

# SPECTRUM

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## Out of the closet - into responsibility

We live in the age where language has become an ever more slippery entity. If George Orwell's "Newspeak" has not materialized, the efforts of the post-structuralists have at least encouraged us to look at context a little more closely. Over the last ten years the word "responsibility" has become particularly loaded with political meaning - ironically, as so many of those who aspire to political and moral leadership have urged, in their diverse ways, an abrogation of personal responsibility. Just take a look at the contributions from across the field. On the left, the traditional Marxists emphasize the importance of impersonal and inevitable historic and economic forces, while on the right, through the looking glass, the sadomonetarists preach abject surrender to a near mystic "Market Force." Joining in the game, the religious fundamentalists of every stripe demand uncritical and unthinking obedience and surrender of responsibility to a new Manichaeism, while the peddlers of simplified and popular psychobabble reduce complex psychological principles to a magical absolution, all our faults are somebody else's responsibility. In the ensuing debate (to be polite) extreme positions are assumed, the moral high-ground seized, the opposition marginalized, trivialized or demonized. Rational argument is replaced by slogans, charges of culpability fly thick and fast, "responsibility" and "victim status" are the chosen weapons and neither side is terribly interested in taking prisoners.

Minorities and disadvantaged groups of any kind are especially vulnerable and apt to get caught in the crossfire. While attempting to assert their own pride, and express an historically justified anger of sense of grievance, it is all too easy to take up the stance of permanent victim, or to wallow in self-pity. As James Baldwin so eloquently testified in his writings, a righteous anger can so easily become a state of embitterment, a permanent rage against a world that not only does not care, but will not become in the least self-critical.

For gay men and lesbians, the lessons learned by Baldwin, who was both black and gay, are particularly apposite. The pressures to surrender any sense of personal responsibility are enormous, and the most important lessons of the Stonewall rebellion, the most difficult to take to heart. The most obvious pressures come from the religious right, and scarcely need repeating here. The Vatican declares us moral cripples with fatally impaired judgement, suffer-

ing from an "intrinsic moral disorder". Others rehash Freud and blame dysfunctional parents (usually the father), seduction of youths by older "perverts", or even possession or obsession by demons (perhaps I am not responsible for this column after all - it may be the spirit of Linda Blair!!). The medical and scientific fraternity are also in on the act, for though psychologists today would not define homosexuality as a disorder, the geneticists and endocrinologists have stepped into the breach. Now it could be the result of a hormone imbalance in the brain, or even a genetic trait.

For Edmund White, Stonewall was the moment for him when being gay ceased to be a diagnosis and became a positive choice of lifestyle. That act of rebellion, of asserting pride, and of taking responsibility for our lives, is usually personalized in "coming-out".

Forget the histrionics so beloved of soap-opera script writers - they are as divorced from reality as all the other contrivances in that genre. "Coming-out" begins with that day

you can look yourself in the mirror and admit who and what you are. Not a moral cripple, a social pariah or permanent victim, but a fully functioning human being, with as much right to exist as the next, and as much right to the pursuit of happiness. "Coming-out" is no guarantee of happiness, or an immunization against pain, but it is an affirmation of your inherent dignity, and most importantly, an affirmation of responsibility for the conduct of your life, the successes AND the mistakes.

The two decades since Stonewall have been likened to the maturation of an individual, from the rebellious, heady adolescence of the 1970s to the sombre adult reality of the 1980s. Growing up is rarely painless, but would the AIDS support groups, the gay and lesbian legal aid groups, the switchboards and phone-lines, and the safer sex campaigns have been possible without that initial act of rebellion, that assertion of independence and responsibility? While Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and their pale imita-

## The Superbowl for amateurs

This weekend is the SUPERBOWL!!! The superbowl is to sports what New Year's Eve is to drinking. It's tailored especially for the amateurs. That is, people who don't watch football or even sports at all on TV are going to watch the "S" Bowl. And not that being an amateur is all that bad. Being amateur means that you do it for the love of doing it. You know, amo (Latin etc.). So next time someone says,

"You're strictly an amateur (fill-in-the-blank)!" You can respond, "Thanks, my love for doing (fill-in-the-blank) is that obvious? Well, I have been (fill-in-the-blank)ing for a long time."

So, I'm sure many of us will be glued to the set(s). This must be superbowl XXVI, since the first one, Green Bay versus Oakland was back in 1966. Notice the Roman numerals. This means the event is really big. Bigger than the 1992 Olympics. You see, the Olympics have Roman numerals, but nobody has the foggiest idea what they are. The same goes for the World Cup in soccer. This is a sport so boring, that they dare to hold the championship only every four years. And why not, that's what you get for making up a game that your not allowed to use your hands. I know some people who eat without using their hands. And nobody cares about that either. What's really funny is that football

(and rugby, speaking of eating without using your hands) are "descended" from soccer. The story goes that a soccer player exclaimed during a match,

"This sucks!"

Or something like what they must have said back in those days (1880's). So s/he, probably he, and ran with the old pigskin (which is really a cowskin). They tried pretty much the same thing in rugby, but the rules got "screwed-up" because they keep tossing it backwards. Anyway, the forward pass came in about 1912, Notre Dame vs. Army. If you need to pin down the actual details, watch an old Knute Rockne movie.

Let's face it. Professional football was really the first pro sport which didn't seem to matter what colour your skin was. So even if you don't understand the game, it has had some socially redeeming aspects, such as the first sport to recognise the dangers and ban the use of steroids. The various cheerleaders squads. If you like Country and Western singers, that's where Mike Reid got his start.

So this weekend. For the uninitiated, there's two teams. One has a somewhat racist name "Redskins". The other is sort of named after some clown who slaughtered thousands of North American bison. They're playing the game up north, which is unusual. But it's indoors. Most

## Positively Pink by Adrian Park

tors were espousing selfish individualism and declaring "society" to be dead, gay and lesbian activists were bucking the trend of the 1980s and rediscovering the values of shared and personal responsibilities. None of this was achieved from the comfort of the closet, or by simply sniping over the parapet of the ghetto, nor was it achieved from the privileged vantage point of exalted victimhood, or by unquestioning obedience. This achievement was not gained by moral cripples, or by genetic defects or by unbalanced hormones, it was achieved by the co-operation of feisty, rebellious, self-accepting, self-critical, questioning individuals acting in concert (most of the time). It is an achievement of which to be proud, produced by

using responsibility as a tool, not as a weapon.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank John Valk for his comments, and for taking the time and effort to write a considered response to my last column. It is possible to disagree and yet still respect another person's viewpoint. Who knows, perhaps between us we could start a new trend!

There will be a general meeting of Fredericton Lesbians and Gays (FLAG) on February 12th at 7:00 pm in Room G14 of Edmund Casey Hall at Saint Thomas University in Fredericton. The meeting will discuss FLAG's future plans, including a dance. New members are welcome.

## Well, This is What I Think by D. J. Eckenrode

superbowls are fairly boring games, as they tend to be a little one-sided. However, there seems to be little doubt that the two best teams in pro football are meeting. Unlike the stupid USA college football. Actually, voting to see who was the best. Imagine voting to see how many goals Brett Hull scores in a season.

For me, ties to the Bills go way back to 1958, when Stew Barber,

one of the "big kids" (Mickey Cassidy's cousin even) from our area went to play for the Bills. He went on to be one of the best offensive tackles to ever play for the old AFL. And maybe they'll even have one of their former players run for president of the USA someday. So when Dr. Know and I sit down to watch the game this Sunday, I'm lining up with the Bills.

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