

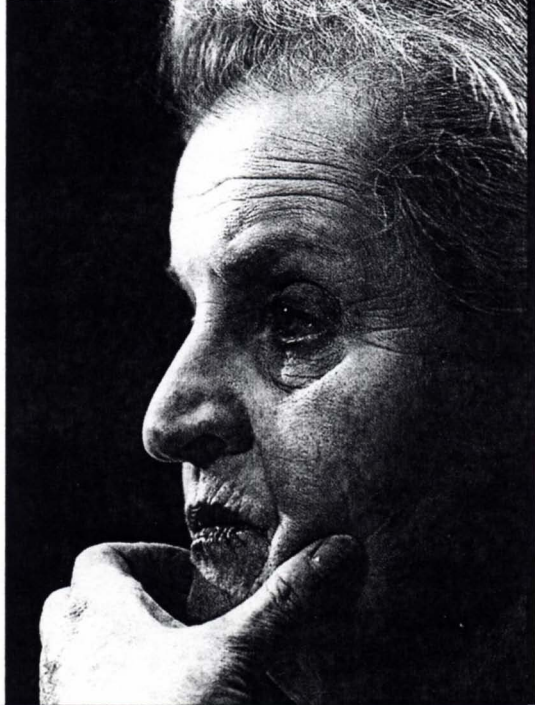
Susan SARANDON

SUSAN SARANDON IS THE BIG SISTER you'd come out to first, and you know she'd kick the ass of anyone who gave you a hard time about it. The feelings of admiration are mutual. "I appreciate and gravitate toward gay men *and* women," Sarandon tells us. "As a woman I realize the struggle they have had and that they face the same enemy: the establishment. And I've learned from them humor in the face of adversity and pride in being different." It's just that mix of in-your-face strength and sly subversiveness that makes the wild, warm-eyed star so appealing. And she backs words with action. "My early involvement with AIDS came directly from the loss of a dear friend who felt the need to hide his illness from everyone," says Sarandon, who soon appears in her partner Tim Robbins's gay-tinged *Cradle Will Rock* and is developing a TV movie based on the story of gay rights activist-mother Mary Griffith. "This gave me no choice but to speak out."

madeleine

ALBRIGHT

MADELEINE ALBRIGHT IS THE FIRST FEMALE U.S. secretary of state, and as Congressman Barney Frank points out, trailblazers strike a chord with gay men. "She puts a serious dent in some of the stereotypes that have been used to put roadblocks in women's way," Frank says. Any time another minority gets ahead and gets the job done in a unique and telling way, we all benefit. Her appearance on this list alone helps negate the stereotype that gay men only care about Audrey Hepburn movies and Madonna.





elizabeth TAYLOR

WHO WOULDN'T WANT to befriend the woman who befriended James Dean, Rock Hudson, and Montgomery Clift? "And Michael Jackson!" laughs playwright and screenwriter Paul Rudnick. Jackson may be straight, but the writer notes that the eternal diva has "befriended every gay male person in history." *Larger-than-life* doesn't begin to describe her appeal. She's unlucky in love but ever hopeful. She's still one of the most beautiful women in the world. She has starred in film classics (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*) and notorious boondoggles (*Cleopatra*). And, of course, she's a hero. "She took great risks early on by linking herself to the AIDS crisis," notes producer Barry Krost. Other celebrities are just following her lead. And we'd follow her anywhere.

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elizabeth DOLE

SAYING ELIZABETH DOLE'S SEEMINGLY HIGH VOTE of confidence among our male readers is a surprise is an understatement as grand as a certain canyon in Arizona. True, before she dropped out of the presidential race in October, she had made polite noises about gay support, going so far as to say she wouldn't disqualify someone for a post simply because he was gay. Still, that's a far cry from being proactive on gay issues. Perhaps the things that endear Dole to some gay men are her talk show-host ability to charm a crowd and her calm approach to a husband who shares his sexual impotence problems with the world. Rich Tafel, executive director of the gay group Log Cabin Republicans, says he thinks Dole's campaign shut down "because she doesn't have a message," but he adds, "She's a strong figure, and a lot of people respect that."





whoopi GOLDBERG

WHOOPI GOLDBERG WHIPPED INTO OUR CONSCIOUSNESS playing a lady-lover in *The Color Purple*. But the shy role she played to perfection in Steven Spielberg's drama is a far cry from the truth-telling, dirt-dishing attitude of Goldberg the woman. How appropriate then that she has now found success on—of all places—her self-produced game show. “Anyone who could make *Hollywood Squares* not square has a will of steel and a lot of chits to call in,” notes Scott Seomin, entertainment media director for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, which bestowed a wildly eloquent Goldberg with the Vanguard Award at the GLAAD Media Awards in April. “She was gay-friendly before it was trendy.” Besides, replacing fey Paul Lynde in the center square adds immeasurably to her cachet among gays.

THINK OF THE ODDS. Oprah Winfrey may be a one-person conglomerate today, but early on she was a down-to-earth black woman trying to make it on the whiter-than-white talk turf. These days while Springer et al. exploit their guests for freak appeal, we trust Winfrey to tell our stories with respect—as she did when she warmly hosted Ellen DeGeneres and Anne Heche on her show soon after they announced their love. Gay men have reason to feel at home with Oprah too. “I’ve never been able to put my finger on why gay men identify so strongly with black women who overcome hardship,” says Rich Tafel, executive director of the gay group Log Cabin Republicans. “But we do. Oprah’s not a victim. She’s taken control of her life. And my sense is that for her, the gay issue is a nonissue. The way she treats her gay guests, she normalizes it—unlike so many of the other talk shows.” Winfrey, who is bringing her brand of enlightenment to the magazine world next year, continues to rewrite the rules.

oprah WINFREY

