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### **The Vermont Coalition of Lesbians and Gay Men**

in their work to pass legislation guaranteeing equal rights to Lesbians and Gay men in Vermont and insuring protection for People With AIDS and HIV+ persons. Contribute to our cause and add your name to our mailing list. **We need your help.**

Yes, I want to be a part of making Vermont safer for Gays and Lesbians. Add my name to your mailing list.

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Vermont Coalition of Lesbians  
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**THANK YOU!**

## **OUT IN AMERICA: A REVIEW**

Nora Landon

The infrequent appearances of gay and lesbian people and issues on television tend to be heavy on heartbreak: a man dying of AIDS, a young man coming out to his family, a woman in a lesbian relationship deciding she's really straight after all. These programs are targeted at a straight audience, which is usually asked to empathize with the pain of the straight characters.

On June 26, during Gay Pride Week, gay men and lesbians had an opportunity to talk directly about their lives and struggles: the accomplishments of the past 22 years, the challenges we face, the issues that unite and sometimes still divide us. The occasion was the broadcast of *Out in America*, a panel presentation featuring seven gay and lesbian activists and three heterosexual supporters, moderated by Andrew Humm, co-host of *Gay USA* on the Gay Cable Network.

*Out in America* places the gay/lesbian civil rights movement firmly in the continuum of other struggles for freedom and dignity. Comparisons to the Holocaust and to the black civil rights movement in the US were made throughout the program: in the choice of panelists; in the opening clips of supportive families; and in the questions and answers.

The panelists were intelligent and articulate and were chosen to represent a variety of viewpoints and experience. They included: Roberta Achtenberg, elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1990; Kevin Berrill, of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force; Richard Failla, the first openly gay justice on the New York Supreme Court; and writer and critic, Jewell Gomez.

The most vivid panel members were Larry Kramer and Craig Washington. Kramer, author, playwright and committed AIDS activist (he co-founded Gay Men's Health Crisis and founded ACT UP) lit up the screen with his passion and anger. When other panelists, whom he accused of being "goody-goodyies", stressed the importance of building coalitions, he challenged them to explain how. With his square, unsmiling face and black ACT UP T-shirt, he was a forceful presence even when not speaking. Washington, a Congressional representative from Texas, was more measured, but equally el-

loquent. When asked why he supported gay rights, he talked about growing up black in a color-conscious world and said he could not "advocate on behalf of rights for black people without advocating on behalf of rights for all people".

Given the diversity in gay and lesbian life stories, it is not surprising that there was much active debate and little consensus. The panelists agreed on the importance of coming out; and that we are many other things in addition to being gay men or lesbian women. We are members of different ethnic groups and religions, we have a variety of political and social concerns. We need to make our presence as gay men and lesbians felt in all the groups to which we belong.

While I appreciate the historic importance of this broadcast, I wish I could say that I liked the program better. My biggest complaint with *Out in America* is that it overlooked women. Of the ten panelists, only three were women. While much was made of the comparisons to the Holocaust and the black civil rights movement, there was almost no mention of the women's movement, which has had an enormous impact on lesbians and on the gay/lesbian movement as a whole. Issues of particular concern to lesbians, such as lesbian parenting or invisibility, were not discussed. The talking heads format used by the program is inherently static and potentially tedious. Humm's job was to keep things lively and stop any floor fights that developed, and he did this. His knowledge of the topic, and ability to think on his feet and control the discussion were impressive. In moderating, however, he danced back and forth in front of the panelists, barking out rapid-fire questions and often interrupting them. Many valuable and interesting comments ended in midstream, and his intrusiveness was distracting. I thought the program lacked coherence and might be confusing, especially to people without a background in gay and lesbian issues. Most of the flaws in this program stem from trying to tackle too much in one hour. Since this was a unique opportunity to speak out loud and without apology on national television, the temptation to say everything at once must have been overwhelming. We have many more stories, and we need to be able to tell them. ▼