Forbes."

Signorile personified a new mood in New York's gay subculture. At every meeting of ACT UP/New York, speakers announce the deaths of one, two, sometimes three activists or supporters of the group--from AIDS. Sensational stories of the
murder or attempted murder of gay men--and of police indifference to the crime--recur in the newspapers. The activists' admirable new militancy and readily understandable impatience in response to these outrages inspired Signorile's "Gossip Watch." It won him myriads of readers--but few friends at first. Mainstream media reacted angrily: the gay writer had violated a taboo of "respectable" journalism. Rules set gossip columns apart from ordinary journalism. Honesty is not the best policy, and the columnist is guided by axioms for making and perpetuating a "celebrity." Fame is in certain professions a commodity to be marketed--and therefore as synthetic and deceptive as any other commodity mass-produced for private profit. The image-making industry had coalesced as early as the 1920s, when Hollywood came to dominate the motion picture world and radio (followed three decades later by television) established its coast-to-coast network. But even from an avowedly leftist standpoint the late Max Lerner had written, in his column in the *New York Post* in the early 1950s, that "he would not rescue from the burning flames" newspapermen who rushed into print "to tell everyone who is a fag or a swish--knowing that there are few cruelties crueler and that the victim has no recourse." But now the political climate has decisively and, we pray, permanently changed. Militants fervently supported for the brave and lonely queer with a skimpy bank account who dared to out those still comfortably ensconced in the closet.

Responses to Signorile's breach of convention ran the full
gamut. The gadfly Larry Kramer, the inspirer though not the founder of ACT UP, dubbed him "one of the greater contemporary gay heroes." Yet Tom Stoddard, whom he had labeled an "Uncle Tom," called Signorile's conduct "revolting" and "infantile" and denounced his "cheap name-calling."

Signorile emerged as the star of *OutWeek* from its first issue. He dedicated his column to attacking the media in general and other gossip columnists in particular. Fearlessly, sometimes crudely, he reproached them for ignoring or downplaying the AIDS crisis and other queer issues, for maintaining the façade of conformity thrown up by public figures whom they know to be "different from the others," and for glorifying the Reagans, Bushes and other political figures who "are keeping us down at best, murdering us at worst." Targets of Signorile's *OutWeek* exposés included publishing tycoon Malcolm Forbes, record magnate David Geffen, actress Jodie Foster, gossip maven Liz Smith, Cher's daughter Chastity Bono, actor Richard Chamberlain, and a host of others. He refused to be impressed, intimidated, or made to feel guilty.

Who is this brash young man who moved so suddenly into the spotlight? Signorile was named Michelangelo after his paternal grandfather. His father, who owns a sandwich shop in Brooklyn and two croissant shops on Wall Street, and mother are both first-generation Italian-Americans whose parents came from the same village in Italy. Raised in Dongan Hills on Staten Island, he remembers having his first homosexual experience at twelve or
thirteen. There he attended Monsignor Farrell High School, where he played left guard on the football team. His uninhibited sexuality gave him the reputation of being a “fag,” leading to constant fights with other boys who called him names. One of these clashes took place in the school library, and as a result he was expelled. He graduated from New Dorp High School on Staten Island, attended Brooklyn College for a year and a half, and then transferred to the Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University. After graduation he worked for Mike Hall for two years, then left to become a free-lance writer. He began his own downtown column for Nightlife, and also contributed to People and a London magazine named The Face.

At a club one night late in 1987, he met an ACT UP recruiter. He and his co-worker Michael Musto went to their first Monday night meeting at the Community Services Center in Greenwich Village. They were overwhelmed by the spirit and élan of the group and by its message. Signorile began to neglect his journalistic career and to devote himself to the ACT UP media committee.

In the spring of 1989, Signorile got a call from Gabriel Rotello, a keyboard player and musical arranger whom he had met through ACT UP. Saying that he and Kendall Morrison, the owner of Dial Information Services, a phone-sex company, were going to launch a new gay weekly in New York City, Rotello asked Signorile to sign on as a columnist and features editor. On going to work
for *OutWeek* Signorile came out of the closet to his own family--which was at first unable to accept the fact.

Signorile claimed that he did not at the outset try to force people out of the closet. He conceived the idea of printing a box with people's names in it and calling it "Peek-A-Boo." He would let the readers interpret the feature as they wished. When other gay periodicals picked up items, he began to realize the political potential of outing. He asserted that before naming names, he made sure that his source had been sexually intimate with the person or whose best friend had been: he did not rely on chance sightings in gay bars on the analogy of "So-and-so was seen last night at the Stork Club with . . ." He had no hesitation in casually mentioning people in his column if he had the word from others who moved in their social circles or had been intimate with them.

Although many of his targets were celebrities from the entertainment world, it should be borne in mind that George Bernard Shaw once said that there are people to whom "dead prima donnas are more interesting than saints, and extinct tenors than mighty conquerors." Signorile admits that he had not thought much about the issue of press responsibility before he started his columns. He claims that "every newspaper and every reporter has an agenda. . . . I'm attacking the *Daily News* [a New York City tabloid] for making believe it's respected journalism when it's not."

As for the targets of his outings, Signorile says: "Basically, people who are famous. I will never think of
bringing out a private citizen. . . . People who are rich and famous who are gay almost owe it to humanity to come out of the closet." Forbes was a prime target for outing because he was an attention-craving celebrity and as publisher of his own magazine, *Forbes*, even controlled the flow of news. The most powerful thing such people can do in the face of the AIDS crisis "is to come out of the closet and address the issue of the crisis in the community."

Signorile has partially conceded the argument that a homo-sexual who has to be forced out of the closet is a poor role model. People who remain closeted, said playwright Harvey Fierstein, author of *Torch Song Trilogy*, "quite often are filled with shame and have not accepted themselves." An outing self-hating homosexual can, according to one viewpoint, win the admiration of no one, least of all heterosexuals. But according Signorile, "they will provide visibility" and also furnish negative role models. He also maintains that privacy as a basis for gay rights belonged to the 1950s, when outing meant ruin. At this point in its history our community "should be making itself as public as possible for visibility." The Queer Nation must be able to take a census of its citizens!

In Signorile replied to Tom Stoddard's charge that his behavior was "McCarthyism of the Left": "Joe McCarthy was pointing out Communists, a thing he perceived to be bad. . . . I am pointing out gays and lesbians, people I perceive to be good and normal and natural like me." He expressed doubts as to
whether outing has benefitted his own career, frankly admitting that now no establishment
magazine would hire him. In the eyes of respectable journalists, his venture in outing has made
him a pariah. Yet the prime beneficiaries of the "new freedom," according to the editors of
*OutWeek,* were the supermarket tabloids that boosted their sales by exposing queers (Hartman,
1990). In August 1990 Signorile mentioned receiving "queries from leading newspapers and
television news divisions wanting to know if it were true that *OutWeek* was planning to out U.S.
Supreme Court nominee, David Souter." The establishment media and their columnists dutifully
reported apocryphal stories about Souter's involvements with the opposite sex. The issue
remains moot to this day.

However, in the wake of the demise of *OutWeek,* Signorile was invited to join the staff of the
*Advocate,* which had long condemned outing. Its issue of November 5, 1991 proudly proclaimed
that he would be writing a column entitled "Absolutely Queer" that would focus on the political
scene of the entire nation. He was also working on a book tentatively titled *Queer in America.*
To be published by Random House in 1993, it will be a personal account of the last five years of
activism, and a gay *U.S.A. Confidential*--disclosing how we are placed in the power structures of
New York, Los Angeles, and Washington.

*Michael Petrelis--an AIDS Militant*

The late spring of 1990 marked a new development: the "privatization" of the practice of outing.
Michael Petrelis, a
young man of Greek descent, was diagnosed with Kaposi's sarcoma and AIDS in 1985. For a time he was a resident of Bailey House, a hospice for people with AIDS in New York City. After becoming active on their behalf, he joined the newly formed ACT UP. While the organization forged an uneasy détente with its adversaries--although with misgivings on the part of the more militant members--Petrelis advocated escalating the struggle. His inspiration was Stonewall, not Selma: "Civil disobedience has become institutionalized; it's a cliché. We shall not overcome by singing 'We Shall Overcome'." Even many ACT UP militants recoil from Petrelis' brash radicalism and maintain that he does not speak for the organization. Larry Kramer, the controversial inspirer of ACT UP, has defended Petrelis as a kindred spirit within the group: "He's turned obnoxiousness into an art form."

In turn Petrelis, who supplied most of this information, as well as other useful points in this book, during his sojourn at Percy's home in October 1991 and on other visits, sees his role as ACT UP's own ACT UP. On February 23, 1989 he and a few other activists, who had been chewing the fat at a greasy spoon, decided to out Mark Hatfield because the Senator was supporting the Helms Amendment and other homophobic causes. At a fund raiser for him in a small town outside Portland, Oregon they zapped him by outing him. This was a landmark—the first outing ever by activists.

Among his major feats, Petrelis participated in the massive disruption of the service at St. Patrick's Cathedral on Sunday
December 10, 1989 to protest Cardinal O'Connor's obstructionist stance on measures such as the
distribution of condoms to prevent the spread of AIDS. Standing on the seat of a pew, he
screamed "You're killing us!" until forcibly removed by the police. His personal style of
activism provoked conflicts with ACT UP/New York that some believe led him to transfer his
residence to Washington, D. C. There he could better sting the politicos on whose outing he
concentrates, in contrast to Signorile, who mainly outs entertainers and producers. For a time he
issued an irregular journal with the picturesque title *Piss and Vinegar*. On May 29, 1990 on the
steps of the nation's Capitol, he outed a dozen public figures, among them three senators and two
governors:

Sen. Herbert Kohl (D., Wisc.) Gov. William Schaefer (D., Md.)
Comptroller Liz Holtzman (D., NYC) David Geffen, Geffen Records

The press release that he distributed on that occasion stated: "I . . . claim these people for the gay
and lesbian community. I do this in a positive manner. . . . Some of the elected officials whose
names I've read have horrendous voting records" on gay and AIDS-related issues. "Others have
great solidarity with our community. In this respect they are just
like their heterosexual counterparts. Elected officials in the closet should realize the joy and support that await those who come out of the closet. . . . Even First Lady Barbara Bush recently wrote a letter . . . to say, 'We cannot tolerate discrimination against any individuals or groups in our country'." In this connection, the Kinsey figure of 4% of males that are exclusively homosexual would yield just for the United States Congress about 22 out of the 439 representatives and 100 senators, not to mention those who would rate 5 or 4 on his scale. Barney Frank said as much at a forum in Faneuil Hall in Boston on June 15, 1990 and elsewhere. The nation's press corps responded with a single voice--silence. No major newspaper, gay or straight, printed the names on Petrelis' list. Like other outings, this one was effectively suppressed by the establishment media. Even most of the gay periodicals that mentioned the event opted not to print the list of 12 names, either for fear of libel action or, more probably, out of unwillingness to be his accomplice in outing. It is true that Petrelis gave a bare list, without any supporting evidence, but the press corps apparently felt no urgency to look for any, a stark contrast with their eagerness to expose the antics of Gary Hart on the yacht "Monkey Business" when he was running for the presidency or Wilbur Mills and the Argentine strip teaser "Firecracker." This move effectively brought outing to the nation's capital, the center of the political power structure. This press conference touched off a debate within the gay
community, where Petrelis was denounced--again, and also led to stories in the establishment press about outing--without naming names. Consistency in a matter like this, to be sure, is always conditional. Peter Prichard, editor-in-chief of USA Today, explained: "There is a phenomenon in our business that everyone decides to withhold something from publication for reasons of taste. But if it slips out elsewhere, everyone tends to use it."

Petrelis himself has scored media hypocrisy. They prefer not to tell about gay people in the everyday stream of news stories, but have no objection to lurid accounts such the affair linking Steve Gobie with Barney Frank. He believes that many prominent media figures are themselves in the closet, together with a goodly number of local anchormen and reporters. However, the New York Times, according to statements on the floor of Queer Nation/New York, automatically dismissed any member of its staff who is openly gay or lesbian before the new publisher took over this year. In the 1970s the Christian Science Monitor conducted witch hunts to rid its staff of "perverts." It was only slightly more homophobic than run-of-the-mill newspapers. No mainstream paper employed an openly gay columnist before the Milwaukee Star hired one, although women and minorities now have their voices in print. In conversations with Petrelis, representatives of the media invoked the privacy of the outees rather than fear of libel actions, although many who might sue dread the adverse publicity which such a move would inevitably attract.

On May 6, 1990 the San Francisco Examiner printed a story
that began: "There will come a day, in the future that Arthur Evans [author of Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture] envisions, when once a year the names of the famous--the politicians, the preachers, the entertainers--who are secretly gay will be solemnly announced to a gossip-loving public. On this national outing day, closeted public figures who have trampled on the gay community would be exposed as hypocrites and frauds." This prophecy emboldened Petrelis to read his list from the steps of the Capitol at high noon on May 29.

The lack of response left Petrelis undaunted. June 23, 1991 was the day of Washington's gay pride parade. Captain Greg Greeley, who had been one of the organizers of the event, was scheduled for discharge from the Air Force the following day. But that Sunday afternoon he opted to lead the parade with a banner that read TOGETHER IN PRIDE '91. The story in the Washington Post caused a conflict with the Air Force over his impending discharge and a front-page story in same paper on Tuesday June 25. Petrelis then seized the occasion to hold a press conference on Friday June 28, in which he outed a high Defense Department figure, Assistant Secretary Pete Williams. His object was to expose the Pentagon's hypocrisy in harassing Greeley while leaving Williams undisturbed in his closet. In the presence of reporters from an NBC affiliate and the wire services, several of Petrelis' crew told the audience how they had seen Williams frequenting gay bars for years. One even claimed that a friend had had a "brief encounter" with Williams.
Petrelis then unrolled a poster labeling the Pentagon spokesman as a CONSUMMATE QUEER. Although they had noticed Greeley, who came out of his own accord, the mainstream media acted true to form in suppressing the Williams outing. This sequence of events, however, coming just as *OutWeek* was folding, provoked Michelangelo Signorile to publish the article that he had prepared for it in the *Advocate* of August 27, 1991. This event set a new mark for outing. At all events, Petrelis’ record was such that Ann Northrop, herself a former Boston debutante and now ACT UP heroine in her own right, at a meeting of the Stonewall 25 Organizing Committee in New York City on December 18 said that "in the last four years he has done more for the movement than whole organizations." We shall interrupt the main drama to discuss various outings in other cities.

**Outings in Other Cities**

Outings occurred in places other than Washington or New York. Some have only regional significance, but the outing of a rabbi in Minneapolis compelled the Jews there to confront a problem which the celibate Roman Catholic clergy had long faced. The Christian clergy has, through one circumstance or another, felt the scourge of outing on many occasions. Judaism seemed exempt—but no longer. In its issue dated January 7, 1991 the *GLC Voice*, the gay newspaper in Minneapolis, outed the senior rabbi of the largest synagogue in Minnesota. Rabbi Stephen Pinsky admitted that he twice pleaded guilty to charges of sexual misconduct and had an extramarital affair with another man.
In a letter of January 4 to the congregation of more than two thousand, the directors of Temple Israel announced that they had given Pinsky, who is married and has two children, a six-month leave of absence. They acted after Pinsky confessed that he had been romantically involved with a man for several years and had twice pleaded guilty to charges of groping undercover police officers in adult bookstores--in 1982 and in 1983. The Star Tribune, a Minneapolis metro daily, published Pinsky's admissions on January 5. An openly lesbian member of the congregation said: "This is the worst outing I have ever seen. People should be able to make their own choices about whether to come out." Yoel Zahav, the openly gay rabbi of Sha'ar Zahav [Golden Gate], a Reform synagogue in San Francisco, said that outing Pinsky will not necessarily help him to resolve his inner conflicts over his sexual orientation but will harm homosexuals in the Jewish community. Pinsky, he said,"is obviously a deeply conflicted individual who has been a public and vocal supporter of the [gay] community," as the Advocate reported on February 12, 1991. Boston activists have been less spectacular, but Evelyn Murphy, the Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts, was unexpectedly outing by Warren Blumenfeld in May of 1990, at the very moment when she was seeking the Democratic nomination for Governor. On live television, with no advance warning, he said that everyone in the gay community knew about her--to the dismay of the candidate and of her supporters. He managed to alienate
almost everyone: half for outing the Lieutenant Governor, and half for apologizing the very next
day to her for having done so. She, however, refused to receive his call personally.
David Hamburger, another member of ACT UP/Boston and Queer Nation/Boston, outed Paul D.
Harold, the Democrat who represents the district of Norfolk in the Massachusetts Senate, by
pointedly defacing the closeted legislator's campaign posters on subway cars. The police
apprehended him in the act and threatened him with arrest. Hamburger currently leads a
working group of Queer Nation/Boston called OutPost, whose posters expose closeted
homophobes. As this is written, Harold is running for Congress in the primary against Studds,
whose district was gerrymandered to the Representative's detriment in 1992.
On a much grander scale, activists in New York have been putting up posters with celebrities'
names captioned ABSOLUTELY QUEER. A similar phenomenon hit London in the summer of
1991, to the outrage and disgust of "respectable" journalists. So there is a third method of
outing: through direct poster and graffito campaigns that evade the censorship of the ostensibly
"free" but in reality tightly controlled establishment media.
The columnist Juan R. Palomo was dismissed from the *Houston Post* on August 30, 1991 after
he revealed his sexual orientation in a column that lamented the lack of public concern over a 27-
year old banker, Paul Broussard, murdered by ten suburban youths who chased and attacked him
and two companions as they left a gay bar in the Montrose neighborhood. In taking the matter
public,
Charles Cooper, the senior vice president and editor of the paper, declared that the columnist had acted in a way "detrimental to The Post." Hispanic and gay activists criticized the paper, and a protest was planned to demand the rehiring of Palomo.

**ILGA Condemns Outing**

At the twelfth Annual Conference of the International Lesbian and Gay Association, a network of homosexual rights organizations founded (and still largely based) in Western Europe, in Stockholm on July 1-7, 1990, outing was roundly condemned. Its media workshop reported that according to the Dutch homophile journal *Gay Krant* of June 16, 1990, ACT UP in the United States (presumably ACT UP/New York City) was threatening to publicize the names of 35 closeted gay and lesbian "parliamentarians" (members of Congress) in order to pressure the political establishment to pass laws protecting homosexual rights and dealing with the AIDS crisis. ACT UP had allegedly called on its members around the world to furnish it with the names of closeted politicians so that it could make the list public despite opposition. The workshop proposed a resolution that read: "The ILGA condemns the phenomenon of outing. While encouraging all gay and lesbian persons to come out openly for their sexual orientation, the ILGA recognizes that it is every person's own and indefeasible right to decide himself/herself on this issue. The ILGA considers every interference with this right by others as an unacceptable infringement of a person's
right to respect for his/her private life." It further called upon American ACT UP chapters to cease and desist from outing.

**End of OutWeek**

The abrupt demise of *OutWeek* in June 1991 left a huge hole in the gay media world. Bravely, the journal had ushered in a new era of queer national activism in the 1990s--but died fighting on the barricades. Much speculation appeared to account for *OutWeek's* failure. Some ascribed its failure to advertisers and subscribers who shied away from outing. Others maintained that advertisers discovered the owners to have overstated circulation figures. Some activists found its pages ever more trivial, dull, and uninteresting, so that they admitted buying it out of sympathy for its politics but barely perusing its contents. Of its leading backers and editors, one was using cocaine, and others were battling AIDS.

There was also a contradiction between its "politically correct" line, proclaimed almost from the first issue, and the interests of its readers and the potential customers for the products and services advertised on its pages: a perpetual dilemma for gay newspapers. The paper had also on occasion been sympathetic to pederasty and the North American Man-Boy Love Association (NAMBLA), an affinity that could hardly have endeared it to much of its readership.

A writer in the French popular weekly *Nouvel Observateur* commented in November 1991: What the tough gays--25% of the community--have
unleashed within their community is tantamount to civil war, according to Andrew Sullivan, editor of the Washington New Republic. They have even risked reawakening the dark memories of the fifties and of McCarthyism, of the time when the American administration, among other things, organized a hunt for homosexuals and invited every bureaucrat to denounce his colleague. Outing: la guerre sale [Outing: The Dirty War] was the recent title of a publication in Paris of Ornicar, an association for the defense of human rights in the face of sexually-based discrimination. A dirty war, to be sure, that makes American society the theatre of a huge psychological show, but one which despite everything has the merit of forcing both sides to define their positions. So advertisers have unanimously decided to boycott the weeklies that promoted outing, OutWeek first and foremost: they have since ceased to appear (Leibowitz 1991, p. 11).

So this, perhaps the most radical of all gay movement journals, ended its existence after a mere two years. Its legacy, however, is enormous, and it must find a successor. Efforts in New York City to found a replacement created NYQ, which in turn became QW. It has survived to this moment but not really filled the void. The Advocate has moved partially into the brink. Its editor-in-chief, Richard Rouillard, shifted his position on outing, and with great trepidation, hesitation and equivocation. In any case, he limited Signorile to 800 words every other week, far less space than he had in OutWeek. In July
1992 Rouilard was removed in the wake of conflicts over the new, "glossier," but politically even shallower format that *The Advocate* was cultivating (*The New York Times*, August 10, 1992, p. D6). No other gay publication seems currently enthusiastic about outing.

**The Pentagon Is Besieged**

The revelation of revelations came in August 1991. On the pages of *The Advocate*, Signorile, fresh from producing the Gossip Watch for the defunct *OutWeek*, outed a figure who had been in the public eye for months: Assistant Secretary of Defense Pete Williams. Stories had begun to reach his and Petrelis' ears eighteen months earlier. A telephone caller had told him: "Pete Williams--the PR guy for the Pentagon--is gay, and they all know it. They have a policy against gays serving in the armed forces, but their spokesman is gay, and it's all right with them."

Signorile was at first reluctant to confront the power of the Pentagon--the nerve center of the "military-industrial complex" against which President Eisenhower had warned the American people in his farewell speech. But the journalist's spine was stiffened by friends and colleagues who stressed the importance of his mission. Brooking no criticism, the government had stubbornly backed the military establishment's policy of excluding us as "incompatible," "security risks," "threats to morale," or simply "undesirable." A Senate subcommittee report of 1950 had praised the armed services for following "a rather uniform and constant pattern in ferreting out and removing these
persons from the services." The Pentagon, said Signorile, "relentlessly conducts witchhunts year after year and has netted almost 13,000 queers since 1982, almost all of whom have been discharged. . . . Whether they cooperate or not, the queers are kicked out of the military and branded with a mark on their discharge papers that stigmatizes them forever." He concluded that "while a handful . . . have fought back and gone public with their stories, most slink into obscurity, humiliated and afraid." In the face of this policy, the retention of a top Pentagon official with the rank of Assistant Secretary of Defense and a top security clearance who is openly homosexual and accepted as such by his superiors represents a classic instance of the double standard, particularly since more than two thousand servicemen have been discharged for homosexuality just since he was appointed in 1989.

The matter came to a head on June 23, 1991. Scheduled for discharge from the service the day following Washington's gay pride parade, Captain Greg Greeley helped to organize it and defiantly led it, granting an interview to reporters. The Air Force ordered him to appear the next day at the Office for Special Investigations (OSI) in southeast Washington. Refusing to cooperate with the investigators, Greeley turned to the doyen of Capital activists Frank Kameny. Together they went to the Washington Post, which put the story on the front page. At a press conference Petrelis declared: "Pete Williams . . . hypocritically remains silent in his job as Pentagon spokesman
while the Department of Defense continues its irrational policy of ejecting thousands" of other homosexuals from the very armed services which he represents. Unsuspected by the public, his orientation was known to his superiors--all enmeshed in a web of hypocrisy and duplicity that has been the norm for centuries.

Of course, the mainstream media chose to suppress the story, even though Petrelis' bold move had capped several months of uninterrupted gossip about Williams' nonconformist sexual life. Most reporters covering the Pentagon had held the story for two years. By late June every commanding figure in the Fourth Estate had learned from his underlings that "Williams was queer." But the establishment was adhering to its automatic reflex of protecting its own.

Signorile asked: "How does a homosexual get to the top in Republican Washington? Actually, the same way any woman-lover does: by possessing a picture-perfect background, making all the right connections, and keeping very quiet regarding those things about oneself that simply can't be discussed in mixed company."

There is even, so it seems, an upscale gay bar, J.R.’s, near Dupont Circle, where Representative Gerry Studds was recently mugged. It is reputed to be the watering place of queer nationals in government jobs, other gay professionals, Georgetown University students, and openly gay politicians. Here too even many devotedly Republican and right-wing homosexuals congregate. But others linger in the shadows of private parties. The ultra-closeted have only secret liaisons.
An habitué of this fancy dive in the past, Williams stopped coming once the outbreak of the Gulf War made him a media celebrity peering out of the screen of every television set as Americans by the million avidly watched the drama in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq unfold. So many were the gay men in his circle that it is doubtful whether he was ever really "in the closet."

Williams' situation appears to have been one in which his sexual orientation was not hidden but the knowledge of it skillfully "managed."

The Village Voice considered the story when it became clear that OutWeek was not to publish it, but its staff vetoed it on July 3. Four weeks later, on Wednesday July 31, New York's Channel 11 (WPIX-TV) broadcast a segment using Williams' name and reporting that the Advocate was about to out him, airing footage from a late June Queer Nation press conference. This telecast failed to evoke a single echo. Most papers--including the Washington Post--refused to print a story by columnist Jack Anderson that was to be syndicated nationwide on Friday August 2. So in the issue which appeared that weekend, though postdated August 27, 1991, the Advocate published Signorile's bombshell together with an editorial that in certain circumstances justified the practice, which the magazine had categorically condemned the year before. The feature bore the heading, "We commit ourselves to this singular [our italics] instance of outing in the name of the 12,966 soldiers who have been outed by the military since 1982." The editorial began:
"Outing is a weapon of last resort." It concluded a list of grievances by saying: "And the armed forces are booting us out, ruining lives, at the rate of nearly 1,000 per year." The gay community has long known that the right-wing organizations that have made homosexuals and the gay rights movement their target have as many homosexuals in their ranks as do the left-wing organizations that take the opposite stance. If *The Advocate* previously turned a blind eye to those who acquiesced in these right-wing policies, it was because it understood "that all of us have to make some accommodations to a principally heterosexual world and that some progress could, albeit slowly, be made by closeted homosexuals in high places." But what of those in policy-making positions who nevertheless do nothing? In almost all cases we could still suffer their presence, because they were "our people."

But "we cannot support the acquiescence of . . . the assistant secretary of defense for public affairs to the policies of the most homophobic department of the U.S. government." Too many of our own people have been harmed, and too egregiously. Williams is clearly involved in policy-making at the highest level, and "his silent complicity in this noxious conspiracy . . . implicitly allows his superiors to continue the blanket exclusion, the hateful investigation, the dishonorable discharges, the ruination of lives."

*The Advocate's* readers, continues the editorial, concur with this policy. A November 1990 survey found that a majority of
1,271 respondents felt that outing was "sometimes a justifiable political action." An estimated 700 soldiers who fought in the war were about to be discharged for homosexuality, the Wall Street Journal reported in January and again in July of 1991, even though their superiors knew full well that they were homosexual before they were assigned to operation "Desert Shield." The services are quite willing to treat us as expendable—before, during, and after combat. Outing is thus justified as retribution for wrongs done to our community by those who bear the double burden of responsibility and hypocrisy. Those who make common cause with obscurantist clergy, military, and right-wing groups that exploit homophobia to trick the electorate into voting against its economic interests—should be publicly exposed and humiliated. Outing in these circumstances is merely an act of self-defense against mortal peril, a weapon of last resort of the belligerent Queer Nation.

While the journal that Signorile chose as the vehicle for his article does not belong to the mainstream, The Advocate is the most respected and widely read gay magazine in America with a circulation (August 1992) approaching 120,000, triple its nearest rival's. By adopting, at least in this sole instance, the tactics of outing, its Los Angeles editors signaled that the practice was edging closer to the center. Moreover, The Advocate released advance copies of the story to the regular media. Most editors and columnists remained wary, but some took notice of the
outing without naming Williams. What was once a sturdy hull shielding the powerful on the ship of state had now sprung leaks --too many for the upholders of the old policy to plug. The Advocate of September 24, 1991 contained readers' responses. Jim Doust of Chicago wrote: "I have mixed feelings about outing but would support continued outing of destructive, closeted homophobes." In the same vein Richard V. McCune of Los Angeles commented: "I do not support the outing of individuals under most circumstances, especially celebrities in the entertainment industry. There does, however, come a time when it is the morally correct thing to do. In the case of Pete Williams, it was inevitable." Steven Hanson of Coos Bay, Oregon had this to say: "The outing of assistant secretary of defense Pete Williams is to be applauded. . . . Regardless of the fact that outing is simply the telling of the truth, which may hurt but which is never bad, any public figure who hides the truth while persecuting or supporting the persecution of others who share that same truth deserves, at the very least, honest exposure."

Equally explicit were the negative reactions. John Norman of Cañon City, Colorado wrote: "I would like to record a resounding no to outing in general and to the outing of Pete Williams in particular. . . . Williams is the criminal, and, acting as prosecutor, judge, and jury, you have carried out his trial, conviction, and execution. What is his crime? Not something he has done."

Tom Scott of San Francisco seconded this
view: "The ADVOCATE's attempt to demonize Pete Williams...is both cheap and preposterous. You found an easy target, and you grabbed for attention that might, at least temporarily, raise your circulation. . . . You owe Williams an apology, although nothing you might do now could ever repair the unwarranted damage to his career." Randy Curwen of Chicago reasoned: "Yes, the military's position is wrong. . . . But people like Williams (whose bosses, you make it quite clear, have to have known he was gay) have done more to advance our cause by proving that gays can function effectively in any area of employment than, say, someone like Michelangelo Signorile, who can't write an exposé that exposes even one instance in which Williams has done anything reprehensible."

So the outing of Williams divided our community quite as much as previous outings in OutWeek, if not more so. Indirectly it proved that many held the "unwritten law" of silence to be still valid and binding, while others roundly applauded the new tactic and wanted to see even more exposure of closet cases in high places. Honor may have yielded to expediency or a higher cause may have triumphed over personal privilege.

**Randy Shilts Has Second Thoughts**

In an "op-ed" piece in the New York Times of April 12, 1990, Randy Shilts endorsed outing. The prominent gay journalist wrote that "the refusal of newspapers to reveal a person's homosexuality has less to do with ethical considerations of privacy than with an editor's homophobia. In my experience, many
editors really believe that being gay is so distasteful that talk of it should be avoided unless absolutely necessary." He added: "In Hollywood and New York, hundreds of publicists make their living by planting items in entertainment columns about whom this or that celebrity is dating. Many of these items are patently false and intended only to cover up the celebrity's homosexuality." Why do editors routinely lie about the (real) homosexuality and the (assumed) heterosexuality of public figures?

Intolerance of homosexuality results in yet another form of perjury. Heterosexuals also become entangled in the web of deception and falsehood. Obligatory heterosexuality has required that everyone pretend to be heterosexual or be depicted as heterosexual in historical works or literary biographies. As long ago as 1862 Karl Heinrich Ulrichs had written in a private letter that "the Dionaic [heterosexual] majority has no right to construct human society exclusively Dionaically [heterosexually]" (Hirschfeld 1914, 955). Even those who personally detest homosexuality become accomplices to the monumental dishonesty that permeates public and intellectual life and undermines the self-righteous claims of Christianity to possess a "revealed morality" that transcends all others.

In a certain respect, outing threatens the established morality far more than does sodomy law repeal. It either occurred unobtrusively as part of the revision of an entire penal code or served to raise public hypocrisy on the subject to a
higher level, since the changes were motivated solely by abstract philosophical arguments and extenuated by the assurance that there were "better ways to deal with this scourge of society"--which meant that the traditional silence or defamation could, and indeed should, persist unchanged. Outing strikes at the very heart of the sodomy delusion: it exposes the dishonesty and hypocrisy of Christian society in regard to this major facet of human sexuality.

The Kinsey reports amounted, we can now see, to a massive, albeit statistical and anonymous, outing of the gay population of the United States. That is why homophobic psychoanalysts like Abram Kardiner and Edmund Bergler were enraged by Kinsey's finding that most homosexuals were not disturbed individuals who deserved to be on their couches--if not in prison or an insane asylum--but normal, functioning, purposeful human beings, like most Americans. Karl Westphal's own disciples had concluded as much in 1891. Petrelis and Signorile gave a political focus to outing and pinpointed celebrities whose hypocrisy had passed the limit of toleration. It was rage over the persistence of this hypocrisy--and a frantic drive born of the fear of approaching death--that inspired the newest wave of outing. Many of the prominent figures in ACT UP chapters around the country sense that they have only years or months to live, and are indignant that the official response to the AIDS crisis has been so inadequate. Queer Nation is in its turn demanding the loyalty of all who
participate in the gay subculture by virtue of their homosexual lives and loves, however private and clandestine they may be.

In an interview published in *The Progressive* of May 1991, Shilts commented on the Queer Nation:

They are a younger generation of people, largely in their early twenties, who are coming out very militant, who are calling the older generation of us 'assimilationists'... They're doing a lot of shock value stuff. It's the most exciting thing to happen to the gay community in twenty years. These younger people grew up at a time when it was much easier being gay, because of the work done by the older people... They're demanding to be called "queers." They're taking back a word that was pejorative.

Shilts told how he came out: "I started by being involved in antiwar marches--the very early gay-liberation movements were involved in the anti-war movement, so I was around the gay-liberation people more. And once it hit me, a week later I told everybody. It was on May 19, 1972. I told every friend, everybody in my family, that I was gay. And I swore that I'd never live another day of my life in which people didn't know that I was gay."

In the *Los Angeles Times* of August 7, 1991, however, Shilts reversed his earlier opinion and expressed strong disapproval of outing. He reproached the activists who hadouted Williams: "Before gloating, however, theouters would do well to consider
their own intellectual inconsistencies. The two levels of social change that the gay movement seeks are in conflict. . . . It's doubly hypocritical to seek the right to privacy in courts and then wantonly violate others' rights to privacy in the gay press." Shilts concluded by calling outing "a dirty business that hurts people"--as if the homophobia of American society had not been hurting people since the day the Republic was founded.

John Mitzel at first wrote favorably of outing in his column in the Boston gay monthly *The Guide* of September 1989, then two years later, in September 1991, attacked Michelangelo Signorile in the same periodical. One might suspect an element of professional jealousy to be involved, but the sword of outing does have two edges and cuts both ways.

**Fictionalized Treatments of Outing--Television, Film, Novel**

As Larry Gross mentioned: "In May 1990, *LA Law* (NBC) ran an episode featuring the outing of a heroic policeman (largely modeled on Oliver Sipple) by a gay activist editor; the policeman sues but loses in court on First Amendment grounds. In January 1991, *Gabriel's Fire* (ABC) ran a story that was both unconvincing and homophobic: a divorced pro football quarterback is falsely outing by a gay man who is a member of (the non-existent) 'Outers of America.' While the football player, who professes to 'have nothing against homosexuals,' wins his lawsuit, the program shows his son choosing to live with his mother, his hopes for endorsements dashed, and his camp for underprivileged children destroyed." While both plays are implicitly homophobic, their
plots also argue that outing can be ruinous even to a celebrity, if only through loss of prestige (Gross 1991, p. 383).

The novel by Richard Stevenson, *Third Man Out* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), turns upon the relationship between private investigator Strachey and Queer Nation activist John Rutka--a composite of Petrelis and Signorile. As the story opens, Rutka is outing everyone "out of sight." Not surprisingly snipers take aim at him and his house is firebombed by agents of an exceptionally powerful but frightened closet case dreading that his turn will soon come. Uneasy at first, Strachey soon grasps that the political stakes are far higher and the ethical issues far more complex than the fate of the celebrity whom Rutka would rashly drag into the limelight.

So long as the Motion Picture Production Code forbade depiction of homosexuality or reference to it, the subject was moot. Even Vito Russo delved far more into Hollywood's imaging of gender and gender stereotypes than into homosexuality proper--because that was all he could find. But when filmmakers gained the freedom to treat gay themes, some produced works which, as it were in a "return of the repressed," simply visualized on the screen the worst stereotypes of the psychoanalytic literature of the 1940s and 1950s, which in turn replicated the paranoid fantasies of the medieval mind. Earlier in the century these baleful interpretations had been confined to the pages of professional journals read only by specialists and to books such as Edmund Bergler's *One Thousand Homosexuals* and Hervey
Cleckley's *The Caricature of Love*.

*The Silence of the Lambs*, which garnered the chief Academy Awards for 1991, implied that a serial killer was homosexual by giving him stereotypical makeup, lisp, and poodle named "Precious." *Basic Instinct* (1992) ascribed the murderous proclivities of its heroines to their lesbianism, implying that their "perversion" is the ultimate anti-social orientation. In Barbra Streisand's *Prince of Tides*, the central trauma is Tom Wingo's rape by a man at the age of 11. Other scripts virtually eliminated the homoerotic subtext of the original plot, leaving the sexual orientation of the characters in a haze. The screen adaptation of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* left out the lesbian affair of Whoopi Goldberg's character Celia. The film version of Fannie Flagg's *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* suppressed the lesbian bonding between the liquor-loving, pants-wearing Masterson and the demure Parker, illustrating Hollywood's infinite capacity to turn something into nothing.

No film hero or heroine is a Queer National or a positive, admirable homosexual role model. Queers are either murdering villains, self-hating paradigms of psychopathology, or furnishing comic relief. Television, though, is ahead of Hollywood. In recent years it has built many screenplays around gay characters. At the same time fundamentalist pressure groups have attempted to force advertisers to withdraw their support of such programs in order to preclude a positive image of love for one's own sex from
reaching the public--and particularly "impressionable young people." The traditionalists have never abandoned their centuries-old policy: if not defamation, then silence.

Queer Nation, Out in Film, and other activist groups planned an action at the Academy Awards ceremony on March 30, 1992, both as guests arrived at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles and later during the show, close to the awarding of a major Oscar. They also announced their intention to out a large number of closeted stars with maps pinpointing where they live--no doubt to the trepidation of their press agents. Many appearing on the platform wore the red ribbon, but the threatened outing no more materialized than the one announced for Governor Wilson's aides after he reneged on his promise to support gay rights.

Unsympathetic portrayals have contributed to a rise in queer-bashing. A survey of by The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute found that incidents of violence (including harassment, threats, vandalism, arson, police brutality, physical assaults, and murder) against individuals who were or were perceived to be homosexual rose 31% in five cities during 1991. Kevin Berrill, director of the institute's Anti-Violence Project, declared that "The wide scope of anti-gay violence in 1991 should come as no surprise given the stench of bigotry that routinely emanates from Hollywood, the halls of Congress, the pulpits of the religious right, and other venues."

So the problem of appropriate visibility for us in film and
television remains open. The old attitudes can be insinuated as effectively--and far more subtly--by the screen portrayal of a homosexual psychopath than by a sermon on the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah. Even more controversial is the issue of how such characters should be positively depicted, because the community itself is not of one mind, some preferring conventional types who chance to love their own sex, others applauding the most flamboyant and uninhibited.

**Queer Nationals in the Military**

Williams ranked as a top official at the Pentagon, with access to highly classified information. Yet he was never humiliated and cashiered as were thousands of uniformed homosexual (or bisexual) men and women during his service as spokesman in what was technically wartime. So his outing poses a genuine dilemma for the military. It exposes the blatant hypocrisy of an establishment that goes to great lengths to "ferret out" homosexuals and expel them from the military, but allows a "known homosexual" to occupy a high position in the Pentagon itself. Department of Defense Directive 1332.14 reads:

Homosexuality is incompatible with military service. The presence in the military environment of persons who engage in homosexual conduct or who, by their statements, demonstrate a propensity to engage in homosexual conduct seriously impairs the accomplishment of the military mission. The presence of such members adversely affects the
ability of the Armed Forces to maintain discipline, good order and morale; to foster mutual trust and confidence among service members; to ensure the integrity of the system of rank and command; to facilitate assignment and worldwide deployment of service members who frequently must live and work under close conditions affording minimal privacy; to recruit and retain members of the Armed Forces; to maintain the public acceptability of military service; and to prevent breaches of security. Homosexual acts are crimes under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

A homosexual act means bodily contact, actively undertaken or passively permitted, between members of the same sex for the purpose of satisfying sexual desires.

Discharge for homosexuality can result from: 1) committing homosexual acts; 2) attempting to commit homosexual acts; 3) stating the desire or intent to commit homosexual acts.

Other countries, it must be admitted, have similar policies. Of those in the common law tradition, or at least influenced by it, the number includes Australia, Canada (reportedly on the verge of reversing it), Cyprus, Great Britain, India, Jamaica, New Zealand, and Trinidad and Tobago. Nations following the civil (Roman) law tradition that bar homosexual service in the military include Argentina, Colombia, Guatemala, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. Moslem countries are Iraq, Pakistan, and Turkey--so that the cultural context is in no way homogeneous. In most of
these jurisdictions homosexual acts are not in themselves criminal when committed by civilians in private. On the other hand, if the United States were to change its policy it would scarcely be alone. A number of countries explicitly permit homosexual persons to serve in the armed services--Austria, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland--and a good many others report no policy one way or the other. Here, in any event, is an opportunity for America to join the ranks of the enlightened.

Unfortunately, the American armed forces did not abandon their policy even during the Gulf crisis, even though they instituted a temporary Stop Loss procedure. This is a wartime device that allows the armed services to defer administrative separations of military personnel who are not involved in actual misconduct.

Reserve Specialist 4 in the U. S. Army's 129th Evacuation Hospital Unit Donna Lynn Jackson wrote a letter to her post commander as reported in the Advocate stating: "I am an open lesbian, and I wish to be deployed as such with my unit." Initially this proved no obstacle to her being sent with her unit to Saudi Arabia, in preparation for the attack on the Iraqis occupying Kuwait. She was, however, ultimately left behind alone, to be reassigned to an administrative unit pending an Army investigation. When Jackson was informed that the Department of Defense would resume its anti-homosexual policy once the troops returned from the Middle East, the reservist revealed the
Pentagon's hypocrisy to the media. After two years of active service and five as a reservist, she faced the possibility of joining the more than a thousand odd a year whom the military discharges for homosexuality. She was undaunted by her experience, however: "The more who come out, the better the chances of the military changing its policy on homosexuality."

On January 11, 1991 Randy Shilts estimated that 30% of women in the armed forces are lesbians: "Lesbians have a much tougher time in the military than gay men. They're kicked out at a rate three times higher than men." His article provoked a Department of Defense denial that the fundamental policy had changed in any way. At the same time Sandra Lowe, an attorney with Lambda Legal Defense, claimed to know a number of service personnel who came out to their superiors but were shipped off the Gulf anyway.

About the military's anti-homosexual policies Shilts made some remarkable revelations in an interview of May 30, 1991 in the *Progressive*:

The military policies are created by the United States Government, and enforced brutally as a matter of policy.

. . . The brutality of the policies--they drive people to suicide. Murder is all but condoned in some services.

. . . I mean that gay people get murdered, that gay people's lives are routinely threatened in the military, and the military does absolutely nothing about it. If somebody threatens a gay person in an aircraft carrier at sea, and he starts receiving death threats and informs
his superiors, the superiors almost always respond by launching an investigation against that person to determine whether he should be kicked out for being gay. They will never respond by launching an investigation of the death threats. I have so many stories of this. . . . For women, lesbians, you're talking as much about women's issues as you are about homophobia. For the first time, you have women being able to go into nontraditional roles. Every time women are allowed into a new job category in the military, they're almost invariably accused of being lesbians. The first women allowed to go onto a ship in the Navy sailed on the Norton Sound. Within months, they had their first witchhunt for lesbians. Women who do a good job are women who are good military people, which means they're aggressive and competent. . . . The antigay regulations, as they're used against women, are basically used as a way for men to get women into bed. I've talked to women who have been raped but have not reported it, or have been afraid to report it, because the men said they would accuse them of being lesbians if they reported it. Women who do not submit to the sexual advances of superiors are routinely accused of lesbianism and routinely kicked out. The level of sexual harassment in the military astounds me, and is enabled by antigay regulations.

Shilts is devoting his next book to the military's anti-homosexual policies and prejudices.
Openly gay Representative Gerry Studds of Massachusetts, who has spearheaded the fight against the exclusionary policy, commented: "It is the lowest form of hypocrisy for the Pentagon to maintain that gays and lesbians are unfit for military service while it sends them off to risk their lives in the Gulf. And it is utterly inconceivable to me that these same men and women, upon the loyal completion of their tours, will be kicked out of the service because they are gay."

The issue of outing in the military is complicated by the fact that in the Korean War and the Vietnam War, revealing one's orientation was a convenient way of staying out of the armed services--and the radicals of the Gay Liberation Front wanted nothing more. But today, as Marxism, "comic book" and other, wanes, some activists demand for queer nationals the right to serve in the military, either as career soldiers or in a national emergency as draftees. Miriam Ben-Shalom, a lesbian who lost her appeal to rejoin the Army Reserves when the Supreme Court refused to hear her case in February 1990, disclosed that she personally knew 250 homosexual veterans, many of whom had already endured the rigors of combat, who would have been willing to volunteer for duty--even front-line service--in the Persian Gulf if the Department of Defense abandoned its policy. Others in contrast called for massive gay support for the anti-war movement that briefly revived in the winter of 1990-91, with demonstrations in San Francisco, Washington and elsewhere. So the issue is clouded by fundamental political rifts within the queer nation itself.
Moreover, activists had long been campaigning for the expulsion of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) from college campuses because of its exclusionary rules and for the banning of military recruiters from campuses. The head of the Humanities Department, David M. Halperin, persuaded the President of Massachusetts Institute of Technology to denounce the anti-homosexual policy imposed by the Army and many colleges, including Dartmouth, are giving notice that they will expel ROTC if the homophobic policies continue. The presidents of more than sixty universities have now denounced the military's ban on homosexual servicemen. It blatantly contradicts the rule against discrimination based on sexual orientation that many colleges have adopted.

**The Williams Outing and the Military**

Events moved swiftly. Perhaps uninfluenced by Williams' outing, on August 19 the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco ruled that the Army had to prove that there is a rational basis for its policy on homosexuals. It would not accept homophobia as a valid reason for exclusion. The decision stemmed from the discharge of Army Reservist Captain Dusty Pruitt after she disclosed during a 1983 interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, in connection with her work for the Metropolitan Community Church, that she was a lesbian. The judges found that past decisions upholding the military's policy were based, in part, on acquiescence to the prejudice of others. That rationale was undermined by a 1984 Supreme Court decision which said that...
social disapproval of an interracial marriage did not justify denial of child support. "Private
biases may be outside the reach of the law, but the law cannot, directly or indirectly, give them
effect." The same argument had figured, interestingly, in the dissenting opinion in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which upheld the right of the Southern states to impose racial segregation: the
majority cited decisions rendered at a time when the institution of slavery so dominated public
opinion that prejudice was the law of the land. In the same way, the courts had tacitly ratified
prejudices grounded in medieval intolerance as a valid basis for legal decisions.

Less than two weeks later, on September 1, 1991, in what was clearly at least in part a response
to the Williams outing, the *New York Times* carried an editorial headed "Gay Soldiers, Good
Soldiers." It began with the questions: "Do homosexual personnel, male and female, threaten the
effectiveness of the armed forces? Or is it shortsighted prejudice for the military services to ban
homosexuals and to discharge those discovered in its ranks?" The editors explained that in
recent weeks the issue had revived, so that Defense Secretary Cheney had been obliged to justify
the policy that deemed homosexuality "incompatible with military service." He was not eager to
maintain a ban that deprives the armed services of potential talent, brands thousands of
individuals with dishonorable discharges that blight their subsequent lives, and costs millions to
train their replacements. "Much of the opposition to homosexuals reflects a deep-seated
fear that gay personnel would make sexual advances on their heterosexual comrades, provoking fights or starting affairs that would destroy discipline. But that wrongly brands all homosexuals as sexual aggressors."

The editors accused the Defense Department of duplicity, since homosexuals are allowed to serve in civilian jobs, even at the highest and most sensitive levels, under civil service rules outlawing sexual orientation as a criterion for employment. "That is why," it added, "Secretary Cheney has no trouble retaining a trusted aide who was identified as homosexual by a gay magazine"--an obvious allusion to *The Advocate's* "outing."

Repeating the arguments advanced in *The Advocate* editorial, the *Times* went on to say that the absurdity of the policy was underscored by a message from Vice Admiral Joseph S. Donnell, the commander of the surface fleet in the Atlantic, in late July of 1990 telling his subordinates that "With the influx of women on our ships and throughout the Navy in general, it is necessary to address the sensitive issue of female homosexuality and ensure equal treatment of male and female homosexuals. There is a perception by many that female homosexuality is somewhat tolerated, while male homosexuality is dealt with swiftly and sternly. [You must] demonstrate equality in the treatment of male and female homosexuals." Investigations of lesbianism must not be "pursued halfheartedly" merely because "experience has . . . shown" that lesbians are generally "hard-working, career-oriented, willing to put in long hours on the job and among the
command's top performers." Equality in this instance evidently means the same right to be exposed and punished--a right which the armed services would never deny to anyone.

Rejecting all of the conventional arguments for exclusion of homosexuals, the *Times* cited Gallup Polls that indicate mounting public approval. It concluded that regulations proscribing sexual harassment could deal with any problems that arise from homosexual propositioning, and that "what consenting adults do on their own time is their business, not the military's," so that there was "no evident justification for discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation." On the heels of this statement, the 99th convention of the American Psychological Association in San Francisco heard attacks on the policy. Speaker after speaker told the professionals that the ban is supported by no data from the social sciences, but that it is brutally enforced and functions in a dehumanizing way. The Department of Defense for its part withdrew the speakers who were assigned to uphold the existing policy.

The prompt response of the foremost establishment newspaper to Signorile's bold move--little more than three weeks had elapsed since the issue of *The Advocate* hit the stands in New York City--vindicated outing and the exposure of hypocrisy. So, just two years after *OutWeek* began its outing of the celebrities in our midst, the practice yielded its first major dividend. Others, it is safe to predict, are on the way.

The *New York Times* of Friday October 11, 1991 reported that
under the pressure of court cases, the Canadian Government was about to reverse a policy barring homosexuals from the armed forces. Officials of the Canadian defense establishment had recently informed members of Parliament of the impending change. Nicholas Swales, a member of the staff of the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defense, called the policy change "inevitable." "It was only a matter of time," he said, "before they came round to this sort of conclusion." Homosexual rights advocates hailed the move as "long overdue." As of this writing, however, the decisive step has not yet been taken.

Defeats, however, also lay ahead. In December 1991 US District Judge Oliver Gasch rejected the suit of Joseph C. Steffan, a Naval Academy midshipman who, acknowledging his homosexuality, still claimed that the policy was unconstitutional. The judge ruled that the regulations "rationally further legitimate state purposes" and further "a healthy military force, morality, and respect for the privacy interests of both officers and the enlisted." In the wake of this decision the feeling among legal activists was that appeal to the courts is useless because their reasoning runs in a vicious circle, and that only Congress and the President can terminate the policy.

**Outing in the United Kingdom**

Britain has the highest age of male homosexual consent in Europe: 21. It is 18 in Germany and Luxembourg, 16 in Belgium, 15 in Denmark, France, and Greece, 14 in Italy, and 12 in the
Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain. Although the European Court of Human Rights has challenged the validity of the law, in Ireland homosexuality is illegal. In most European Community nations the age of consent for lesbians is the same as for gay men. For British lesbians the age of consent is 16, on a par with that for heterosexuals.

The Sunday Times of London reported on December 1, 1991 that Scotland was on the verge of announcing the dropping of criminal charges against consenting homosexual males between 16 and 21 "unless there is evidence of seduction, corruption, or a breach of trust," in the words of Lord Fraser of Carmyllie, the lord advocate. Although British Prime Minister John Major has noted a "changing social attitude towards homosexuality in this country and abroad," he insisted that in England and Wales, where the law is different, the present policy would continue. A Downing Street spokesman declared: "Whatever happens in Scotland has no impact on England and Wales. There has been no change in prosecuting policy. There have always been differences between English and Scottish law," but conceded that more prosecutions were "unlikely." The well-known actor and gay rights activist Sir Ian McKellen went to confer with Major. Another actor, Michael Cashman, chairman of the gay rights organization Stonewall, deplored the inconsistency in the law between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, but thought that "this decision will take enormous pressure off many young gay men. Some have been driven to suicide. It will also allow health
education authorities and schools to target young people with safe sex education."

Not surprisingly, the Scottish announcement brought forth a spate of denunciations from Tory right-wingers. Bill Walker, president of Conservatives for the Family, warned that "there is a great danger that people will be left with the impression that it is open house in Scotland and that is not acceptable." Teddy Taylor, a former Scottish minister, vowed to fight the measure: "I have never known such a big decision on a fundamental moral issue being taken in this way. If we cannot overturn this we may as well close parliament down and turn it into a museum."

In spite of the heat of the ongoing debate about homosexuality in the United Kingdom, there has not yet been a significant outing. In the summer of 1991 activists proclaimed that they were about to out 200, including numerous members of Parliament and other highly-placed people, but whereas in California in the wake of Pete Wilson's veto they outed only Mickey Mouse, in Britain the outings did not materialize at all. The chapters of ACT UP and Queer Nation in British cities have not yet successfully outed anyone. Part of the problem there comes from the slander and libel laws, which are much stricter than in the United States. In Great Britain the old common and statutory laws prevail, protecting public officials and politicians as much as private persons, so that anyone resorting to outing there could be sued, while in the United States decisions beginning in the 1960s removed the shield from such
celebrities. In Great Britainouters feel obliged to proceed anonymously, as indeed they apparently intended when they threatened to put up posters denouncing the 200.

**Outing Reaches Australia**

In Australia, where the overt gay community, consisting of those who are out to more than a few friends, sex partners or family members, numbers only in the tens of thousands even at the highest count, outing has provoked tremendous outrage. It is understandable that an outing there might be more detrimental to the outee, who could find few people among whom to take refuge and perhaps nowhere to hide except the outback. But numbers alone cannot explain the extent of the revulsion. One has to speculate whether the continent down under is simply less advanced or less decadent, if one prefers, than Great Britain and Western Europe, where, although there has been little outing, nevertheless the idea has not struck people as so repellent as it seems to the Australians. A single professional outer has shocked and enraged their whole gay establishment. In the evolution of their gay liberation movement, Australians have followed Americans rather closely, with a time lag of a year or two at most. Hence it is no surprise that outing reached its shores in the summer of 1991, as fast as it made its way to Paris. On the night of Thursday August 8, a person or persons unknown designed a poster on an Apple computer which bore the headline GUilty OF DECEIT AND HOMO-HATRED. With the names of two prominent politicians, it was signed "A message
from Queer Nation—a nation without borders." This event announced that seventeen months after its founding Queer Nation had found citizens in Australia.

A laser printer produced the posters, which were appropriately hung on walls and telephone poles in Sydney. Two were thrust under the door of a clothing store beneath the offices of the gay biweekly Sydney Star Observer. At a press conference some hours earlier, State Upper House MP Franca Arena had burst into tears while telling of threats to expose her twin sons Mark and Adrian, 24, as homosexual. Shortly after this event, Melbourne activists disclosed that they had a list of containing the names of 40 prominent politicians, including a State Governor, two Supreme Court judges, a member of the Hawke cabinet, seven state MPs, two Anglican bishops, four captains of industry, and one captain of a VFL premiership team. Two former Prime Ministers, both deceased, were also to be outed from the grave.

In an effort to find the culprits, New South Wales Special Branch police combed the pages of The Bulletin, the Australian edition of Newsweek, which ran an article naming people involved in outing internationally. The State Attorney General promised criminal defamation actions. Michael McDougall of ACT UP/Sydney denied that Queer Nation existed in that city "except in the imagination and mind of maybe one person. It holds no meetings, has no office, no address, no agenda. It's a joke." The Australian political establishment and media did not treat the
affair as a joke, but reacted with furious indignation. On August 13 the Prime Minister, Robert Hawke, condemned the outing of prominent homosexuals as "outrageous." He even asserted that he did not care if any of his cabinet members was gay. "I take the view that in these sorts of things people have the right to be what by nature they want to be. And provided they operate within the law, live within the law, then that's their right". He claimed never to have used accusations of homosexuality as a political weapon. Some two years earlier, as it happened, he had confessed on national television that he had been guilty of adultery and besides was too fond of the bottle.

The President of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organizations, Bill Whittaker, warned that outing might result in more homophobia and queer-bashing. He asserted that AIDS and gay organizations were responsible enough to deal with the issue. "This includes the possible strategic outing of someone in an exceptional case where it can be proven that they are homosexual and proven that they are using a position of influence to directly harm the gay and lesbian community or people with HIV/AIDS." He denounced those who "mindlessly follow every American trend" in the name of activism. The secretary of the AIDS Council of New South Wales, David Buchanan, said that "frankly, the action was despicable and childish"--a reproach sometimes addressed to ACT UP/New York City by those who dub it "GROW UP!"

ACT UP/Sydney issued a statement distancing itself from the outing of Franca Arena's sons. A dozen businesses
subscribed to a full-page advertisement in the *Sydney Star Observer* voicing their opposition to outing.

On Thursday August 15 Donald Horton, 47, a respected judge of the Supreme Court in Brisbane, Queensland, was found dead in his car at his home in suburban St Lucia. Friends confirmed that threats to out him had driven him to suicide. A close friend said that Horton's homosexuality was well known and sensitively accepted among those who worked alongside him. He said: "Don was deeply distressed and was concerned his profession would be demeaned if his persuasion was publicly identified". Another friend added: "It's disgraceful to think the Outing issue is moving into Queensland. The concept is cruel and vicious and can only cause unnecessary suffering to many innocent people." The judge, said another colleague, had always carefully kept his homosexuality discreet. Gay activists were quoted to the effect that he should have been the least likely target for an outing campaign, because he had never kept his homosexuality secret from those in his milieu, even from Queensland's former National Party Government, which made him a Queen's Counsel and appointed him to the Supreme Court. The president of the Queensland AIDS Council insisted that the judge "simply wasn't in the closet." Other prominent Australians condemned outing unreservedly. Ron Casey, a "radio personality," said that the "despicable" move had "put the homosexual acceptance cause back light years" (because a light year is a measure of space, not time, it has no relevance to chronology). Another radio commentator, Brian Bury,
said: "I think it's disgraceful and cowardly. It's almost a fascist attack on people's private lives."

Chris Murphy, a criminal lawyer, was quoted as saying: "Outing homosexuals is a disgraceful abuse of the right that people have to the quiet enjoyment of their private lives." The editor of the *Sydney Star Observer*, Larry Galbraith, called outers "a handful of loose cannons on the deck of the gay community being egged on by certain media people." The *Sun-Herald* labeled outing "dangerous idiocy," claiming that it was "potentially dangerous because the perpetrators have no way of knowing the impact that the revelation will have on the victim, his or her relatives or friends. Put simply, it is sexual McCarthyism."

Early in August it was reported that New South Wales Attorney General Peter Collins would ask the Crown Solicitor for a detailed legal opinion on possible prosecution of people arrested for putting up outing posters in the streets of Sydney. He said that the Government was prepared to bring charges of criminal defamation against such offenders and would not have to pass new legislation to cover the crime; the law already existed, and "the penalty would be left to the judge."

On the other hand, two long-time Melbourne activists held that the issue merited serious consideration by the gay community. Jamie Gardiner, an executive on the Victorian Council for Civil Liberties, told *The Sunday Age* that it was important for gay young people "who often feel they're the only ones--to know there are leaders in every walk of life who are gay." He
hastened to add: "We understand that in a society as discriminatory and oppressive as ours people have wanted to stay in the closet. But as time goes on it becomes less excusable to stay in the closet, especially for those who have made it." To boot he suggested that as a first step, the gay periodicals OutRage and Sydney Star Observer could approach successful homosexuals to talk about their experiences and publish such interviews in batches of a dozen, arguing that the community can admire these people.

Tony Westmore, a member of ACT UP/Sydney and Queer Nation/ Sydney, justified outing of public figures who, so far from supporting queer political aims, work actively against them in the hope of concealing their true colors. Such people, he said, are to be found in "all sorts of policy debates: employment, planning, health, social services, adoption, defense, immigration and foreign affairs." He added: "Fear of exposure and the concomitant need to fly the flag of conservatism fire their voices. These fires might be damped by the cleansing waters of truth." Such people "in order to protect themselves and their loved ones, legislate against us, make public comments which are lots less than flattering and work in ways to make life dreary. I say let's drag them out of their closets for their families, constituents and audiences to see." In a homophobic society, one Australian wrote, "it is a punishment to be described, against your will, as a homosexual. The disgraceful reality is that it may cost people their jobs and expose them to abuse, ridicule,
even violence." So Australians debated the merits of outing as this novel political tactic ruffled public life down under.

Magic Johnson, Freddie Mercury, and the Media

On November 7, 1991 Earvin "Magic" Johnson announced to the world that he was HIV-positive. The basketball superstar carefully insisted that he had contracted the virus from a woman. Since the African variant of AIDS is usually heterosexually transmitted, but the American one is not, the truth of his assertion may be disputed. But the mass media gave this "coming out" more attention than the deaths from AIDS of thousands of people who had contributed infinitely more to society--and might have done far more good had they lived--than the aging player. Activists were infuriated at this distortion of the importance of events: for years their outcries had gone unheeded, even their efforts to warn America that AIDS was spreading among racial minorities--mainly through IV-drug use. Now the media heralded as epoch-making what might otherwise have been filed away in Magic's private medical history. Richard Rouilard wrote in the Advocate of December 17, 1991: "What we have the right to demand from this self-proclaimed spokesman for people with HIV is that he get beyond the divisiveness that he is, knowingly or unknowingly, promoting. We can demand that he cut the heterosexist garbage immediately. . . Magic's assertions ad nauseam that he's 'not gay' strikes one of the nastiest chords played out in the AIDS tragedy yet--the notion that there are innocent and guilty victims of this
worldwide pandemic." Randy Shilts had commented on the death of Kimberly Bergalis, an "innocent" girl purportedly infected by her dentist, in the same vein in an op-ed piece in the *New York Times*, "Good AIDS, Bad AIDS": "She mentioned how unfair it was that she had to suffer from AIDS even though she 'didn't do anything wrong.' With those words, she seemed to be separating those who don't deserve AIDS from those who do." Unfortunately this distinction is implanted in the popular mind and reinforced by religious traditions. Early in the epidemic medical personnel had dubbed the condition WOG [Wrath of God] by allusion to Romans 1:18: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men." In this view homosexuals and IV-drug users are being punished for immoral behavior, while heterosexuals, hemophiliacs and others who acquire the disease through blood transfusions or in the womb are the "innocent victims" of others' wrongdoing.

A few weeks after "Magic's" disclosure, Freddie Mercury, the lead singer of the rock band Queen, became Britain's most famous casualty. A star of international renown, he died of AIDS-related pneumonia at the age of 45, only a day after he confessed that he too had the disease. AIDS groups declared that Mercury's case will make it easier for others to publicize that they are HIV-positive. Born Frederick Bulsara, a name which he long kept hidden, the scrawny musician with greasy hair studied music-hall kitsch and developed his own grand style. Because of his flamboyance with his Bechstein grand piano, Mercury has been
dubbed the "Liberace of heavy metal." Having made it to the big time in England with the song "Keep Yourself Alive," his band first swept American audiences with "Killer Queen." Writing in the Boston Phoenix (December 6, 1991), the critic Michael Bloom pointed out that "by their name alone, suggesting either royalty or homophilia, Queen alerted you that they trafficked in ambiguities, embraced disparities, and reconciled contradictions in their art and their very being." He noted that Queen's most famous songs, "We are the Champions" and "We Will Rock You" "became both an anthem for gay solidarity and something to holler at sporting events--another contradiction they bridged with ease."

**Pete Wilson's Betrayal of the Queer Nation**

The veto by Governor Pete Wilson of the gay rights bill on September 29, 1991 triggered riots and demonstrations unparalleled in California since the assassination of Harvey Milk. It provoked not only violence but a reassessment of gay politics. And rightly so!

The former real estate salesman, who apparently had no principles or scruples beyond achieving success in sales and in elections, had deceived gay Republicans. As a gubernatorial candidate Wilson had promised the Log Cabin Club, the gay Republican group that had formed in California and was strongest there, that he would sign the measure into law. When the legislature did pass the bill, the religious right--well-organized in the state--and other conservative homophobes
generated a tremendous backlash. Although the gay lobby and liberals pressured the governor, he caved in to the other side and to caveats from Washington and vetoed it, in callous disregard of his solemn campaign promises.

When confronted by activists at Stanford, who were protesting his speech at the University, he had the temerity to call them fascists. The unscrupulous tactics of right-wing Republicans in California have been notorious since "Tricky Dick" Nixon first rose to fame by smearing Representatives Jerry Voorhis (1901-1984) and Helen Gahagan Douglas (1900-1980) as fellow-travelers. Ronald Reagan had also gained his political start by attacking Communists in the Actors' Guild, Hollywood's left-leaning union. Although governor and then Chief Justice Earl Warren proved that there were liberal Republicans in California, the thrust of California Republicanism has been arch-conservative and homophobic. Republican Representative Dannemeyer of California was the homophobe in the House of Representatives matching Jesse Helms in the Senate. Thus Wilson's betrayal shook Republicans' credibility among queer national voters across the nation, even in Massachusetts, whose Republican governor, William Weld, is the most sympathetic to gay rights the nation has ever yet seen.

The reaction propelled people into Queer Nation. As long-time activist Jim Kepner told us, its Los Angeles chapter was limping along until the veto, when its membership suddenly soared into the hundreds and a similar reaction occurred the length and
breadth of the state. There were nightly actions for weeks. The word "queer" had never been so popular among Californians. It was equally popular at the academic conference held at Rutgers in November 1991, as Wayne Dynes himself noted with some chagrin. If the group in Chicago is still languishing, as Paul Varnell reported to us, unlike the two coasts the Midwestern heartland has never been in the forefront of the gay movement, even if it can thank the survival of the populist-progressive tradition of the early twentieth century for some firsts in practical achievement.

On May 15, 1992 the District of Columbia's Queer Nation chapter outed Anne-Imelda Radice, the new chair of the National Endowment for the Arts. The Washington Post on May 28 threatened to publicize the outing if she did anything "noteworthy," such as deny funding to a gay artist. In the meantime The Advocate was readying an article calling her "George Bush['s] new doormat homosexual" and quoting lesbian leader Vivian Shapiro who termed Radice "a lesbian from hell." Queer Nation's Margaret Cantrell said that Radice's lesbianism "is widespread knowledge. Mainstream reporters have confirmed it to me but they won't print it because of what they call 'the privacy issue'." Radice's lover, identified as Noel Brennan, is in the telephone book at the same address but under a different number. Radice is thus another queer national whom the Bush Administration allows to remain in office, presumably for obediently carrying out its conservative, homophobic policies (Wockner, 1992).
Conclusion

The exposure of Pete Williams was spectacular. It may well be commemorated as having been overwhelmingly beneficial in its results. The episode took Signorile's career onto a new plateau, though he has not done much outing in the *Advocate*. It justified the long-term, strenuous efforts of Petrelis, who dogged the footsteps of the shrinking number of candidates in the 1992 primaries, even though Jerry Brown told him at a rally at Boston University when Petrelis asked him whether he practiced safe sex that he did not discuss his sexual life in public. If outing persists, as it undoubtedly will, their place in the history of homosexual liberation is assured. Less visible, but even more important benefits impend for millions of men and women in the American military, today, and for the future. Evermore, a revision of the discriminatory policy seems inevitable, though a Democratic administration in Washington will probably be needed. The Williams outing may well prove to be the catalyst that brought to fruition this long-needed change, which Frank and Studfs, the only openly gay members of the House, have been urging for several years. The coming out of "Magic" Johnson as HIV-positive and the death of a rock music star attracted even more attention among the masses.

Of course sharp differences of opinion on the merits of outing persist. Inasmuch as ours is a pluralistic society, no one reasonably expects unanimity on such a thorny issue among those most likely to be affected--or even among the least likely.
Even queer nationalists debate whether to favor assimilation into existing society or defiance of its conventions on sex and gender. At all events, the socialist/communist option of the late 1960s no longer exists for the younger generation. For many heterosexuals the whole subject of attraction to one's own sex is still charged with negative feelings and beliefs. The path to full legal toleration and social acceptance remains a steep and challenging one. Perhaps we shall have to go our own way. As so often happens, political differences concern both means and ends. Yet we can and must approach the issues with as much finessse and sound judgment as we can muster. Long live Queer Nation!

*The Advocate* (Los Angeles).

*Body Politic* (Toronto).

*Boston Phoenix*.


*Gay Community News* (Boston).


*IN* (Boston).


*OutWeek* (New York).


*Sydney Star Observer*.

Laurie Udesky. 1991. "Randy Shilts: 'For me, coming out was very political'." *The Progressive*, May, pp. 30-32, 34.
