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**Stories From the War on Homosexuality:  
Arthur Dong Collection, Vol. 1**  
(Deep Focus Productions)

Arthur Dong's documentaries always impressed me as a nifty mix of old-school reserve and new-school activism. He clearly has an agenda—to demonstrate through interviews and research that homophobia has always been a pervasive, destructive force in American life, and still is. But he lets that agenda emerge organically from his subjects, and when facts contradict his preconceived notions, he builds the contradictions into the movie rather than dismiss or distort them.

With the DVD release of Dong's first video collection, however, it is now possible to see Dong not just as a committed activist filmmaker, but a plain-spoken visionary—Cassandra at the bridge, armed with a camera. *The Arthur Dong Collection, Vol. 1* is subtitled "Stories from the War on Homosexuality." It's a stunningly frank admission of Dong's motivating fear—a fear that places him at odds with the more assimilationist elements in the gay media. In America, there's always a desire to proclaim that things are

better than they used to be—that whatever obstacles are placed in the path of an ostracized group, things are still better now than they were 10 years ago, or 30 years ago. Dong's films reject that idea, making the same controversial point as some African-American and feminist scholars and activists: Hateful, controlling urges have not been eliminated from American life, but merely driven underground, where they could erupt again without warning.

The three movies collected in this box set are *Licensed to Kill*, a series of interviews with homophobic murderers; *Coming Out Under Fire*, about gays in the World War II military, and *Family Fundamentals*, about gay people raised in fundamentalist homes. Cumulatively, they pack a wallop that far exceeds the already considerable power they attained as standalone movies. Each movie focuses on a different aspect of gay life, but each makes the same basic point: There is now, and always has been, a war on homosexuals, waged by straights who wish to define themselves by attacking people they perceive as their opposites.

The supplements are superb. Each disc contains reading lists, study guides for teachers, lists of research and policy groups, an interview with Dong and up to an hour of deleted scenes and interviews. The set even isolates the musical scores (by Miriam Cutler on *Licensed to Kill*, and by Mark Adler on the others) on separate tracks. From a filmmaker as thorough as Dong, one would expect no less.

—Matt Zoller Seitz