

NATAP: Letter to America's Heterosexuals, Larry Kramer

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A letter to America's heterosexuals

An aging 72-year-old gay man isn't hopeful about the future.

By Larry Kramer, (LARRY KRAMER is the founder of the protest group ACT UP and the author of "The Tragedy of Today's Gays.")

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DEAR STRAIGHT PEOPLE,

Why do you hate gay people so much?

Gays are hated. Prove me wrong. Your top general just called us immoral.

Marine Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, is in charge of an estimated 65,000 gay and lesbian troops, some fighting for our country in Iraq. A right-wing political commentator, Ann Coulter, gets away with calling a straight presidential candidate a faggot. Even Garrison Keillor, of all people, is making really tacky jokes about gay parents in his column. This, I guess, does not qualify as hate except that it is so distasteful and dumb, often a first step on the way to hate. Sens. Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama tried to duck the questions that Pace's bigotry raised, confirming what gay people know: that there is not one candidate running for public office anywhere who dares to come right out, unequivocally, and say decent, supportive things about us.

Gays should not vote for any of them. There is not a candidate or major public figure who would not sell gays down the river.

We have seen this time after time, even from supposedly progressive politicians such as President Clinton with his "don't ask, don't tell" policy on gays in the military and his support of the hideous Defense of Marriage Act. Of course, it's possible that being shunned by gays will make politicians more popular, but at least we will have our self-respect. To vote for them is to collude with them in their utter disdain for us.

Don't any of you wonder why heterosexuals treat gays so brutally year after year after year, as your people take away our manhood, our womanhood, our personhood? Why, even as we die you don't leave us alone. What we can leave our surviving lovers is taxed far more punitively than what you leave your (legal) surviving spouses. Why do you do this? My lover will be unable to afford to live in the house we have made for each other over our lifetime together.

This does not happen to you. Taxation without representation is what led to the Revolutionary War. Gay people have paid all the taxes you have. But you have equality, and we don't.

And there's no sign that this situation will change anytime soon. President Bush will leave a legacy of hate for us that will take many

decades to cleanse. He has packed virtually every court and every civil service position in the land with people who don't like us. So, even with the most tolerant of new presidents, gays will be unable to break free from this yoke of hate. Courts rule against gays with hateful regularity. And of course the Supreme Court is not going to give us our equality, and in the end, it is from the Supreme Court that such equality must come. If all of this is not hate, I do not know what hate is.

Our feeble gay movement confines most of its demands to marriage. But political candidates are not talking about "equality" and we are not demanding that they talk about "equality. My lover and I don't want to get married just yet, but we sure want to be equal.

You must know that gays get beaten up all the time, all over the world. If someone beats you up because of who you are (your race or ethnic origin) that is considered a hate crime. But in most states, gays are not included in hate crime measures, and Congress has refused to include us in a federal act.

Homosexuality is a punishable crime in a zillion countries, as is any activism on behalf of it. Punishable means prison. Punishable means death. The U.S. government refused our requests that it protest after gay teenagers were hanged in Iran, but it protests many other foreign cruelties. Who cares if a faggot dies? Parts of the Episcopal Church in the U.S. are joining with the Nigerian archbishop, who believes gays should be put in prison. Episcopalians! Whoever thought we'd have to worry about Episcopalians?

Well, whoever thought we'd have to worry about Florida? A young gay man was just killed in Florida because of his sexual orientation. I get reports of gays slain in our country every week. Few of them make news. Fewer are prosecuted. Do you consider it acceptable that 20,000 Christian youths make an annual pilgrimage to San Francisco to pray for gay souls?

This is not free speech.

This is another version of hate. It is all one world of gay-hate. It always was.

Gays do not realize that the more we become visible, the more we come out of the closet, the more we are hated. Don't those of you straights who claim not to hate us have a responsibility to denounce the hate? Why is it socially acceptable to joke about "girlie men" or to discriminate against us legally with "constitutional" amendments banning gay marriage?

Because we cannot marry, we can pass on only a fraction of our estates, we do not have equal parenting rights and we cannot live with a foreigner we love who does not have government permission to stay in this country. These are the equal protections that the Bill of Rights proclaims for all?

Why do you hate us so much that you will not permit us to legally love? I am almost 72, and I have been hated all my life, and I don't see much change coming.

I think your hate is evil.

What do we do to you that is so awful? Why do you feel compelled to come after us with such frightful energy? Does this somehow make you feel safer and legitimate? What possible harm comes to you if we marry, or are taxed just like you, or are protected from assault by laws that say it is morally wrong to assault people out of hatred? The reasons always offered are religious ones, but certainly they are not based on the love all religions proclaim.

And even if your objections to gays are religious, why do you have to legislate them so hatefully? Make no mistake: Forbidding gay people to love or marry is based on hate, pure and simple.

You may say you don't hate us, but the people you vote for do, so what's the difference? Our own country's democratic process declares us to be unequal.

Which means, in a democracy, that our enemy is you.

You treat us like crumbs.

You hate us. And sadly, we let you.