# Is Cruising the most controversial film about gay men ever?



In 1980, the cinematic bomb went off when director William Friedkin, already famous for his horror classic The Exorcist, joined forces with Al Pacino, the star of The Godfather, to create a disturbing crime thriller. It was called Cruising. Despite the big names attached to the project, the film spiralled into controversy, becoming one of the most debated releases of its decade.

Cruising centres on Pacino’s character, Detective Steve Burns, who goes undercover in New York's underground leather and BDSM scene to catch a serial killer who has been targeting men in these precincts. The film dives deep into a psychosexual abyss as it interrogates the intersections of violence and attraction, all while capturing a shadowy underworld that remained largely unspoken of in mainstream cinema at the time. While many expected a triumph, the film's portrayal of gay culture caused a fierce backlash from activists demanding more authentic representations and not sensationalised portrayals of the way they lived their lives.

The late 1970s were marked by significant struggles within the gay community, which was almost invisible in mainstream culture and which craved positive portrayals in media. The release of Cruising, with its emphasis on brutal violence within the gay community, felt not only reckless but harmful. Many within the community viewed the film as an invasion of their spaces rather than a genuine exploration. This discomfort was compounded by on-set tensions; both Friedkin and Pacino grappled with their vision of the film amid protests and media scrutiny that questioned their motivations. Alarmed by the backlash, Pacino would later express regret over his involvement in the project, saying in his memoir that he found the film exploitative and chose to donate his earnings to LGBTQ+ charities.

The production difficulties were made worse by the considerable criticism aimed at the film's directly exploitative elements. Activists rallied against the movie, using disruptive protests on set. This pressure resulted in significant cuts to the film, with over half an hour of footage ultimately lost. Critics have noted that this disjointedness only serves to amplify the film's haunting qualities.

As the narrative of unfolds, Cruising reveals the lack of coherence in its commentary on masculinity, violence, and homophobia, igniting questions that remain unanswered: Is the killer a mere symptom of something far more insidious within society? Does the film validate or critique the very culture it depicts?

Despite its troubled legacy, many now recognise Cruising as an engagement with themes that remain relevant today, reflecting on issues of identity, fear, and the darker sides of human desire. The film's bizarre blend of horror and crime narrative reinforces its status as a cinematic enigma.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://collider.com/al-pacino-william-friedkin-thriller-cruising/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cruising_(film)> - This Wikipedia article provides a comprehensive overview of the 1980 film 'Cruising,' directed by William Friedkin and starring Al Pacino. It details the film's plot, production challenges, controversies, and its reception. The article highlights the protests from New York's gay community during filming, concerns about the film's portrayal of homosexuality, and the subsequent critical reception. It also discusses the film's legacy and its place in queer cinema history.
* <https://www.looper.com/414932/why-cruising-was-al-pacinos-most-controversial-film/> - This article examines the controversies surrounding the 1980 film 'Cruising,' focusing on the protests by gay activists during its production. It describes how activists attempted to disrupt filming by making noise and using mirrors to spoil cinematography. The piece also touches on the film's portrayal of the gay community and the subsequent debates it sparked.
* <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/cruising> - This Rotten Tomatoes page provides critical reviews and audience reactions to the 1980 film 'Cruising.' It includes a consensus statement noting that while the film is well-crafted and features a committed performance by Al Pacino, it struggles to engage its subject matter sensitively or justify its brutality. The page also features individual critic reviews and audience scores.
* <https://www.them.us/story/al-pacino-cruising-controversial-gay-movie-donate-paycheck> - This article discusses Al Pacino's reaction to the 1980 film 'Cruising.' In his memoir, Pacino reveals that he found the finished product 'exploitative' of the LGBTQ+ community and donated his entire paycheck to charity. The piece provides insights into Pacino's perspective on the film and its impact on the gay community.
* <https://www.out.com/film/al-pacino-cruising> - This article reports on Al Pacino's admission that he found the 1980 film 'Cruising' to be 'exploitative' of the LGBTQ+ community. It details how Pacino anonymously donated his entire paycheck to various charities, reflecting his discomfort with the film's portrayal of gay culture.