

Movie review

'Improper Conduct' strikingly reveals Cuba's gay purge

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It began simply, but went bad real fast.

On a routine visit to Bulgaria, Raul Castro was surprised to see no homosexuals. "No problem," said that country's leaders. "We just put them all in prison."

Moving on to Shanghai, Raul again saw no homosexuals. "No problem," said that country's leaders. "We just took advantage of a holiday where they all gathered down by the river for a party. We clubbed them and then threw them in the river to drown."

And so Raul Castro returned home to Cuba and told his brother Fidel of these bizarre things, and soon began the purge of Cuba's homosexual population. That simple. That bad.

Camouflaged from history for 25 years, writers-directors Nestor Almendros' and Orlando Jimenez Leal's stunning documentary film "Improper Conduct" finally exposes not only The Maximo Lider's tyrannical revolutionary regime but Castro's insane obsession to dispose

of Havana's homosexuals.

Through well-conducted interviews held in Miami, Paris, Rome, New York, Madrid and London with 28 men and women who either served under Castro or were imprisoned by him, we find Castro was (still is?) Hitler-bent and hell-bound with a vision of a perfect machismo Cuba — a country in which homosexuals had to go because they were "defective."

"Improper Conduct" naturally gives famed cinematographer Almendros a visual chance to strike back at the ruthless rule he was forced to flee — where people suddenly found themselves looking at 5-to-10 in a work camp for any one of three reasons: having long hair, being a homosexual or just plain improper conduct (meaning anything the State said it meant).

Yet, "Improper Conduct" — made on a shoestring and with a lot of heart — goes far beyond being a personal vendetta into a heartfelt universal message of repression. Although political by subject matter, Almendros-Leal haven't made a "political film." They've made a movie of *The Outsiders* — people



Jean-Paul Sartre, left, and Simone de Beauvoir visit Havana in a scene from 'Improper Conduct'

trapped in a land where Manliness is everything and if you don't look right, well, sorry baby, but clang-clang go the jailhouse doors.

"Improper Conduct" makes us stop and remember repression doesn't only lie 90 miles offshore. We're so used to homosexuals populating the art capitals of the world today that we think we've really grown up as an understanding and tolerable society. Oh, yeah? Let's play a little game then. Take a trip down to Witchita, apply for a job at an insurance company and tell them you're a homosexual. Object? See if

IMPROPER CONDUCT, directed by Nestor Almendros and Orlando Jimenez Leal. In French and Spanish with English subtitles. Unrated. Playing at the Cinematheque

the job interview lasts more than 13 seconds.

As former Cuban playwright Rene Ariza so wisely says, "We must restrain the Castro that's in all of us." In other words, meet the new boss. Same as the old boss. Where the persecuted become the persecutors and "Improper Conduct" becomes a lethal warning as well as a riveting documentary.