

A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society

Cleland Selby

"Let us build an American home for the twenty-first century where everyone has a place at the table and not a single child is left behind." Bruce Bawer, a gay man who professionally has won accolades as a cultural critic and poet, is not about to let President Clinton's vision fall as quickly as the President apparently has for gay people. Clinton made that statement on the eve of his inauguration. Bawer's recently released *A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society* will surely stir the adrenaline for many Vermont gay people. However painful the message, Mr. Bawer makes a rather cogent argument for lesbians and gay men to re-evaluate many of the political strategies employed by the gay subculture. Emerging in this work are many of the basic themes that also appeared in Kirk and Madsen's *After the Ball*; that being openly out will better assure that all gay people gain "a place at the table."

"In the war against homophobia a million gays marching on Washington would have less impact than a million gays being honest about their homosexuality in their re-

spective homes and work places and houses of worship," says Bawer. Although it rambles at times, the text is engaging and provocative and seems almost to have been written in a single writing session. One wonders how this work with references to August 1993 could have been in the bookstores by November. Clearly the work reflects a firm grasp of the issues as well as an ability by the author to point out what he considers to be many of the flaws in some well respected works; Paul Monette's *Becoming a Man*, Michelangelo Signorile's *Queer in America, Culture and Desire* by Frank Browning, and even the E. M. Forester classic *Maurice*. Bawer advocates assimilation through reform, not through revolution. According to the December 14th issue of *The Advocate*, he has stirred up a beehive of gay activists who are certain to sting him for his attacks on "gaythink", gay writers, and much of the gay subculture.

Examined in *A Place at the Table* are the author's perceptions of the "negative impact" upon heterosexuals of many gays

who participate in pride events, of homosexual promiscuity, and of gay attacks upon almost all religious organizations. His major theme is simple: most gay persons are within the mainstream as are most heterosexuals. Bawer maintains that a large percentage of gay persons are not politically or religiously liberal but that instead work and live within mainstream America. The book is his plea that all gay persons recognize the common values we share with heterosexuals, values Mr. Bawer believes are too often not seen because of the publicity given by the Christian Right to the actions of the minority living "the gay lifestyle."

The writer's voice is one of urgency although the social and political climate in Vermont may appear to be more gay affirmative than in most other states, maybe the message in *A Place at the Table* needs to be considered even by Vermont lesbians and gay men. If nothing else, this is a work that is certain to create some lively discussions in the coming year. ▼

Health Resource Organizations

AIDS HOTLINES:

Vermont 1-800-882-2437
New Hampshire 1-800-752-2437
New York State 1-800-541-2437
Massachusetts 1-617-522-4090
Maine 1-800-851-2437
National 1-800-342-2437
Canadian 1-613-563-2437

AIDS Community Awareness Project (ACAP)

PO Box 608
St. Johnsbury VT 05819
(802) 748-1149

AIDS Community Resource Network (ACoRN)

PO Box 2057
Lebanon NH 03766
(603) 448-2220

Bennington Area AIDS Project

PO Box 1066
Bennington VT 05201
(802) 442-4481 or 1-800-845-2437

Brattleboro AIDS Project

PO Box 1486
Brattleboro VT 05302
(802) 254-4444 (Helpline)
(802) 254-8263 (Office)

Franklin-Grand Isle AIDS Task Force

P. O. Box 241, St. Albans VT 05478
(800) 524-7742 • (802) 638-7834

Friends Vermont

Emotional, Spiritual, & Psychological Support
PO Box 402
Bristol, VT 05443
1 800 639-3316

Gay/Lesbian Alcoholics Anonymous

GLAA, P.O. Box 5653
Burlington, VT 05402

Lesbian Cancer Support Group

(802) 660-8386

North Star (Holistic Health Care)

RR2 Box 3255
Morrisville VT 05661 • (802) 888-2858

Vermont AIDS Council

PO Box 275
Montpelier VT 05601 • (802) 229-2557

Vermont C.A.R.E.S. (Committee for AIDS Resources, Education, and Services)

PO Box 5248
30 Elmwood Avenue
Burlington VT 05401
(802) 863-2437 (Burlington)
1-800-649-2437 (Rutland and
Washington County support groups)

Vermont Department of Health

1-800-882-2437 (AIDS Hotline) or
(802) 863-7245 (AIDS Program office)

VT PWA Coalition

PO Box 1055 • Brattleboro, VT 05302
1-800-698-8792 or (802) 222-5123

Vermont Women's Health Center

336 North Avenue
Burlington VT 05401 • (802) 863-1386