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For Gay Guys

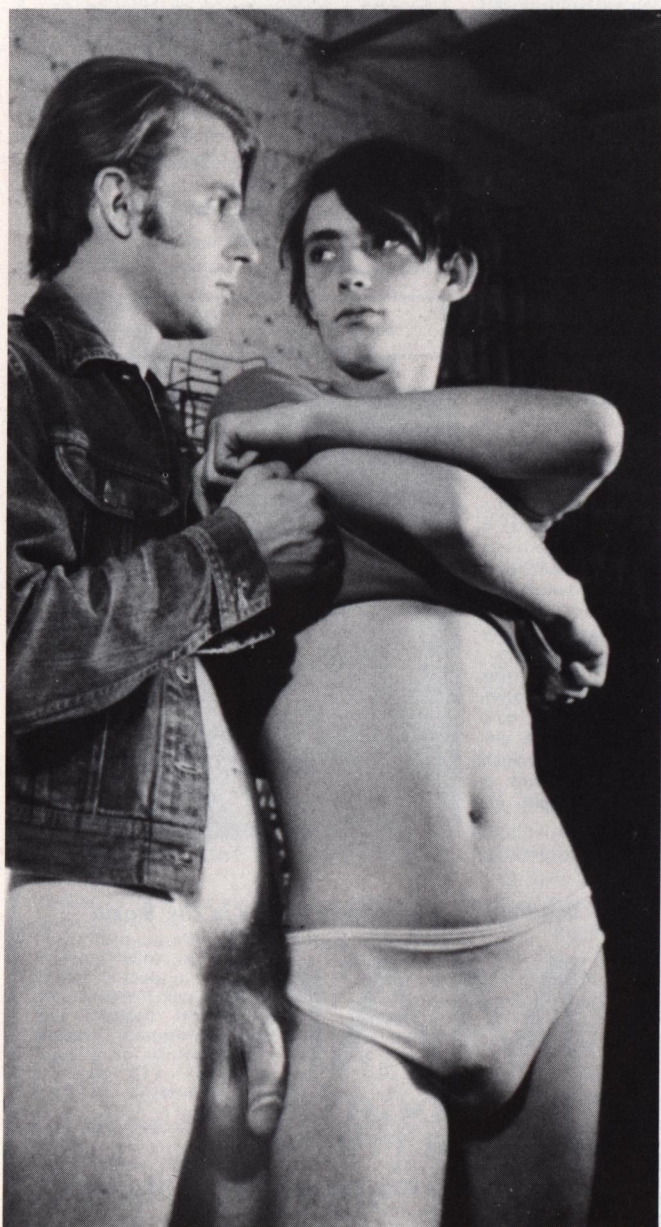


Sex
Orient



The Lavender Syndicate

by Craig Rodwell



WHEN I "came out" at 13, one of the first things I learned about my new life was that most of the Gay bars were controlled by "the syndicate." So when I started going to them I didn't have to ask who those creepy straight guys in business suits were at the door.

It wasn't too many years ago—at least in New York State—when a Gay bar, per se, was illegal; the State Liquor Authority had a regulation which, in effect, made serving a drink to a Homosexual grounds for a bar losing its liquor license. In the mid-sixties, three of us who were active at that time with the Mattachine Society of New York conducted a "sip-in" at a Gay bar in Greenwich Village. We entered the bar with various reporters in tow, announced that we were Homosexuals and asked that we be served a drink. The bartender then refused to serve us—which enabled us to set up a case with the City Commission on Human Rights, and which a few months later led to the State Liquor Authority's changing its regulations, permitting Homosexual people to be served.

Aside from winning for Gay people the right to be served drinks in licensed premises, we had thought that this new legal status for Gay bars would help break the syndicate's stranglehold; we thought that Gay people themselves would step forward and open Gay bars; we thought that, at last, Gay people would begin to gain control over their own institutions. We had no illusions this would happen overnight, but we did think the corner had been turned.

We were wrong. Not only has the syndicate tightened its grip on Gay bars . . . they have opened new so-called Gay establishments—movie houses, pornoshops, baths, etc. The major difference between now and then is that now you rarely see any of the creepy straight guys in business suits. Most of the mob-run Gay establishments are run by "fronts." In other words, in a business where licensing is involved, such as bars, baths, movie houses, the only way to get a license is for someone with no previous criminal record to apply for it. Consequently, Gay people (with no previous criminal records) now appear as the owners—on paper—even though they didn't have a penny to invest in the operation.

In the past few years, many of us in the Gay Liberation Movement have been approached by mob figures offering us the ownership of record of one of their places. I was approached to be the "front" for one of their "male movie houses" here in New York City; and the only way I got out of it was by playing dumb. I kept saying I didn't understand; and since I didn't have any money to put into the business, I couldn't see why they would want me to be the owner. After a month or so, they finally gave up on me. I won't say that I wasn't tempted; the idea of having a business, doing no work, and getting paid for it, is appealing. But I also realized that once I got in with them, that would be it. I would be known by law enforcement agencies as a "front for organized crime" for the rest of my life.

To give you some idea of the extent of syndicate operations in our Gay community:

1. Nationally, Gay syndicate operations run into the hundreds of millions of dollars bracket. There are thousands of mob-controlled Gay bars, movie houses, pornography shops, etc.

2. Thousands of Gay males have been and are today being blackmailed through contacts with syndicate-run "call-boy" services or thorough contacts in mob-run Gay bars. One of these blackmail rings was broken temporarily a few years ago when the

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THE SYNDICATE

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newspapers reported that an organized blackmail ring with mob connections had blackmailed Gay males, including a U.S. Congressman, a prominent television entertainer and an Air Force General.

3. Thousands of Gay people have been turned into "pill-freaks" and worse through the easy accessibility of any kind of drug in mob-run Gay bars.

4. Syndicate-run Gay bars are a major outlet for other mob businesses—such as hijacked liquor and food, jukeboxes, vending machines—not to mention prostitution, blackmail and drug-pushing.

5. Certain Gay publications regularly give free space in the form of listings to the various syndicate Gay operations—the bars, baths, movie houses.

6. Even Gay Lib organizations have not been immune to the approaches of our "friends" in the underworld. A local mobster was quoted recently as saying, "I contribute to the (a Gay Lib organization's name) Legal Defense Fund so we won't be zapped." And to this day, the vast majority of Gay Lib organizations have virtually ignored the problem of syndicate/Mafia domination of Gay bars, which are, let's face it, the most important social institution that Gay people are allowed to have in this culture.

It is no secret among most Gay people that many of our major Gay institutions have long been controlled by the syndicate. If we are ever to gain control over our own lives, it must be clear that one of our major goals in the Gay Liberation movement is to rid our community of the parasites who have lured us into *their* closets. The closet of the Gay bar where we are allowed to stand against the walls and stare at other Gay people while paying exorbitant prices for watered-down drinks. The closet of the porno shop where we are allowed to spend \$10 for a male-nude magazine wrapped in cellophane and put quarters into vending machine to see a minute of two men making love. The closet of the drug-induced state where we can attain a euphoric state of temporary bliss. The closet of the Gay movie house where we have the "privilege" of spending \$5 to see nude males for a couple hours.

There is going to be a long and difficult struggle on the part of thousands of Gay people before we can begin to tip the scales in this fight to wrest control of Gay institutions from the syndicate. But at the end of that struggle is the day when Gay people, particularly those who are just coming out, can go into a Gay bar or baths or movie house or bookshop and feel that they are a vital part of a Gay community where we interact on a free and loving basis.

In my next column, I will suggest ways that all of us can help in this struggle.

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ROYAL FLUSH

(Continued from page 32)

its quintessence. Henry started his reign as a war conqueror and a womanizer, but he found his true nature on a visit to Venice, January/February 1973

and returned to France feminized, covered with rouge and precious stones and surrounded by parrots and little dogs.

The king presided at various court functions in sumptuous drag. One costume is described as a pink damask gown embroidered with pearls, with trefoils of pearls and emeralds decorating the sleeves. Henry was in drag so often that, as one observer of his time recorded for history, "the people who saw him found it hard to tell if they were looking at a woman-King or a man-Queen."

Male orgies were the order of the day during Henry's reign, of course, and his courtiers were all handsome young men called *mignons*. Henry even had a touch of sado-masochism about him, and on days of religious penitence, he energetically flagellated his *mignons* after the ceremonial processions.

(In our next issue . . . "Oh, Those Greats!")

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COMPANY YOU KEEP

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nights together in the forest.

Indeed, the two shared a close relationship during the period when Washington, at age twenty-five, was named commander-in-chief of the Virginia militia and there were frequent opportunities to have Gist at his side.

George would probably have been content enough to pursue his rustic romance with Gist indefinitely if he hadn't had the matter of his social and military position to consider. In those days men of his station always married, whether they were gay or not, and although George had evaded the issue until then with the dodge that the woman he loved was already married, he had to take steps soon if he was to save face.

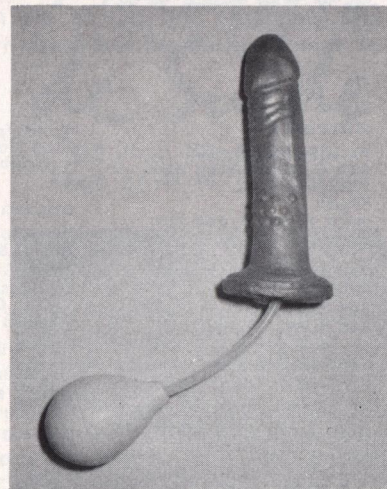
Fortuitously, the rich widow Martha Custis entered the picture, and she was the perfect prospective wife for a gay man. Four children from her marriage had satisfied her maternal instinct, and all she wanted from a second husband was companionship. George was pleased at the opportunity to enter into a state of marital respectability with an "understanding" wife who would put no undue demands on him. She must not have, for the Father of Our Country was never a father in any other way.

Martha was a perfect wife for George and didn't interfere in the least in the important military and political adventures he undertook that eventually got him the Presidency. During that period of his life, George met Alexander Hamilton, who was probably the big gay love of his life. During the Revolution, Hamilton was George's private secretary, aide-de-camp, and faithful companion.

It seems significant that there was a rift between the two men after the war, when Hamilton suddenly married. But Hamilton's marriage apparently no more stood in the way of a gay relationship than George's had, for the two men resumed their fellowship later and Hamilton was subsequently entrusted with high office during Washington's term as President.

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The Big Squirt

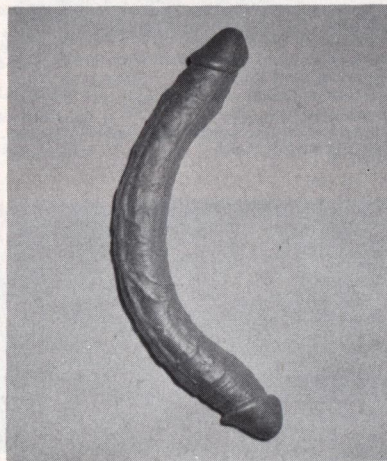


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