First Allies to the Cause: The Mafia’s Influence on the Gay Community in the Twentieth Century

Rose Crawford, Paige Hurley, and Sarah Li
Senior Division
Group Exhibit
Exhibit contains 450 words
Process Paper contains 443 words
Process Paper

As an avid reader, during winter break, with nothing else to do, I found my nose buried in a novella about life of the gay man in the 1930s (*An Act of Easy Mercy*). The story mentioned the two main characters meeting at a Mafia owned gay bar in Brooklyn Heights, and that was the hook that piqued my interest. I was a Google search away from verifying the notion. When the time came to find a topic, my mind floated back to that golden nugget of information that was both bizarre and a Pandora’s box for investigation. From there, my research idea came to fruition.

The research process, however, led me on a treasure hunt for an academic book. I later discovered that the difficulty to find source material came from the modernity of the concept. Like a diamond in the rough, I found the broad-scope book *the Mafia and the Gays*. I used the book as the basis for my research purely because it was one of the only books I could find that described the bar ownership in depth (whereas newspaper articles covered the concept of Mafia owned gay bars when discussing Stonewall, but not the influence that ownership might have had). I followed bread crumbs and used the sources cited in the initial book to find piecemeal sentences and quotes from other sources, and from there, I dove into the treasure trove of LGBT archives.

The Gay community experienced trials and triumph during their time under the thumb of the New York Mafia. While they were arrested based on prejudiced cops’ testimonies of stereotypical behavior, they found a haven in the bars run by organized criminals. Their haven crumbled with the exploitation of their vulnerability to pedal drugs, prostitution, and over-priced liquor to the group. Their triumph came with the Stonewall Riots of 1969 that protested the discriminatory police policies as well as the Mafia’s oppressive regime of power over the Greenwich Village gay bar patrons. It is a classic story of manipulation and revolt, and the triumph of the gay community extends past the riots to their continued fight for rights into the twenty-first century.

Because of the broad nature of this topic, and its niche subject matter, I thought an exhibit board could bring the information to life. While any essay would be a roller coaster read start to finish, a board could comprehensively illustrate the Mafia’s influence with quotes, color, and pieces of periodicals that
can provide a clear exposé of the topic. Without an exhibit, the color of the triumph of this long oppressed community could not be grasped at the level that is due.
Bibliography

PRIMARY SOURCES


Mike Brown published the news story that explained the avarice of the Mafia-owned newspaper GAY POWER. This primary source provides evidence for the change in sentiment that the gay community had toward the Mafia.


This video provides contemporary relevance to the legacy of the gay bars established by the Mafia, and its interview format gives testimonial evidence which speaks more to the community mindset than statistics ever could.


This news article announces Ianniello’s arrest as well as the names of his three most prominent restaurants, which were known for their gay clientele. The article further elaborates on the connection between the Mafia and the ownership of gay bars.


This source provides further verification of the Mafia connections several gay bar owners had. It also details the names of the bars owned, to further prove Mafia ownership.

This source provides a newspaper clipping of the front page of a newspaper that announces Anna Genovese’s court testimony of her husband’s business in the gay bar industry. It is contemporary to the time of Vito Genovese’s arrest (which was in 1953).

SECONDARY SOURCES


Bender’s article provided a stunning picture of the Stonewall Inn as it would have appeared in 1969 just before the riots, which provides an image of how discreet the clubs were...how normal their buildings seemed.


Brazee provides the court ruling of the Julius Restaurant’s lawsuit against the State Liquor Authority after the bar lost its liquor license following a police raid. This source also provides partial testimonies in the discrimination investigation.


Brown provides an initial argument of the exploitive nature of the Mafia’s reign over the gay community through bar ownership. She explains the advantageous position the Mafia was in during the Prohibition era and the discrimination against the gay community during that same time.


This source helped identify the reasons for the raid while also tying in the Mafia involvement in the bar. It directly quotes from the news articles released at the time providing its evidence from primary sources when the primary sources themselves were unavailable to me.


Chauncey, once a Yale professor, now Columbia University professor of history, gives a retelling of the Italian influence and business in prostitution. This is valuable to give a timeline of the Sicilian Mafia’s
exploitation of gay men, while giving grounds to later claims of exploitation in the 1970s by the Gay Liberation Front.


Crawford’s book provides an overview of the Mafia’s influence in the gay community from bar ownership to heroin distribution. It is one of the only sources that contains the FBI files and is one of few sources that gave in depth information about the Mafia ownership of gay bars.


Davis’s photo archive has come in handy in providing a visual image to the major Drag Kings of the 1940s. The photos give faces to the Kings, as well as an idea of their performance wear.


Davis’s photo archive has come in handy in providing a visual image to the major Drag Kings of the 1940s. The photos give faces to the Kings, as well as an idea of their performance wear.


The Bowery Boys New York City History website provides a high quality black and white image of the Peppermint Lounge in the 1950s and 1960s around the time the Beatles were appearing there. It illustrates how popular the clubs were while also providing evidence to their standing.


NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project provides an image of the Julius Bar which also verifies its existence, but also its discreet nature. It existed right in front of the eyes of the police and general public, but went rather unnoticed until its Sip-In in the 1960s.

This source provided a stunning picture of the gathered LGBT community outside of Stonewall Inn in the 1960s, celebrating the boarded up bar. This provided a visualization of the togetherness of the community.


Mortimer’s crime reporting focused specifically on the LGBT community, and he provides a contemporary citation of the Mafia ownership of the gay bars, as well as the implication that niches of the public were aware of the ownership as well.


Liptak’s article in the *New York Times* provides the date of the historic Supreme Court ruling that granted marriage to same-sex couples.


Dictionary.com provided a relevant definition to a vocabulary term pertinent to the research that the general public might not have been familiar with.


This source provided Matty Ianniello’s obituary from when he died in prison, while also providing a picture of the mobster which helps visualize who was owning the gay bars in the 1950s and 1960s. It also shows that those owners were still living not too long ago which shows how close to the present the gay liberation movement is.


This article provides a succinct summary of the protest that occurred at Julius Bar after its liquor license was revoked because the investigator claimed the bar permitted homosexuals. It also provided a clear black and white image of the sip-in.

Streitmatter’s theory of the Mafia’s mindset post Stonewall and during the Gay Liberation Movement of the 1970s illustrates the change in the Mafia’s perspective toward the gay community from one of alliance to one of lower class.


This overview of drug abuse in the LGBT community provides modern statistics that illustrate a widespread drug use in a marginalized community, providing relevant statistics about usage. It gives no theory on potential causations, just merely numerical statistics which allow for the investigator to interpret the data.


This book interviews Marty Robinson, a participant in the Stonewall Riots, who encourages the gay liberation movement to continue to shed light on the mob’s control over the bar scene. The interview present provides a concrete perspective on the change in attitude toward the Mafia, and the realpolitik involved in the gay bar industry.


This source provided a stellar picture of Vito Genovese for connation since he was a main racketeering partner in several gay bars in the 1940s and 1950s. The picture helps visualize the main players in forming a cohesive gay community.


This BBC video provides modern testimonial about the meaning of gay clubs and bars to LGBT people, which illustrates the legacy of the impacts the bars had on their patrons.

Wright provided a succinct overview of Chavis and McMillan’s theory that was not bogged down with extraneous examples, which permitted its flexibility to the application of the theory. This source is used for defining and explaining the psychological theory of the development of communities in les mis terms.
Communism affected global politics in the 20th century largely because communism made the Cold War possible. Communism also helped to affect the specific ways in which WWII played out. The existence of communism helped WWII play out the way it did. Hitler knew that the West was very suspicious of the Soviet Union. He thought that this would help keep the West on his side. It made him think that the UK and the US, for example, should be his allies in a fight against communism. It is also part of what made him attack the Soviet Union. Thus, without communism, WWII might have been very different. After WWII, communism completely shaped world politics. Without communism, it is likely that there would have been no Cold War.

Unfortunately, due to the complicated situation with VkusVill, we have been left without work and without a home, wrote daughter Mila on Instagram, posting a picture from a balcony in Spain. It’s a difficult time for us and we need friends, she continued. Maybe the friends of your friends or their friends can help us start our new life in Barcelona. A 2013 law in Russia - widely condemned in the West - bans any promotion of gay values and lifestyles to minors. Homophobia is widespread in Russia, where many supporters of President Vladimir Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church identify LGBT+ activists with Western liberal values, seen as contrary to Russian tradition. Russian firm triggers row over lesbian family ad. In a YouTube interview, recorded just before their departure, the family described the hate campaign directed against them. They spoke to YouTuber Karen Shainyan, who discusses LGBT issues on his channel. Yuma said “I was just... Yet in the First World War the Tsarist autocracy of Russia was allied to the capitalist ‘democracies’ of Britain and France, and in the Second World War Stalin and Churchill were allies after 1941. ‘Natural human aggression’ is frequently cited as a cause of war. Yet, if it were, governments would not have to use conscription to push people into killing one another. Socialism will be one world-wide community without national boundaries. It will mean the common ownership and democratic control of all resources by humanity as a whole. That’s very easy to answer as most of the wars in the 21st century have involved America in the Middle East. Those wars are entirely based on: controlling the oil industry. Lucas, like so many in the Western policy community, likes to talk about democracy and liberal values, which theoretically are centred on the wellbeing of the individual. But when it comes to the real-life individuals in countries like Russia and China, they’re just pawns in a geopolitical game. Victory in this game is measured in terms of the impoverishment of the Russian and Chinese people; the dismemberment of their states; and as a by-product, potential mass death. Lucas’ views are extreme even by the standards of the Western foreign policy community, but his faith in the spread of democracy as the solution is right in the middle of the mainstream. So too is his general approach, which views success in terms of defeating geopolitical rivals and preserving American hegemony.