

# LETTERS

## Improper Context

Dear Editor:

As one of several Cuban dissidents interviewed in Nestor Alemendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal's documentary *Improper Conduct*, I would like to point out several of the many factual errors in J. Hoberman's review in your April 17 issue.

● Referring to Castro's "military ideal," as discussed by Susan Sontag in the film, Hoberman declares that "Cuba, like Israel, has legitimate reasons to mistrust its neighbors." Yes, possibly, if it were only a question of self-defense. But what about the thousands of Cuban soldiers sent to Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, Eritrea? What about the escalated training and arming and advising of guerrillas in Central and South America?

● Hoberman claims that the issue of persecution of homosexuals in Cuba is "... more complicated than the film lets on." He goes on to quote an unnamed source, allegedly the author of an article in a forthcoming issue of the magazine *Signs*: "The CIA targeted the homosexual intelligentsia (in Cuba) and worked to persuade its members to defect, promising generous academic grants and publishing contracts." This is a totally fabricated lie. Hoberman seems to have a higher opinion of the CIA than I do: a CIA seeking out gay artists to subsidize and support?! Dissident gay writers and artists are shown in the film putting on puppet shows and pushing ice cream carts up Broadway. And there are thousands of other displaced Marielitos—many of them homosexual artists—in menial dead-end jobs. Are these, then, the big-time financial operations Hoberman would have us believe are supported by the CIA?

● Hoberman says Armando Valladares "was imprisoned for his role in the Batista regime." False. This slander was cooked up by Cuba to cover up the truth, which was that Valladares was imprisoned for opposing Castro's leanings to the Soviet Union. If Valladares had been imprisoned for his role in the Batista regime, he would already have been in jail by January 1959. In fact, at the time of his arrest—December 1960, almost two years after Castro's takeover—Valladares was still employed as a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Communications.

● Hoberman says the interviewees are mainly middle-class and white. But I come from one of the poorest peasant families one can find in Cuba, and so does Carlos Franqui. The not-so-white Guillermo Cabrera Infante is a product of one of the worst poverty-row sections of prerevolutionary Havana. Only Herberto Padilla and Dr. Martha Frayde could be classified in the middle-class category. In any case, aren't the people in power—the Castro brothers, Armando Hart, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, etc.—from the middle or upper-middle class? It seems to be Hoberman's contention that middle-class whites have no right to talk, that their opinions are of no serious value.

● According to Hoberman, "The filmmakers' Cuba exists in a virtual vacuum..." there are no historical cross-references. On the contrary: the hatred of the Cuban people for Batista's dictatorship and the euphoria after its fall are documented in the film by newreel footage, as is Castro's pact with the Soviet Union (which resulted in even greater repression), the Peruvian Embassy incident, and the Mariel flotilla.

Hoberman missed the point of *Improper Conduct*. He nitpicks at many minor aspects of the film but dismisses as unimportant and meaningless the primary issue, which is the suppression of human and artistic freedom.

—Reinaldo Arenas  
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