



Off the Straight and Narrow

by John Corry

Beware when the press plows new moral ground. Homosexuality is now all over page one and the evening news, although reasonable people may find that stories about it are suspect. "Don't ask, don't tell" applies to the new journalistic rules as well as to a prescription for gays in the military. When the media report on homosexuality they do so with one eye closed, as if fearful of finding something unpleasant. Homosexuality must be seen as widespread, healthy, and even endearing, and to see it as anything else is to violate the new moral canon. Stories are shaped accordingly.

Last spring, for example, the reputable Battelle Human Affairs Research Center in Seattle released a survey that found that only 1.1 percent of American males described themselves as exclusively homosexual, while only 2 percent reported a homosexual experience in the last decade. ABC's "World News Tonight" dismissed the finding with a single skeptical sentence, while NBC's "Nightly News" ignored it. "Nightline" and the "MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour," both of which ordinarily enjoy windy discussions of gay issues, ignored it, too. The 1.1 percent figure could not possibly be correct. If it were, the media attention focused on homosexuals might seem excessive, and only a homophobe would want that.

Nonetheless, the figure was consistent with similar studies here and in Europe, none of

which had ever come close to confirming Dr. Alfred Kinsey's old estimate of 10 percent. It did not matter. Within weeks of the publication of Battelle's finding, *Newsweek* did a cover story on lesbians. It said there were "2 to 3 million of them in the United States—far fewer than the approximately 5 percent of the population represented by gay men." *Newsweek* did not disclose who had counted the lesbians, although the 5 percent figure, raising the Battelle figure by a factor of four or five, was clearly its own. On the other hand, by media standards, the estimate was quite reasonable. Just before *Newsweek* was on the newsstands, "60 Minutes" did a report called "Gay Cops." It centered on a former New York police officer who has found life more enjoyable in San Francisco. It also introduced us to a gay FBI agent identified only as "Jim."

Jim, his back to the camera, said that

the FBI had recruited women and blacks, but not gays, which clearly displeased Mike Wallace. He asked Jim how many FBI agents were in the closet, and Jim said about one out of ten. "About the same proportion as in society," Wallace said smoothly, and raised the Battelle figure by a factor of ten.

Obviously, some statistics about homosexuals are more acceptable than others. The same week that "60 Minutes" was reaffirming Dr. Kinsey's discredited estimate—actually, Kinsey admitted he was never sure himself—NBC's "Nightly News" reported on gay purchasing power. NBC might have ignored the Battelle figures as irrelevant or unscientific, but on some matters, it could be precise. It said gays spent \$514 billion a year and lesbians preferred Toyotas over all other cars, while among male homosexuals Toyota was number two. NBC also reported quite cheerfully on the growing spate of androgynous ads. Androgyny, you must understand, is acceptable, and perhaps even preferable, in the new moral canon.

Serious people may be bemused by much of this. Media vagaries are divorced from real life. The matter of gays in the military, though, is really too important for either vagaries or the new canon. When Bill Clinton made his first dreamy pronouncement about lifting the ban on gays, television did a number of stories about homosexuality in other armies. Canada and Europe's NATO countries were usually cited. "Macho, Tough and Gay," a report on "60 Minutes," was typical. It may seem inappropriate to pick on "60



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Minutes" twice in one column, but as much as anything on television, its little mini-movies are paradigms of media thinking.

"Macho, Tough and Gay"—it sounded like an ad for a leather bar—focused on a lieutenant colonel in the Dutch army who, according to "60 Minutes," got along well with his men, and fully expected to rise in rank despite his homosexuality. In a tattle-tale mood, he even confided to Ed Bradley that he knew of gay generals in the United States Army.

Nonetheless, the report was distinguished more by what it left out than by what it included. The Netherlands does not have much of an army, and the entire Dutch military establishment will be reduced to only 39,000 when conscription ends in five years. Indeed, all European NATO countries except Britain have conscription, and their armies must accept homosexuals whether they want to or not. They know if they make homosexuality a bar to military service, large numbers of draftees will announce they are gay as soon as they receive their induction notices.

Meanwhile, "60 Minutes" also neglected to mention that most Dutch troops live at home, and barracks life is limited. The gay lieutenant colonel may get along with his men because he and they do not share quarters. Nonetheless, he may be right when he says he expects a promotion. Homosexuals in the Dutch army have their own union. The lieutenant colonel might call a strike if he is passed over for full colonel. Suggestions by "60 Minutes" to the contrary, the Dutch experience is not applicable to the United States. The Canadian experience is not either, even though it was so often cited. The Canadian army is smaller than the Metropolitan Toronto police force, and, as the *Toronto Globe and Mail* has glumly reported, it has more generals than tanks—130 to 113—and no one expects it ever to go to war.

Which leaves us with, among other things, the coverage by America's most prestigious newspaper. Unfortunately, though, the *New York Times* has embraced the new canon. Indeed, it seems to want to expand it. The aggressively trendy—and increasingly incomprehensible—Sunday "Styles" section appears determined to

legitimize all aberrant lifestyles, while the editorial page sees homophobia, sexism, or racism at the root of most problems. Granted that literate adults do not read the "Styles" section. Granted, too, that the editorial page has become less interested in persuading readers about the correctness of its positions than in finding new ways to have tantrums. One can put up with all that, but it is disturbing to find the news columns bent out of shape. There are days when the *Times* seems to be edited by ACT-UP and Larry Kramer.

Thus the coverage of gays in the military; it really has been quite terrible. Colin Powell, for instance, delivered the commencement address at Harvard, and a small number of gay activists turned their backs. Overwhelmingly, though, Powell's reception was favorable. The *Times* story noted this in the first paragraph, but the rest of the story solicited the views of the activists. Or, Sam Nunn and the Senate Armed Services Committee visited the naval base at Norfolk, Virginia, and found that most of the sailors did not want homosexuals as shipmates. The page-one story in the *Times*, however, led with what might have been the only petty officer at the base who said he couldn't care less.

The thinking here may seem baffling, although discerning readers can find clues. Other news organizations, for example, noted that Major General Harold Campbell, who was forced to retire from the Air Force for making disparaging remarks about Bill Clinton, had termed the president "gay loving." *Times* stories, though, did not mention that. Instead they said that Campbell had called Clinton a "dope smoking," "skirt chasing," "draft dodging" commander-in-chief. Apparently, the *Times* had decided that those terms were derisive, but that "gay loving" was not. It had applied the ACT-UP and Larry Kramer test.

In fact, the test is not always that subtle, and on occasion its guidelines stand out in sharp relief. When Marine Colonel Fred Peck, who opposed lifting the ban on homosexuals in the military, told the Senate he would fear for the life of his gay son if the young man joined the armed services, the *Times* buried his testimony in the last two paragraphs of the jump on a page-

one story. Then it corrected its mistake. Two days later it carried another story—not about Colonel Peck, of course, but about the son, a student at the University of Maryland, and how he had felt about disclosing his homosexuality to his father. A week later, the young man turned up in the *Times* again, this time on page one. He said homosexuals were just like everyone else, and that the ban should be lifted on gays in the military. The *Times's* editorial page was so overcome by all this that it made him the subject of an editorial.

America's premier newspaper has been stacking the deck. Journalism allows room for maneuver, and reporters and editors are allowed to make choices. The *Times* can find unlimited space for Colonel Peck's son and any number of closeted, unidentified gays, but it averts its eyes from those it disagrees with. On gay issues, most of big media does this, too. Only the *Washington Times* interviewed Major Charles B. Johnson, who had written to the commandant of the Marine Corps: "The new interim policy on homosexuals serving in the military

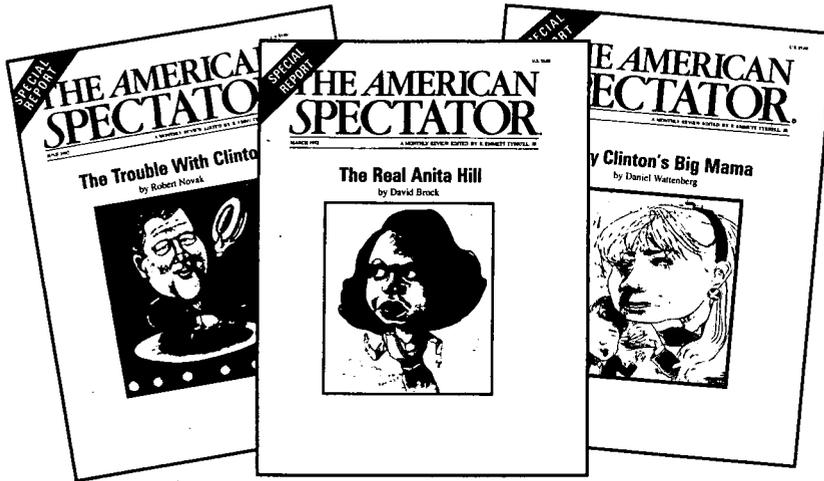
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constitutes an illegal order. I therefore tender my resignation at the government's earliest convenience."

Major Johnson is an interesting man. As a captain in 1983, he waved his service pistol at three Israeli tanks that tried to force their way into an American-controlled area in Beirut and stopped them in their tracks. His picture was on front pages. Later Major Johnson served in the Gulf War. Moreover, he has a Ph.D. in policy analysis, and when he offered his resignation, he was only three years away from a pension. It is hard to think of him as anything other than principled, and in an interview with Michael Hedges he got down to what had escaped most of the media. "To change the policy is not only stupid, it is illegal," he said of the president's proposal. "It will cause unnecessary deaths in combat of soldiers, sailors, and airmen. These will be capricious deaths that won't accomplish anything, and that makes them illegal."

Give the media all the best of it, and say that, because Major Johnson was only expressing an opinion, they were not obligated to report it. It is harder, though, to excuse the inattention to facts. Despite all the attention being paid to gays in the military and the lamentations about witch hunts, the *Washington Times* seemed to be the only newspaper to report on a study of courts martial by the Army's judge advocate general. The study found that eight of every ten homosexuals the army had court-martialed for sexual misconduct in the previous four years had been involved in a sexual assault. Moreover, nearly half the 102 assault cases had involved child molestation. So much for all the witch hunts. The *Washington Times*, using documents it obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, also reported that the army prosecuted at least sixteen soldiers for lesbian or homosexual activity during the Gulf War. They included six male soldiers, one of them a West Point graduate who took part in what army investigators called a "sex ring" in occupied Iraq.

This is all terribly unattractive, of course, and has no place in the new canon. Better to have a television correspondent chat up a Dutch officer or a newspaper reporter chase after a colonel's son. We are witnessing the neutering of journalism, with nothing substantive to replace it.



Mom, Can I Go Out to Pray?

by Francis X. Rocca

The Baltimore Arena is a forlorn place. Less than half a mile away are the expensive shops of Harborplace and the state-of-the-art ballpark at Camden Yards, but the Arena's neighbors are porno stores and fried chicken outlets. Inside, its concrete walls are crumbling. From the rafters hang mementos of the Baltimore (now Washington) Bullets, including a banner proclaiming them "1947-1948 BAA Champions." Instead of basketball, this is now a venue for indoor soccer and lacrosse. On Thursday, June 17, it is the setting for "Miracle Day 93: The Baltimore Revival."

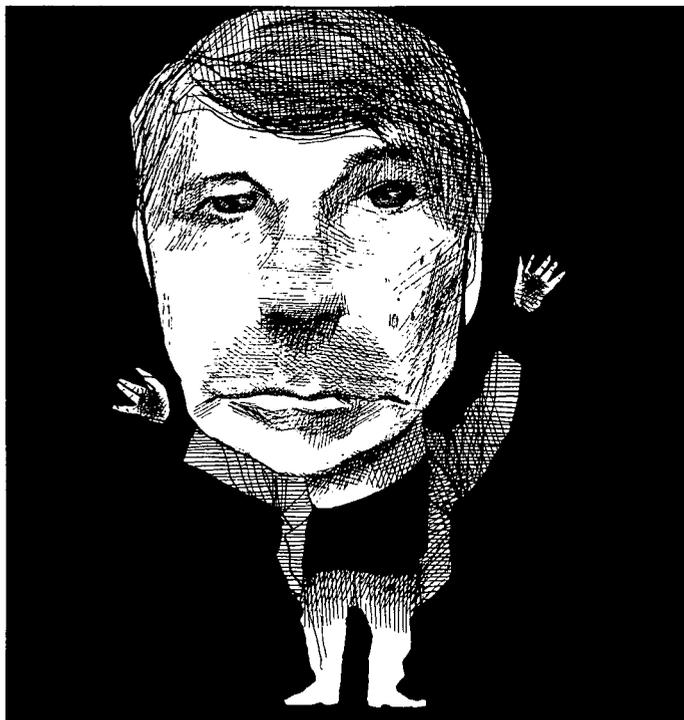
The date marks thirty years since the Supreme Court ruled that prayer in public schools was unconstitutional. Baltimore has a special link to that event, since it was the city of Madalyn Murray O'Hair, the atheist who brought the suit that led to the ruling; and the organizer of tonight's rally has a special link to her: he is her son, William J. (Bill) Murray, now a Christian evangelist.

Murray is the author of *My Life Without God, Nicaragua: Portrait of a Tragedy*, and an annotated edition of the U.S. Constitution, all for sale along with video tapes and Miracle Day T-shirts at tables by the entrances. He is a veteran of "Sally Jesse Raphael," "Today," and "Good Morning America." Murray's eccentric notoriety may account for a bit of tonight's attendance, but

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this event is co-sponsored by four churches in Maryland and nearby Pennsylvania, and most of the 5,000 people here (in a facility that holds 12,000) will show that they have come out of more than idle curiosity.

They are still walking in when the music begins at seven. Among them are a tall, blond teenager whose T-shirt, emblazoned with the portrait of a thorn-crowned Christ, proclaims him "Won by One"; a paunchy, unshaven laborer in a tank-top; a bearded, bespectacled office worker in a tie and short-sleeved shirt; and a slim, middle-aged woman in a floral-print spring dress. No more than ten percent of the congregants are black, yet it is they who seem most at home. The black worshippers are the first to raise their arms at high points in the music,



and they are saying "Amen" long before the preacher asks them to. When the Rev. J. R. Damiani, master of ceremonies, introduces the leaders of local high school bible clubs—part of a growing movement sanctioned by the 1990 Supreme Court decision in *Board of Education v. Mergens*—half of them are black.

Then Damiani introduces the first major attraction of the evening, the man who "ministered to our church on Super Bowl Sunday—and it was a super Sunday." To great cheers, Phil Driscoll runs on stage. He wears a purple check jacket over black T-shirt and slacks; his blond mane is cut like a rockabilly musician's, short on the sides and down past his shoulders in back. After a proficient jazz trumpet solo he launches into a series of rock songs: a mournful ballad on the

Passion leads into an everybody-clap-your-hands number called "He's Alive Again," which sounds like the theme to one of the *Rocky* movies. The driving, throbbing beat reminds one of the debate among conservative Christians as to whether or not rock music is compatible with devotional lyrics. As Jimmy Swaggart used to point out, before he lost his credibility on such matters: "You know why they call it 'rock 'n' roll,' don't you?"

The kids aren't screaming, but they're not smirking either, and their boomer parents are tapping toes. Even the senior citizens are smiling, no doubt glad that, if there must be rock, at least it's about Jesus. Phil, who confesses between sets