Buchanan’s remarks hateful and harmful

By Peter M. Nardi

Last year, more than 7,000 cases of violence against gay men and lesbians were reported to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in Washington, D.C. This confirms a 1987 report to the Department of Justice which concluded that members of the gay minority are more likely to be attacked than are members of ethnic and religious minorities because of their minority status.

One of the categories not included in these statistics is verbal harassment, that is, the routine yelling of epithets hurled at people in public, graffiti on walls, pamphlets passed out at rallies, and other forms of written and oral expression. Not included are columnists such as Patrick Buchanan and his article (March 20) appearing in many newspapers around the country in which he attacks New York Mayor Dinkins for “prancing with sodomites” in the St. Patrick’s Day Parade. To reduce an entire group of people to a sexual act — a sexual practice that is also performed by heterosexuals, by the way — is not only a sign of ignorance and hatred, but also an inhuman way to treat anyone.

This form of gay bashing creates a climate in which physical violence can routinely occur. Buchanan, for example, trots out the writings of Harry Jaffa, an academic whose views on homosexuality are generally regarded as erroneous and inflammatory and which have contributed to an atmosphere of verbal gay bashing at the Claremont Colleges. Violence against gay men and lesbians, verbal and moral, is evident even at our educational institutions.

Harmful also are the remarks of Jaffa and Buchanan when it comes to AIDS. Their knowledge of the disease, both medical and ethical, is abysmally low and providing them a forum to present inaccurate information about a serious disease is a threat to public health.

It is sad when writers like Buchanan see people who are willing to support gays and lesbians as immoral because they are offending and insulting Irish Catholic traditionalists, when those same traditionalists feel that discrimination against women, gays, and others is acceptable. To hide behind the rhetoric of morality and to ignore the immorality of bigotry is disingenuous and arrogant.

Buchanan quotes Jaffa as saying, “Sodomites should be returned to the closet, where they were of relatively little danger to themselves or others.” This hateful remark ignores the harm created by staying in the closet and implies that AIDS was caused by gay people. What is more dangerous are the people, like Buchanan and Jaffa, who spread hate. It is the insecure who blame others for their failures and who try to enact laws to oppress those who are different. Discrimination against gay men and lesbians — and the verbal and physical violence used to carry it out — are no longer limited to the streets.

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