

CHAPTER 3

LEATHER NOIR: HOMOPHOBIA LAPD-STYLE

- Cop Bullies as “Homomasculine Fetish”: From LAPD to the Academy Training Center
- Larry Townsend, *H.E.L.P./Drummer*, and the LAPD Raid on the Black Pipe Bar, the “Biggest Raid in LA Since Prohibition” Screams *The Advocate* (*Drummer* 3, page 37)
- *The National Enquirer* in Anita Bryant’s Florida Trashes *Drummer* in California; begins Culture War
- Censorship in Cincinnati, the Most Puritan City in the USA; Mapplethorpe and Schwarzenegger censorship on eBay

Los Angeles in the leather-noir 1970s was a mysteriously conservative city. Think of the LA politics, danger, and corruption in the 1974 film, *Chinatown*, directed by Roman Polanski who learned plenty about the LAPD after the Manson Family murdered his wife, Sharon Tate, and Jay Sebring, a reputed leatherman, in 1969. LA’s notoriously right-wing police chief, Ed Davis, was still obsessing over the bad press his LAPD earned over the S&M-like Manson-Tate bloodbath executed by Charles Manson’s sex slaves.

In 1977, at the same time as *Drummer* was fleeing LA, Polanski learned even more when arrested by the LAPD and charged with the drugging and raping of a minor female at the home of Jack Nicholson. Polanski left the United States forever.

All during 1974, with “crazy” Ed Davis chasing the glamorous and elusive high-society fugitive, Patty Hearst, around LA, the LAPD called in its public relations team with camera and helicopters to cover the LAPD’s furious gun battle and fiery attack on the terrorist Symbionese Liberation Army which had kidnaped and radicalized their “sex slave,” the San Francisco heiress Patty Hearst, who, after prison and pardon, went on to camp stardom in John Waters’ films. This media-savvy coverage of the SLA on May 17, 1974, forecasted exactly the way the LAPD brought in the press, including a helicopter, to get TV-news cameras rolling for the film-at-11 attack on *Drummer*, April 10, 1976.

The institutional homophobia of the LAPD was transparent and

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dangerous. The psychological effects on 1) LA gay people being debased and brutalized in a second-class life, and on 2) leather culture abused down to a third-class lifestyle, are, I think, played out in John Embry's reactionary approach to using *Drummer* as an assault weapon.

Was Police Chief Ed Davis Embry's Ideal Bully Top?

Is it not a gay survivalist technique that gay men often use to reverse the psychology of bullies? In *Brideshead Revisited*, when Anthony Blanche is threatened with a dunking by bullies of the kind who tossed Cecil Beaton into a river at one of Stephen Tennant's famous parties, Anthony Blanche, as articulated by Evelyn Waugh, said:

“Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to be manhandled by you meaty boys. It would be ecstasy of the naughtiest kind.”

A core concept to examine is how erotic the LAPD “Slave Auction” bust was to the heart of the magazine's autobiography.

In *Drummer* 6, pages 12-14, *Drummer* 7, page 68, and *Drummer* 11, page 76, and *Super MR* #5 (2000), pages 34-39, Embry, greasing up the inherent eroticism, wrote virtual porno S&M details of how on that “Slave Auction” night forty leatherfolk were arrested, bound in handcuffs, hauled off in full leather—and in one dress—on a police bus, kept crowded in cells, and were forced to piss and dump in their leather pants on the bus and the floor of the booking center cells.

What?

The “Slave Auction Arrest” is an archetypal *Drummer* story of capture verging on kidnaping where the helpless bottom is bound and bullied by fetishized alpha males in authority.

You don't need to be Joseph Campbell to recognize that the “Slave Auction” bust also doubles as the kind of quintessential S&M counterphobic jerkoff fantasy that *Drummer* and its personals ads specialized in. In fact, the following quintessential “Services” ad with a photo of a straight and muscular cop ran for years in *Drummer* personals. This was probably the most popular classified ad in *Drummer* history. It offered an ultimate *Drummer* fantasy: a real weekend with real straight cops. Many *Drummer* readers booked their vacations at the Academy Training Center. I attended, with the permission of my longtime friend and Academy Training Center owner Chip Weichelt (1952-2003), as an eyewitness reporter going undercover for *Drummer*. This ad appeared in *Drummer* 123 (September 1988):

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The [Academy] Training Center, Inc, now a full-time staffed facility [first in Washington, Missouri, and then in Alpharetta outside Atlanta], continues to offer men with a serious interest a unique alternative service. TC can design and implement each detail of your experience in various environments and scenarios for week-end or week-long sessions. Special situations such as public arrest, hostage, and other complex programs are executed in a realistic correctional or military atmosphere. Cell confinement, immobilization, isolation, interrogation, sensory control, and endurance situations are all offered in a safe, sane, discreet [that is, no sex with the straight cops; shaming words like *gay* and *faggot* were never uttered in a TC scene] and monitored environment. All TC programs are administered by professionally trained military, corrections, and LE [law enforcement] personnel. Written inquiries should include a phone number for contact, or call (314) 281-4345. Reservation and deposit are required. References available worldwide. TC cannot offer sexual situations as part of their programs. Training Center, PO Box 672, Bridgeton MO 63044. Special programs for guest instructors now available.

The stretch from the negative LAPD arrests (1976) to the positive Training Center experience (1988) is a way for queer historians to measure how gay liberation evolved forward inside leather culture in the intervening years.

For all the trauma caused by the terrorist LAPD, Embry's Tar-Baby horror-film "take" on being topped by real cops is the *sturm und drang* of a period drama.

In twelve years, attitudes changed 180 degrees.

In December 1990, *Drummer* 145 published my upbeat gonzo feature on straight cops role-playing rough but consensual S&M games with gay men behind bars: "Incarceration for Pleasure: The Academy Training Center."

Before that evolution, however, Embry knew the conservative fascism of the LA scene. After the "Slave Auction" bust, he declared the opening of the culture war in *Drummer* 11 (December 1976), page 76: "Chief Edward M. Davis is at war with the gay community. He is basing many of his political aspirations on the battle." Yet, faced with the dangerous Ed Davis who had the usual political ambitions of a fundamentalist conservative, Embry seemed in some expiatory act of immolation to have been asking for trouble by publishing wild articles, seductive stories, and "feel-good" coverage of

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very risky topics. Was it merely to harass the LAPD? Was it Embry's masochistic hubris? What was Embry's motive?

The Great *Drummer* Slave Auction Arrest can be explained quite simply: Embry tried to stage an event to increase business and publicity for his Leather Fraternity mail-order enterprise, and when the LAPD took notice, Embry—to make himself appear a gay victim—claimed, post factum, that his commercial show that was for his own business gain was, in fact, a benefit for the gay community. In short, when caught, Embry lied his way to an alibi, casting the famously bigoted Ed Davis as the villain. Embry, thinking fast on his feet, hoped to stage-manage the truth into an LA version of the legendary Stonewall Inn arrests in New York. At the time, even David Goodstein of *The Advocate*, who dismissed Embry and the leather community, did not buy his spin in several articles, beginning with *The Advocate*, issue 190, May 19, 1976. As a result, sales of *Drummer* took off, and Embry banged the drum of the Slave Auction bust as if it were a parade.

CONTROVERSY IS FREE PUBLICITY

Embry, having read his First Amendment rights, seemed politically very self-aware of his pushing of forbidden erotica to taunt the cops. In *Drummer* 12 (January 1977), he wrote a full-page ad for the upcoming extra issue *The Best and the Worst of Drummer* (January 1977). He boldly advertised that in *The Best and the Worst of Drummer* would contain pages of writing, images, and “items we felt were too much even for *Drummer*.” As was Embry's custom of selling the same text and pictures twice or thrice, nearly everything in *The Best and the Worst of Drummer* was a reprint of previous *Drummer* features. Readers so disliked re-runs, and wrote so many “Letters to the Editor” about Embry's recycling, that I changed course by including all-new materials in my first special issue, *Son of Drummer* (September 1978), including Robert Mapplethorpe in his *Drummer* debut.

In *Drummer* 13 (March 1977), Embry filled his “In Passing” editorial column protesting the parallax arrest of publisher, Larry Flynt, whose *Hustler* magazine was busted for pornography in Cincinnati in 1977 where gay leatherman Robert Mapplethorpe's *Drummer*-style photographs would be put on trial in 1990. (Cincinnati is the most puritan city in American fundamentalism. See the film, *Dirty Pictures*, 2000.) Stretching to be “in like Flynt” on page 76, and claiming permission from the *L. A. Free Press*, Embry reprinted novelist Harold Robbins' article defining the censorship of *Hustler* as “another example of fascism in America.”

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Thirteen years later, in *Drummer* 133 (September 1989), I updated this American Fascist censorship battle with my obituary about Robert Mapplethorpe whose photographs triumphed in that obscenity trial in Cincinnati. (See also my formal introduction of Mapplethorpe to the leather world in *Son of Drummer*, and on the cover of *Drummer* 24; in the book, *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*, 1994, and in my entry, “Mapplethorpe,” in *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia*, 2001.) In that same issue, a disgruntled reader wrote to the editor accusing *Drummer* of S&M self-censorship on the one hand and the glorification of drugs on the other:

“...sorry to see so much has become a no-no in your fiction. You claim your distributors threaten you to be sweet and clean and pure like *Family Circle* magazine or *Reader’s Digest*. However, it seems that you still promote the use of drugs in your safe-sex vanilla fiction. Many of the characters (maybe the authors?) can’t function in sex...unless they are stoned blind? —HM, Bridgeport CT”

Drummer assistant editor Paul Martin—an eyewitness bear who defined himself in *Drummer* 143, page 59—responded that only four stories depicted drug use. One was an excerpt from my pal Geoff Mains’ *Gentle Warrior*, and another was an excerpt from my own *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982*. As for *Drummer* self-censoring and turning “vanilla”, Martin wrote: “I don’t call the for-real POW torture in ‘Shadow Soldiers’ [*Drummer* 127] by Jack Fritscher ‘vanilla.’” Indeed, the landmark *Drummer* 100 also dared published my non-consensual S&M story “The Lords of Leather” which was later published in my anthology *Rainbow County and Other Stories* (1999) and subsequently optioned by *The Advocate* through its Alyson Publishing. Alyson freaked out over the torture of American soldiers and censored the story by asking to drop it in favor of another consensual story. After that, Simon Sheppard canonized “The Shadow Soldiers” in his anthology *Homosex: 60 Years of Gay Erotica* (2007).

Regarding the “Slave Auction,” Embry must have felt he had won the “free publicity” lottery when *The National Enquirer* ran a two-page spread titled “The Real Hollywood—Wild, Wicked, & Wide Open.” The authors were Barbara Stemigin and Malcolm Boyes whose name is similar to venerable gay author, Malcolm Boyd, the partner of then *Advocate* editor, Mark Thompson. Malcolm Boyes is the British journalist who, after working for the *Enquirer*, became the producer of television “tabloid gossip” programs such as *Inside Edition* and *Extra*.

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Embry relished *Enquirer* details of the “Slave Auction” and printed news photos he so apparently wished he had in his possession. As eyewitness evidence, he photostated the two pages and reprinted the *Enquirer*’s copyrighted material in *Drummer* 18 (August 1977), page 6. In his rather “indignant” essay about the *Enquirer* coverage, was he bragging or complaining?

The Enquirer, a national scandal-tabloid, was published in Florida where second runner-up to Miss America, Anita Bryant, was revving up her Dade County “Save the Children Crusade” which resulted in legislation outlawing Florida gays from adopting. As if by instant karma, Bryant’s politics ended her commercial singing career; her straight marriage split into divorce amidst a rumor her husband was gay; and she declared bankruptcy.

Years later in a 2003 Republican alliance, *The Enquirer* went on, it was reported, to have created a deal with Arnold Schwarzenegger not to publish trash journalism about him when he was campaigning for the governorship of California. Just before the election, eBay, the corporation famously headed by Republican Meg Whitman, censored my auction of my Schwarzenegger and Mapplethorpe photographs and memorabilia. The eBay “bust” of my “auction” made headlines around the world, exposing yet one more way how anti-gay corporations support politicians.

After he was elected, the hateful Schwarzenegger was the one and only person standing between gays and gay marriage in California. He alone twice refused to sign his name to the done deal of Assemblyman Mark Leno’s gay marriage bill passed by the California legislature.

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