



**Knut Olav Åmås, Richard Goldstein**

## Culture and gender in neo-conservative America

*Richard Goldstein talks to Knut Olav Åmås*

How far has America really come when it comes to gay rights and gender equality? Richard Goldstein, editor of the influential *Village Voice* believes that a social backlash in neo-Conservative America is forcing women back into traditional notions of femininity and is provoking new forms of accepted homophobia.

In late June 1969 Richard Goldstein is a cub reporter on the New York City weekly *Village Voice*. One day he leans out of the window of his office in West Village to see what's happening outside the Stonewall bar in the street below, where transvestites are battling with the police. It is a battle that is destined to trigger a gender revolution, the first step on the road to gay liberation in the West. Goldstein is married and thinks that the fracas in the street below has nothing to do with him. However, in an aside to a colleague he says, "I really hope those guys win their rights."

On 11 September 2001 Richard Goldstein is a seasoned, middle-aged executive editor of the *Village Voice*. He leans out of the window of his flat on Christopher Street in West Village to see what is happening a few blocks further south in Manhattan. Two passenger jets crash into the twin towers of the World Trade Center, an event that will leave an indelible mark on American and international politics for the foreseeable future. Goldstein is living in partnership with a man and is one of the United States' foremost homosexual opinion leaders.

The sexually inspired set-to outside the Stonewall bar and the terror attack on the World Trade Center represent two disparate aspects of present-day America. They are central to Richard Goldstein's world of ideas.

### **Rock, graffiti, Aids**

Goldstein became America's first rock journalist when he started working at the *Village Voice* in 1966. He was the first to write about the then unknown group The Doors, about a singer called Janis Joplin, and about an artist named Keith Haring. In his capacity as a journalist, which he has been for half his life, Goldstein has probed the links between culture, politics and gender in America. In the sixties he wrote about the nation's counter-cultures, in the seventies about political liberation movements, and in the eighties about the Aids epidemic. He was the first to label graffiti art, and he helped to win a Pulitzer Prize for *Village Voice* with a series of articles on Aids in Africa.

With a 250,000 circulation of the print edition and 150,000 readers of the net version, *Village Voice* is America's leading weekly newspaper. Its readers are mostly the young, who are a favoured target of advertisers – all the paper's revenue derives from advertisements. The owners, who are unknown to the

editorial staff, demand that the paper make a good profit – and it does. *Village Voice* provides its public with more serious reading on commercial entertainment and culture than any other newspaper, but also prints a lot of political and analytical news and articles. Goldstein is currently working on a book he has entitled *The Culture of Cruelty*, a book about sadomasochism in popular culture, and, among other things, Eminem.

Richard Goldstein entered journalism because, as a child of working-class parents, he nurtured a modest dream of becoming "a Dostoevsky from the Bronx." "But when I started high school," he says, "I discovered *new journalism* through reading Tom Wolfe and Norman Mailer. They wrote about things as they really are instead of making them up, but continued to employ the same fictional techniques that I so loved in realistic literature. I was seized by the idea of writing about real life as though it were fiction, while remaining true to the facts. I was very much into rock music at the time. Rock was still looked down upon as inferior in those days, but to me it was as heady as sex.

I felt an urge to portray rock by literary means. That's how I started writing, and journalism leads to dependency, you very soon find yourself hooked on the adrenaline kick it gives, the rapid feedback and the influence what you write sometimes has." Goldstein has a master's degree in journalism from New York's Columbia University, a journalistic course of study inaugurated by Joseph Pulitzer.

### The social matrix

**Knut Olav Åmås:** Why have you expended so much energy on, and devoted your whole journalistic and editorial life to, one particular subject, that of the relationship between culture and politics, with gender and sexuality as a kind of link between the two?

**Richard Goldstein:** 'Because it is precisely their interaction that has made America America. Understanding these paradigms is the only way they can be changed and influenced. *The Matrix* is one of the most important American films of recent years: it demonstrates the impossibility of escaping from the social matrix. Freedom consists in knowing how you interpret the interplay between culture, politics and gender – and how you feel about living within that configuration.

In the United States entertainment is an immensely important means of assessing social identities. Social identities appear first in culture, in a vital, sexualized form. When people subsequently adopt them, "buy" them, they tend to become social norms. That is one of the keys to understanding the way America has evolved; cultural images become concrete models for the nation's politics. They are not fantasies, as you Europeans sometimes tend to believe, they are veritably remodelled as political and social truths. That has happened with macho ideals in the last ten years or so. The build-up of a backlash against the feminist movement is clearly apparent in the entertainment industry and has generated new hypermasculine and hyperfeminine ideals.

Do you understand what I'm getting at? America's response to 11 September may in many ways be illustrated by the cultural developments that preceded that event. Just look at the films, music, videos, the whole arts and entertainment industry, in fact. The modes of thought were there – just listen to hip-hop and gangsta rap. Because their exponents are black, their innate anger is termed "progressive" – they have a right to an anger that differs from that

young white males can permit themselves to display. They have a common enemy: all that isn't masculine enough. We are confronted by a reactionary backlash culture with a radical face. We are now seeing the political consequences of according the macho ideal top place in the hierarchy, not least in the war against Iraq. The eagerness to resort to war that has recently swept America is the political result of the re-emergence of cultural machismo. It wouldn't have been as strong in a feminist society. We would not, of course, want to be without a military defence force, but we wouldn't have rushed into war."

**K. Å:** But there is still room for political dissent in America, surely? You yourself are part of a liberal, intellectual, Jewish community of people. Hasn't opposition been stronger in the last eighteen months than one would have thought possible in the light of the authoritarian mood so in evidence after 11 September?

**R. G:** No. I don't agree. I belong to the Vietnam generation, so I know just how strong dissension *can* be. This is nothing compared with what we were witness to in connection with the Vietnam war. George W. Bush's popularity will undoubtedly rise again. With the Republicans now controlling both the White House and Congress, they control everything.

### The return of the gender hierarchy

**K. Å:** You see increasing sexual conformity as the intellectual foundation of what, in your 2002 book *The Attack Queers. Liberal Society and the Gay Right*, you call a cultural backlash in America, don't you?

**R. G:** Yes, there is an ongoing process of re-hierarchization between the sexes, a recoil from free, Dionysian love and the widespread idea of equality that has been of such great symbolic importance up to now. The Neo-Conservatives constitute a hierarchy with white, heterosexual males at its apex. The writer Andrew Sullivan claims that homosexual men can liberate themselves by adopting as their ideal the lifestyle of normal, heterosexual men – "embracing their sex." The sex and art historian Camille Paglia says women can achieve freedom by cultivating traditional forms of womanliness. Both are set on reducing the multiplicity of ways in which sex is "presented."

This is a conservatism that Europeans find difficult to comprehend. One of the keys to understanding American politics is to view them as status politics, as a struggle for social standing. In the United States a person's status as a citizen is far more likely to change than that of people elsewhere. Factions compete with each other much more visibly and unscrupulously; standings rise and fall with the changing status of other groups. Your role and position in society, if, for example, you are a speaker of one of the one hundred and sixty minority languages spoken in New York, is even less foreseeable than in equivalent circles in Europe. Homosexuals in Scandinavia enjoy *civic equality* but not *status equality*. In the US, it's the other way round.

The backlash applies not only to sexual leanings and feminist gender politics, but also to ethnic minorities. *Affirmative action* at America's universities and in the workplace – the radical policy of awarding blacks study places and jobs according to a quota system – has now been done away with in many places. This policy has led to the rise of a black middle class that has deprived the white working class of jobs and the affluence that goes with them. Many people have felt themselves threatened.

In the last fifteen to twenty years the social standing of American males has improved compared with that of females, as has the status of whites compared with that of blacks. Conversely, the aims of feminist policy as they relate to social and financial equality have suffered a setback. These days, what counts is women's admiration of what we term the *alpha male* – a white man who enjoys both prestige and power. It's not that ethnicity doesn't matter, it will always be a fundamental factor, but gender has become the most dynamic element of present-day American politics.

The Clinton years saw an improvement in the living and working conditions of women and minorities. Admittedly, there was no increase in these groups' real power, but that was outweighed by their gains in symbolic prestige. It was precisely the rapidly increasing visibility of women in the Clinton era that caused the backlash and created new heroes. The Republicans have always looked upon Hillary Clinton as an 'unnatural' woman, because she wielded considerable power as a person in her own right: her position never depended solely on her role as First Lady. That made her a threat.

Politically, the backlash led to the legal measures taken against the President. It is no coincidence that the scandals surrounding him focused on sex: radical issues of gender were at the core of Clinton's politics. By comparison, the Bushes, father and son alike, have about them a patriarchal air.

The dialectic between culture and politics, between cultural fantasies and political realities, is not understood by the American media, so there's no wonder that it is not properly comprehended in Europe either. When culture plays on the same side as politics in a society, it leads to what might be termed a hegemonic state of affairs.

### **Feminism perceived as a threat**

"Why, then, has there been a backlash against feminism? As I see it, the rise of feminism in the US generated a deeply rooted fear among the mass of Americans, because the process was perceived as having gone too far and brought about all too radical changes in the standing of women. The idea that women were able to manage for themselves and make their own way in the world, with no need of men, is, for males, profoundly disturbing – as, indeed, it is for many women. Feminism has struck at the very heart of the structure on which society rests. Feminists of both sexes have not only demanded respect in specific, if circumscribed, areas, they have also evinced an urge to change society as a whole.

The same may be said of the position of ethnic minorities, which, until a short while ago, had been greatly strengthened, only to be followed by an equally powerful conservative backlash. Whites have abandoned many urban areas and have transferred their children to private schools. Various means of resistance have been adopted to *counter* the radically improved status of blacks. The myth that blacks and crime are synonymous has taken firm root, and millions of whites have changed their political allegiance in favour of the Republican Party, especially in the southern states.

My favourite author, Nathaniel Hawthorne, maintains that Americans are promiscuous puritans. We have a lot of sex, he says, at the same time as we are puritanical. That is a concept that tells us something about American culture; in this country ideas gain a foothold by extreme measures, and are repulsed by measures that are equally extreme. Here, nothing takes place gradually.

Sexism and misogyny play a major role in making people conservative. Traditional gender-thinking is the foundation on which the world view of modern American Conservatives rests. Homophobia is a natural manifestation of this: there exists, not least, a lasting fear of the strong, masculine homosexual. Such people muddy the stereotypical image of the male homosexual as wholly feminine. Aggression and angry resistance combine to form the most provocative image a homosexual can present. Every majority wants its minorities to display a measure of invisibility, silence and servile tact."

### Paranoia and offended susceptibilities

"What," Goldstein asks, "are the fundamental features of what we may call *machoism*?" and he himself provides the answer. "It is a sense of paranoia, the feeling that the world is a jungle, that there is never enough power to protect you properly, that trust and empathy are unreliable and labile quantities, and that there exists a constant sense of having been offended that is met with righteous indignation. The perpetuation of male power is the one cause that currently *defines* American politics.

Macho men are bitterly opposed to women. Consider someone like Eminem – he's rabidly homophobic. Take a closer look at his lyrics. You'll find that at the heart of them is rage against women, all women. It is no coincidence that his first film, *8 Mile*, was an outstanding box-office success the same week that George W. Bush swept the board in the mid-term elections, and that the American people handed Congress to the Republicans on a plate. American women are voting Democrat less than formerly. It is this switching of allegiance that we have to thank for the fact that Bush now enjoys hegemony in the nation's politics. Very few young women in America call themselves feminists nowadays; they'd feel ashamed if they did. They are also afraid of being rejected by men, of being perceived by them as a threat; and they themselves are concerned about not being thought woman enough."

### What Eminem is and is not

**K. Å:** But do we *have* to take Eminem's texts as literally as you do? Doesn't he use a variety of names and guises to represent attitudes which he himself doesn't necessarily identify with? Isn't pinning him to one specific identity, one point of view, rather too simple?

**R. G:** No. To do otherwise would be to provide Eminem with an aesthetic alibi, to turn him into a pale Baudelaire. He doesn't pose, he isn't the spokesman of ordinary working people, someone trying to exorcise society's demons. He would have met with much greater opposition had he openly directed his hatred at Jews instead of women and homosexuals. He has succeeded in becoming mainstream because it suits today's cultural climate to consolidate the arch-conservative sexual hierarchy that also Eminem stands for. The white middle class has embraced him because it is there that feminism has made itself most strongly felt. The majority of middle-class people are, quite simply, not yet prepared to relinquish male predominance. Eminem has reminded them of that.

Just listen. In the whole of Eminem's *oeuvre* there is nothing remotely resembling a lovesong written to an adult woman. That is so unbelievable that it deserves repeating: world culture's leading personality in the year 2003 has *never* written a lovesong to an adult women. Bitch-bashing is his preferred

means of expression. His use of irony and different personae is a pretence, a device designed to enable him to evade charges of sexism; it's also a cop-out for the people who watch and listen to him, as it enables them to maintain a comfortable distance from charges of sadomasochism while allowing them to live out their fantasies. It tones down a brutal message.

**K. Å:** In Norway female newspaper columnists in their fifties write glowing articles claiming that Eminem is the new Elvis Presley.

**R. G:** Can't they read? Elvis wrote lots of lovesongs: he stood for liberation of a Dionysian sexuality. Eminem stands for sadomasochism and male control. He stands for dominance. He stands for rape. He stands for the right to take the life of every woman he hates. All this is readily apparent in his lyrics, it's not something one needs to search for. If liberals are to live with Eminem, they will have to make him appear less dangerous than he really is. It's fascinating to see how both Madonna and Eminem have so rapidly progressed from being extreme outsiders to becoming innocuous, acceptable and mainstream commercial. Madonna talks about how wonderful it is to be a mother. *Forbes* asserts that Eminem "may be the most popular man in America." Why has this transformation come about? The short answer is 11 September, the day the mild-mannered man was rejected as an ideal and the dominating neo-macho man became the new hero and icon of the real world.

**K. Å :** Mightn't it be said that Eminem holds up an unsavoury mirror to our time, a mirror that reflects the most repulsive elements of American society?

**R. G :** If only it could – you can read Strindberg that way, too. But Strindberg is, after all, universally regarded as a misogynist, whereas Eminem has become a positive figure. A militant monster has evolved into a populist hero, a Rocky of our time. The critics have gradually taken to keeping their mouths shut about this loathsome sexist stuff. Lack of criticism is a prerequisite if the cultural backlash is to be transmuted into a social norm.

### Contradictory legislation

"Homosexuality has come to be worshipped in present-day America," says Goldstein. "Its standing in society has risen. The process of liberation that has taken place in recent decades has elevated us from an extremely low to a rather higher level in status politics – just as, all over the West, homosexuals are in process of becoming parvenues rather than pariahs. Nowadays they are even being embraced by the Republican Party; that's because many of them live in densely populated, politically important states like California and New York. And America's homosexuals contribute a lot of money to election campaigns, in which respect they have much in common with the Jews. But to accord a community respect is not the same as granting it power. By all measurable standards homosexuals have acquired very little power in the last decades. We are more poorly protected by the judicial system than are homosexuals in Europe. As soon as the Republicans come into power, we find ourselves in trouble. They reject anti-discrimination laws and their politics are overtly anti-homosexual. The Supreme Court has ruled that sodomy may be a criminal offence. The Constitution affords us no protection either, it doesn't entitle anyone to be homosexual. Homosexual relations are against the law in fifteen states of the Union. In Texas a male couple were recently arrested in their own bedroom.<sup>1</sup> When my partner and I travel, we always take along a book setting out the laws of the states we visit, as the rights of homosexuals vary considerably from one state to another. Even though we might be in a state

where minorities are protected by law, we'd risk arrest if we strolled hand-in-hand in a national park in that selfsame state. That's because what apply in such parks are federal laws, not local."

### On appearing normal

**R. G:** For the vast majority of urban homosexuals who aren't well-to-do white men, the system is oppressive, as it always has been where minorities are concerned. The real dynamic in homosexual America comes from working-class immigrants from Latin America. They make up a quarter of New York's population.

But for small, privileged groups there is a breach in the system through which one can find a place at the table, provided one assumes, in so far as is possible, the mantle of straightness – virtual normality, one might say. Normality is the price of status and toleration. And if there is one thing the American white middle class prizes, it is its freedom to exploit every opportunity to acquire heightened social status – upward mobility, in other words. Such privileged elitist groups, who dominate the mass media, realize that it is now safe to come out. This elite has been subjected to less stigmatization, and it is among them that the Neo-Conservatives are found. They cling tightly to their enhanced status, and stigmatize homosexuals who refuse to conform. They are eager to make a sharp distinction between politics and culture, and wish to restrict liberation to the right to partnership and nothing more. But that does little to help the large, silent majority of homosexuals in the US whose need is for anti-discriminatory measures on a more ambitious scale – maladjusted people who are anything but well off, who are black, too feminine or too masculine. Ninety-seven per cent of lesbian women and homosexual men feel themselves subjected to discrimination in today's America.

We must distinguish between superficial tolerance of people who are different and sincere, heartfelt acceptance of them. There is plenty of the former, but the latter is in shorter supply. Acceptance entails a proper dialogue between two parties, a dialogue culminating in a new form of identity which incorporates features of both, a negotiatory, not a hierarchal, model. We must say, "we are *not* quite like you, and we do not *want* to be."

Margaret Thatcher said, "there is no such thing as society." The Neo-Conservatives see only competitive, independent individuals. This makes everyone more vulnerable, it pulverizes us. It is the instrument of the consumer society – it sets out to weaken the bonds between people as citizens of a community and replace them by commercial bonds. These days, market leaders can reach everyone with specially tailored products. A person standing alone is far less able to resist cultural pressures. Even such a small group as a couple is capable of creating its own culture. An individual cannot have a culture. Guess, then, why there is increasing pressure on people with ample purchasing power to remain single.

It is disastrous for people to renounce their historical links of their own volition. To do so is to revert to a model in which one enters into a more or less discreet and privatized circle of like-minded friends and acquaintances, but without forming any broader, visible and social fellowship.

**K.Å :** But surely the desire to streamline homosexual culture and to fit in is also a result of the great success that has been achieved as regards strengthening the position of minorities in the United States?

**R. G:** Yes, the fragmentation and eradication of the distinguishing features of a lifestyle are unintended consequences. The status of the gay community has improved because it observes standards that, with the passage of time, have fallen into line with those of society at large. But that is not the same as saying that the community has achieved real power. That is why we can't call a halt to our endeavours on the political plane to dismantle the social hierarchy. We still have ahead of us plans for liberation. The problem is that we are less motivated to implement them.

The struggle for liberation centres on men and women being enabled to define their sexual roles as they wish and to end polarization. It is a humanistic project that is far from being fulfilled, although young people have put a lot into tackling it. Homosexual liberation is always feminist. Stigma is generated by conservative, traditionalist masculinity, by keeping a watchful eye on one's fellow men, by being ever on the lookout for signs of homosexuality. Such frontier-police activity is at the core of homophobia: surrounding masculinity with fear instead of exploring one's potential and putting it to the test. But straight society *needs* homosexuality as a contrast, as a sharply delineating factor to help define what it means to be normal.

### **Toning down the political aspect**

**K. Å:** So that's the way you think things are going in some sections of American society?

**R. G:** Yes, there's a broad movement on foot to take the social element out of society and politics out of the public domain. At the same time as individuals are enjoying less and less of a private sphere, business corporations are being increasingly shielded from outside scrutiny. That's because the Bush administration continues to privatize public undertakings. It is one of a number of major changes that are taking place in America's public sector. And it's not being done through a figure from *Metropolis*, someone who just sits there manipulating all about him. We are talking about an ongoing process, a trend whereby society is moving in a certain direction. But as long as the leading mass media fail to put two and two together and perceive how closely the individual's diminishing private space is linked to the increasing private space of big business, the process will continue. Opposition to privatization of the public space is too overly focused on public institutions and too little on private business corporations – for example, surveillance of workplaces, of mail, of electronic information and so on and so forth. People would be horrified if they knew how many such means exist ... Workplaces – factories, offices – are the least democratic places in America. Democracy stops at the door. American workplaces are far more authoritarian than their European counterparts.

**K. Å:** Does that mean that in your opinion the US is an authoritarian society?

**R. G:** I wouldn't say it is today. Rather, it's a democratic society with a hegemonic government. There is still, and always will be, room for change. I only hope that the people who are out to make changes are wearing bullet-proof waistcoats! They weren't in the sixties, Martin Luther King Jr. and some of the others, and they paid for it with their lives. That is one reason why the United States changed course after the sixties. If we suffer a recession, if our foreign policy is defeated and we make more enemies in the world, and if the gaps between people widen, we may find ourselves in a very grave and deep depression indeed, in which case the country may well become more

authoritarian. America's strength has always been that its power is economic and cultural rather than military. That is now changing. I fear an economic collapse some time in the course of the next twenty years. Last time that happened we had a liberal society; now the culture is semi-fundamentalist. That is very, very frightening. In the presidential election held in the fall of 2000 many of my friends voted for Ralph Nader, because they no longer saw any difference between the Democrats and the Republicans. Well, now we are seeing the results of such narcissistic thinking. It was a gross strategic error.

**K. Å:** Don't left-wing intellectuals at the universities have any political influence these days?

**R. G:** No, none. Nor do they like working together on joint projects any more. The academic Left is anarchistic and individualistic, and it's finding it hard to define exactly what it stands for. These people are satisfied with just developing and disseminating ideas, but have no interest in building institutions. So there isn't much money going into think tanks on the Left. In that respect, too, the Right has done much better – they fund people who write books and become leaders of public opinion. Intellectuals on the Right have shown that they can band together and both win and retain power. I often set out to write articles prompted by a contradiction in terms, namely that homosexual America is markedly Left-Liberal. That being so, why do few but the Neo-Conservatives speak out as homosexuals in the mainstream media? I find it hard to understand paradoxes of that sort.

**K. Å:** So if I ask you whether American intellectuals are more or less actively at odds with society today, what would you say?

**R. G:** I would say that leftist intellectuals are less visible, whereas those on the right are well to the fore, they're the public intellectuals of our day. Their think tanks are very powerful. They fund many reports for organizations and the government. In the 1960s the Left was a social nightmare because it based its politics – politics of sensation – on the impulse of the moment and not on systemized structures. The Left stood for issues that threatened American society – feminism, race and gay liberation. I remember that we moderate Left-Liberals fought bitter battles with Marxists who regarded sexism and homophobia as diversions from the class war.

There were times in the 1960s when the United States was in danger of disintegrating altogether on account of student unrest, race riots and the slayings of some of our leading political figures. At times there was, in fact, a real danger of revolution. The Left should have taken that lesson to heart, but its ability to build institutions and think long-term has in the decades that followed remained as feeble as ever. That is why race, sexuality and gender proved to be keys to the advance of the Right in the eighties – they were our own campaigns, but turned upside-down. Substantial sections of America's white middle class deserted the Left because they felt their interests threatened by such issues. We had, of course, to act as we did, to fight sexism and racism. But we have also had to pay the price – we are seeing that today, now that the Right are taking over all the principal institutions and the Left have hardly any they can call their own. The sixties were one big frolic, and a good one at that, but that's *all* they were.

### **Fundamentalists are the Establishment**

Richard Goldstein is a Jew. After taking part in public debates for some decades, he claims that there is only one subject that arouses stronger emotions than sexual dissent: divergent opinions on American policy towards Israel.

**R. G:** There is no formal Israel lobby pulling the strings in Washington and New York. That belief is a stereotype. Let us instead take a look at Christianity as it is practised in this country. The people who really do have political clout in the United States today, also in regard to Israel, are the twenty per cent or so of the population who are Christian fundamentalists on the Right and who are George W. Bush's core voters. They see Israel as a crucial issue now and for ever more. And they constitute a mass movement, as in America fundamentalists are not the deviationists and despised extremists on the fringes of society that they are in Europe. Here, they are the Establishment itself. They vote in every election, they aren't secularist, and they aren't humanistic. If you haven't grasped that, you don't understand the American mentality or American politics. Together with Orthodox Jews they form such a large and powerful bloc of the electorate that it is *impossible* for the United States to pursue a policy aimed at a balanced relationship between Israel and the Palestinians. For religious and metaphysical reasons they favour an imperial Israel. More so than other international conflicts, the whole Middle East imbroglio is for all parties metaphysical. No issue, not even that of homosexuality, evokes such violent passions in the United States as the nation's relations with Israel. I am concerned about the consequences America's war against Iraq may have for Israel, and about whether due consideration has been given to the risks involved. Israel may suffer grievous harm or even annihilation as a consequence of its closest ally, the United States of America, having so destabilized the Middle East.

If Christian fundamentalists gain a foothold in America's judicial system, within a generation they will be in power. They are strongly opposed to abortion and favour a ban on the teaching of Darwinism in schools. Whenever they fail to balk the teaching of the theory of evolution, they try to smuggle in their doctrine of Creationism under the guise of freedom of speech. Metaphysics is taking over this country.

Leonard Cohen has said that the USA is the birthplace of the best and the worst. That is my kind of patriotism, the only kind I know.

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<sup>1</sup> This interview was conducted before the Supreme Court ruling of 26 June 2003 which repealed the anti-sodomy law in Texas, thereby legalising consensual sex between adults of the same sex. The ruling relates to the arrest of two men in 1998 in Texas on the charges of sodomy. [Editor's note]